

Commentary on Luke's Gospel

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SECTION 3 continued (5.1-9.50).

2). THE FOUNDING OF THE NEW ISRAEL UNDER THE KINGLY RULE OF GOD (6.20-8.18)

In this second part of the section 5.1-9.50, Jesus now reveals Himself as the founder of the new Israel under the Kingly Rule of God:

- a He proclaims the new Law of the Kingly Rule of God (6.20-49).
- b He sends out His power to the Gentiles, to those who are seen as unclean, but who have believed. They too are to benefit from His Kingly Rule (7.1-10).
- c He raises the dead, a foretaste of the resurrection, revealing Him as 'the Lord'. The Kingly Rule of God is here (7.11-17).
- d John's disciples come to 'the Lord' enquiring on behalf of John, and He points to His signs and wonders as evidence that He is the promised One. The King is present to heal and proclaim the Good News of the Kingly Rule of God (7.18-23).
- c He exalts, yet also sets in his rightful place, John the Baptist as the greatest of the prophets and points beyond him to the new Kingly Rule of God, emphasising again that the Kingly Rule of God is here (7.24-35).
- b He is greeted by the transformed prostitute, who has believed, a picture of restored Israel (Ezekiel 16.59-63) and of the fact that the Kingly Rule of God is available to all Who seek Him and hear Him.
- a He proclaims the parables of the Kingly Rule of God (8.1-18).

Jesus Proclaims The New Law of the Kingly Rule of God (6.20-49).

Like Matthew 5-7 this 'sermon' or 'address' is carefully put together and patterned, but, in spite of similarities, we would be mistaken if we thought that it was simply made up of extracts from the same address (even though that is the view of many). The emphasis in both addresses is very different. Jesus preached over a number of years and we can be quite sure that we have been given the substance of most of His teaching in the addresses recorded, for it is very unlikely that huge amounts of what He said would have been forgotten or thought of as not worth recording. Thus in view of the material that we have we must assume that He taught the same thing to the crowds many times, varying His approach and possibly using different patterns, but regularly with similar material, until it had burned its way into their hearts. Unlike us they loved repetition. Moreover it was necessary in order that it might be remembered. We have one example in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew. We have another different one here (the difference lies in the emphasis and the make up).

These people did not have Gospels or a New Testament and as He wanted to ensure that they remembered His words, it is clear that He regularly put them in memorable forms, and constantly repeated much of His material word for word, although in different contexts, patterning it in order to aid the memory. We would therefore expect to find that there were a number of addresses which were similar but not the same, and should recognise that they represented the basic teaching of His Law.

It is apparent from the different and failing attempts to connect this with a Q document, once we take into account the similarities and differences between Matthew and Luke, that the situation is far more complicated than many suggest. It is equally possible that those similarities and differences arose from the fact that Jesus preached similar things word for

word for memory purposes in many different addresses, while at others He varied His approach, and that some of these were written down in Greek (some of which would also be available to Matthew) and were consulted by Luke (as he mentions in 1.1) in order to assist in clarifying finer points of Aramaic when he himself was translating Jesus' address contained here from Aramaic into Greek. This would explain both similarities and differences between Matthew and Luke, and also the introduction of Lucan terminology, without the necessity of assuming that Luke, or anyone else, actually changed Jesus' words.

The usual theory suggests that Luke simply dropped large amounts of what he found, or had no access to it. Now while that is explicable for some of what Matthew contained, which was especially applicable to Jews, it does not explain other parts which would have been very relevant to Luke's readers, and which on the usual theories would have been available to him (on this theory, for example, he completely and deliberately changes the emphasis of the beatitudes). Luke was concerned to give us more of Jesus' teaching, not less, and it is difficult to believe that the early church were so lacking in interest in Jesus' teaching that they only kept a record of one sermon, and would have mildly put up with it being changed.

Besides a glance at the 'sermon' below reveals that it is compact and unified. The pattern reveals the genius of Jesus, not that of Luke. And Luke wisely chose not to play around with it but to present it as it was.

The idea that Jesus' words were played around with in the way that some scholars suggest is obviously (to put it politely) untrue. Had they been so they would not have retained their uniqueness. A message which is a conglomeration of different people's ideas would not have become the kind of message that has impressed men of all ages. We only have to look at later Christian writings to appreciate that. Give the early church twenty years to play around with Jesus' words and they would have been totally unrecognisable as being anything out of the ordinary. Yet we are asked to believe that the early church produced any number of sayings of Jesus which revealed the same genius as that of the Master. Such a suggestion can only be seen as fantastic. For anyone who considers His words as given below will recognise that they are far from being ordinary. They reveal the mind of genius. Furthermore we also have to take into account that we have here every indication of a complete, if abbreviated, address.

His words here begin with four blessings and four comparative woes, and end with a story of who would be blessed (those who built on rock) and who would receive woe (those who built on earth). In between are varied patterns of four, and six divided into two sections, the first of which is to do with loving and giving, and the second is to do with contrasting those who are genuine those who are fakes.

Luke has further divided the message into three subsections by the use of dividers, the second of which is part of the message. These are as follows:

- 1). 'And He lifted up His eyes on His disciples and said' (6.20-26). This is then followed by a prophetic declaration of blessings and woes.
- 2). 'But I say to you who hear' (6.27-38). This is then followed by a dissertation on loving the unlovely, and revealing that love in practical and genuine ways.
- 3). 'And He spoke also a proverb to them' (6.39-49). This is then followed by a passage distinguishing between what is genuine and what is not, and ends with the contrast between the one who builds with a sound foundation, and the one who builds on shaky foundations, both of whom will be tested, both by the events of life and finally by God's judgment.

The whole can be analysed as follows:

Blessings and Woes On Israel (6.20-26).

6.20-26 'And he lifted up his eyes on his disciples, and said,

- a Blessed are you poor, for yours is the Kingly Rule of God (20).
- b Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be filled (21a).
- c Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh (21b).
- d Blessed are you, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man's sake (22).
- e Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy (23a).
- f For behold, your reward is great in heaven (23b).
- e For in the same manner did their fathers to the prophets (23c).
- a But woe to you who are rich! for you have received your consolation (24).
- b Woe to you, you who are full now! for you will hunger (25a).
- c Woe to you, you who laugh now! for you will mourn and weep (25b).
- d Woe to you, when all men speak well of you! for in the same manner did their fathers to the false prophets (26).

True Love Is All Important And Must Be Practically Expressed (6.27-38).

(This section is all about loving and giving and proceeds in a 4 4 6 6 4 4 pattern).

6.27-38) 'But I say to you who hear (27a).'

Love Is Defined And Commanded (6.27-28).

- g Love your enemies (27b),
- h Do good to those who hate you (27c),
- g Bless those who curse you (28a),
- h Pray for those who use you badly (28b).

Love Is Illustrated (6.29-31).

- j To him who smites you on the one cheek, offer also the other (29a)
- k And from him who takes away your cloak, do not withhold your coat also (29b).
- k Give to every one who asks you, and of him who takes away your goods, ask them not again (30).
- j And as you would that men should do to you, do you also to them in the same way (31).

Love Is To Be Shown Towards The Undeserving (6.32-34).

- g And if you love those who love you, what thank have you (what reason have you to be thanked)?
- l For even sinners love those who love them (32).
- h And if you do good to those who do good to you, what thank have you?
- l For even sinners do the same (33).
- k And if you lend to those of whom you hope to receive, what thank have you?
- l Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive again as much (34).

The Reason Why Christians Should Love the Undeserving (6.35)

- g But love your enemies (35a),
- h And do them good (35b),
- k And lend, never despairing (35c),
- f And your reward will be great (35d),
- m And you shall be sons of the Most High (35e),
- l For he is kind toward the unthankful and evil (35f).

General Attitudes Which Should Result From This Kind of Love (6.36-37).

- n Be you merciful, even as your Father is merciful (36).
- p And judge not, and you shall not be judged (37a).

- p And condemn not, and you shall not be condemned (37b),
- n Release, and you shall be released (37c).

The Generosity That Should Result From This Kind of Love And The Assurance of God's Reciprocal Generosity (6.38-40).

- q Give, and it shall be given to you (38a),
- r Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, shall they give into your bosom (38b).
- r For with what measure you mete (38c),
- q It shall be measured to you again (38d).

Distinguishing The Genuine From The Fake (6.39-49).

6.39a 'And he spoke also a proverb (parable) to them,'

The Importance Of Finding The Right Teacher And Responding To Him (6.39b-40).

6.39b-40

- s Can the blind guide the blind? (39a).
- t Shall they not both fall into a pit? (39b).
- u The disciple is not above his teacher (40a),
- v But every one, when he is perfected, shall be as his teacher (40b).

A Reminder That Love Must Result In Honesty When Judging (6.41-42).

- w And why do you behold the mote that is in your brother's eye (41a),
- x But do not consider the beam that is in your own eye? (41b).
- y Or how can you say to your brother, Brother, let me cast out the mote that is in your eye (42a),
- y When you yourself do not behold the beam that is in your own eye? (42b)
- x You hypocrite, cast out first the beam out of your own eye (42c),
- w And then you will see clearly to cast out the mote that is in your brother's eye (42d).

In The End What Men Are Is Revealed In What They Produce By Their Lives (6.43-44).

- aa For there is no good tree which brings forth corrupt fruit (43a),
- bb Nor again a corrupt tree which brings forth good fruit (43b).
- cc For each tree is known by its own fruit (44a).
- bb For of thorns men do not gather figs (44b),
- aa Nor of a bramble bush gather they grapes (44c).
- dd The good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth that which is good (45a),
- ee And the evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth that which is evil (45b),
- ddee For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks (45c).
- ee And why do you call me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say? (46).

The Security Of The One Who Hears The Words Of Jesus And Does Them (6.47-48).

- ff Every one who comes to me, and hears my words, and does them (47a),
- gg I will show you to whom he is like (47b),
- hh He is like a man building a house, who dug and went deep (48a),
- ii And laid a foundation on the rock (48b),
- jj And when a flood arose, the stream broke against that house (48c),
- kk And could not shake it, because it had been built well (48d).

Disaster For Those Who Hear The Words of Jesus and Do Not Do Them (6.49).

- ff But he who hears, and does not (49a),

- hh Is like a man who built a house on the earth without a foundation (49b),
- jj Against which the stream broke, and straightway it fell in (49c),
- kk And the ruin of that house was great (49d).

Having analysed His words we must now reverently consider the detail.

Opening Blessings and Woes (6.20-26).

Perhaps before we look at the detail of the narrative we should set the scene, for here interpretation, at least to begin with, depends on context. We need to ask why He spoke as He did. The answer is probably not hard to find.

Jesus had been on the mountain top with his disciples and had chosen His Apostles. Now He has come down with them to a level plain half way down the mountain where large crowds have gathered. As we have seen in verse 17 the crowds had gathered from many places. There before Him He saw large numbers of ordinary people, people whom, as He had reason to know, were struggling to feed their households, and faced many problems in their lives. They were poor, they knew what it meant at times to go hungry, they knew what it meant to weep at the vicissitudes of life. And many He had healed, and many wept for that reason too, some with joy and some with a deep sense of sin in His presence. They had come to see and hear the great Prophet because they were seeking God.

But gathered there also would be the sightseers and the curious. News of His activities would unquestionably draw such people, especially from among the wealthy. There would thus almost certainly be a group of such, standing apart from the main crowds, and watching with sceptical interest or unseemly hilarity. Some had come to see this new phenomenon for themselves. Others had come because their wives had pressed them into it. and still others had come to criticise and to try to counter His teaching. But they did not want anyone to think that they were part of the rabble. So as they stood there they would be quite obvious to Jesus.

Thus as we consider this beautifully balanced opening passage from verses 20-26 comparison with Matthew 5.3-11 clearly reveals that while in the Beatitudes in Matthew Jesus is describing the inner heart of individuals and their attitude towards life, here in Luke His emphasis is on the people to whom He is speaking, and the outward daily circumstances of their lives about which, externally, little could be done. But it was their very need which partly resulted from those that had brought them here, together with the consciousness that it gave them of their dependence on God. This together with their desire to have the thirst of their souls satisfied.

What Jesus has in mind here therefore in His words is how these 'poor' who are before Him ('you') are reacting to their poverty by seeking spiritual blessing from Him, how these who are hungry in front of His very eyes ('you') are responding to their hunger by looking to the living bread for sustenance, how these who are weeping ('you') even in front of Him are leaving behind their sorrow by coming to the Consoler and finding comfort and strength. And He makes clear, very clear, to them that God has a purpose to bless them. And that they are truly blessed because they are listening to Him in order to do what He says. They are building on a sound foundation (see verses 47-48).

On the other hand He also wants them to recognise that in hearing Him and responding to Him they are putting themselves in danger of being 'persecuted for the Son of Man's sake'. He wants them to know that the storms will necessarily come, for he knows that we must 'through much tribulation enter under the Kingly Rule of God' (Acts 14.22).

In contrast are those who stand off from Jesus because they are wealthy, materially well satisfied, and kept amused by the pleasures of the world, and somewhat supercilious or filled with levity. They do not seek Him for what He is, but out of curiosity and amusement, a position which in the end can only confirm their spiritual bankruptcy. He can see who they

are, even as they sit or stand before Him. They follow certain of the Scribes, many of whom are 'false prophets', and will therefore suffer their just end, for they are building on no foundation.

Thus the whole impact of Luke is different from Matthew's. To make them extracts from the same sermon is to miss their genius. Luke's message is complete in itself, and so is Matthew's. And both have different emphases.

It will be noted that the four blessings parallel the four woes, with a central comment separating them. The words are addressed to 'His disciples' in the widest sense. The term 'disciple' signifies any who have come genuinely seeking to learn. That should be noted. What is said, is said to them as disciples. It thus applies to them as such, and indicates that the intention was not specifically evangelistic. He is building up those who have already to some extent responded, while keeping in mind that not all there have responded.

6.20-22 'And he lifted up his eyes on his disciples, and said,

"Blessed are you poor, for yours is the Kingly Rule of God.

Blessed are you who hunger now, for you shall be filled.

Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh.

Blessed are you, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man's sake."

While at first sight, if taken out of context, it might seem that Jesus is saying here that poverty, hunger and misery are to be welcomed as such, that is not what He means at all. It is to take it out of context. Rather He is indicating that He sees Himself as talking to those before Him who are actually experiencing the things He mentions. He sees before Him men and women who are poor, who know what hunger means, and many who are weeping as they listen to His message of hope. And He is assuring them that there is a blessing available for them because in their condition they have come to seek Him. For such things can be a blessing when in reasonable proportions they encourage people to seek God, and are so now in their case, because those who are now before Him are here precisely because of these things. Thus these things are proving a blessing to them. If we allow God to fashion us by such things, He says, we will be truly blessed, and we will then find greater reward in Him.

Furthermore those who do follow Him will find that such a situation continues, and should be glad of it. They will continue to be 'poor' because they will be using their possessions as He commands (see what follows), being rich towards God (12.21) and laying up treasure in Heaven (12.33-34; Matthew 6.19-20). But along with it they will have the joy of already enjoying their consolation (contrast verse 24), by having their present part in the Kingly Rule of God. They will both enjoy Heaven now, and Heaven later. They will continue to be hungry because in following Him they will face shortages and privation (9.58), but they will receive full provision in return (Mark 10.30), and finally a heavenly inheritance. They will continue to weep because life has its share of sorrows, and they will continue to be aware of their sins, and they may even weep because of persecution, but they will find comfort in their sorrow because their eyes are on Him, and they will in the end have everlasting joy and laughter. By not becoming part of the rat race of those who are always on the lookout to benefit themselves at others expense, they will enjoy greater benefits than such people can ever know. They will experience being under His Kingly Rule. Their hearts will be overflowing with good things. They will have a deeper peace and joy than the world can ever appreciate (Philippians 4.7; 1 Peter 1.8), and then in the end they will enjoy blessing, and fullness and laughter to the full when they are with God for ever. That future compensation is also in mind very much comes out in comparison with the woes, for with the woes all the resultants are seen as in the future apart from the first. The point in it all is that the godly will enjoy in the future, what the ungodly will lose.

He is here thus very much describing the situation in which the godly people who have come

to hear Him find themselves because they are not rapacious and greedy. In the Old Testament 'the poor' regularly means those who are humble and godly (Psalm 40.18; 72.2-4). And it is to them that the Good News is being proclaimed (4.18; Isaiah 57.15; 61.1-2; 66.2). They are in contrast to the wealthy who manipulate, and cheat, and use violence in order to 'better themselves'. For His disciples are not self-seeking but dependent on God and on what He gives them (compare 12.31; Matthew 6.31-32), and are satisfied with that, and humbly worship God. Such are blessed, says Jesus, for theirs even now is the Kingly Rule of God. They are in submission to Him and walk in His ways. They accept His Kingly Rule now. They seek first the Kingly Rule of God and His righteousness (12.31; Matthew 6.33). They look on their possessions as His (16.11). They partake at His table. They eat the Bread of Life (John 6.35). They drink the water of life (John 4.10-14; 7.37). They find their solace in Him (Matthew 5.4). Thus they will continue to enjoy His Kingly Rule now, and will also finally enjoy His everlasting Kingdom. Theirs are the true riches both now and in the future (16.11). They are truly blessed.

They are blessed (makarioi - enjoy true wellbeing from God) even though, as a result of their godly lives, they sometimes go hungry as they are now, and that because they accept what comes from the hand of God, and do not seek food at any price. They strive to make a living and to wrest from their lands what they can, sharing the burden of life with others, but refusing to follow the paths of greed and violence and dishonesty as ways of accumulating wealth. They are genuine and honest. So one day they will be filled, for in that day the Messiah will have brought in His rule and will bless such people and satisfy them with good things. Above all their hunger of soul will be satisfied.

His hearers might at present weep because of their sins, and because life is hard, food is scarce, and times are difficult, or because of the opposition and persecution that they will face because they follow Him, but the fact that they have come to hear Him indicates their hunger after God. Thus they can be sure that one day, when the Messiah has finished His work, they will laugh and rejoice, and will even now find comfort in Him.

But while Jesus was undoubtedly using the descriptions literally (poor, hungry, weeping), there was also underlying them the thought of their spiritual significance, (a fact which Matthew brings out more emphatically). God's people will often be physically poor, may go physically hungry, will experience physical distress, but they will also be spiritually humble and lowly, they will be spiritually hungry after God and His word His words here are based on Psalm 107.9, compare Luke 1.53), they will spiritually weep over their sins. And that too is what they have demonstrated by being here. Thus the descriptions cover all aspects of their lives.

"Blessed are you, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man's sake." And above all they will be blessed when they suffer for His name's sake (compare Isaiah 66.5), when men hate them and keep apart from them, and reproach them, and cast them out as evil (Isaiah 66.5), because they are followers of Jesus as the Son of Man (even possibly excluding them from the synagogue). For He is here as God's representative, and because the world will not like His message, He and those who respond to Him will suffer. But when they do suffer they will be suffering both for His sake and for God's sake. Note the implication of the close relationship between Himself and God in these words. No Rabbi would have spoken of men's relationships to himself like this. He would rightly have considered it to be blasphemy. By it Jesus is claiming and demonstrating His uniqueness.

'For the sake of the Son of Man.' In Daniel 7 the Son of Man as representing the people of God is a persecuted figure (verse 25 with 14, 18) and it is only the intervention of the One Who represents them (7.13), coming from the midst of that persecution, which finally delivers them from it. And while the persecution was there shown to be by external forces, such

enemies were always supported by an enemy within who hoped to profit from the situation. It was a similar situation to that in which they found themselves. Thus reference to the Son of man includes the thought of persecution from without and within (compare 9.44, 58; 17.25). Let them recognise that He has come as the persecuted Son of Man in order to take up His Kingly Rule. And if they will persecute Him they will persecute them (John 15.20). Those who become one with the Son of Man must expect persecution, for so the Scriptures have made clear.

Jesus was aware from the beginning that persecution awaited both Him and them. His mother had been warned of the sword that would pierce her heart (2.35). John the Baptist was in prison, unlikely ever to come out (3.20). He had nearly been put to death by His own townsfolk (4.28-29). He knew that as the Bridegroom He would one day be 'taken away' (5.35). The belligerence of the Pharisees was on the increase, and they were already plotting Him harm (6.11). Their continued dogging of His movements were a constant warning (5.17-21. 30, 33; 6.2, 7). And He only had to consider what had happened to the prophets and had been warned about in Isaiah 66.5, which speaks of 'your brethren who hate you and cast you out for My name's sake', in order to realise what He must expect. And He was fully aware of the severity of the punishments of the synagogues who would beat those whom they saw as obstinate, and even exclude them. So He emphasises it also here. He wants them to be aware of what they are facing. Let them not doubt that as they 'build their houses' on the foundation of His words the storms will come. But if they hear His words and do them they need have no fear. Their houses will stand firm. Thus it is no surprise that He later warned His disciples of what their fate might be (12.11-12).

6.23

**“Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy,
For behold, your reward is great in heaven,
For in the same manner did their fathers to the prophets.”**

Yes, if they are persecuted for His sake they can rejoice and jump for joy, for they will receive great reward in Heaven, for that is how God's prophets were treated when they too came on earth (including John the Baptist). By their response as described above they will be aligning themselves with the true prophets, who also sought only to please God, and they will therefore enjoy a prophet's reward.

The reference to the prophets may have in mind:

- 1). That as the prophets were persecuted they too must expect to be persecuted (11.47, 49-50; 13.34; Matthew 23.29-31, 34).
- 2). That as the prophets have gone to their reward (13.28), so will they too go to their reward.
- 3). The fact that they will be persecuted is positive proof that they are equal with the prophets and will therefore enjoy both what they suffered and what they will receive (compare 1 Peter 4.12-14).

The mention of the reward is not as a kind of bribe. Those whose eyes were only on a reward would not be welcome, or genuine. The point was that having chosen to walk in God's way, it was something that they could look forward to. It was an incentive while they were in the way.

Note the reference to *their* fathers. Jesus has already divided Israel into two parts, those who are for Him and those who are against Him, the old Israel and the new.

6.24-26

“But woe to you who are rich! for you have received your consolation.

Woe to you, you who are full now! for you shall hunger.

Woe to you, you who laugh now! for you shall mourn and weep.

Woe to you, when all men shall speak well of you! for in the same manner did their fathers to

the false prophets.”

Jesus then turned His attention to the group of wealthy onlookers. Any who are sitting there who are rich and complacent should note that they have already received their reward in this life. They may be simply supercilious, or they may be sneering, but they should recognise that they have nothing to look forward to. Those who are rich have already had their consolation (contrast 2.25 which describes the consolation that they have lost). Those who are full and satisfied with themselves now, will one day be hungry as they see the good things that they will miss out on (compare Isaiah 65.13). Those who are laughing and having an easy time now, with little regard for others, should ask themselves why times are so easy for them. It is because they have little regard for God. Thus when they are called to account they will mourn and weep (compare Isaiah 65.14). And if all speak well of them it reveals that they are satisfied with the falsity and dishonesty of the religion around them, and are conforming with it, following the false prophets because it suits them. They have nothing to rejoice in or for which to jump for joy. For a commentary on this passage we only have to turn to Revelation 3.15-20). ‘You say, “I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing”, and do not realise that you are the one who is wretched; miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.’

‘The false prophets.’ These are those who are popular because their message suits people’s tastes. They soothe people’s consciences by saying, ‘peace, peace, where there is no peace’ (Jeremiah 6.14; 8.11). They are loved by all for they say nothing disturbing (see Jeremiah 5.31).

It may well be that there were few such people as he has described here in his audience, and that these words were on the whole spoken mainly of those not present, as an encouragement to the godly that God does see how men behave towards them, and that He also had in mind future generations. He knew well enough that His words would be recorded and passed on into the future. But our knowledge of human beings tells us that His wonder-working must have drawn a number of such people, while such was the work of the Spirit that we would expect that a good number of such people, hungry of soul and seeking something more than they had, would have come to hear Him in order to try to find what all their wealth had not given them. For them the message would be very significant, as they recognised the change of direction that their lives must take if they were to be His disciples, and it would provide them with a warning of how seriously they must take the matter.

In the end the whole point here is that He is assessing the response of all who are present with Him and listening to His teaching. Those who walk humbly with God and acknowledge Him, will be blessed, those who allow the pleasures of the world, the deceitfulness of riches and the desire for other things to take their minds off responding to Him will in the end face woe. A stark choice lies before them. The Question is, will they respond to the new teaching that He has brought and recognise Him for what He is, or will they remain in the old ways, and perish?

‘Woe.’ This could be translated ‘alas’, but that would not be a good contrast with ‘Blessed’. The comparison of blessings and woes ties in with Isaiah 3.10-11. ‘Tell the righteous that it will be well with them, for they will eat the fruit of their deeds. Woe to the wicked it shall be ill with him, for what his hands have done will be done to him.’ This could well have been a summary of these words of Jesus. ‘Woes’ already occur fairly regularly in the Old Testament (Isaiah 3.9-11; 5.8-23; 10.1; 33.1; Amos 5.18-6.7; Habakkuk 2.6-19), and even blessings in comparison with woes, and their equivalent (Ecclesiastes 10.16-17; Isaiah 3.9-11; compare Deuteronomy 28.3-19). Thus Jesus is speaking as the prophets of old of the fact that a man must choose between blessing and woe (see Matthew 7.13-14). But the point is that they each choose the way for themselves.

So He will now lay out His new ways, and He calls on them to consider them and respond to them. For they are dynamic and demanding and call for a totally new approach to life, and a

new attitude towards God and towards others. They speak of total self-giving, as against self-receiving.

They must, however, be seen in the light of the environment of His hearers. They are not speaking of how to deal with scoundrels and rogues who try to fleece them, and of outsiders who come with violence to attack them, but of how to respond to the people who live within their environment, who they rub shoulders with every day. Nor are they describing how the country must be run. A Christian will support his country's laws and its police force, where these are behaving justly. He supports the punishment of evildoers (even though he may sometimes recommend mercy). The instructions here are personal not judicial. A country could not be run in this way, for there justice and punishment are necessary. He is rather speaking of how individual Christians should respond to others in their daily lives, of how we should treat all men, and especially our 'neighbours'.

Love Is Defined and Demanded (6.27-28).

He commences this next section with a call to love their enemies, followed by definitions of what that involves.

6.27a "But I say to you who hear,"

His words are for those who will hear and do what He says, for those whose ears are awoken by the Holy Spirit.

6.27b-28

**"Love your enemies,
Do good to those who hate you,
Bless those who curse you,
Pray for those who use you badly."**

So He now concentrates on those for whom His blessings are promised, although those who wished to avoid the woes would do well to take note. His message will not be palatable to the rich, but if they wish to avoid their fate they will do well to listen. Notice the 'I say to you' (compare Matthew 5.22, 27, 32, 34, 39), which is the connecting up phrase with what has gone before. He wants them to know that He is speaking with Messianic authority. He is here making clear the new divine initiative, making new demands in the light of the times. And it is spoken to 'those who hear', that is, those who hear with the intention of response, those who are committed to discipleship.

For in the light of His presence among them it is now necessary for men and women to behave differently, and His demands in this direction commence with four requirements, the first being partly defined by the other three. Thus in this foursome the first line indicates the demand, and the other three explain how it should be revealed. Love must be active if it is genuine.

They are to 'Love your enemies.' This love (agape), as is clear from the words, is a love which behaves in the same way towards all. It is Christian love. It does not refer to feeling affection for someone (phileo), and it certainly does not speak of sexual love (erao). The latter is simply a human craving and is not really love at all. It arises out of physical effects on the body which are looking for reciprocation in a sexual way (although we often deceive ourselves about them). It would be better described as 'passion'. Many today seek to justify wrong relationships because 'they love each other'. What they mean is that they want sexual gratification, and will do any wrong to get it. But Jesus condemned such attitudes out of hand. That was not what He spoke of when He spoke of love. The Greeks had a separate word for sexual love. It was erao (from which comes Eros, the goddess of lust). They too recognised that that was not genuine social love. Indeed it is often antisocial.

Of course sexual love may be combined with true love, but then it will be thoughtful and

considerate, and obedient to God instruction on the matter, keeping within God's laid down standards. For the true love will override the sexual love. But having strong feelings for someone is not what Jesus was describing when He spoke of love. Such feelings lead often to evil and not to right behaviour.

Furthermore affection and liking arise out of compatibility between people and from having known someone for some time, and 'getting on with them'. But if that was in mind we would pick and choose. However, for true love there is no picking and choosing. The love that Jesus is speaking of here is a higher love, a spiritual love, a love which is the same towards all, a love which produces right response and right action, even towards those whom it is difficult to love. It is a love which wills and purposes good towards its recipients from a benevolent heart. This comes out in the way in which it is defined in the following three lines. It is a love which responds to hate, by the person doing good towards those who hate them. It is a love which blesses even as it is cursed. It is a love which means that when those who have such love are used badly, they respond by praying for the good of those who treat them in that way. It is unselfish love that seeks no benefit from loving. It is like the love of God which continues, even when it is dealing with a world that insults Him to His face (see verse 35; Matthew 5.45). It has nothing to do with the love between a man or a woman, or its perversions.

We can contrast this whole attitude with the position held by the cults of the day. The teaching of the Essenes, for example, was that their followers should 'hate the children of darkness', and they meant it. The emphasis with many was on loving those who are 'with us' and hating those who are not.

'Bless those who curse you, pray for those who use you badly.' True Christian love will not be affected by any counter response, for God remains unmoved by man's antagonism against Him. He could destroy mankind at a blow, but He does not. Thus those who follow Him must bless men even when all they receive are curses. They may be cursed by those whose views they run counter to, or by those whose business profits they affect, but in return they are to offer blessing. And when those curses turn to misuse and persecution, they are to pray for those who use them badly. Indeed they are to pray for all who use them badly. For they should be filled with God's love shed abroad in their hearts towards all.

Illustrations of This Love.

The demand that they love their enemies is now illustrated by a number of practical examples. It was never intended to be just a good idea. So practical illustrations are now given of what this might involve. They include reaction to personal violence, reaction to those who take advantage of their generosity through greed and theft, and then a general reference to all aspects of life, a saying which sums up the whole.

6.29-31

"To him who smites you on the one cheek offer also the other,

And from him who takes away your cloak withhold not your coat also.

Give to every one who asks you, and of him who takes away your goods ask them not again.

And as you would that men should do to you, do you also to them in the same way."

We have here four examples of how love behaves. When struck it does not strike back. This is talking about response to a blow struck in anger or in contempt. It is not talking about how to deal with someone who intends severe physical harm. To a blow struck suddenly in anger or contempt the Christian is to turn the other cheek, not literally, but in how he responds. He does not respond blow for blow. Instead he seeks to be conciliatory and to show love to the one who has hit or smitten him (compare John 18.23).

To the one who takes his outer coat the Christian hands over his undergarment also. If this were taken literally all Christians would walk around naked. But that is not the intention. The point is that the person has taken his outer garment, which most Jews would look on as

sacrosanct. This would be looked on by most as an unforgivable injury. But for the Christian the point is that if a man is in such need that he will do such a dreadful thing then the Christian should not just be satisfied with letting him have the coat, but should follow him up to see if he can do anything further for him as well.

In Matthew 5.40 Jesus had spoken of the inner clothing being taken by court action. Thus here He has strengthened the picture of the affront that has been given in order to make the illustration more forceful.

‘Give to him who asks of you’ refers to someone known to be in need who seeks financial help. The assumption is that the circumstances will be known, although that must not take away from the general idea. Help should be given to those in need. But in many cases today, with people who we do not know, simple giving to assuage the conscience would not necessarily be an act of love. If a man says to us that he is hungry he may well mean hungry for drugs. It would not be love to give him money. Love will rather take him to the bakery or food stall in order to buy him food. In such cases giving money might be the easy way out and might even be seen as doing him harm and therefore as sinful. The basic idea is, ‘make sure that the needs of anyone who comes to you for help are being met’.

‘Of him who takes away your goods ask them not again.’ This does not refer to someone who has borrowed a book or a lawnmower. It refers to someone who in dire need has taken what belongs to someone else. If the person is in such need then love will allow him to keep it, and will see what more it can do.

‘And as you would that men should do to you, do you also to them in the same way.’ Finally Jesus adds on a catch-all saying. This principle is a simple test of what is right. It means behaving towards others in their best interests, in the same way as we would want them to behave towards us. By taking this approach we can fairly quickly define what is good and what is not.

In its negative form this statement was a well known, if not well practised, saying. In its negative form it was spoken by Isocrates and the Stoics among others, by Confucius, and by Rabbi Hillel who came before the time of Jesus, and it has often been pointed out that essentially, when analysed in depth, the negative form is saying the same thing as the positive form. But while philosophically that might be true, there is no question but that the positive form gives a more positive angle to the saying, for people on the whole do not analyse. They gather impressions. The positive form is much rarer, and probably did not occur before Jesus’ use of it. It stresses the positive approach, rather than just that of abstaining from doing harmful things. Jesus was concerned with positive living.

So in a well rounded way Jesus completed the list of positive actions with the most positive of all. It is another way of saying, ‘you shall love your neighbour as yourself’ (Leviticus 19.18, 34), as long as by our neighbour we understand those that we share the earth with. But the problem with the latter was that many of the Jews had hedged it round. Firstly they limited it to Jews. Then they limited it to Jews that they approved of. Thus in the end it came to mean for them ‘love those who are in your particular circle’. Jesus here makes sure that His command applies to all men and women.

Such Love Is To Be Towards The Undeserving.

Verse 31 is now taken up and explained, in the context of what has gone before. To treat friends in a loving way is normal, but to treat all others in such a way is unusual. However that is the very purpose of the Messianic requirement.

6.32-34

“And if you love those who love you, what grace is there to you?
For even sinners love those who love them.

And if you do good to those who do good to you, what grace (charis) is there to you?

For even sinners do the same.

And if you lend to those of whom you hope to receive, what grace is there to you?

Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive again as much.”

‘Charis’ (grace, approbation) can be used of the gracious approbation of a superior, thus here ‘why should you expect thanks from God’. But it is also regularly used in the greeting ‘grace to you’. It may therefore here point to the grace of God which by its action enables the Christian to do what is unnatural, love his enemy. Or it may refer to a gift coming from God’s grace. Matthew 5.46 on a similar question has ‘if you love those who love you, what reward have you?’ This would suggest the third is in mind, or possibly the first, if God’s gracious thanks can be seen as a reward.

On the other hand in the sermon preached in Luke Jesus may have altered the emphasis as against Matthew, for the passages are not strict parallels.

Whichever way that is, Jesus now emphasised His teaching by pointing out that simply loving, and doing good, and lending to those who love us and do us good and lend to us, is not what He is talking about, for then we are simply behaving naturally, and benefiting by it. It is only when we do it for those who do not do it for us that we manifest the grace of God at work within us and can expect to receive God’s approval, and/or His reward.

Loving those who love us is not difficult, says Jesus, it is loving those who do not love us which is often difficult. Doing good to those who do good to us is normal courtesy, and would be expected of most normal human beings. It is doing good to those who hate us, in the same way as God does good to those who hate Him, which reveals the grace of God at work. Lending to those from whom we hope to benefit in one way or another is not unusual. What is unusual is lending not expecting to receive it back, or gain benefit from it. And that is the test of Christian love.

‘Of whom you hope to receive.’ This could either refer to the return of the capital, the receipt of interest, or having built up a stock of credit so that a reciprocal loan might be forthcoming in the future if needed. Whichever way it was the person who had made the loan would benefit by it. So the point is that the special nature of Christian love is revealed by lending, expecting nothing back.

Lending not expecting to receive back the loan might appear an unlikely scenario. But it is precisely the scenario in Deuteronomy 15.7-11 where God’s people were to lend to the poor even though the year of release was coming and they therefore knew that the debt would be forfeit. They were to lend anyway, not expecting to receive the full amount back. Thus the idea here was not totally new, or so revolutionary as it sounds. The revolution lies in the fact that the idea has expanded to all loans at any time. The promise in Deuteronomy 15 was that if they did lend, not hoping to receive it back, God would bless them more abundantly.

Note on Deuteronomy 14.28-15.10.

In this passage we find God’s provision so as to ensure that in Israel none went hungry or bankrupt. Every third year (the third and sixth in the seven year cycle) the tithe was to be set aside for the poor and needy, especially those who had no land of their own. Then every seventh year all loans made had to be cancelled. This ensured food available for the poor and the survival of the insolvent. But the danger then was that people would be unwilling to lend as the seventh year grew near. God thus firmly warned that they were not to behave so. They were to lend even if they suspected that they would not even have their loan repaid. And the promise was then that God would Himself pay them back and reward them with prosperity in their fields and in their lives. Jesus is taking these charitable provisions and expanding on them

End of note.

The Reason Why Christians Should Love the Undeserving (6.35)

Having defined Christian love, given practical examples of it, and demonstrated that in order for it to be thankworthy before God it must be shown to the undeserving, He now summarises it again in order to demonstrate its source.

6.35

**“But love your enemies,
And do them good,
And lend, never despairing,
And your reward shall be great,
And you shall be sons of the Most High,
For he is kind toward the unthankful and evil.”**

So in view of what He has just said about loving the undeserving, let them do it. Let them love their enemies, and do them good, and lend to them when they are in need, never despairing, because it will mean being like God Himself. It will mean revealing themselves as sons of the Most High, Who is kind towards the unthankful and the evil. It will be walking with Him on the higher plane and revealing that they are like Him, that they are His sons. And then they will receive great reward. This may be because of the response that comes from the act themselves, or from the joy that results, or from God’s blessing to those who obey Him, or indeed all three. But it will also include God’s reward on that final day when all of us have to give an account of ourselves to God (Romans 14.10; 2 Corinthians 5.10).

‘Never despairing (apelpizo).’ This is a word often used as a medical term. It strictly means ‘despairing’. Thus it may signify that they are not to despair of the fact that God will reward them as He promised in Deuteronomy 15.10. Or it possibly here means ‘not despairing of anyone.’ The idea may then be that we must not say something like, ‘Oh, if I lend to them they will only waste it’, but must give them the benefit of the doubt. Or it may signify that we must not despair of winning over our enemies in this way.

But comparison with ‘of whom you hope to receive’ in verse 34, may be seen as supporting the meaning ‘not hoping (elpizo) to receive anything in return’, which is found later in the early fathers. But it is never used in that way in classical literature, or before that time.

‘You shall be sons of the Most High.’ This firstly gains meaning from 1.32, in that we will then be like our Master (compare 1 John 3.2). We will be revealing ourselves as the sons of the Most High like He is. And secondly it will be genuine evidence that we are truly ‘sons of God’ (Romans 8.14-15; Galatians 4.5-6), which we will be demonstrating by our behaviour. We will be revealing God-likeness.

Note that here the Most High is gracious towards those from whom He expects no return. This parallels much better than Matthew’s statement would the previous instructions concerning lending not hoping to receive again. It fits this message much better.

General Attitudes Which Should Result From This Kind of Love (6.36-37).

6.36-37

**“Be you merciful, even as your Father is merciful.
And judge not, and you shall not be judged,
And condemn not, and you shall not be condemned,
Release, and you shall be released.”**

Having described acts of mercy Jesus now applies the idea generally. The first command here is ‘be you merciful’, and it relates back to ‘lending never despairing’. To make unrequited loans is a big thing to ask, but it should be possible for one who has received mercy and therefore loves God enough (compare 7.43). Such people should be willing to show mercy,

even to a lender who cannot repay his debt. And in return they will receive mercy, for God will abundantly bless their crops (Deuteronomy 15.10).

Note the reference to ‘your Father’. Now they are revealing themselves as His sons by their merciful behaviour they can expect Him to bless them, not just as a reward, but because He is their Father.

But the thought of showing mercy in this way leads on to being merciful to all. Being merciful refers to more than just forgiving a monetary debt. It refers to not holding people to account, out of compassion. Then their Father will not hold them to account (Matthew 6.14-15). They are therefore not to judge unmercifully, and the result will be that they themselves will not be judged unmercifully. (They may judge righteous judgment in order to help others - John 7.24; as in Luke 6.42). The thought is to prevent censoriousness. They are not to be condemnatory, but to be forgiving, so that they too may not be condemned (compare Matthew 6.14-15). They must remember that they too are sinners. They must leave the condemning to God. (That is not, of course, to prevent them from pointing out that God will condemn in the end). They are ‘to release’, and thus ‘be released’. This may have in mind the ‘year of release’ whose regulations caused the kind of lending which hoped for nothing in return (Deuteronomy 15). They are to carry out the ideas contained in the provisions for the year of release and then they can be sure that God will release them from their debts too.

If this last is the meaning, either Luke read Deuteronomy 15 in a Greek version other than LXX (a good possibility) where ‘release’ was connected with *apoloio* and not with *aphesis*, or he changes the term here because *aphesis* would have been too general to get over the specific point. (In Deuteronomy 15 LXX ‘release’ is *aphesis*). Otherwise we may translate *apoloio* here as signifying forgive, which of course is what *aphesis* also means. Whichever way it is the point is certainly that as we release and forgive others, so will we be forgiven and released. As we forgive others the little that they owe us so will God be able to forgive us the huge amounts that we owe Him.

The Generosity That Should Result From This Kind of Love (6.38-40).

The ‘release’ just mentioned is the same thing as giving. Indeed it is a kind of giving, for it turns the loan into a gift. Thus Jesus now moves from the particular to the general. Not only are they to release debts but they are to give generously in all things. They are to be open handed like their Father. Then they too will receive bountifully. Elsewhere He puts it simply as, ‘freely you have received, freely give’ (Matthew 10.8). On the basis of verses 32-34 this includes giving to those from whom we can expect to receive no return.

6.38

“Give, and it shall be given to you,
Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, shall they give into your bosom.
For with what measure you mete,
It shall be measured to you again.”

So those who are His are now called on to give freely and abundantly. The idea here, as earlier, is that as we give God, will give to us. Indeed we are promised that He will not only give in accordance with how we give, but even much more munificently. As we reveal ourselves to be His children by our generosity, so will He pour on us His gifts. He will not be stinting. He will give us good measure. And then He will press it down and shake the container so that there is more room in it so that He can give more. Then He will pour in His gifts until they run over. ‘They shall give into your bosom.’ The ‘they’ is probably a Hebraism referring to God as being expressed in the plural (as with the ‘us’ in Genesis 1.26). ‘Into your bosom’ refers to the fold in the garment where it hung over the girdle, which could be used like a pocket. It is saying that God will fill our pockets to overflowing! (It should be noted that the illustration is totally Palestinian).

Or the 'they' may mean that by moving the hearts of others to give to us ('they'), God will ensure that we receive more abundantly than we give, not necessarily monetarily. We will receive our gifts in terms of abundant fellowship with God's people, in terms of gratitude and our own warmness of heart. But the overall idea is that the way we measure our giving (whether stingily or generously) will be the measure according to which God gives to us.

Distinguishing The Genuine From The Fake (6.39-49).

Luke now draws attention to a break in the sermon. It may be that this indicates that what follows was spoken at another time, or it may have been simply in order to draw attention to the fact that, after the seriousness of what He has been saying in very practical terms, his following words are not to be taken literally but as parabolic. The connection between what follows and what has gone before is simple. Having given His teaching concerning the life of love Jesus now warns them not to be diverted from it, either by blind guides or by disobedience. The blind guides emphasise religious ritual. They prefer 'sacrifice' to 'mercy' (compare Matthew 9.13; 12.7). Those who follow them will fail in their walk and stumble. Others simply do not carry out what they have heard. But they will if their hearts are true. We could have headed this next section, "Don't just talk about it, do it!"

6.39a 'And he spoke also a proverb (or 'a parable' - that is, 'parabolically') to them,'

From this point on Jesus introduces His ideas in parabolic language.

The Importance Of Finding The Right Teacher And Responding To Him (6.39-40).

Jesus now stresses that in order to walk aright we need to ensure that we have the right teacher so that we will gradually be led on towards perfection. Anyone who teaches anything other than Jesus has said is a blind leader of the blind. They must not 'get above' their Teacher. Rather they must follow Him and listen to Him and then in time they will be made perfect like He is (1 John 3.1-2).

6.39b-40

"Can the blind guide the blind?
Shall they not both fall into a pit?
The disciple is not above his teacher,
But every one when he is perfected shall be as his teacher."

The first need is to ensure that we do not follow a spiritually blind teacher, for if we are led by someone spiritually blind, we too will be spiritually blind, (we will be what they are), and both will therefore fall into a ditch. There was a warning here against the Jewish leadership and the belligerent Rabbis and Pharisees that followed Jesus around, checking on Him and constantly criticising, and indeed anyone who taught contrary to what Jesus taught (compare Matthew 15.14; 23.24, 26). He is warning that the teaching and example of such teachers was not to be heeded. It included any who taught falsely. We must beware whom we have teaching us, for we must remember that we will become like our teachers.

Having the right teacher is important because it is the teacher who is in charge and is in control of what we learn (more so when no libraries were available). The consequence is that when we reach maturity we will have become like our teachers, and if our teachers are faulty, we shall be so as well. He could have said, 'Beware who you hear' (compare 8.18; 12.1; Mark 4.24; Matthew 7.15).

Underlying this is the thought of being obedient to the Teacher. The disciple is no more above his teacher than a servant is above his master (Matthew 10.24; John 13.16; 15.20). Thus the importance of submitting to the right teacher.

The implication here, of course, was that He was their Teacher, and that they should listen to His teaching and that of the newly appointed Apostles and continue on as His disciples. Then they would be led through to mature truth. A Reminder That Love Must Result In Honesty

When Judging (6.41-42).

He has previously warned against judging censoriously, or without proper regard for the facts. Now He relaxes that a little in cases where the intention is genuinely to do others good. But warns firstly against doing it hypocritically.

6.41-42

“And why do you behold the splinter that is in your brother’s eye,
But do not consider the beam that is in your own eye?
Or how can you say to your brother, Brother, let me cast out the splinter that is in your eye,
When you yourself do not behold the beam which is in your own eye?
You hypocrite, cast out first the beam out of your own eye,
And then you will see clearly to cast out the splinter that is in your brother’s eye.”

The ‘splinter’ and the ‘beam’ in this illustration both connect with building. They will lead on to the parable about building. A ‘splinter’ (or ‘chip’) is a tiny piece of timber, a ‘beam’ is a huge piece of timber which is used, for example, to hold up roofs. (The same contrast is found later in the Rabbis). That is why some have translated as ‘splinter’ and ‘plank’. The point is that we must not try to remove our brother’s small imperfections while in our own lives there are huge imperfections. First we must ensure that the huge imperfections are removed from our own lives. We must come into God’s light and let Him deal with all our own sin. We must put aside from our lives all that we know to be wrong. We must examine our own thoughts and motives. And then, once we have genuinely and fully done that, and the huge beam which has been marring our lives has been removed, then and only then, we can approach our brother to help him (compare Galatians 6.1-2).

‘You hypocrite.’ The word means a play-actor, and thus someone who is putting on a show which is not genuine, or acting in a contradictory way. In The End What Men Are Is Revealed In What They Produce By Their Lives (6.43-46).

Yet it is important that we help each other with regards to imperfections in us, for a tree is known by its fruit, and therefore it is important for all of us that our imperfections are dealt with. We have already seen this illustration about trees bearing fruit in the teaching of John the Baptist (3.8).

6.43-44

For there is no good tree which brings forth bad fruit,
Nor again a corrupt tree that brings forth good fruit.
For each tree is known by its own fruit.
For of thorns men do not gather figs,
Nor of a bramble bush gather they grapes.

Jesus now emphasises that the test of what we are is the fruit that we bear. This applies to all who read these words. This is what salvation is all about. It is in order to produce fruit-bearing trees. Jesus is saying that a man will be revealed as what he is by what men behold in his life. If he is a genuine Christian, ‘a good tree’, he will bring forth good fruit and not bad fruit. Whereas those who are corrupt trees, and therefore not Christians, will not produce good fruit but bad fruit. Every tree will be known by its fruit. Jesus is saying, ‘Show me a Christian whose life has not changed for the good, slow though the process may be, and I will show you a man or woman who is not a Christian.’

Our lives, says Jesus, should be producing good fruit, the equivalent of figs and grapes which delight man’s heart. But if we are not producing such fruit then we are simply revealing ourselves to be brambles and thorns. And what fruit should we be producing? ‘The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faith, gentleness and self-control’ (Galatians 5.22).

But we should note that the point here is not that men are what they are and cannot be changed. The good tree here is a good tree because the Holy Spirit has made it so. It was not naturally a good tree. Christ has not come simply to develop good trees which do not need changing, He has come to seek and to save the lost and turn them into good trees. That is why He goes on to speak of the treasure that God puts in men's hearts.

Note the differences with Matthew 7.16. Both are clearly drawing from a different source in spite of similarities. There is absolutely no reason why one or the other should have arbitrarily altered the source of the fruit, whereas we can understand Jesus doing so at two different times depending on His surroundings.

6.45-46

**“The good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth what is good,
And the evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth what is evil,
For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.
And why do you call me, Lord, Lord, and do not do the things which I say?”**

Jesus then points out that our hearts are like a treasure store. If we are Christians God had filled us with His treasures. He has put His Holy Spirit within us. He has created within us a new heart (2 Corinthians 5.17). He has filled our hearts with His love (Romans 5.5). And the truly good man, the true Christian, whose heart is thus full of good treasure, will bring that forth to the world. He brings forth what is good. All that he brings forth is a blessing. But the non-good only have evil treasures in their hearts. When they reach into their hearts and lives they only bring forth what is harmful, and unhelpful, and evil. (There really is no argument from this to support the idea that a man can be a Christian but not change. Such a view is an insult to Christ and to God).

For in the end it is what is in the heart that will come from the mouth. We speak as we are, and reveal what we are by our words. Do we want to know what a man's heart is like? Listen to what he says. He cannot keep it hidden for long. For out of the abundance that is in the heart (or otherwise) the mouth speaks.

Jesus then applies the lesson practically. Here are words that can so easily come from the mouth, ‘Lord, Lord.’ But the test of their genuineness is whether we do what He says. This is not, however, contradicting the previous line, for eventually the mouth will reveal whether Jesus is Lord or not. It is rather emphasising the same truth from a different viewpoint.

‘Lord, Lord.’ The repetition stresses the depth of the profession (compare Genesis 22.11; 46.2; Exodus 3.4; 1 Samuel 3.10). This person is making a great outward show of his submission. He is trying to make a huge impression, both in the eyes of Jesus and in the eyes of man. But Jesus is saying that such submission is worse than no submission if we do not do what He says. It is only obedience which really shows that He is our Lord. Otherwise we are simply emphasising our own hypocrisy.

The question here is not as to whether ‘we have made Jesus Lord of our lives’. God does not humble Himself to a position where He leaves such a choice to us. For the fact is that if we are Christians we profess Jesus as Lord, and God and Creator, to Whom we are responsible in all things. He is therefore our Lord. And the point here is that if we call Him ‘Lord, Lord’ and do not do what He says we are hypocrites and fools. We can only expect destruction, as the following illustration makes clear.

The Security Of The One Who Hears The Words Of Jesus And Does Them (6.47-48).

Jesus now ends His message with a forceful parable. He likens all who claim to be disciples to compare themselves with two men who set about building themselves a house. One built firmly on a rock. He was like the man who hears Jesus' words and does them. The other built directly onto the earth with no foundations. He was like a man who hears Jesus' words and

does not do them.

6.47-48 Every one who comes to me, and hears my words, and does them,
I will show you to whom he is like,
He is like a man building a house, who dug and went deep,
And laid a foundation on the rock,
And when a flood arose, the stream broke against that house,
And could not shake it, because it had been built well.

There is a difference between this parable here and the parallel one in Matthew 7.24-27. Sometimes in different messages Jesus emphasised His previous words by repetition. Sometimes He did it by alteration. Here the man is seen as putting in effort. He 'digs deep'. He wants to be certain of the soundness of the foundation (it hints at nothing about a cellar). Then he lays a foundation on a rock. (This is done equally by both Jews and Gentiles). The result is that when the bad years come and floods arise his house is able to cope with the pounding of the water. In the same way the man who hears Jesus' words and does them will be able to stand against all that life can throw at Him and against all the attacks of the Enemy. Nothing will hurt him (10.19). He is unshakeable.

When a person tells you that they are having difficulty believing, ask them about their lives. The problem in all probability lies in what they are doing, or planning to do, rather than with their faith or lack of it. The house is being shaken because it is no longer on the rock.

Disaster For Those Who Hear the Words of Jesus and Do Not Do Them (6.49).

6.49

But he who hears, and does not,
Is like a man who built a house on the earth without a foundation,
Against which the stream broke, and straightway it fell in,
And the ruin of that house was great.

But the one who hears Jesus' words and does not do them is like the man who builds his house without a foundation. And when the floods come his house collapses. There is no reason for talking about wadi beds here. Where there are mountains, and valleys, and rain floods are common to life in most parts of the world in one form or another, and equally so in Palestine.

Chapter 7 The Centurion's Servant, The Widow of Nain, The Concerns of John the Baptist Are Met, The sinful Woman.

Following the proclamation of the law of the new Kingly Rule of God, Luke now presents us with a number of incidents which reveal the breadth and depth of that Kingly Rule. It reaches out to the believing Gentiles with a word of power, it reaches out to a weeping widow of Israel with the offer of life, it affects the dead and restores them to life, it encourages imprisoned John who is raised to his true status, an incident which, however, also bring out the greatness of that Kingly Rule. It reaches down to a 'sinful woman' and makes her whole. And it will be followed by a further address in which Jesus makes clear the provision for the advancement of His Kingly Rule.

The Centurion's Servant (7.1-10). Jesus' Kingly Rule over Disease

In this incident Jesus is true to His own teaching and 'gives to him who asks of him' (compare Matthew 10.8 where giving is related to healing). The incident gains in importance in that it reveals to Christians the might of Rome submitting itself as unworthy even to come to Jesus, with Jesus then sending there His word (which is how Acts ends). Jesus as the great Prophet and King is seen as superior to Rome. Yet it is a clear indication that the grace of God through Jesus is available to those Gentiles who humbly seek it. It also indicated to non-Christians that Rome approved of Jesus Christ.

The very way in which Jesus heals the servant is an indication of the Kingly Rule of God. All

nature is under His control, and He has but to speak and it is done. Just as in the beginning He spoke and the worlds came into being, now He speaks and one part of that world, which has been corrupted, is restored.

The passage may be analysed as follows:

- a After He had ended all His sayings in the ears of the people Jesus entered into Capernaum (1).
- b A certain centurion's servant, who was dear to him, was sick and at the point of death. And when he heard about Jesus, he sent to him elders of the Jews, asking Him that He would come and save his servant (2-3).
- c They, when they came to Jesus, besought him earnestly, saying, "He is worthy that you should do this for him, for he loves our nation, and himself built us our synagogue" (4-5)
- d Jesus went with them. And when He was now not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to him, saying to Him, "Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy that you should come under my roof" (6)
- c That is why I did not think myself worthy to come to you. But say the word, and my servant shall be healed, for I also am a man set under authority, having under myself soldiers. And I say to this one, "Go", and he goes; and to another, "Come", and he comes; and to my servant, "Do this", and he does it' (7-8)
- b And when Jesus heard these things, He marvelled at him, and turned and said to the crowd who followed Him, "I say to you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel" (9).
- a And those who were sent, returning to the house, found the servant whole (10).

Note how in 'a' Jesus enters into Capernaum, and in the parallel the people return to the centurion's home with the servant healed. With the King comes healing. In 'b' the centurion exercises his faith and in the parallel Jesus marvels at his faith. In 'c' the elders say that the centurion is worthy, in the parallel the centurion says that he is not worthy. In 'd' the might of Rome confesses its unworthiness before Jesus.

7.1 'After he had ended all his sayings in the ears of the people, he entered into Capernaum.'

Having completed the giving of the new Law Jesus now returned to Capernaum.

7.2 'And a certain centurion's servant, who was dear to him, was sick and at the point of death.'

In or near Capernaum lived a Centurion and his household, and a servant whom he loved dearly was sick, and indeed at the point of death. By the fact that he was concerned about it we see both the centurion's compassion and his concern for his servants. The centurion was probably a Roman soldier assigned to the service of Herod Antipas as there were no official Roman forces in Galilee at that time. Or he may have been a foreign soldier in Herod's army. But his obvious wealth would suggest that he held an important position.

7.3 'And when he heard about Jesus, he sent to him elders of the Jews, asking him that he would come and save his servant.'

He was also a humble man. He did not despatch his soldiers to bring Jesus in, as he might have done. Nor did he go himself in order to exercise his influence as a servant of Rome. He recognised that he was dealing here with something greater than Rome, and that, as he was a Gentile, a Jewish prophet may well not wish to enter his house (no Pharisee would so so). So he rather approached some of the elders of the synagogue which he had built for the Jews, and asked them to intercede with the Prophet on his behalf. They on their part were willing. This was an indication that general Jewish hatred of Gentiles could be overborne when Gentiles were willing to show favour to Judaism. But had he been a proselyte they would

surely have said so.

7.4-5 ‘And they, when they came to Jesus, besought him earnestly, saying, “He is worthy that you should do this for him, for he loves our nation, and himself built us our synagogue.’

The Jews were very impressed by good works. It was something for which Jews were well known. To them this, together with his reverent attitude towards the God of Israel, made the centurion commendable. It is made clear, however, that in the end what commended him to Jesus was his faith in Him. It did illustrate, however, that a tree is known by its fruit, and that a man of faith will also be a man of works.

Accordingly the elders came to Jesus and put to him the centurion’s plea, assuring him that he was a deserving man having built a synagogue for the Jews. The remains of a synagogue have been discovered in the area which might well be a synagogue built on the site of this very one (which would have been destroyed by Titus).

7.6 ‘And Jesus went with them. And when he was now not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to him, saying to him, “Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy that you should come under my roof,”

Jesus responded to their plea, and the cry for help, and went on His way. It is probable that the centurion had actually seen the approach of the elders as a first step in order to scout out the position, rather than as a request for Jesus to come. Thus it would appear that when a messenger was sent on ahead in order to say that the Prophet was coming, the centurion sensed his own unworthiness and in a sense panicked. He felt that he was not worthy for a Prophet to come under his roof. Indeed he may also have recognised that for Jesus to do so would render Him unclean, but we must not see that as the main motive, otherwise it would have been stated. So he immediately sent his friends to assure Jesus that He need not come to his house, because he knew that he was not worthy. He was a man in awe of God.

7.7 ‘That is why I did not think myself worthy to come to you. But say the word, and my servant shall be healed.’

Indeed, he tells Jesus, that is why he had not come himself. He realised that he was only a Gentile and that he had no call on a Prophet of Israel. All therefore that he requested was that out of compassion Jesus would speak and heal his servant.

7.8 ‘For I also am a man set under authority, having under myself soldiers. And I say to this one, “Go”, and he goes; and to another, “Come”, and he comes; and to my servant, “Do this”, and he does it.’

He assured Jesus that he had no doubt that He could do this because he knew that He was a man who enjoyed the authority of God. So just as he himself could give orders and be obeyed, because he was a man under the rule of the powerful Caesar, and could act in his name, so he knew that Jesus could do the same with disease because He was under the authority of the Creator, and could act in His name. The centurion clearly had a high view of Jesus.

7.9 ‘And when Jesus heard these things, he marvelled at him, and turned and said to the crowd who followed him, “I say to you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel.” ’

When Jesus heard these words he marvelled. Here was a man with a high view of God, and a high view of Him, higher than any He had come across before. And a man whose high view also included genuine faith. Indeed greater faith than any that Jesus had yet found in man. For this man believed in Him implicitly.

We are not told so but we can assume that Jesus immediately spoke the word of healing. The Creator spoke and the disease vanished.

7.10 ‘And those who were sent, returning to the house, found the servant whole.’

And when those who had been sent returned to the Centurion's house they discovered that the servant had fully recovered. He was made whole.

Luke here tells the story so as to bring out the acknowledged uncleanness and unworthiness of the Gentiles vividly. It is not blurred over. But the point for his readers to see is that in spite of that uncleanness Jesus was undeterred and acted on the Gentile's behalf and in response to his plea. His Kingly word is thus seen to be also for Gentiles even at that stage.

Note. In Matthew the centurion is depicted as coming to Jesus himself. This may be because in the end the centurion did come himself because he was so het up over his servant being so close to death, or because the thought of the Prophet defiling Himself appalled him, something which either Luke's source had not known about, or that Luke wanted to avoid mentioning in order to bring out the barrier of separation between Jesus and the centurion. He also omits Jesus' meeting with the Syrophenician woman. He wants the impact of the Gospel coming to the Gentiles to be centred on Acts. (Luke has a way of not drawing attention to things when we would normally expect him to. He speaks through silences). In contrast with Luke, who was writing for Gentile readers, Matthew, who was writing mainly for Jewish Christian readers, wanted to stress how the centurion had humbled himself before a Hebrew prophet by personalising the incident. His view may have been that for a man to approach through his servants who gave his personal words to Jesus was the same as the man himself approaching. Matthew does have a tendency to abbreviate his sources. It is quite normal in historical records for them to say that some famous person did something, when in fact it was done by his servants (compare how I quite naturally said that Titus destroyed the synagogue in Capernaum above).

End of note.

The Raising From the Dead of the Widow of Nain's Son. Jesus' Kingly Rule Over Death (7.11-16).

Here we have an unforgettable scene. On the one hand we see a sad and dreary procession coming out of Nain, full of weeping and despair. Hope has gone. All is darkness. On the other we see a joyous and happy crowd seeking to enter it, full of hope and expectancy. All is light. The attention of one was concentrated on the dead body of the one who had been his mother's only hope, for she was a widow, on the other the concentration was on the Lord of life Who was the hope of Israel. And the two met. The result was inevitable. Death was swept aside and Jesus was revealed as ruling over death and Hades (Revelation 1.18). It was a foreview of the resurrection. Part of the reason for the telling of the story here is that it illustrates Jesus' words to John (7.22), words of hope pointing to the resurrection.

But there is also another motif lying behind this story brought out by Jesus' words to the widow, 'Do not weep.' A weeping widow was a picture of Israel in its need, 'A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping, Rachel is weeping for her children, she refuses to be comforted for her children, because they are not' (Jeremiah 31.15, compare Lamentations 1.1) which can be combined with the promise 'the reproach of your widowhood you will remember no more' (Isaiah 54.4-5). Thus here we see the promise of life made available to Israel through the Messiah.

The passage analyses as follows:

- a He went to a city called Nain, and His disciples went with Him, and a great crowd (11).**
- b When he drew near to the gate of the city, behold, there was carried out one who was dead, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow, and many people of the city were with her (12).**
- c When 'the Lord' saw her, he had compassion on her, and said to her, "Do not cry" (13a).**

- d He came near and touched the bier: and the bearers stood still (13b).
- c And he said, “Young man, I say to you, Arise” (14).
- b He who was dead sat up, and began to speak. And He gave him to his mother (15).
- a Fear took hold on all, and they glorified God, saying, “A great prophet is arisen among us,” and, “God has visited his people” (16).

Note that in ‘a’ Jesus approached Nain with His disciples and a great crowd, and in the parallel all are filled with awe and glorify God and declare that God has visited His people. In ‘b’ the dead body is being carried out to be buried, and in the parallel the dead body sits up and begins to speak. In ‘c’ Jesus speaks to the widow, and in the parallel He speaks to the son. In ‘d’ He is seen to be in overall control of the situation.

7.11 ‘And it came about soon afterwards, that he went to a city called Nain; and his disciples went with him, and a great crowd.’

Jesus’ popularity with the ordinary people continued, and a great crowd followed Him as he and His disciples approached Nain. Nain is the modern Nen in the plain of Jezreel six miles SSE of Nazareth and on the slope of Little Hermon. Its ancient gates have not yet been discovered, if it had any, but insufficient work has as yet been done on the site to be sure. However ‘gate’ can indicate simply an entrance thought of metaphorically as a gate. The fact that so obscure a place as Nain is mentioned is a clear indication that some genuine wonder occurred there that made men remember it..

7.12 ‘Now when he drew near to the gate of the city, behold, there was carried out one that was dead, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow, and many people of the city was with her.’

But when He drew near to that town He saw a funeral procession coming towards Him. Burials took place outside towns, and burial sites have been discovered near Nain. Jesus no doubt saw many funeral processions for in those days life was uncertain. The thing, however that distinguished this one was a particular weeping woman, for she was a widow, and her only main mainstay was now dead. Life held little for her in the future. She was fairly well known for almost the whole of the town were taking part. Taking part in such an even was seen by Jews as a meritorious act. And there was also probably a great sense of sympathy with her. For a widow to lose her only son was a huge tragedy. Perhaps Jesus knew the woman. She did not live far away from the town where He had grown up. Or perhaps He knew her because of Who He was.

7.13 ‘And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her, and said to her, “Do not cry.” ’

We are not told of any request made to Jesus. Perhaps all thought that there was nothing that He could do. But Jesus of His own volition went forward to help her because He was filled with compassion at her need. Here was One Who did not look lightly on the sufferings of His people. And gently He said to her, ‘Do not cry.’ We are reminded of His earlier words, ‘Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh’ (6.21). Soon the widow’s laughter will reach up to God.

‘When the Lord saw her.’ The use of ‘the Lord’ is not accidental. Here was the One Who was in control of the situation, the Lord of life. Compare 2.11 (a Saviour Who is Christ the Lord); 5.8 (the holy Lord); 5.12 (the Lord over disease); 5.17 (the Lord of power); 6.5 (the Lord of the Sabbath); 6.46 (the Lord of disciples Who must be obeyed). It speaks of authority and power.

7.14a ‘And he came near and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still.’

Then He came near to the bier and touched it, probably in a recognised way in order to indicate that the carriers should stop. This was not a time for words. And they did stop immediately. This required a certain level of faith, and is the only sign of faith that we

discover in the story (the phrase is central in the chiasmus), but it was enough. In spite of the situation they were waiting for Jesus to do something.

Normally for Jesus to touch the bier would render Him 'unclean'. But in this case it was the act of One Who rose above such things because of what He was about to do. In the same way as when He had previously touched the leper and healed him (5.13) He was now also conscious of no uncleanness (all good Jews knew instantly when they had become unclean). He stood in a unique position to such things, for He was turning all things upside down. As the man lived there could be no question of uncleanness.

7.14b 'And he said, "Young man, I say to you, Arise." '

Then Jesus spoke to the young man, saying, "Young man, I say to you, Arise." John tells us that one day that voice will speak the same words and all who are in the graves will come forth, some to everlasting life, and some to judgment (John 5.28-29). It was the command of the Lord of life, the heavenly King. Again Jesus had healed by a word (compare 7.7, also 4.39). He was a man 'under' the greatest Authority of all.

7.15 'And he who was dead sat up, and began to speak. And he gave him to his mother.'

And the dead man sat up and began to talk (compare 1 Kings 17.22 LXX where the child on being raised from the dead by Elijah 'cried out'). And Jesus then handed him over to his mother. For 'He gave him to his mother' compare 1 Kings 17.23 LXX where the same words are used. Jesus would not call someone who was so necessary to his aged mother to follow Him. It is impossible for us to appreciate quite how she must have felt. In one instant of meeting Jesus her whole life was transformed from misery and hopelessness to joy and hope. Today somewhere in the world the same thing happens daily as men who are dead in sin meet the Lord of life and have their lives transformed. For Luke wants us to know that His power is still the same today.

The comments above make clear that we are intended to connect this incident with the miracle performed by Elijah. Jesus is greater than Elijah, greater than Moses, greater than all the prophets (compare 9.10).

We only have details of three occasions on which Jesus raised people from the dead, one a son (here), one a daughter (8.54), and the third was Lazarus (John 11). But 7.22 suggests a number of others. Eusebius quotes Quadratus (125 AD) as saying in his Apology to Hadrian, 'The persons who were healed, and those who were raised from the dead, by Jesus, were not only seen when they were healed and raised but were always present also afterwards, and not only during the time when the Saviour walked on the earth, but after His departure also, they were present for a considerable time, so that some of them even lived until our times'.

7.16 'And fear took hold on all, and they glorified God, saying, "A great prophet is arisen among us," and, "God has visited his people." '

The people were filled with awe at what He had done. And the result was that the view that Jesus was a 'great Prophet' received a new boost, and men began to say, 'God has visited His people' (compare 1.68, 78). There was a great sense that God was once again active among His people. Note the stress on 'great'. This arose because He had raised the dead. It put Him on a level with the greatest of the prophets. Compare 1.32. The promises of the angel were being fulfilled.

John the Baptist Sends An Appeal To Jesus (7.17-23).

Meanwhile, while all this was going on, John the Baptist was languishing in prison. But he was regularly being visited by some of his brave disciples, and heard reports of what was going on and what was being said.

It is clear, however that he was puzzled. Why was something not happening? Surely if Jesus

was God's Coming One now was the time to act. Why was He hesitating? Perhaps he thought in terms of an insurrection and the deliverance of the people from the tyranny of Rome and Herod, but if so the idea had never appeared in his preaching, and so it must be doubtful. Probably he rather expected that he would face up to the authorities with signs and wonder of an awesome kind. That would explain why Jesus answered in the way that He did, saying to John, 'There are signs and wonders, but they are acts of compassion, not of belligerences, for I have come to obtain My way in peace'

We, of course, know the answer to John's problem, for Luke has revealed it to us. We have just seen the word of Jesus heal a dying man at a distance, and then raise a man from the dead. We know that Jesus has come to act through His word. But lying in a cell with nothing to do but think and pray John does not have our advantage.

We may analyse the passage as follows:

- a This word went forth concerning Him in the whole of Judaea, and all the region round about, and the disciples of John told him of all these things (18).
- b John, calling to him two of his disciples, sent them to the Lord, saying, "Are you He Who is coming, or look we for another?" (19).
- c And when the men were come to Him, they said, "John the Baptist has sent us to you, saying, Are You He Who is coming, or look we for another?" (20).
- c In that hour He cured many of diseases and plagues and evil spirits, and on many that were blind He bestowed sight (21).
- b And He answered and said to them, "Go and tell John the things which you have seen and heard; the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good tidings preached to them" (22).
- a And blessed is he, whoever shall find no occasion of stumbling in me" (23).

We note in this small passage the dual repetition of a question, and a dual answer, one in deeds the other in words. This stresses the importance of both question and answer. Jesus is aware that His disciples too are listening and possibly wondering the same thing as John. Note that in 'a' 'the word concerning Him went out' and many heard it, and then in the parallel Jesus says 'Blessed is he, whoever shall find no occasion of stumbling in me'. The word that went out was conveying the truth about Him, and must be accepted without it being a stumblingblock. For it conveyed the truth about His Messiahship and the presence of the Kingly Rule of God. Whoever thus received it would be blessed. In 'b' the question is put forward, and in the parallel the answer is given by Jesus outlining the activities that 'the word' that went about spoke of. And in 'c' and parallel we have a doubling up of the question and the answer. It is dually witnessed because of its importance to all.

7.17-18 'And this word went forth concerning him in the whole of Judaea, and all the region round about, and the disciples of John told him of all these things.'

So the word of what He was doing, and especially of the raising of the dead, spread around the whole of Palestine (Judaea in its widest sense) and even beyond. And by means of his disciples it reached John in prison.

Note Luke's continual emphasis on this spreading of the word (which will be repeated regularly in Acts). After the exorcism in the synagogue at Capernaum, 'word about him was going out to every place in the surrounding region' (4.37). After the healing of the leper, 'so much the more the word went abroad concerning Him' (5.15). Following this the Pharisees and teachers of the Law were present 'from every village of Galilee and Judaea and from Jerusalem' (5.17). And this is surpassed in 6.17-18, where we hear of 'a great multitude of the people from all Judaea (the land of the Jews) and Jerusalem and the seacoast of Tyre and Sidon, who came to hear him and be healed.' And now we are told that 'And this word about Him went out in the all the land of the Jews and in all the neighbouring region.' The news is

spreading widely and rapidly.

7.19 ‘And John, calling to him two of his disciples, sent them to the Lord, saying, “Are you he who is coming, or look we for another?” ’

Having heard the news of this rapid spreading of the word and of all that was taking place (as much as his disciples could tell him) John called two of his disciples and sent them ‘to the Lord’. This use of ‘the Lord’ connects up with 7.13. They were sent to the Lord Who had raised the dead (compare verse 18, ‘all these things’). The contrast between Jesus and John is being emphasised. Jesus is increasing, John is decreasing (John 3.30). For John worked no miracles, whereas Jesus wrought wonders wherever He went. He is revealing His power as ‘the Lord’ (Christ the Lord - 2.11), besides which John is merely the greatest of the prophets.

(B; f13; 157 and others have ‘the Lord’. Aleph A W Theta f1 f28 have ‘Jesus’).

We should not be taken by surprise by John’s doubts as he languishes in the darkness of his prison cell in chains. If Jesus could express hesitancy in Gethsemane when He knew what was happening, how much more likely John in prison when he did not know what was happening. John had been expecting so much, and now time hung heavy on his hands. He did not doubt God (‘look we for another’). He was still as involved as ever (as far as he could be). But he just could not understand what he heard about the ministry of Jesus. Things did not seem to be going as he had expected (we are not wise when we decide how God should act). Jesus was no longer preaching in the wilderness regions, as He had for a while alongside John (John 3.22-4.3). Indeed from all reports he was partying with outcasts and the non-religious. And there was no suggestion of His gathering an army. All He had was a small band of Galileans (although they could be tough fighters), and all they did was go around preaching. That was all very well for a time. But he had expected that by now other stirrings might have been taking place.

‘A certain two (duo tinas) of his disciples.’ John wants a twofold witness in order to confirm its certainty. Although it may be that his disciples also went around in twos. It was quite common.

The message that his disciples took was in the form of a simple question. “Are you He Who is coming, or look we for another?” For John had been looking for ‘the Coming One’ to act as the eschatological figure through Whom the Holy Spirit would be poured out, when all who were in rebellion against God would be brought into judgment (3.16-17). For ‘the Coming One’ compare ‘blessed is He Who comes in the name of the Lord’ (13.35), ‘blessed is the King Who comes in the name of the Lord (19.38). But this was not what appeared to be happening. Where were the fires of judgment? He was puzzled.

7.20 ‘And when the men were come to him, they said, “John the Baptist has sent us to you, saying, Are You He Who is coming, or look we for another?”

So the men came to Jesus with the message. The question is repeated a second time so as to bring it home to the reader. It was the question that all were asking.

7.21 ‘In that hour he cured many of diseases and plagues and evil spirits, and on many that were blind he bestowed sight.’

While John’s disciples were there Jesus continued performing His wonders, He healed diseases and plagues, He cast out evil spirits, He gave sight to the blind. He revealed the power, love and compassion of God.

7.22 ‘And he answered and said to them, “Go and tell John the things which you have seen and heard; the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good tidings preached to them.”

And then He turned to John’s disciples and told them to go to John and tell them what they

had seen and heard. 'Tell him that the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the skin diseased are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised up and the poor have the Good News preached to them.' All this was in fulfilment of Isaiah 29.18-19; 35.5-6; 61.1, to which is added that the skin diseased are cleansed (as with Elisha - 2 Kings 7) and the dead are raised (as with Elijah (1 Kings 17) and Elisha (2 Kings 4) and compare Isaiah 26.19 where the raising of the dead is an eschatological sign.

The message was threefold, firstly that One was here Who paralleled and even eclipsed Elijah and Elisha, secondly that the eschatological signs were being fulfilled, and thirdly, through deafening silence, that the time of judgment was not yet. God was at work in His own time. He was not in a hurry. He was gathering the wheat into the barn. The judgment could wait until the harvest was gathered in.

'The blind receive their sight (4.18; 14.13, 21; 18.35-43; Mark 8.22-26; Matthew 9.27-31; 12.22; 21.14), the lame walk (5.17-26; 14.13, 21; Matthew 15.30; 21.14; John 5.3; Acts 3.1-10), the lepers are cleansed (5.12-16; 17.11-19), and the deaf/dumb hear (11.14; Mark 7.31-37; Matthew 9.32-34), the dead are raised up (7.11-17; 8.40-56; John 11), the poor have good tidings preached to them (4.18; 6.20; 14.13, 21)." Note that what is placed last draws attention to His central purpose. He is here to proclaim Good News, gathering the wheat into the barn (3.17). The judgment will follow in due time.

'The poor have the good news preached to them.' No one had any time for the poor. The Romans trampled on them, the Greeks despised them, the priests and Levites passed them by. But God had time for them. It was the Anointed Prophet from God Who would proclaim the Good news to the poor (61.1). It was the good shepherd who would attend to the poor of the flock (Zechariah 11.7, 11), the shepherd who would be smitten (Zechariah 13.7). For they were God's special concern (Isaiah 25.4; 41.17).

7.23 "And blessed is he, whoever shall find no occasion of stumbling in me."

And then He adds that John must believe and trust Him. He will be blessed if he does not find what Jesus is doing as a stumblingblock. In other words He is saying to John. 'Yes, I am the Coming One as you will recognise if you consider what I am doing along with the Scriptures, but you have misunderstood the present purpose in My coming. Trust Me and you will see that all will work out as God has planned.'

'No occasion of stumbling in Me.' John is to see Him as a sanctuary, a firm rock, not as a stumblingstone (Isaiah 8.14). Indeed that is why John himself has prepared the way so that none may stumble (Isaiah 57.14).

We should note that it is not a question of John having lost faith. He still believes that One is to come from God. He has rather partially (only partially, for he has still sent to enquire of Him) lost faith in the way Jesus is going about things. It just does not accord with his expectations. Possibly he had hoped to see Jesus up. That is why Jesus' reply is 'trust me John, and consider again my activities in the light of Scripture. I know what I am doing, and blessing for you rests in recognising it too'.

Jesus' Testimony to John (7.24-35).

His answer being sent to John Jesus turned to the waiting crowd. He did not want them to see John as a shaken reed. It was not John who had failed in the purposes of God, but the fickle hearers. And He uses the opportunity to make clear His own great superiority to John because of what He had come to do, while at the same time giving John the highest place possible to man. In doing so He brings home the wonder of the fact that the anticipated Kingly Rule of God is now here in Him. But He then rebukes those who have failed to understand. The Scribes and Pharisees are especially in mind.

We can analyse this passage as follows:

- **When the messengers of John were departed, he began to say to the crowds concerning John, “What did you go out into the wilderness to behold? A reed shaken with the wind?”**
- **b “But what did you go out to? A man clothed in soft raiment? Behold, those who are gorgeously appavelled, and live delicately, are in kings’ courts.”**
- **c “But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and much more than a prophet.”**
- **d “This is he of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before your face, Who will prepare your way before you.”**
- **e “I say to you, Among those who are born of women there is none greater than John.**
- **f “Yet he who is but little within the Kingly Rule of God is greater than he.”**
- **e “And all the people when they heard, and the public servants, justified God, being baptised with the baptism of John, but the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected for themselves the counsel of God, being not baptised of him.”**
- **d “To what then shall I liken the men of this generation, and to what are they like? They are like children who sit in the marketplace, and call one to another, who say,
‘We piped to you, and you did not dance,
We wailed, and you did not weep.’**
- **c “For John the Baptiser is come eating no bread nor drinking wine; and you say, ‘He has a demon.’ ”**
- **b “The Son of man is come eating and drinking; and you say, Behold, a gluttonous man, and a winebibber, a friend of public servants and sinners!”**
- **a “And wisdom is justified of all her children.”**

The contrasts are powerful leading up to the presence of the Kingly Rule of God and its glory. In ‘a’ the people see a reed shaken in the wind, and in the parallel wisdom is justified of her children, who have totally misunderstood both John and Jesus. In ‘b’ we are told of the celebrating in king’s houses, and in the parallel the Son of Man comes celebrating for He is the King, even though misunderstood. In ‘c’ John is ‘more than a prophet’ and in the parallel he reveals it by his abstinence and they misunderstand him and see his prophetic spirit as of the devil. In ‘d’ we have the powerful Scriptural expression of the purpose of John’s coming and in the parallel the Pharisees’ expression of it in the equivalent of Nursery Rhymes. In ‘e’ there is none greater than John and in the parallel the people confirm it and the Pharisees deny it. And centrally in ‘f’ those who come under the Kingly Rule of God as expressed in Jesus, however lowly, are ‘greater’ than John, for they have entered in to what John could only look forward to.

Note the powerful progression in greatness from lowest to highest; John is not a reed that bends to the wind (a), John is not a soft courtier (b), John is a prophet and more than a prophet (c), John is the one sent to prepare the way for the Coming One (d), among men born of women there is none greater than he (e). And yet with all that the Kingly Rule of God has now come, and those who enter it are greater than John (f).

Then notice the comparisons. The people (the poor, and hungry, and weeping) have received the Kingly Rule of God and have been baptised with the baptism of John, ‘justifying God’, while the Scribes and Pharisees and their like (the rich the full and the foolishly content) have turned away from it, rejecting the counsel of God, and refusing to be baptised (e). They have done so because neither John or Jesus have danced to their tune (d). John they have accused of being devil-possessed because of his asceticism which has gone beyond what they consider necessary (c), Jesus they have accused of being worldly and frivolous because He eats and drinks and fails to totally follow their rules (b). Truly, says Jesus, wisdom is ‘justified of her children’ (a), just as God was justified of His (e).

7.24 ‘And when the messengers of John were departed, he began to say to the crowds

concerning John, “What did you go out into the wilderness to behold? A reed shaken with the wind?” ’

Jesus now turned to challenge the crowds. He did not want them to see John as failing. Indeed the problem lay not with John and his honest doubts, but with those who failed to follow the counsel or purpose of God (verse 30).

So they should now recognise that they had gone out to John in the wilderness, not because he bowed to the winds of the Scribes and Pharisees and of Herod, and to the winds of change, but because he came with a powerful, firm and consistent message. (Anyone less like a reed bending before the wind than John the Baptist it is difficult to imagine).

The idea here may be taken from 1 Kings 14.15 where a reed in the water, shaken in the wind, is illustrative of those who are rejected by God because of failure.

7.25 “But what did you go out to? A man clothed in soft raiment? Behold, those who are gorgeously apparelled, and live delicately, are in kings’ courts.”

They had not gone out to him in the desert because he walked in king’s courts, and wore beautiful clothing, and lived in luxury, for those who were like that were not to be found in the desert, they were in palaces, picking their way carefully to avoid contamination, and bowing and scraping to the king. So they had not been looking for that. They had gone because they were looking for what they did find, a prophet of God.

7.26 “But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and much more than a prophet.”

What did they go out to see? They went to see a prophet, a prophet from God. And yes, even more than that, they went out to see one who was more than just a mere prophet, he was the prophet who was the Preparer of the way as prophesied by Isaiah, the Messenger of Malachi 3.1. After him would come the Coming One.

‘More than (just) a prophet.’ He was the Elijah who was for to come (Matthew 11.14), the one who came in the spirit and power of Elijah (1.17), although not strictly Elijah himself (John 1.21).

7.27 “This is he of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before your face, Who will prepare your way before you.”

For he was the one of whom God had said that he was His messenger, sent before His very eyes, to prepare the way for God to act and to enable Israel to behold its God (Malachi 3.1; compare Isaiah 40.3-5 as in Luke 3.4-6).

The actual quotation is a combination of the Hebrew text for Malachi 3.1 slightly altered and with a slight addition from Exodus 23.20. The messenger will come from God, and like God he will go forward to prepare their way. The same combination is found in Mark 1.2; Matthew 11.10. Possibly it was as contained in a list of prophecies or proof texts compiled by the early church or produced by the Apostles.

7.28 “I say to you, Among those who are born of women there is none greater than John, yet he who is but little (or ‘least’) within the Kingly Rule of God is greater than he.”

So among those born of women there is no greater than John the Baptist. But now in Jesus what John pointed to is fulfilled (as He has pointed out to John previously in verses 22-23). The Kingly Rule of God is here in the King, and those who now enter it have a standing higher even than that of John. They are not only born of the Spirit, they are directly servants of the King Who is present among His people, a privilege that John has never had (significantly there was the indication here that John would never leave prison. His task was done). It is clear from this the high status and position that Jesus is claiming for Himself. The greatest of all men has now been superseded by the Greater, by the King, by ‘Christ the Lord’

(2.11).

As the New Testament tells us elsewhere, this was the day that the prophets and righteous men of past ages had longed for. They had longed to see what these people saw, and to hear what they heard (Matthew 13.17; 1 Peter 1.10-12). And now it was here. And John had to sink into the background because the One was here to Whom all the ages had pointed.

Others see 'he who is least' as a reference to Jesus Himself, thus stressing that He is here as the King under God, because made man least in the Kingdom of Heaven. 'Least' then contrasts here with 'greater'. John may be great among men, but Jesus is under the Kingly Rule of God, where the least is greater than the greatest on earth. Or perhaps He had in mind His Apostles (Luke 22.26).

'There is none greater than John.' John is described as the greatest of all men who have been born into the world. Furthermore as 'more than a prophet' he is the greatest of the prophets. But his greatness becomes insignificant in comparison with things to do with Heaven. These last probably include the thought of the new birth from above (John 3.5-6) by which those who are born of the Spirit enter the Kingly Rule of God (John 3.5) having been made partakers of a heavenly/divine nature (2 Peter 1.4), but it cannot just mean that for we must not deny to John the birth of the Spirit. More probably the thought is of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit which will result in signs and wonders. (John did no miracle - John 10.41).

Does this then mean that John could not enter under the Kingly Rule of God? That is certainly not the idea. But what he cannot do is enter it on earth as a direct servant of the King. Jesus had not set Himself up as King until John was imprisoned (2.20; Mark 1.14). Thereby his ministry ceased and Jesus' independent ministry began in the proclaiming of the Kingly Rule of God (Mark 1.15). Those who now enjoy a position under Him are thus greater on earth than John for they are in the direct service of the King. The prophet has fulfilled his great ministry. Now the Greater than he reigns, along with His Apostles.

7.29-30 "And all the people when they heard, and the public servants, justified God, being baptised with the baptism of John, but the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected for themselves the counsel of God, being not baptised of him."

Having stated the position Jesus now deals with response to that position. Their coming has divided up Israel. On the one hand are the common people (the poor, and hungry, and sorrowful), together with the outcasts (the public servants) and they have revealed God to be in the right in what He has done (justified His decision) in sending John, by responding to John's message and being baptised with His baptism in readiness for the Coming One, in readiness for His pouring out on them of His Holy Spirit. On the other are the Pharisees and the Lawyers (Scribes), and the rich and the full and the self-satisfied, who have rejected the counsel and purposes of God, and have refused to be baptised. They justify themselves (18.11-12). Note Jesus certainty of the purpose of God which they have rejected. They have actually turned against God's purposes.

7.31-32 "To what then shall I liken the men of this generation, and to what are they like? They are like children who sit in the marketplace, and call one to another, who say,

'We piped to you, and you did not dance,
We wailed, and you did not weep.'

For these Pharisees and lawyers and their ilk are like children sitting and complaining that John and Jesus will not take part in their games. They will not dance to the Pharisaic tune, nor will they enter into the Pharisaic ways of expressing their mourning. One goes too far, the other does not go far enough.

The words may well be taken from a well known children's song, sang at play, as the children sang and danced together, referring to the miming of mourning, and playing at wedding and

funerals.

7.33 “For John the Baptist is come eating no bread nor drinking wine; and you say, ‘He has a demon.’”

So when John, like Elijah of old, goes into the wilderness and clothes himself in goatskin and eats wild honey (Mark 1.6) they cry, ‘He has a demon’. (The wilderness was seen among other things as a place of demons). ‘He is behaving like a madman’. To go alone with God like that was beyond their comprehension. They loved the tight huddle of self-congratulation.

7.34 “The Son of man is come eating and drinking; and you say, Behold, a gluttonous man, and a winebibber, a friend of public servants and sinners!”

And when Jesus walks among men and eats and drinks with them, they say, “See, He is a gluttonous man, He is wine-lover, He is a friend of public servants and sinners.” ‘Public servants’ were those who served the hated Herod and the government which ruled under Rome, the tax-collectors, the customs officers, the collectors of tolls. They were despised by all as traitors. ‘Sinners’ were those who did not follow the Pharisaic regulations for maintaining ‘cleanness’ and in tithing, and with regard to the strict observance of the Sabbath and other such matters.

Thus they could not make up their minds as to what they wanted one way or the other. One was too narrow minded, the other too broadminded. For unless men walked in their carefully laid out path, veering neither to one side or the other, they were to be condemned. They accepted no other way.

‘The Son of Man.’ That this refers to Jesus is undoubted. But what does it signify here? In Daniel 7 the son of man is both prince and people. Thus here Jesus is emphasising His oneness with the people. He is not apart from them, He is identified with them. Thus He eats and drinks with them. Yet He does it too as an individual. He is one with them and yet He is their King.

7.35 “And wisdom is justified of all her children.”

Thus the proverb was clearly true. The wisdom of the Scribes had produced children suited to it, who could not agree with any but themselves. While those who have found the true wisdom and responded to Jesus have entered under His kingly Rule. Their wisdom too, received from the Master, has produced its children with their fruit.

Jesus Is Greeted By the Transformed Prostitute, Who Has Believed And Reveals It By Her Purified Love, A Picture of Restored Israel (Ezekiel 16.59-63) And Of The Fact That The Kingly Rule of God Is Available To All Who Seek Him and Hear Him (7.36-50).

One of the most vivid passages of the Old Testament is where Ezekiel speaks of Jerusalem as having become like a prostitute who has sold herself to the highest bidder (Ezekiel 16.15). Then God declares, ‘I will remember my covenant with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish with you an everlasting covenant. Then you will remember your ways and be ashamed --- I will establish my covenant with you and you shall know that I am the Lord, that you may remember and be confounded and *never open your mouth again* because of your shame, *when I forgive you all that you have done*, says the Lord God.’

So when a prostitute (she had unbound hair) comes to the feet of Jesus, and *speaks never a word*, but washes His feet with her tears and wipes them with the hairs of her head, did not Jesus remember these words? And do we not here have a picture of the fallen people of God and their way back to forgiveness? And the result is that the Messiah, Who introduces the everlasting covenant, the sure mercies of David (Isaiah 55.3), comes and receives her under His Kingly Rule, and *declares that she is forgiven ‘all that she has done’* (‘her sins which are many’).

The incident may be analysed as follows:

- a And one of the Pharisees desired Him that he would eat with him. And He entered into the Pharisee's house, and sat down to a meal (36).
- b And behold, there was a woman who was in the city, a sinner; and when she knew that He was having a meal in the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster cruse of ointment, and standing behind at His feet, weeping, she began to wet His feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hair of her head, and kissed His feet, and anointed them with the ointment (37-38).
- c Now when the Pharisee who had bidden Him saw it, he spoke within himself, saying, "This man, if He were a prophet, would have perceived who and what manner of woman this is who touches Him, that she is a sinner" (39).
- d And Jesus answering said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." And he says, "Teacher, say on." "A certain lender had two debtors, the one owed five hundred shillings, and the other fifty. When they had not wherewith to pay, he forgave them both. Which of them therefore will love him most?" (40-42).
- e Simon answered and said, "He, I suppose, to whom he forgave the most." And He said to him, "You have rightly judged." (43).
- d And turning to the woman, He said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered into your house, you gave me no water for My feet, but she has wetted My feet with her tears, and wiped them with her hair. You gave Me no kiss, but she, since the time I came in, has not ceased to kiss My feet. My head with oil you did not anoint, but she has anointed My feet with ointment."
- c "For this reason I say to you, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little."
- b And He said to her, "Your sins are forgiven."
- a And those who sat at the meal with Him began to say within themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?" And He said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you, go in peace" (49-50).

Note than in 'a' Jesus 'sat at the meal' with the Pharisee and his guests, and in the parallel those who 'sat at the meal' with Him gave their reactions. In 'b' the woman comes in and reveals her loving gratitude to Jesus, and in the parallel He says, "Your sins are forgiven you." In 'c' the Pharisee mutters to himself that if Jesus knew what kind of woman she was He would not allow her to touch Him, and in the parallel Jesus points out that the reason he does so is because she is truly forgiven. In 'd' Jesus asks which debtor will love the most and in the parallel reveals how the woman has loved the most. And in the centre the point is made that it is the one who is forgiven the most, who loves the most.

Perhaps before we look at the text in more detail we should consider the logic behind the story. And central to it, and clearly shown, is the fact that she was NOT forgiven because she loved Jesus. Rather she loved Jesus because she was forgiven. That is the point of the parable. Each debtor loved because he was forgiven, and the one who was forgiven the most loved the most. This is then made clear by the fact that it is her faith which has saved her. Thus her forgiveness has come through faith.

And that brings out that when Jesus saw this disreputable woman come towards Him to touch Him He knew at once the reason why. It was *because she had been listening to His preaching and had repented and had received forgiveness, and now wanted to reveal her gratitude.* That is why He did not rebuke her.

7.36 'And one of the Pharisees desired him that he would eat with him. And he entered into the Pharisee's house, and sat down to a meal.'

The story begins with Jesus being invited to the house of 'one of the Pharisees'. He appears to be on fairly good terms with Jesus, but it becomes quite apparent that while he would expect

the necessary pouring of water over the hands to take place (without which he himself would not have eaten) he pays little attention to the courtesies which would be offered to an honoured guest. Here clearly was one who did not 'love the most'. He no doubt felt that he was doing enough in allowing Jesus to sit with his honoured guests.

7.37-38 'And behold, there was a woman who was in the city, a sinner; and when she knew that he was sitting at a meal in the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster cruse of ointment, and standing behind at his feet, weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hair of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment.'

And then there was a sudden interruption. It was clearly not a large house, and there were apparently few servants, for through the doorway there came a woman with unbound hair. It was in fact quite normal for the doors to be left open as an act of charity so that people could enter the house while the meal was going on, hoping either to receive a hand out, or some pearls of wisdom from the learned men sat at table. But a woman like this would not have been welcomed. Unbound hair would be seen as a disgrace in a woman, and would indicate her profession. She had heard that Jesus was sitting at a meal in the Pharisee's house, and she came bringing an alabaster cruse of precious ointment.

Everything was against the woman, and she would know it. She had been dealing with Pharisees for years. She knew that her touch was unclean, she knew that her precious ointment had been bought with immoral earnings (or would be seen as so), she knew that she should not enter a Pharisee's house. But she was determined. No doubt she wanted to anoint Jesus' head with her ointment. And she did so because of her faith in the fact that He would be her Saviour (verse 50), and because of a consciousness of sins forgiven through her previous contact with Him. It was because she knew that she was now clean that she felt that she could do what she did.

So entering the house she made for where Jesus was lying on a couch by the table. He would be lying on one elbow with His feet extended backwards. And she took in the situation at a glance. It was clear that Jesus' feet were still dirty from the road. It would take her by surprise. To her he was the most important person in the room, and she would not be able to believe that they had not had the courtesy to arrange for His feet to be washed. Perhaps that was why she began to weep as she realised how her beloved Master was being treated, or perhaps she was already weeping. But it altered her whole approach. Reaching down she wiped the dust of His feet with her tears, and then she wiped them with her hair. Then she kissed His feet, and poured on them the precious ointment that she had brought. How dared they treat her beloved Master like this? And to everyone's surprise Jesus appeared unmoved and made no effort to prevent it.

7.39 'Now when the Pharisee who had bidden him saw it, he spoke within himself, saying, "This man, if he were a prophet, would have perceived who and what manner of woman this is who touches him, that she is a sinner."'

The Pharisee was horrified, but courteously said nothing. He could see at once what kind of a woman this was, 'a sinner', probably a prostitute. To be touched by such a woman was to be ritually defiled. Yet it was apparent that Jesus was making no attempt to avoid her. He could only assume that Jesus did not realise what kind of a woman she was. Some prophet! He had been considering what he could believe about Jesus, and now he knew. Sadly He was not genuine after all.

It is salutary that he apparently felt no guilt about his own neglect of his guest. He probably felt that Jesus should feel grateful that He had been invited. But at least he kept his head averted and pretended that he had not seen the woman. He must not make his guest feel uncomfortable.

7.40 And Jesus answering said to him, “Simon, I have something to say to you.” And he says, “Teacher, say on.”

We learn immediately that Jesus knew exactly what he was thinking. For He casually turned to him and said, “Simon, I have something to say to you.” It says something for Simon that he showed nothing of what he was thinking and spoke as though nothing was wrong. We have only to think for a moment to realise what all the other guests were thinking, and that they would all be uncomfortably looking at Simon wondering what to do. But he simply said, “Teacher, say on”, as though nothing unusual was happening at all.

Jesus then spoke in the form of a short parable.

7.41-42 “A certain money lender had two debtors, the one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. When they had not wherewith to pay, he forgave them both. Which of them therefore will love him most?”

The illustration was simply told. Two men had borrowed money from a moneylender, one fifty thousand pounds, the other five thousand. And then when the money lender discovered that they could not pay, probably to their great surprise, he cancelled their debts. Which then would love him the most?

7.43 ‘Simon answered and said, “He, I suppose, to whom he forgave the most.” And he said to him, “You have rightly judged.”

Simon had no difficulty in answering that one. It was the one who was forgiven the most. And Jesus replied that he had got it absolutely right.

7.44 ‘And turning to the woman, he said to Simon, “Do you see this woman? I entered into your house, you gave me no water for my feet, but she has wetted my feet with her tears, and wiped them with her hair.”

Up to this point Simon had probably been ignoring the woman and pretending that he had not noticed her. So Jesus pointedly draws attention to her. And then He draws attention to what she had done that Simon had left undone. When Jesus had entered his house no one had washed His feet.

It was normally considered polite to arrange for the feet of guests to be washed once they had come in off the dusty road. The failure to arrange it for Jesus must have been deliberate. Perhaps Simon had wanted to make it clear to the other guests that Jesus was not here because he thoroughly approved of Him, but more under sufferance; that He was not so much a guest as an invitee. He was indicating that he was wanting to find out what He had to say, but must not be thought to be too interested, or making too many concessions. It would not be a discourtesy, only an indication that Jesus was not a particularly welcome guest.

The fact that Jesus drew attention to it demonstrates that He wanted to strike his conscience and give a gentle rebuke. Here was Simon criticising the woman in his mind for being a ‘sinner’, but in fact Simon was far more guilty than the woman. He had failed in offering basic hospitality to one whom he considered might well be a prophet of God (which did put him in the wrong. It was a discourtesy to God).

The fact that there were sufficient tears to wipe His feet demonstrates the deep feeling the woman was experiencing. Her gratitude to Jesus was overflowing. And then when she had washed His feet she used her hair to dry them.

7.45 “You gave me no kiss, but she, since the time I came in, has not ceased to kiss my feet.”

The welcoming kiss was not so much a requirement as the washing of feet, but it would still be given to a welcome guest. Again Jesus had been kept in His place. He must not be made to feel too welcome. But this woman whom Simon was criticising in his thoughts was giving Jesus the welcome that had been refused Him by Simon. To her He was the most important guest there.

How could He not appreciate it? Especially as He knew what was in her heart.

7.46 “You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment.”

It is clear how bare had been Simon’s welcome. He had neglected all the means normally used to make a favoured guest feel welcome and to make him comfortable. But this woman had made up for Jesus’ lack of welcome by anointing not His head, but His feet. All that Simon had pointedly failed to do to God’s prophet, this woman had done, and more. It was a rebuke from God. He had failed even to offer common olive oil, yet this woman, despised by all present, had brought expensive ointment.

7.47 “For this reason I say to you, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much, but to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little.”

And what did all this prove? It proved that she had good reason to be grateful to Jesus. And Jesus knew the reason why. He knew that she had been burdened down by many sins, and that on hearing His words as He proclaimed the Good News she had at some stage found forgiveness for them all. This explained her love and gratitude. Her much love proved her much forgiveness. A lesser love would have indicated that she had received a lesser forgiveness.

It should be noted that the fact that she was there at all, not saying anything but expressing genuine Christian love, indicated that she felt that she owed Jesus a debt of gratitude. Why else would she love Jesus? The kind of ‘love’ she had been used to would not have been deserving of forgiveness, nor would it have been welcome to Jesus. What had happened here had to be because something that He had done or said had genuinely benefited her, and it had to have been something spectacular for her to humiliate herself like that. Furthermore she would have been in no doubt about the kind of welcome she would receive in the Pharisee’s house, and yet she had come. Why? Because she had known in her heart that Jesus would not turn her away. She knew that He would welcome her because He would know that she had turned to God and had been forgiven. (She would not expect to be welcomed as a practising prostitute). Thus all points to an experience of having been cleansed for which she was grateful. And the parable confirms that Jesus was aware of it.

‘But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little.’ Is there a hint here of Simon’s own failure. Not on a par with the woman’s, but still there? He had not demonstrated great love.

7.48 ‘And he said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.” ’

So He turned to the woman and assured her, “Your sins have been and are forgiven.” They would be welcome words, a further assurance of what she already knew in her heart. And possibly spoken as much to the hearers as to her. He would be very well aware that they were at this stage hanging on His every word. And it was necessary for her rehabilitation that it be known by all that she was forgiven.

7.49 ‘And those who sat at the meal with him began to say within themselves, “Who is this who even forgives sins?” ’

But those who were there recognised the implication of what He had said. He was guaranteeing that her sins were forgiven. He was taking on Himself a divine prerogative. He was setting Himself up as having special divine authority. And they asked each other with awe, ‘Who is this?’ They do not accuse Him of wrongdoing. They are genuinely interested. Their response to that question could make all the difference in their lives.

7.50 ‘And he said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you. Go in peace.” ’

Then Jesus turned to the woman again and said, “Your faith has saved you. Go in peace.” He wanted her to know that in the end it was her faith in Him that had saved her. She had been delivered from a life of sin because she believed in Him. And now she could go with peace in

her heart. 'Who is this?' She knew that He was her Saviour.

As we come to the close of the story perhaps we should consider its lessons. Firstly it demonstrates that all can be saved, no matter what their sins, if only they turn to God and believe in Jesus Christ. Secondly in the light of Ezekiel 16 it illustrates a call to Israel to repent of her spiritual adultery and return to the Lord in view of the fact that the everlasting covenant of the Messiah is now on offer. Thirdly it was a lesson to Simon about the courtesy that should be shown to a prophet of God and a gentle hint not to overlook the courtesies of life. Fourthly it revealed the authority of Jesus to make confident and specific declarations about the forgiveness of sins.

Chapter 8.

Jesus Proclaims the Parables of the Kingly Rule of God (8.1-18).

Having commenced this part section with the new Law of the Kingly Rule of God (6.20-49), and having in various ways revealed the advance of that Kingly Rule over Gentiles (7.1-10), over death (7.11-17), over disease and evil spirits (7.18-23), as an advance on the work of John the Baptist (7.24-35), and over the outcasts of Israel (7.36-50), Luke closes this it with the proclamation of the advance of the Kingly Rule of God through the word, in parables.

This passage may be analysed as follows:

- a He went about through cities and villages, preaching and bringing the good tidings of the Kingly Rule of God, and with him the twelve, and certain women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary who was called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna the wife of Chuzas Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others, who ministered to them of their substance. (2-3).
- b And when a great crowd came together, and those of every city resorted to him, he spoke by a parable: 'The sower went forth to sow his seed, and as he sowed, some fell by the way side, and it was trodden under foot, and the birds of the heaven devoured it. And other fell on the rock, and as soon as it grew, it withered away, because it had no moisture. And other fell amidst the thorns, and the thorns grew with it, and choked it. And other fell into the good ground, and grew, and brought forth fruit a hundredfold. As He said these things, He cried, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." And His disciples asked Him what this parable might be (8b-9).
- c And He said, To you it is given to know the mysteries of the Kingly Rule of God, but to the rest in parables, that seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand (10).
- d Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God (11).
- e And those by the way side are those who have heard. Then comes the Devil, and takes away the word from their heart, that they may not believe and be saved (12).
- f And those on the rock are they who, when they have heard, receive the word with joy, and these have no root, who for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away (13).
- e And that which fell among the thorns, these are they who have heard, and as they go on their way they are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection (14).
- d And that in the good ground, these are such as in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, hold it fast, and bring forth fruit with patience (15).
- c And no man, when he has lighted a lamp, covers it with a vessel, or puts it under a bed, but he puts it on a stand, that those who enter in may see the light, for nothing is hid, that shall not be made manifest, nor anything secret, that shall not be known and come to light (16-17).
- b Take heed therefore how you hear, for whoever has, to him shall be given, and

whoever has not, from him shall be taken away even that which he thinks that he has (18).

- a And there came to him his mother and brethren, and they could not come at him for the crowd. And it was told him, “Your mother and your brethren are standing outside, desiring to see you, but he answered and said to them, “My mother and my brethren are these who hear the word of God, and do it” (19-21)

In ‘a’ the proclamation is made of the Kingly Rule of God and with him are the twelve and certain women who are within that Kingly Rule, and in the parallel His brothers and mother are not with Him and are not within that Kingly Rule. In ‘b’ the sower sows the seed and the one who has ears to hear must hear, and in the parallel they are to take heed how they hear lest they lose what they have. In ‘c’ the disciples are given the secrets of the Kingly Rule of God, and in the parallel what is hidden is to be made manifest. In ‘d’ the seed sown is the word and in the parallel the word produces fruit. In ‘e’ the Devil takes away the word from men’s hearts and in the parallel the word is choked in their hearts. Central in ‘e’ is the word that flourishes but then withers because it has no root. The main part of the parable is stressing not the final harvest but the dangers of not receiving the word correctly.

It should be noted that verses 19-21 are incorporated by Luke in the chiasmus in order to balance it, and in order to draw out its connection with the parable of the sower. His family were perfect examples of hardened ground, in contrast with those in verses 1-3. But it will also be used to open to following chiasmus because of its contrast with the glory of the Messiah yet to be revealed. While this double use is unusual, there are similar examples of overlapping chiasmi elsewhere in the Scriptures.

The Good News of the Kingly Rule of God Continues To Go Out: A Summary of the Forces At His Disposal For Winning Men to Come Under the Kingly Rule of God (8.1-3).

Jesus’ ministry of teaching the Good News of the Kingly Rule of God continues (compare 4.18, 43; 6.20), and He is accompanied by the twelve and a group of godly women, no doubt along with other disciples.

8.1-3 ‘And it came about soon afterwards, that he went about through cities and villages, preaching and bringing the good tidings of the Kingly Rule of God, and with him the twelve, and certain women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary who was called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod’s steward, and Susanna, and many others, who ministered to them of their substance.’

Following on the previous successes Jesus continued going through the towns and villages of Galilee proclaiming the Good News of the presence of the Kingly Rule of God, and with Him went His ‘army’, the twelve Apostles and a group of influential women who helped to provide sustenance. These last had experienced His healing power and in their love and gratitude followed Him, ministering to Him and His disciples. It was in fact quite common for women to support Rabbis materially, indeed sometimes to the point of bankruptcy. Jesus Himself criticised the Rabbis for ‘devouring widow’s houses’ (20.47). How much more then would wealthy women support One Who had done them so much good. But it would have been unusual for them to follow them continually. These women were equally ‘disciples’ with the men, but they would stay, and camp together, separate from the men.

Note that this description of the women disciples follows immediately after the incident of the sinful woman whose love for Him has also been spoken of. Luke wants to avoid any slur on Jesus as a result of someone suggesting that only women of a certain type

came to Him. He indicates here that even the highest and most reputable in society followed Him. It is also contrasts in the chiasmus which follows with the mother love of Mary. That love was in contrast to this and was a hindrance to His ministry, although it should not have been. But here with Him were His spiritual ‘mother, sisters and brothers’ who helped Him all the way.

There seems to be no thought that the women should give away all their wealth. Women in those days could not support themselves as men could, nor did they have the freedom that men had. A woman could not just ‘enter into a city and there abide’. She had to be careful not to give a wrong impression of herself.

No doubt there were other disciples with them also. Some would follow Him on and off depending on when they could get free time, and there may have been others with Him permanently, but if so they are not mentioned here (but compare the seventy later on), although verses 57-62 would suggest that it was so.

‘Mary who was called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna the wife of Chuza, Herod’s steward, and Susanna, and many others.’ Both Mary and Joanna are mentioned in 24.10 as having seen the empty tomb, they thus appear to have remained with Him through much of His ministry. Joanna had moved in the highest circles, but she had chosen the better part. There are no grounds for thinking that Mary had been a prostitute or a particularly evil woman. Possession by multiple evil spirits was not unusual (compare 11.26). But it may suggest that she had once been a medium and had delved deep in the occult. The mention of ‘seven’ (completeness in the realm of the spirit) probably indicates a severe case of complete control (compare ‘legion’ - verse 30). She had clearly been a deeply troubled woman, and was a continual testimony to the power of Jesus to save. We know nothing further about Susanna, but she was apparently prominent, probably famed for her works of compassion (compare Acts 9.36; Romans 16.1; 1 Timothy 5.10). But later traditions concerning all these were probably based on mere speculation and wishful thinking.

The Parable of the Sower (8.4-8).

The purpose of this parable appears to be in order to explain why not all who heard His words responded fully, and to encourage His followers with the knowledge that this was to be expected. Not all had the same keen interest as they had. But they could be sure of this, that the seed that was sown would gradually reap an abundant harvest. It was, of course, also designed to make men think.

8.4 ‘And when a great crowd came together, and those of every city resorted to him, he spoke by a parable.’

The crowds still flocked to Him from towns all around, and He was now teaching in parables so as to stir the people into thought. He had probably already discovered that many of His hearers were becoming ‘word-hardened’, and stolidly listened to His words without taking them in and acting on them. So now He had decided to teach in stories, leaving them to think about, and ask about, their significance. The first example is that of the sower which reveals the way by which the Kingly Rule of God is growing.

As we consider the parable we need to consider the background situation. Different farmers would have strips of land in the same field, and much of the land would be hard and stony, and some merely a thin layer of soil over hard rock underneath. The poorer farmers would do what they could with their wooden ploughs, pushed or pulled by hand, but only parts of their land would be dug up suitable for sowing. There would be the rocky parts which the plough would not touch, and weed ridden parts where the weeds had been cut back but were still in the soil, or parts so overgrown that getting

rid of the weeds would be too difficult, and there would necessarily be pathways between the furrows for other farmers to reach their strips. So as the sower went forward, taking handfuls from his satchel of seed and dispersing it over the ground, however great his effort and careful his aim, it would fall on all kinds of ground. He was not even sure in all cases what would be the good ground.

8.5 ‘The sower went forth to sow his seed, and as he sowed, some fell by the way side, and it was trodden under foot, and the birds of the heaven devoured it.’

So it was with the sower here. Some of his seed fell on the pathways where others trod on it as they went about their business, in casual unconcern, and where the birds soon swooped down and ate the grain which was simply lying on top of the ground.

8.6 ‘And other fell on the rock, and as soon as it grew, it withered away, because it had no moisture.’

Some fell on rocky areas where there was only a thin layer of soil. It might spring up in the rain and sun, but it soon withered because it was planted where it could reach no moisture beneath the surface.

8.7 ‘And other fell amidst the thorns, and the thorns grew with it, and choked it.’

Other seed fell among where the thorns and weeds were beginning to grow, and they grew up and choked it.

8.8a ‘And other fell into the good ground, and grew, and brought forth fruit a hundredfold.’

But much fell on good ground and grew and produced an abundant harvest.

8.8b ‘As he said these things, he cried, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.” ’

Then He urged His listeners to think carefully about the meaning of what He had said.

The Interpretation of the Parable: The Kingly Rule of God Is Being Built Up By The Spreading of the Word (8.9-15).

8.9 ‘And his disciples asked him what this parable might be.’

We who are used to the parables and this way of using illustrations are puzzled as to why no one seemed to understand. We forget that we have been given the key. But the people were used to hearing stories from the Rabbis, and sometimes such stories had strange meanings which were not always apparent on the surface. Many were just content to enjoy the story and not think too closely about what it meant. Thus they may well have felt that they could not be expected to know what Jesus was inferring by His words. They were more interested in the miracles. However, had they really wanted to know it was always open to them to ask. Which is precisely what those who did want to know, did.

8.10 ‘And he said, To you it is given to know the mysteries of the Kingly Rule of God, but to the rest in parables, that seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand.’

Then He explained to His disciples that for them the ‘secrets of the Kingly Rule of God’ would be unlocked, because they genuinely wanted to know. The word ‘mystery’ in the New Testament always speaks of ‘a mystery now to be revealed’. Thus He would open up the mystery for those who were seeking. And it would mean more to them because they had first had to think about it before asking.

But to the remainder it was told in parables, so that they would see what was on the surface but not see what lay underneath, so that they would hear what was said and yet

not appreciate its true meaning. And why should He do this? So that they might not become hardened to the message. Once they really began to want to know they could come and ask. Until then it was better if they only received hints of it.

8.11 ‘Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God.’

He explained that the seed represented the Good News of the Kingly Rule of God, the word of God going out to the people from the Scriptures. It was not an idea without precedent as we see in Isaiah 55.10-11; 61.11. Compare also Amos 9.13 which has in mind abundant harvests. Contrast Jeremiah 12.13.

In the Old Testament ‘the word of God’ was that word which came to the prophet for him to pass on (see 1 Kings 12.22; 1 Chronicles 17.3). Compare also ‘the word of the Lord’ which also came to the prophets (over two hundred times).

8.12 ‘And those by the wayside are those who have heard. Then comes the Devil, and takes away the word from their heart, that they may not believe and be saved.’

Those by the wayside were people who were like hard, beaten down ground, resistant and unreceptive to the seed of the word of God. And just as the birds had done, the Devil would swoop down and take the word from their hearts, lest they believe and be saved. He would not risk it lying there where it might be kicked on to good ground. As far as he was concerned God’s seed had a nasty knack of sprouting where it ought not.

Jesus knew well from His earlier experience of temptation (3.4-12) the subtlety with which the Devil could come. And how he would soon plant thoughts which would remove the effect of a casual listening to the word of God.

If Jesus had not believed in a personal Devil there was no need to introduce him here. Some other interpretation would have been equally valid.

8.13 ‘And those on the rock are they who, when they have heard, receive the word with joy, and these have no root, who for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away.’

Those on the rock were people whose hearts were like rock, totally impenetrable, but with a veneer of interest on top. When the seed fell on them they received it with apparent joy, for they found it pleasant to the ear. But the seed obtained no root, for they did not want their lives to be over-affected, and while they ‘believed it’ for a while, when times of testing came they fell away. For similar belief compare John 2.23-25). They did not see it as worth suffering for. It is a reminder to us that we need to ‘sow deep’.

8.14 ‘And that which fell among the thorns, these are they who have heard, and as they go on their way they are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection.’

And those that fell among thorns were like people who heard the word of God, but cares and riches and the pleasures of life choked the word, and it did not properly mature. How easily this occurs to Christians and non-Christians alike in different ways. Many a Christian has been on the verge of real blessing, only to lose it because something came along at the crucial time and took over their interest and disturbed their dedication. The dangers of seeking wealth are especially made clear elsewhere (6.24; 12.16-21; 14.12; 16.1, 19, 21-22; 18.23, 25; 19.2; 21.1). It can at first seem so innocent. We all have to live. But it gradually destroys the soul and takes over the life. The ‘pleasures of this life’ simply waste a life which could have achieved such good. They are the opposite of ‘let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works’ (Matthew 5.16). All have to decide whether they will live for the moment, or live in the light of eternity. ‘Cares’ can either drive us to God and disappear because we

trust Him, or possess our hearts and destroy us. It depends on the direction in which we look, and whether we truly trust God (see Matthew 6.25-34).

8.15 'And that in the good ground, these are such as in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, hold it fast, and bring forth fruit with patience.'

But the seed that fell on good ground represented those whose hearts were honest and open. They had a good, receptive heart. And once they received the word they held it fast, and they endured, and persevered, and patiently brought forth fruit.

So the emphasis of the parable is that the four types of ground represented four types of people. And it demonstrates that how they responded to the Good News of the Kingly Rule of God depended on the state of their hearts. The Kingly Rule of God was present among them all, but it had to be received by their putting their trust in the King and responding to and doing His words, by a faith which would result in fruit, and in the active doing of His will. Each must then choose how he would respond.

It will be noted that there was response in three out of the four examples. It was just that in one case the response was choked, and in another it simply petered out. Neither were true saving faith.

In its own quiet way it was a revolutionary concept of the Kingly Rule of God, not as something which had to be fought for, but as something that would come about through response to His word as the Holy Spirit applied it in the hearts of men.

(It will have been noted that Luke's account is briefer than Mark's and somewhat different. But this is to be expected. Luke did not just depend on Mark, even though he used him a great deal. He would also have gathered similar details from Aramaic speaking eyewitnesses, and possibly from Aramaic books about Jesus, as well as from the collection of sayings that Matthew also used (see 1.1-4). Thus while he clearly took advantage of Mark's rendering, selecting from it what he found suitable, at the same time he would also extract from elsewhere, and also do a little translating himself in a form more useful for his Gentile readers. The parable of the sower was no doubt repeated any number of times in different forms and with different emphases and he would thus have a number of alternatives to choose from).

The Purpose of the Word Is That It Might Come Fully Into the Light, For One Day It Will Certainly Do So (8.16-18).

8.16 'And no man, when he has lighted a lamp, covers it with a vessel, or puts it under a bed, but he puts it on a stand, that those who enter in may see the light.'

Then He points out that He has not come in order to keep things hidden. That is not the purpose of the word of God. When a man lights an oil lamp he wants it to be seen by all who are in the house. To put it under the bed or to cover it up would be ridiculous. Its purpose is to shine out. And the same applies to Him and His word, and to the word of God itself. He wants all to see what He is offering. He has brought truth for all.

The same applies to our Christian witness. It should be open and available to the world, not hidden by stay-abeds, or by discreetly hiding it. Our light should so shine before men that they see our good works, realise their source, and glorify our Father Who is in Heaven (Matthew 5.16). But let us not forget that if we forget to mention the name of Jesus, then the credit will go to us not Him.

8.17 'For nothing is hid, that shall not be made manifest, nor anything secret, that shall not be known and come to light.'

Indeed he reminds us that in the end everything will be revealed, and nothing will

finally be hidden. God's light shines on it now for those who have eyes to see. And there is coming a day when God will judge the secrets of men through Christ. Then everyone will have to come to the light. So there is one thing that we can be sure of, and that is that whatever we have done and have tried to cover up must either be brought to the light now (John 3.18-21) or will one day be openly revealed when all have to give account. Nothing will be hidden. And it will be by the One from Whom nothing can be hidden, and to Whom men have made such all-sweeping promises and commitments. One day all will be brought into the light and each of us will be known for what we really are.

Thus it behoves us as Christians to bring all our sins to the light now so that the blood of Jesus Christ His Son might cleanse us from all sin (1 John 1.7-10). And then when that day comes we will have nothing to fear, for all our sin will have been dealt with.

8.18 'Take heed therefore how you hear, for whoever has, to him shall be given, and whoever has not, from him shall be taken away even that which he thinks that he has.'

So all should be careful how they hear, whether with receptive hearts or hardened ones. For the one who hears and receives, and thus 'has', will find that he is given more, abundantly more. Whereas those who do not hear with a receptive heart will discover sooner rather than later that they will not only lose God's fullness of blessing, but will also lose the little that they thought that they had of it. They will be left spiritually bankrupt. For His truth is not something that we can take or leave as we like. It is all or nothing. Either we respond to it and grow more and more, or it wilts and dies and leaves us with nothing.

Jesus' Mother and Brothers Come To Hinder Him (8.19-21).

Luke gives no explanation as to why Jesus' mother and brothers come seeking Him, but the fact that they are left on 'the outside' says all that needs to be said. In some way or another they had come to interfere with His ministry, taking advantage of their relationship with Him. Perhaps He remembered back to another time when His mother had interfered with His ministry when as a young boy He was in the Temple. Then she had had a certain right, even though He had to remind her that He was on earth to do His Father's will. But now she had no right. And nor had His brothers. For God had called Him to His Messianic task.

One purpose of their mention here is as an illustration of those who were not receptive to the word of God, as in the parable. As the chiasmus shows us this incident is closely tied in with this whole passage. Originally Mary had eagerly received the word, but it had clearly become choked within her because of the cares of the world and a worldly-wise attitude. While she recognised His calling, she considered that He needed to be guided rather forcibly on how to fulfil it. Many mothers feel that their sons are never quite up to making final decisions about life, however old they get, and feel therefore that they must make their decisions for them so that they do not make mistakes. Her intentions were no doubt good. But they arose because she did not trust her son to make the right decisions. She had failed to genuinely recognise His Lordship. His brothers were more probably similar to the hardened ground. He was their kid brother Whom they had known all their lives. There was nothing that He could tell them. It would take the resurrection to break them down.

Another side of this is that it was an attempt to divert Jesus from the word. Their aim was to do precisely that. But it was of no avail, for the word was too deeply rooted.

8.19 'And there came to him his mother and brethren, and they could not come at him for the crowd.'

Mark 3.21 tells us that they came because they thought that He was ‘beside Himself’. Luke leaves it to be inferred. He had had much to do with Jesus’ mother and therefore was sympathetic in his treatment of her. However the tale had to be told. But he does make it clear that they had not come to join the crowd or to hear. Rather they wanted to ‘come at Him’. Their purpose was not concerned with the cause of the Kingly Rule of God.

8.20 ‘And it was told him, “Your mother and your brethren are standing outside, desiring to see you.’

Someone then came and informed Jesus that His family were outside wanting to see Him. Note that they wanted Him to come to them ‘outside’, away from where God was working. How delicately the gentle Luke puts it. But Jesus knew very well why they wanted to see Him, and that it would therefore be unwise for Him to see them. It would only cause a disturbance all round.

8.21 ‘But he answered and said to them, “My mother and my brethren are these who hear the word of God, and do it.” ’

So He replied that the ones who had a right to His attention now were not His earthly family, but His ‘heavenly’ family, those who heard the word of God and did it, those who responded to Him. This undoubtedly included those mentioned in verses 1-3. Now that He had begun His ministry family ties were broken. All His efforts must now be concentrated on His future task with no outside interference.

“My mother and my brethren.” Note that He does not suggest that any were His ‘father’. He had only one Father, and that was His heavenly Father. The believers were all His family under their Father.

‘Hear the word of God, and do it.’ They are good ground and fully responsive (compare 6.46-47), unlike Mary and His brothers.

Had their purpose been friendly and helpful there is little doubt that Jesus would have found time to see them. They could have come to Him ‘inside’. But they forfeited that right by the reason for which they came. However hard we may try to do so, we cannot hide the fact that at this stage His mother was one of His greatest hindrances. She had not let go of her grown up son, and thought that she could interfere in His ministry to its detriment. She did not necessarily doubt His mission. She, along with His brothers, was just certain that He was going about it the wrong way (compare John 2.1-11; 7.4-5, where incidentally the brothers give the opposite advice to what they wanted to force on Him here, again wrongly). But we should note that we never receive any hint that she changes her mind and follows Jesus until after the resurrection (Acts 1.14), although naturally she was present at the cross where in her weakened state Jesus put her in the care of the Apostle John (John 19.26-27).

(God in His wisdom knew that it would not be good for too much attention to be turned on Mary, and allowed her to backslide a little from her original commitment, but the church in its desire for a mother figure later ignored His efforts, something which has been to the detriment of many people as their eyes have been taken off Jesus. Sadly she had tried to do that while on earth, and her tradition and statues are doing the same thing now).

Some have tried in the interests of the hypothesis of Mary’s perpetual virginity to suggest that these were not brothers of the whole blood, not sons of Mary. But nowhere is that even hinted at, and had they been older than Jesus it would have been one of them who was the current ‘son of David’, not Him. Even at the time of Tertullian (200 AD) it was acknowledged that they were full sons of the whole blood. It is significant

that not one of the Gospel writers presents them as other than brothers.