

**Commentary on the Gospel of Luke**

**By Dr Peter Pett BA BD (Hons-London) DD**

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## SECTION 5 (12.1-14.35).

We commence here a new section of Luke. As we shall see this section centres around a mighty act of Jesus in delivering a woman bound by Satan, and thus doubled up and unable to straighten. By this He made clear why He had come. He had come to make the crooked straight (3.5). And here He did it openly on the Sabbath day. Indeed we are regularly told that Jesus saw the Sabbath as a day for 'healing' and 'making straight', for He had come to turn men from the power of Satan to God (Acts 26.18). It may therefore be that He intended men to see by this that in Him God's new rest had come (Hebrews 4.3-4, 9). The whole of the section may therefore be seen as gaining its significance from this act of power, as He sought to make both His Apostles and those who followed Him 'straight'.

The centrality of this incident in the section is revealed by the following analysis which indicates that the section is in the form of a chiasmus, with the incident of the straightening of the crooked woman central.

This next Section from 12.1-14.35 can be separated into its separate parts as follows:

- a Instructions to disciples concerning facing up to eternity (12.1-12).
- b An example is given of covetousness concerning an inheritance which is followed by the parable of the fool who decided to enjoy rich banquets, ignored the needs of the poor, and in the end suffered the unforeseen consequences of prematurely losing his wealth to others who benefited unexpectedly while the one expected to benefit lost out (12.13-21).
- c We are to seek the Kingly Rule of God and not to be anxious about other things (12.22-34).
- d We are to be like men serving the Lord in His house and awaiting His arrival from a wedding feast, being faithful in His service at whatever time He comes and meanwhile making use of all our time for His benefit (12.35-40).

- **e There are stewards both good and bad who will be called to account for He has come to send fire on earth which will cause great disruption (12.41-53).**
- **f Men are to discern the times and not be like a debtor who realises too late that he should have compounded with the Great Creditor (12.54-59).**
- **g Some present draw attention to the tower that fell on men. He points out that that was no proof of guilt, for all are sinful and will perish unless they repent. They would therefore be wise to repent while they can (13.1-5)**
- **h The parable of the fig tree which is to be given its chance to bear fruit (13.6-9).**
- **i The crooked woman is healed on the Sabbath for Jesus has come to release from Satan's power (13.10-17).**
- **h The parables of the grain of mustard seed which is to grow and reproduce, and of the leaven which spreads, both of which represent the growth of the Kingly Rule of God in both prospective ultimate size and method of expansion (13.18-21).**
- **g Someone asks 'are there few that are saved?' The reply is that men must strive to enter the door while they can (13.22-23).**
- **f We must not be like those who awake too late and find the door closed against them and wish they had befriended the Householder (13.24-28).**
- **e We are to watch how we respond as His stewards for some will come from east, west, north and south, while others will awake too late, like Herod who seeks to kill Him and Jerusalem which is losing its opportunity and will be desolated and totally disrupted (13.29-35).**
- **d Jesus is invited into the home of a Chief Pharisee. And there He eats with him at table, surrounded by many 'fellow-servants'. There He sees a man with dropsy. As God's Servant He knows what His responsibility is if He is to be a faithful and wise servant. It is to heal the man. For God's works of compassion should be done at all times including the Sabbath and not just at times of man's choosing. And yet He is surrounded by those waiting to catch Him out (14.1-6).**

- **c None are to seek the higher place, for he who humbles himself will be exalted (14.7-11).**
- **b An example is given of inviting the poor to dinner which is followed by the parable of a rich banquet, where those who made excuses were rejected, and the result was that due to unforeseen circumstances there a banquet for the poor, while those for whom it was intended lost out (14.12-24)**
- **a Instructions are given to the disciples concerning facing up to the cost (14.25-35).**
- **‘He who has ears to hear, let him hear’ (14.35).**

**Note that in ‘a’ the Section opens with instructions to the disciples, and in the parallel it closes with instructions to the disciples, both seeing things in the light of eternity. In ‘b’ we have a parable dealing with the use of riches, and in the parallel the use of wealth to help the poor is dealt with, in ‘c’ we are to seek the Kingly Rule of God and trust our Father over our daily living, and in the parallel we are not to seek the higher place on earth, for the one who humbles himself will be exalted. In ‘d’ we are to be like men awaiting in the Lord’s ‘house’, awaiting His arrival at whatever time He comes and meanwhile making use of all our time and serving Him faithfully, and in the parallel Jesus is in the Chief Pharisee’s house and is called on to perform an act of faithful service even though it is the Sabbath, an act which He does perform. It is an example of faithful service even in the face of difficulties, and a reminder to us that we are to use all our time, including the Sabbath, for doing God’s work. In ‘e’ there are stewards both good and bad who will be called to account, for He has come to ‘cast fire on the earth’, and in the parallel we are to watch how we respond as His stewards, for some will come into the Kingly Rule of God from east, west, north and south, while others will awake too late, like Herod who seeks to kill Him and Jerusalem which is losing its opportunity and will be desolated and will experience His ‘fire on earth’. In ‘f’ men are to discern the times, and in the parallel we are not to be like those who awake too late. In ‘g’ and its parallel the imminence of death and what our response should be to it is described. In ‘h’ the vine is to be allowed its opportunity of bearing fruit, and in the parallel the mustard seed will grow and bear fruit. Central in ‘i’ is the healing and making straight of one who is crooked, a picture of what He has come to do for Israel. This is the whole purpose of the Kingly Rule of God.**

### **Resume.**

**Prior to looking at this section in detail we should remind ourselves of its context.**

**When Luke commences Acts he claims that in his earlier writing (this Gospel) he had dealt with ‘all that Jesus began to do and to teach’. That is an apt description of the Gospel, for its first half very much emphasises what Jesus had come to do, while the second half, commencing here, will concentrate very much on what He came to teach.**

**Not that it is quite as simple as that. In the first half He has certainly also given us a number of examples of the teaching of Jesus, for quite apart from the teaching which is connected with the various incidents, we find the sermon on the plain where He establishes the basis for the new Kingly Rule of God (6.20-49); the teaching concerning John, which emphasises the new situation brought about by the coming of the Kingly Rule of God (7.24-35); the parable of the sower, which stresses the coming and spreading of the Kingly Rule of God (8.4-18); and the detailed teaching concerning discipleship, which contains warning of the cost to His followers of coming under the Kingly Rule of God (9.21-27). Nevertheless on the whole the emphasis in the first part of the Gospel is on what He did.**

**In the second half of the Gospel the emphasis will be on what He taught. Again it is not a hard and fast rule. Luke tells us of the healing of the crooked woman and her deliverance from the power of Satan (13.10-14), the healing of a man with dropsy (14.1-4); the healing of ten lepers, the number indicating an increased abundance of healing (17.11-19 compare the one in 5.12-14), and the healing of the blind man as He finally approached Jerusalem (18.35-42), and the impression is given that His healing work goes on continually, for He tells Herod, ‘I cast out demons and perform cures today, and tomorrow, and the third day I finish my course’ (13.32). But the remainder of the space is then given over to teaching. Having first given the impression of Who Jesus was, emphasis is now to be placed on His words.**

**Also prominent from now on will be His emphasis on training His disciples by word. Prior to this He had been content to live out His life before them, teaching them by demonstration, until in the end they had recognised that He was ‘the Anointed of God’. As they went about with Him and had seen what He was and what He did, they had had clearly presented to them in some considerable depth something of His uniqueness, a presentation over which He had taken a great deal of trouble.**

**At the same time they had heard continually His message to the crowds, both those to whom He had taught in the synagogues, and to those who continually flocked around Him. In this they had been taught the attitude of sacrificial love that would be required of them as they established His Kingly Rule (6.20-49), even if they had not really grasped its full significance (9.54). That was in teaching given to all. And He had also given them special coaching when they sought it (8.9). They had further learned that what lay ahead of them may have a great cost in terms of turning their backs on themselves and even facing death for His sake (9.23-27). And they had been warned, with little sign of taking it in, that He must suffer. But overall this teaching had been additional to His revelation by His doings, and had not been the emphasis, and thus, while they now recognised in Jesus ‘the Messiah of God’, they were still very much imprisoned within their own ideas. For Jesus knew the importance of leading rather than forcing. He knew that simply to overwhelm them with new ideas would be fatal to their understanding. He did not want them just to learn by rote (although that was a useful beginning and many of His messages were designed to that end), but rather that His ideas might seep through gradually and take root in their hearts, until they then became a part of them.**

**Of course, they knew by now that they had been called to proclaim that the Kingly Rule of God was among them, and that men were now to respond to His Kingly Rule. That had been the message that they had proclaimed when they themselves went out preaching. But they had not really grasped what was involved in this Kingly Rule, and what was to be the final result of it. They still had the idea of a literal kingdom on earth in Palestine (Acts 1.6). They still thought in terms of taking over the reins from the Romans in Palestine, ousting them once and for all, and then ruling in their place (as David had once done, followed by the Maccabees). They had still not realised that the Old Testament contained greater heavenly truths than were apparent on the surface, and that they themselves were involved in a greater and more exciting project than the transformation of Palestine. They were involved in something that would lead to the transformation and salvation of men and women throughout the world, through the word.**

**This lack of understanding comes out in a number of ways:**

- **1). It is made quite apparent that they were still thinking in terms of which of them was to be the greatest, and which of them would hold the most important offices once the new independent kingdom was established. They would continue to jostle for, and argue about, such positions. This was something that they would continue to do right to the end until the coming of the Holy Spirit and the commands they would receive in Acts 1 changed their whole perspective (9.46; 22.24-27).**
- **2). They were still almost certainly thinking in terms of the need to raise a large number of supporters, and were seeing their future in terms of going forward with such an army when the time was ripe, in order to establish God's Kingly Rule by this means. This was something that 'Messianic' claimants were constantly doing, thus raising the ire and retaliation of the Romans, and what they would continue to do once Jesus had died and risen again. Why then should they be any different? It was the popular conception (see John 6.15), and their thinking was little different from that of others. It was what they had been brought up to expect. And they were very much of the people. The only difference between them and the others was that they knew that their leader had extraordinary powers. He could do things that took the breath away.**

**This is no doubt why they were puzzled at the continuing fewness of their numbers and had to be reassured (12.32). They had seen the first increase in popularity as they moved around as preparation for what was to come, and had been encouraged. But they were puzzled as to why Jesus had not made the most of it, and why Jesus now appeared to have left the places where His influence was greatest, and was even talking morbidly about being seized by His enemies and being put to death. Was He not then concerned about the size of His army?**

**At first numbers had not appeared to be a problem. They had appeared to be growing rapidly, with Jesus at work training His leaders. But now many of those very leaders had dropped away (John 6.66) and things seemed to have come to rather a low ebb, and this in spite of the continuation of the large, but impermanent crowds which they discovered wherever they went (12.1). Jesus was still popular but why was He not turning it to advantage? As He Himself was aware they were no doubt more than a little puzzled (12.32). Yet it was clear to them that Jesus Himself did not seem to be worried. So their thoughts may well even have turned to the thought of Gideon and his few as an explanation (Judges 7.4-8). God could save by many and by few. Perhaps it was all part of God's plan to demonstrate His power once and for all.**

**But then had come the mission of the seventy. That had probably boosted all their hopes. At last He was getting everyone prepared for the coming of the Kingly Rule of God! They probably thought that by this Jesus was establishing a base in every city, with the confidence that when the time came for them to rise up, many would be there ready to rise with them. For they had still not fully taken in His teaching about loving their enemies, or the message of His lowly death, or, to the extent that they had, they saw in the promised resurrection the hope that He would arise with power from the grave to defeat all who stood in opposition to Him.**

- 3). They were still thinking in terms of the position that was going to be theirs once they had finally firmly established God's Kingly Rule (Mark 10.35). Now that was something to look forward to. They would enjoy positions of great prestige and authority and all would look up to them. They would enjoy being admired, and tell everyone what to do. We can see then why it was hard for them to throw aside all their old ideas and see in humble service the fulfilling of their dreams.**
- 4). They were still thinking in terms of the future possessions that would be theirs once the good times came (18.28). At present there was hardship, but they had sufficient confidence in Jesus to be certain that there would be a golden tomorrow. And they were thinking of, and looking forward to, physical gold.**

**All this brings out that they did have faith in Jesus as the Messiah of God, but that their eyes were still very much on an earthly Kingdom. They were like many are today. They could not rise above the earthly.**

**That they were in fact wrong in what they anticipated we now know. And that was why it was now necessary for Jesus to begin His task of wooing them away from such conceptions in view of His forthcoming death. And because men's minds, once formulated in a certain way from childhood, are very difficult to alter, and because men's obstinacy of thought is what it is, it was inevitably going to be a slow process. It would be a matter of a slow seeping of information into their minds until in the end the truth would dawn on them (as the truth of His Messiahship had already dawned). This will be the aim of the next few chapters. They are to be times of reformulating all of their wrong ideas, until they begin to grasp more and more of the truth that what the world needed, and what they had been appointed for, was the spread of His word. In this regard no change is more marked than that between what the Apostles are now, and what they will be in Acts.**

### **Jesus' New Approach.**

**The whole process commences by His now turning their thoughts to eternity and the Judgment to come (12.1-11). The first thing that it is necessary for them to do is to begin to live in the light of eternity. So He now sets out to wake up to the fact that they must cease thinking altogether in terms of material possessions, or of prosperous living, or of what they can get out of life (12.13-31), and must recognise that all their concentration must be on establishing the Kingly Rule of God (12.31). And He wants to make them see that this will not be by means of a large army, well-armed, but that God will begin to establish His Kingly Rule through a few, with those few having no earthly resources at all (12.32-34), apart from the Holy Spirit (12.12 compare 11.13).**

**Further He wants them to recognise that He will not be with them permanently. He will be going away from them (as He has already told them - 9.21-22, 26, 44), but that when He is away they must live in readiness for when He returns (12.35-48), for they will have much to do, and after a while He will be coming back in order to reward them for faithful service. (He wanted them to recognise that, while they must be ready for His coming, they must not expect His return immediately).**

**He also wants them to know that all that is ahead is not going to be rosy (12.49-53). Let them not think that the world is soon to become a Paradise. Rather He is shortly going to cast fire down on it, something which would tie in with great suffering that He Himself would have to undergo. And as a result of this He would bring about great divisions in the world (12.52-53), and Jerusalem would be desolated and forsaken (13.34-35; 21.6, 20, 24; compare Matthew 23.37-39). So there was to be a revolution. But not quite of the kind that they were expecting. Rather than be a revolution which drives families together, it will be a revolution that splits households in two because of their attitudes towards Him and His word. These will be His next lessons. And they will not be quickly grasped.**

**But this new emphasis on teaching does not mean that nothing practical was now happening, for, as the chiasmus below reveals, the whole of this present section of concentrated teaching will centre around a practical demonstration of His power in the healing of a crooked woman and her deliverance from Satan's power. Here was another powerful symbol revealing a picture of Israel in its need and how Jesus has come to meet that need. This woman was a symbol of what He had really come to do. He had come to make the crooked straight (3.5) and to deliver the oppressed (4.18). And all His teaching was to that end.**

**We note that Luke constructs his Gospel in such a way that this is to be the last mention of Satan and his minions in action (13.11, 16) until we come to Jesus' last days (22.3, 31). And yet at the same time he makes it clear that this is not because that side of things has ceased, for in 13.32 he depicts Jesus as testifying to the fact that his defeats of Satan's forces will continue on, right up to 'the third day' when Jesus will finish His course and finally defeat them once and for all. Then through His crucifixion and resurrection they will become guerrillas on the run, and no longer possessors of the field. So the story of the crooked woman, coming in the middle of a whole host of teaching, is a reminder of the very real spiritual battle that is still going on, and would continue on right to the end. As we shall see, what follows is to be further teaching on the Kingly Rule of God, as He continues to reformulate their thinking, while His continuing activity towards that end is depicted by the deliverance of the crooked woman.**

**He does, of course, continue to preach to the crowds. That too would continue right up to the end. And yet at the same time it becomes clear that His disciples are now to go through their own intensive training course ready for the future, a future of which He is fully aware, even if they are not.**

**That is why from this point on attention will turn to life under the Kingly Rule of God, and we will find a series of parables which all look at the development of the Kingly Rule of God, the way life should be lived under His Kingly Rule, and the expected return of the King, all these sandwiched between instructions given by Jesus to His disciples in 12.1-12 and 14.25-35, and all centred around the fact of Jesus' deliverance from Satan and the making straight of those who come to Him (13.10-17).**

**Jesus Teaches Concerning Greed, Stewardship and the Need For Fruitfulness Under The Kingly Rule of God Centring on the Fact That He Will Make The Crooked Straight (12.1-14.35).**

**As we have seen we may analyse this next Section from 12.1-14.35 into its separate parts as follows:**

- **a Instructions to disciples concerning facing up to eternity (12.1-12).**
- **b An example is given of covetousness concerning an inheritance which is followed by the parable of the fool who decided to enjoy rich banquets, ignored the needs of the poor, and in the end suffered the unforeseen consequences of prematurely losing his wealth to others who benefited unexpectedly while the one expected to benefit lost out (12.13-21).**
- **c We are to seek the Kingly Rule of God and not to be anxious about other things (12.22-34).**
- **d We are to be like men serving the Lord in His house and awaiting His arrival from a wedding feast, being faithful in His service at whatever time He comes and meanwhile making use of all our time for His benefit (12.35-40).**
- **e There are stewards both good and bad who will be called to account for He has come to send fire on earth which will cause great disruption (12.41-53).**
- **f Men are to discern the times and not be like a debtor who realises too late that he should have compounded with the Great Creditor (12.54-59).**
- **g Some present draw attention to the tower that fell on men. He points out that that was no proof of guilt, for all are sinful and will perish unless they repent. They would therefore be wise to repent (13.1-5)**

- **h The parable of the fig tree which is to be given its chance to bear fruit (13.6-9).**
- **i The crooked woman is healed on the Sabbath for Jesus has come to release from Satan's power (13.10-17).**
- **h The parables of the grain of mustard seed which is to grow and reproduce, and of the leaven which spreads, both of which represent the growth of the Kingly Rule of God in both prospective ultimate size and method of expansion (13.18-21).**
- **g Someone asks 'are there few that are saved?' The reply is that men must strive to enter the door while they can (13.22-23).**
- **f We must not be like those who awake too late and find the door closed against them and wish they had befriended the Householder (13.24-28).**
- **e We are to watch how we respond as His stewards for some will come from east, west, north and south, while others will awake too late, like Herod who seeks to kill Him and Jerusalem which is losing its opportunity and will be desolated and totally disrupted (13.29-35).**
- **d Jesus is invited into the home of a Chief Pharisee. And there He eats with him at table, surrounded by many 'fellow-servants'. There He sees a man with dropsy. As God's Servant He knows what His responsibility is if He is to be a faithful and wise servant. It is to heal the man. For God's works of compassion should be done at all times including the Sabbath and not just at times of man's choosing. And yet He is surrounded by those waiting to catch Him out (14.1-6).**
- **c None are to seek the higher place, for he who humbles himself will be exalted (14.7-11).**
- **b An example is given of inviting the poor to dinner which is followed by the parable of a rich banquet, where those who made excuses were rejected, and the result was that due to unforeseen circumstances there a banquet for the poor, while those for whom it was intended lost out (14.12-24)**
- **a Instructions are given to the disciples concerning facing up to the cost (14.25-35).**
- **'He who has ears to hear, let him hear' (14.35).**

**Note that in ‘a’ the Section opens with instructions to the disciples, and in the parallel it closes with instructions to the disciples, both seeing things in the light of eternity. In ‘b’ we have a parable dealing with the use of riches, and in the parallel the use of wealth to help the poor is dealt with, in ‘c’ we are to seek the Kingly Rule of God and trust our Father over our daily living, and in the parallel we are not to seek the higher place on earth, for the one who humbles himself will be exalted. In ‘d’ we are to be like men awaiting in the Lord’s ‘house’, awaiting His arrival at whatever time He comes and meanwhile making use of all our time and serving Him faithfully, and in the parallel Jesus is in the Chief Pharisee’s house and is called on to perform an act of faithful service even though it is the Sabbath, an act which He does perform. It is an example of faithful service even in the face of difficulties, and a reminder to us that we are to use all our time, including the Sabbath, for doing God’s work. In ‘e’ there are stewards both good and bad who will be called to account, for He has come to ‘cast fire on the earth’, and in the parallel we are to watch how we respond as His stewards, for some will come into the Kingly Rule of God from east, west, north and south, while others will awake too late, like Herod who seeks to kill Him and Jerusalem which is losing its opportunity and will be desolated and will experience His ‘fire on earth’. In ‘f’ men are to discern the times, and in the parallel we are not to be like those who awake too late. In ‘g’ and its parallel the imminence of death and what our response should be to it is described. In ‘h’ the vine is to be allowed its opportunity of bearing fruit, and in the parallel the mustard seed will grow and bear fruit. Central in ‘i’ is the healing and making straight of one who is crooked, a picture of what He has come to do for Israel. This is the whole purpose of the Kingly Rule of God.**

### **Instruction To His Disciples About Living In The Light Of Eternity (12.1-12).**

**Approaching the detail of the section the first thing that Jesus wants to do is make His disciples think in the light of eternity. So He warns them to beware of the hypocrisy of the Scribes and Pharisees, as illustrated in the previous passage, and of becoming like them and thinking like them (like all Jews they had been brought up to respect and take heed to these ‘great men’), and then puts their whole situation in the light of the Judgment Day that is coming. They are to live in the light of that Day. In that Day all will be opened up and laid bare, and all hypocrisy will be seen for what it is. Thus His disciples must take heed to live in the light of that fact. And while those same Scribes and Pharisees might prove in the future to be their enemies they are not to fear, for they themselves are His ‘friends’ and God cares intimately for them.**

**Indeed God is the One Whom alone they should fear, because He alone is the One Who can punish after death. Yet though they should indeed fear Him, they are nevertheless to recognise that God is also on their side and is watching over them, and is with them in all that they do. For in their ‘reverent fear’ they should bear in mind that His care of Creation is such that He observes even the smallest bird and that therefore, because they are His, and in their case He is their Father, He knows all about them. He even knows the very number of the hairs of their head, so important are they to Him. (What other father counts the number of hairs on his son’s head?).**

**They must therefore be bold in confessing His Son before men, so that He, as the Son of Man portrayed in Daniel 7.13-14, may confess them before the court of heaven. Meanwhile they can be sure that they need have no fear of mere earthly courts, for if they are called to give account in earthly courts, His Holy Spirit will Himself be there to guide their defence, and He will tell them what to say.**

**Thus if they are faithful to Him they need have no fear of either Heaven or earth. Before the heavenly court they will be defended by the Son of Man Himself, and before earthly courts by the Holy Spirit. People in such a favourable position have nothing to fear. (Note the transposition of ideas, ‘fear not men -- fear Him -- confessed before Him -- defended before men’. All will be well for those who fear Him).**

**But in contrast those who deny Him before men, or who blaspheme against the Holy Spirit, may be sure that their judgment will be swift and sure.**

**This whole passage is an interesting example of typical Jewish methods of teaching, the stringing together of connected ideas in order to produce the bigger picture, and it is essentially a unity. Note the magnificent series of contrasts, demonstrating both the positive and the negative sides of His message, and emphasising the choices that all men must face up to and make. His words were spoken to the professing people of God in order to distinguish those whose profession was real and those whose profession was false:**

#### **The Contrasts In The Light of Which They Should Live.**

- What is covered, will be revealed, what is hidden will be made known.**
- What is said in the dark, will be heard in the light, what is whispered in private rooms, will be proclaimed from the house tops.**
- Do not fear him who can kill the body -- fear Him Who has power to cast into Gehenna.**

- **He who confesses me before men I will confess--- he who denies Me before men I will deny.**
- **He who speaks a word against the Son of Man can be forgiven-- he who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit can never be forgiven.**

**We must now consider the analysis of the passage.**

**Analysis.**

- **a When the many thousands of the crowd were gathered together, insomuch that they trod one on another, he began to say to his disciples first of all, “Beware you of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy” (1).**
- **b “But there is nothing covered up, that will not be revealed, and hid, that will not be known, wherefore whatever you have said in the darkness will be heard in the light, and what you have spoken in the ear in the inner chambers will be proclaimed on the housetops” (2-3).**
- **c “And I say to you my friends, Do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do” (4).**
- **d “But I will warn you whom you shall fear. Fear him, who after he has killed has power to cast into hell. Yes, I say to you, Fear him” (5).**
- **c “Are not five sparrows sold for two pence? and not one of them is forgotten in the sight of God. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not. You are of more value than many sparrows” (6-7).**
- **b “And I say to you, Every one who shall confess me before men, him will the Son of man also confess before the angels of God, but he who denies me in the presence of men will be denied in the presence of the angels of God, and every one who shall speak a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him, but to him who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit it will not be forgiven” (8-10).**

- a “And when they bring you before the synagogues, and the rulers, and the authorities, do not be anxious how or what you shall answer, or what you shall say, for the Holy Spirit shall teach you in that very hour what you ought to say” (11-12).

We note that in ‘a’ they are to beware of the hypocrisy of the Pharisees who have authority over people’s religious lives and in the parallel they will be brought before the synagogues and authorities for judgment. Furthermore the hypocrisy of the Pharisees is set in contrast with the openness of the Holy Spirit. There will be no play-acting with Him. In ‘b’ everything which has been spoken is going to be revealed and in the parallel all men will be judged by their confession or otherwise of Him and by their blasphemies. In ‘c’ they are not to be afraid of those who kill the body, and in the parallel this is because they are not forgotten in the sight of God and the hairs of their head are all numbered. Central in ‘d’ is their need to reverently fear God.

The instructions now given follow a general theme, majoring on the fact of judgment to come, with the first verse connecting back to what Jesus had previously said to the Scribes and Pharisees at the end of Section 4. This warns against the danger of following them in their hypocrisy.

He points out that to do so would in fact be foolish in the light of the Judgment to come. For eventually everything is going to be revealed and made known, and then all hypocrisy will be laid bare. In the light of this they should therefore not be afraid of those who might seek to kill them (these same hypocrites), but are rather to fear the One Who determines what happens after death, and to remember that He in fact cares for them and has even numbered the hairs of their head. What could be more sure than that?

This, however, depends on them boldly confessing Him before men, for if they do then He will confess them before the angels of God. On the other hand those who deny Him will be denied before the angels of God. And finally He warns that those who blaspheme against the Holy Spirit will never find forgiveness. When the Judgment comes they will be without hope. On the other hand, those who hear the Holy Spirit, and who go before earthly courts for His sake, will find the Holy Spirit there inspiring them as their Great Defender (John 16.7-11).

**This last arises because the thought of those who might kill their bodies, and of those who might seek to make them deny Him, has triggered the thought that those who do boldly confess Him may well be brought before the authorities and charged. So He wants them to know that if that happens they need not worry, because when it does the Holy Spirit will be with them and will teach them what to say. For whereas the Holy Spirit of God, God's power revealed in decisive visible action, is against those who reject Christ to their eternal loss, He is very much on the side of those who confess Jesus Christ.**

**12.1 'In the mean time, when the many thousands of the multitude were gathered together, insomuch that they trod one on another, he began to say to his disciples first of all, "Beware you of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy." '**

**Great crowds continued to gather ('thousands of them') so much so that they were treading on one another, but Jesus had now begun primarily to teach His disciples, although undoubtedly keeping the wider crowd in mind. He warned them to "Beware of the leaven (or 'yeast') of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy." Leaven was the old dough retained from bread-making which was allowed to ferment. It would then be put into the new dough to cause fermentation, so improving its structure and taste. Its effects would spread all the way through the new dough. It can therefore refer to any pervasive influence, whether good or bad, which can be introduced into something and then spread and spread.**

**In 13.21; Matthew 13.33 leaven refers to the pervasive influence of the message of the Kingly Rule of God which spreads and spreads until it has reached everywhere. In Matthew 16.6, 11-12; Mark 8.15 it refers to the teaching of the Scribes and Pharisees, and of Herod, which could have a wrong pervasive influence, if His disciples were not wary. Indeed it could spoil their whole lives. In 1 Corinthians 5.6-7; Galatians 5.9 it refers to sin's pervasive influence in people's lives. It will be seen from this that leaven refers to influence that spread and spreads, whether good or bad. Because the influence mentioned elsewhere is bad, some even see the leaven which is revealed as pervading the Kingly Rule of God (13.21) as being bad as well, and as reflecting those who have failed to take heed to His warning against the leaven of the Pharisees, but if so it is not apparent from the context.**

**Here, however, it refers to the danger of taking up the hypocritical ways of the Scribes and Pharisees as outlined in 11.37-53. They must neither copy their ways, nor let a similar attitude affect the way that they live their own lives. They must ensure that they are always open, straight and honest, and genuinely concerned for the good of others, seeking to submit themselves to the Kingly Rule of God in all humility, and not posturing or seeking honour and flattery.**

**We should recognise that they had been brought up all their lives to give deep respect to the Scribes and Pharisees, who were looked on as the very heart of Israel's spiritual life. Now they were to see their bad points, and not be too carried away by their ideas. They were to learn to discern. (They had no doubt already been greatly shocked to discover that these men did not see eye to eye with their Master).**

**'Hypocrisy.' The word signifies play-acting and indicates those who put on a show on the outside which does not conform to what they are like inside, or those who say one thing and do another.**

**12.2 "But there is nothing covered up, that will not be revealed, and hid, that will not be known."**

**And one good reason for this is that one day all will be revealed and laid bare at the judgment. Anything covered up will be revealed. Anything hidden will be brought to light. All hypocrisy will be unmasked. It is best therefore for them not to have anything in their lives of which they will feel ashamed. All of us therefore need to examine our lives and ask ourselves, is there anything in my life of which I will be ashamed in that day?**

**12.3 "Wherefore whatever you have said in the darkness will be heard in the light, and what you have spoken in the ear in the inner chambers will be proclaimed on the housetops."**

**The same is true of their words. Things spoken under cloak of the night will be brought into the light, things whispered in the ear in a private room will be shouted out from the housetops for all to hear. So they should take heed to what they say. Indeed for every idle word that a man shall speak he will give account of it on the Day of Judgment (Matthew 12.36). For that Day will be a day when all is brought into the light, and all men's secrets will be made known (8.17; Mark 4.22). All this will cause rejoicing for those who confess Christ, but for those who deny Christ, or blaspheme against the Holy Spirit it could be catastrophic (see verses 8-10).**

**12.4 "And I say to you my friends, Do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do."**

**This is the only place in the first three Gospels where Jesus calls His disciples His ‘friends’, but compare also John 15.13-15, where we learn that those are His friends who obey His words, and that to them He reveals His secrets. This tenderness is in order to strengthen them to face the stark fact, baldly stated, that they might be martyred. But even in the face of that they should remember that once they have been killed their enemies will be powerless to do anything more. Whatever they do to their bodies it will not affect their future (there were times in the future when because of their belief in the resurrection men maltreated the bodies of Christians and sought to dispose of them in such a way that they could not rise again, but all would be to no avail). So in view of that fact they need not be afraid of them, for God will watch over them and is so concerned about them that He even knows how many hairs they have on their head. Whatever is done to their bodies He will be able to resurrect them as one whole.**

**12.5 “But I will warn you whom you shall fear. Fear him, who after he has killed has power to cast into hell. Yes, I say to you, Fear him.”**

**The One they should rather go in awe of is the One Who after He has killed the body has power to cast the person into Gehenna, the eternal rubbish dump, the place of fire (Mark 9.43-47; Isaiah 66.24). That is something men cannot do. The name is based on ge-Hinnom, ‘the valley of Hinnom’ which was the rubbish dump and incinerator outside the walls of Jerusalem. To look over the walls at night was an eerie sight, for far below in the valley could be seen the continually burning fires that consumed the city rubbish and the dead bodies of criminals which had been tossed there (Isaiah 66.24). The Jews were vividly aware of this picture and had made it a symbol of the place of unquenchable fire which would consume the wicked dead.**

**12. 6-7 “Are not five small birds sold for two assarion? and not one of them is forgotten in the sight of God. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not. You are of more value than many small birds.”**

**However, while His disciples are to view God with reverential fear, they are not to be terrified of Him, for they should recognise that He cares for them so much that He has counted the hairs of their head, and values them far more than He does the small birds sold for food at five birds for two assarion (two small coins). They are to remember that He Who does not even forget a single one of those small birds, will certainly not forget them. For He is the Creator of all, and all things are open to the eye of Him with Whom we have to do. He knows all.**

**An assarion is one sixteenth of a denarius, the value of less than an hour's labour. The birds would be bought by the poor for eating (thus these were not necessarily sparrows, for sparrows were not eaten as far as we know). So if even the very food that they eat is known by God, they can be sure that they are known by Him as well, however poor and humble they may be. As the Rabbis would later say, 'No bird perishes without God -- how much less a man.'**

**Matthew 10.26-31 contains similar sayings but was clearly spoken at a different time for it speaks of two sparrows for one assarion and even ignoring the other differences it is hyper-criticism which suggests that one or other (or their sources) would change the price of the birds. The differing prices clearly reflect different times of the year when supply and demand for small edible birds considerably altered. A free gift of one small bird for buying double the amount suggests a period of glut which resulted in having to increase demand by tempting offers. At this particular time traders in general were having their yearly 'sales'.**

**12.8-9 "And I say to you, Every one who shall confess me before men, him will the Son of man also confess before the angels of God, but he who denies me in the presence of men will be denied in the presence of the angels of God."**

**He has been speaking about how they should live generally, but now He turns to the crucial question facing all. And that is as to what their attitude should be to Him. For in the end that is what all comes down to. Deliverance or otherwise will finally depend on a person's response to Him.**

**We should pause and recognise the stupendous nature of this claim. He is openly claiming a status that is beyond that of all men, even of Caesar himself. He is declaring that men's destinies will be determined by their response to Him. This is because He is God's sent One, so that to turn from Him is to turn from God. The Kingly Rule of God is now here and men no longer have a number of options. Either they submit to the King and wear His colours, or they face judgment.**

**So the references to the coming judgment have now faced them with a challenge. In that day when they stand before God's court, before the angels of God, they will require a friendly and influential witness if they are to come off successfully, One Who can bring forward a valid reason why they should be found not guilty. And as the sacrificed and risen Christ, the Son of Man Who has gone to receive His Kingly Rule (Daniel 7.13-14), He will be able to do so. So those who publicly confess Jesus before men will find that when, as the Son of Man, He takes up His throne, He will testify on their behalf. On the other hand those who deny Him in the presence of men will find that He denies them before the angels of God. Compare 9.26 where it is confirmed that it will be the Son of Man Who will be ashamed of them, and for both positive and negative compare Matthew 10.32-33, spoken on a different occasion. This was clearly a constantly repeated warning.**

**This warning concerning being 'confessed to' (acknowledged) or 'denied' by Him in the Judgment, or its equivalent, was a favourite one with Jesus repeated on a number of occasions (9.26; Matthew 10.32; Mark 8.38). Matthew tells us on another occasion that He spoke of being 'confessed', not only before the angels of God, but 'before My Father Who is in Heaven' (Matthew 10.32). The general idea, however, is the same.**

**Note the move from earth to Heaven here signified by 'Me' in contrast with 'the Son of Man'. The point is not that the Son of man is a different individual, but that Jesus' status will by then have changed from being a man on earth to being a recognised heavenly figure Who has received all authority, dominion and power (Daniel 7.13-14). Now they are open to choose on the basis of their view of Him, then there will be no option, it will be life or death depending on whether they had opted for Him on earth.**

**The whole of this should be seen in the light of verse 3 where all words spoken are to be brought into the light, which includes their confessions of their Lord, thus revealing whether they are under the Kingly Rule of God or not.**

**12.10 "And every one who shall speak a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him, but to him who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit it will not be forgiven."**

**Some of those who are called for judgment (such as Paul) may look back to a time when they had not believed, and had even blasphemed against the Son of Man. But they need not fear. Such blasphemy would have been forgiven them once they turned to Jesus Christ. And forgiveness for this will continue to be available as He is proclaimed among men. But those who blaspheme against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven. This was an added warning to the crowds who were listening.**

**This blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is revealed elsewhere as indicating those who, in spite of the clear evidence before their eyes, deliberately and continually close their minds to what they know about Him, so that eventually their minds became so hardened that they are unable even to consider the matter any further (Mark 3.28-30; Matthew 12.31-32). It is warning them that if they are not confessing Him now they have the opportunity to repent, but that if they delay until too late they may become too hardened and be unable to repent, and then their doom will be sealed. The example given in Matthew and Mark is of those who saw Him cast out evil spirits, and in spite of their own belief that men who could do this were of God, refused to believe it in Jesus' case out of pure prejudice. They totally and continually day by day shut their minds against Him, saying dogmatically, 'He has an unclean spirit'. Such men are in danger of hardening their hearts until they became unmeltable. (Anyone therefore who is afraid that they have committed such a sin can be sure that they have not. For those who have committed it will never be aware of the fact until that Day, for their hearts are too hardened).**

**Luke may well have had this saying in mind in the way that he depicts Jerusalem throughout his writings. Jerusalem was not rejected for its treatment of the Son of Man, nor even for its crucifying of its Messiah, for the risen Jesus told the Apostles to go to Jerusalem with their message after His resurrection (Acts 1.8) and the Apostles afterwards continually went out to Jerusalem with His offer of forgiveness (Acts 1-6), and large numbers responded. But when Jerusalem finally failed to respond wholeheartedly to the work of the Holy Spirit in its midst, and to its Messiah, it would be set to one side (Peter 'departs for another place' - Acts 12) and replaced by Syrian Antioch as the centre from which the Good News spread (Acts 13). Yet even then it had the witness of the Jerusalem church still continuing to speak to it. But when in the end its Temple doors finally closed on Paul (Acts 21.30), that was also the end of Luke's interest in the Jerusalem which had previously been so important to him. Following these events Jerusalem did, of course, then make a martyr of James, the Lord's brother, and the result was that it was finally utterly destroyed. Up to that time the offer of mercy had still been open, although clearly receding, but by its continual rejection of the signs and wonders and testimony in its midst it had finally 'blasphemed against the Holy Spirit'. Its period of probation had come to an end, and it had become hardened and it thus came to its final punishment from which there was no escape. In 70 AD Jerusalem was finally destroyed. This is probably a very good illustration of what the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit means, and is a picture in miniature of the history of the world.**

**12.11-12 "And when they bring you before the synagogues, and the rulers, and the authorities, do not be anxious how or what you shall answer, or what you shall say, for the Holy Spirit shall teach you in that very hour what you ought to say."**

**Having made clear that death might await some of His disciples (verse 4), which would clearly indicate that many of them might expect to be brought before courts for His sake, He now comforts them in the light of the thought of that eventuality. If they are brought before the synagogue, which had religious jurisdiction, or before rulers and authorities, such as Herod or Pilate, then they need not fear that they will not know what to say. For in that hour the Holy Spirit Whom they have received (11.13) will teach them what to say. Unlike the unbelievers at the last day, they will not be left speechless and comfortless.**

**Note the contrast. On the one hand are those who blaspheme against the Holy Spirit by finally closing their minds to the Christ of God, and on the other are those who, having responded fully to Him, have the Holy Spirit there as their friend and defender. And in between are those still having to make a decision.**

**Note the irony of His words. When they are brought before synagogues (the places where the Holy Spirit should be proclaiming His word) the Holy Spirit will give them their words to say in their defence. As a result of His coming the world is being turned upside down.**

### **The Danger of Riches (12.13-21).**

**We now come to the first of a series of parables in this section. It is the first demonstration of how distorted Israel (and the world) is and how it needs to be made straight (13.10-17). This passage results from the approach of a man who, while being among His audience, has not been listening very carefully. For his father has died recently, and his heart is taken up with the question of his inheritance. Significantly it deals with the grip that riches have on men's lives, and is therefore in strong contrast with what has gone before. There Jesus has faced His disciples with life and death decisions, decisions which were vitally connected with the question of how to inherit eternal life as mentioned in 10.25. He has faced them with God and with the Kingly Rule of God. And now here is this man who, instead of being deeply stirred, comes to talk with Him about his inheritance of a few paltry earthly riches which demonstrates only his love of Mammon (see 16.13; Matthew 6.24).**

**The passage commences with his approach to Jesus concerning his inheritance, which is immediately followed by the parable of the fool who built up wealth and then decided that he could sit back and enjoy rich banquets, totally ignoring the needs of the poor. The latter was clearly completely bereft of the love of God and his neighbour, and it was only on his death bed that he again thought about God and realised what a fool he had been. It was there that he awoke to the folly of his choice, and the result was that he suffered the unforeseen consequences of losing his wealth to others who benefited unexpectedly. By his life he had denied Jesus on earth.**

**It will be noted that in the chiasmus for the Section this passage was placed in parallel with an example which Jesus gives of inviting the poor to dinner (the opposite of the acquisitiveness of the man seeking his inheritance, and the opposite of the selfish and greedy fool), which is followed by the parable of a rich banquet which resulted in the unforeseen circumstance that it became a banquet for the poor, because those for whom it was intended excused themselves from it and lost out (14.12-24). There we find the opposite picture to that of the fool. The poor were fed because it was the Lord's banquet.**

**Analysis of this passage.**

- **a One out of the crowd said to him, “Teacher, bid my brother divide the inheritance with me” (13).**
- **b He said to him, “Man, who made me a judge or a divider over you?” (14).**
- **c He said to them, “Take careful note, and keep yourselves from all covetousness, for a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of the things which he possesses” (15).**
- **d He spoke a parable to them, saying, “The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully (16).**
- **e And he reasoned within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have not where to bestow my fruits?” (17).**
- **d He said, “This will I do, I will pull down my barns, and build greater, and there will I bestow all my grain and my goods” (18).**
- **c And I will say to my soul, “Soul, you have much goods laid up for many years, take your ease, eat, drink, be merry” (19).**
- **b But God said to him, “You foolish one, this night is your soul required of you, and the things which you have prepared, whose shall they be?” (20).**
- **a So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich towards God” (21).**

**Note that in ‘a’ the man is covetous for his inheritance, and in the parallel such laying up of treasure for oneself is warned against. In ‘b’ Jesus refuses to judge and divide, while in the parallel it is God Who questions men’s attitudes. In ‘c’ man’s life does not consist in the abundance of what he possesses, and in the parallel the man enjoys the abundance of what he possesses. In ‘d’ the rich man’s ground produces plentifully and in the parallel he makes plans for his plenty. Centrally in ‘e’ he asks himself the crunch question, ‘what shall I do with what I have received?’**

**12.13 ‘And one out of the crowd said to him, “Teacher, bid my brother divide the inheritance with me.” ’**

**The passage opens with a man coming to Jesus in order to have the problem of his inheritance situation sorted out. It was commonplace in those days for such matters to be dealt with by religious teachers, and he probably thought that as a prophet Jesus’ word would carry even more punch. (Or perhaps the Rabbis had refused to assist him because they recognised the falseness of his claim). But what a contrast he is with those who came asking, ‘what must I do to inherit eternal life’. This man was only interested in this life. Luke may well have expected us to make the contrast which reveals that the question about eternal life was central, while that about earthly inheritance was dismissed as irrelevant.**

**Furthermore the man’s motives were probably even more selfish. For the situation could well have been that the elder brother was striving to keep the family and its land together as one inheritance for the good of all, while this man, like the prodigal son, wanted to separate his part off so that he could do what he liked with it, or claim compensation in respect of it, so that he could have a good time regardless of how it affected the family. And he was asking Jesus to use His authority to help him in his selfish purpose. He was going totally contrary to the principles of Psalm 133.**

**We should note that the approach is not one of genuine arbitration. The two brothers do not appear to have come together for that purpose. It is one of a disgruntled man trying to curry the Lord’s favour on his behalf, and asking Him to force his brother into a situation not of his choosing.**

**12.14 ‘But he said to him, “Man, who made me a judge or a divider over you?”**

**Jesus' reply is indicative of how He saw His position. He had not been sent to sort out petty worldly affairs, especially not when the motives were so poor. Possibly because He has been speaking about the last Judgment the man has misjudged His concerns. But His concerns are with the Kingly Rule of God. If this man wanted judgments concerning inheritances and about divisions of land on earth let him go to those who saw that as part of their task, and gloried in such things. He did not see it as part of His ministry, and He did not consider that God had anointed Him for this. This was nothing to do with the Kingly Rule of God which was for those whose minds were turned towards Heaven. On what grounds then was the man claiming that He should interfere? For the phrase compare Exodus 2.14.**

**We are left to assume that the man then went away. In view of the fact that his eyes were only on an earthly inheritance he was no longer relevant. And that was why he was dismissed. Here was Jesus on His way to Jerusalem to die, and speaking of eternal choices, and all this man could think of was a grubby inheritance. (We may all at some time have to have a part in inheritance cases, but the warning here is not to let them interfere in our service and usefulness for Him. If they take possession of us we are failing Him).**

**12.15 'And he said to them, "Take careful note, and keep yourselves from all covetousness, for a man's life does not consist in the abundance of the things which he possesses."**

**Then Jesus turned to His disciples, and to the crowd, and gave them a strong caution. They were to keep themselves from covetousness, from a desire for 'things' and for wealth. For a man's life does not consist in the abundance of the things that he possesses. It consists rather in their attitude towards God. Let them then rather seek the Kingly Rule of God (verse 31).**

**Here then He is stressing the choice between God and Mammon. For the majority of men Mammon was precisely what their lives consisted of, seeking wealth and power and status. But it was not to be so for those who followed Him. They were to have their eyes firmly fixed on the Kingly Rule of God, on the true riches, the heavenly riches, and on walking to please God (see verses 31-34). They were to set their hearts on the inheritance of eternal life. Here was the continuation of the choices laid out before them in verse 1-12. Let them not find themselves obsessed with paltry affairs like this man was. Let them rather be obsessed with the Kingly Rule of God over their lives. The great danger of the greed that can destroy a person's usefulness comes out regularly in Luke's Gospel (4.4; 8.14; 9.24-25; 12.22-34; 16.19-31; 18.18-30)**

**12.16-17 ‘And he spoke a parable to them, saying, “The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully, and he reasoned within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have not where to bestow my fruits?”**

**He then backed up His words with a parable which demonstrated the total futility of riches to one who only used them for his own ends (an indicator of what Jesus saw in the man’s mind). He described a man who would be the envy of most people. He had much land and the land prospered and produced much grain and fruit. And it left him with a problem. What should he do with it? Of course he would already have given his tithe and the firstfruits as every good Jew would. So he saw that as God now settled up with. He had done his duty by God. The question now was, what was he to do with the remainder?**

**12.18 “And he said, This will I do, I will pull down my barns, and build greater, and there will I bestow all my grain and my goods.”**

**And he resolved his problem by deciding that he would build larger barns so that he could store it all up in order to secure his own future and enable himself to retire. Note the constant reference to Himself. (‘I -- I -- my --I -- my -- my’). He has thought neither for God nor for others. We recognise the significance of the choice he made. It was not to say to himself, ‘well, I already have what I need. I will give all this surplus to the poor and use it in the service of God.’ It was to say, ‘I will use all this for my own benefit and my family’s benefit, and to our greater advantage. I will look after Number One.’**

**12.19 “And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have much goods laid up for many years, take your ease, eat, drink, be merry.”**

**And he would tell his own inner heart, his spirit within, that now he had secured his future. He had plenty laid up for it, and he could now retire and enjoy the fruit of all his past hard work and his hard earned wealth. He did not take into account that it was God Who had given him the corn and the wine (Hosea 2.8; Deuteronomy 15.10).**

**For a man speaking to his own soul in this way compare Psalm 42.5. To do it wisely is good. To do it foolishly is disaster.**

**12.20 “But God said to him, You foolish one, this night is your soul required of you, and the things which you have prepared, whose shall they be?”**

**But that night God told him what a fool he was. For far from enjoying many years of luxury while others starved, that night his inner spirit, his ‘soul’, was to be required of him. And then he would have to leave all his wealth behind (compare Psalm 39.6). And others would enjoy the benefits that he had sought for himself. And he would be left with nothing (compare 16.22). For he had not stored up treasure in heaven. Thus all he would possess was a cold dark grave.**

**‘You fool.’ Compare 11.40; Psalm 14.1, and often in Proverbs. A fool in Scripture is one who has not heeded God’s word and God’s wisdom. Many would have said how wise this man was. He was securing his future. God says he was a fool because he was ignoring his real future.**

**12.21 “So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.”**

**And Jesus then delivered the punch line. That is what happens to those who use their riches for themselves, and are not rich towards God. They end up with nothing but a cold, dark grave, which however splendid men may make it on the outside, is only dark and cold on the inside (see Isaiah 14.10-11). What a contrast to the one who ascends to enjoy his riches stored up in heaven, because he has come under the Kingly Rule of God and has laid up treasure in Heaven.**

**Note that the final verdict is not concerning his building up of wealth, it concerns what he does with it once he has built it up. He can lay it up for himself. Or he can be rich towards God (12.33-34; 16.9). And he foolishly does the former. (In the light of the previous passage we could say, ‘for every idle penny that a man shall spend he will give account thereof in the Day of Judgment’).**

**His Disciples Should Have Their Minds Set On Heavenly Affairs Not Earthly Affairs (12.22-34).**

**Having made clear His position concerning wealth and its use Jesus now turns to those who have little wealth. They can be just as tied up with wealth as a result of having none and being anxious about it, as can the wealthy. They can be equally ‘distorted’, and they equally needed ‘making straight’. Theirs is a different problem. Where is the next meal coming from? Jesus reply is that once they seek the Kingly Rule of God they can put all such anxieties to one side, for God will then take responsibility for them and ensure that they are fed and clothed. Indeed they do not even need to pray about it, because God knows what they have need of before they ask Him.**

**This is now very much getting down to life under the Kingly Rule of God. The disciples have to learn that their thoughts must be wooed away from all thought of material possessions so that they can concentrate on that.**

**Note the interesting parallels between these verses and the previous passage in the mention of store-chambers and barns (the birds do not have any, instead they have God's inexhaustible storehouses to call on), and in the laying up of treasure, but this time in Heaven. They must learn the lesson of the rich fool.**

**Analysis.**

**a “And he said to his disciples, “Therefore I say to you, Do not be anxious for your life, what you shall eat, nor yet for your body, what you shall put on. For the life is more than the food, and the body than the raiment” (22-23).**

**b “Consider the ravens, that they sow not, neither reap, which have no store-chamber nor barn, and God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds!” (24).**

**c “And which of you by being anxious can add a cubit to the measure of his life?” (25).**

**d “If then you are not able to do even that which is least, why are you anxious concerning the rest?” (26).**

**e “Consider the flowers, how they grow, they toil not, neither do they spin, yet I say to you, Even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these” (27).**

**f “But if God does so clothe the grass in the field, which today is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven, how much more will he clothe you, O you of little faith?” (28).**

**e “And do not seek what you shall eat, and what you shall drink, neither be you of doubtful mind” (29).**

**1. d “For all these things do the nations of the world seek after, but your Father knows that you have need of these things” (30).**

**c “But as for you, you seek his Kingly Rule, and these things will be added to you” (31).**

**b “Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingly Rule” (32).**

**a “Sell what you have, and give alms, make for yourselves purses which do not grow old, a treasure in the heavens that fails not, where no thief draws near, neither moth destroys, for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (33-34).**

**Note that in ‘a’ they are not to be concerned with earthly things, and in the parallel they are to use them for establishing a heavenly treasure. In ‘b’ the birds are fed by God, but they are of more value than the birds, so that in the parallel He will give His disciples what is ruled over by His Kingly Rule. In ‘c’ they cannot ‘add’ to the length of their life, so in the parallel they should seek His Kingly Rule (which is eternal), then everything else will be ‘added’ to them. In ‘d’ they are not to be anxious about ‘the rest’, while in the parallel it is the nations who will be anxious about the rest. On the other hand they, the disciples, need not be because they can be sure that their Father knows their needs. In ‘e’ the flowers do not seek after physical benefits (what they shall wear), so in the parallel they also do not have to seek after physical benefits (what they eat and drink or anything else). Central in ‘f’ is confidence in the provision of God.**

### **Their Attitude Towards Food And Clothing, The Things That Men Seek After**

**12.22-23 ‘And he said to his disciples, “Therefore I say to you, Do not be anxious for your life (soul), what you shall eat, nor yet for your body, what you shall put on. For the life (soul) is more than the food, and the body than the raiment.”**

**The idea here is not that no one need ever worry about anything, or do any more work, for by that means many have starved. It is that those who come under the Kingly Rule of God should not be anxious about anything, because God guarantees them His personal care. What they should be concentrating their attention on is their inner lives, their ‘souls’, which are not dependent on food and clothing (the rich man had been very concerned for his soul, how to feed it and satisfy it and make it grow fat. He saw his soul as very physical. That had been his folly), and on their bodies which belong to God for His use, and which they need to ensure operate in His service. They should not be concerned with the externals, but with what is internal. Both life and body should be yielded up to Him.**

**12.24 “Consider the ravens, that they sow not, neither reap, which have no store-chamber nor barn, and God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds!”**

**In considering such things let them think about the birds, even unclean birds like the ravens (or crows) - Leviticus 11.15. They do not sow nor do they reap. They do not pile up wealth like the rich fool. They do not build up large store-chambers which will last for many years. And yet God feeds them as He promised (see Psalm 147.9). In the same way those who give up their lives to follow Him can be sure that He will do the same for them also. Thus like the birds they need not spend their time worrying about such things.**

**12.25 “And which of you by being anxious can add a cubit to the measure of his life?”**

The word used here may mean ‘to his measure of life’, for while ‘cubit’ may seem to suggest the length of an object, outside sources do in fact speak of a ‘cubit of time’; and we can compare with this Psalm 39.5 where ‘a handbreadth’ is used to describe the length of days. Or the same word may mean ‘to his stature.’ The former would fit in with the last parable when death came suddenly (compare Psalm 39.4-5). The idea is then that men cannot extend their lives by ‘even the smallest amount’. How wise then not to have spent their time in sowing and reaping and building barns when they cannot extend their lives even by a fraction (so also verse 26). It also fits in with the thought that those who followed Him might be martyred, with the idea that the times are in His hands, so that trying to extend their lives is a waste of time. ‘Add -- to his stature’ would tie in with the flowers growing in verse 27, but we should note that the growing is not the important point there. The growing is incidental to the main point. And who in general would normally want to add eighteen inches to their height? (And besides it would hardly be called ‘the least’ in verse 26). Thus we would favour the former.

Nowadays we might feel that we can extend our lives by wise eating. And all things being equal we should do so. But not to the extent that it gets in the way of our dedication to God.

**12.26 “If then you are not able to do even that which is least, why are you anxious concerning the rest?”**

So as they cannot do even what is least, add a tiny amount to their length of life (or to their height), why should they spend all their lives worrying about the rest, like the rich fool did, even though he had so much? Worrying about food and clothing is foolish. What they should rather be concerned with is making the most of their lives, of what they themselves are.

It should again be noted that the words are addressed to those called to follow Him. He is not decrying general provision of crops and working on the land, He is speaking of a concern that interferes with their spiritual lives. Having done what they can they must trust God and not worry all the time about such things, for those things are not what should be their main concern.

**12.27 “Consider the flowers, how they grow, they toil not, neither do they spin, yet I say to you, Even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.”**

**A second illustration is given as to clothing. The gorgeous flowers of the field grow beautiful without a lot of toiling and spinning, and yet they even outmatch the glory of the supremely wealthy Solomon. The warning here is against excessive effort like that required to make rich fabrics. To those who follow Him that should be spurned. They should be satisfied with the basics and with looking to God. They should not be wasting their effort on such things.**

**It may be intentional that the birds are male and the flowers female, the point being that His strictures apply to both.**

**12.28 “But if God so clothes the growth in the field, which today is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven, how much more will he clothe you, O you of little faith?”**

**And God supplies such beauty to what grows in the fields in spite of how temporary their lives are. (For ‘today and tomorrow’ compare 13.32 where it means for a little while). How much more then will He add to our lives the beauty that we seek, the true beauty, and ensure that we are clothed.**

**And yet they should then note that all that beauty of the flowers eventually gets burned up as fuel in the ovens. In the end it is really worth nothing. What does matter is the beauty of soul that will survive to eternity.**

**The reference to the casting into the oven (a beehive shaped oven used for cooking) is a reminder of how transient these beautiful flowers are. They die quickly and are then used for cooking with. Like our own food and clothing, they are temporary and all the beauty that they had was transient. In a moment it was gone. Thus the women who are His disciples should not be spending a lot of time concentrating on their own physical beauty, for it will pass away. What they should be spending their time on is the true beauty that reveals that they are of God (1 Timothy 2.9-10).**

**‘O you of little faith.’ At the root of all failure to do God’s will is a lack of faith. For those who believe have no problem with all this. If we question it, it is not because it is not the rational and logical way for a believer to behave, it is because we are not sure of God.**

**12.29-30 “And seek not you what you shall eat, and what you shall drink, neither be you of doubtful mind, for all these things do the nations of the world seek after, but your Father knows that you have need of these things.”**

**The conclusion is therefore that as everything is transient we should not be worried about the daily provisions for our lives. They are of little worth except for survival. And while those are the things that the nations of the world seek after, that is because they have no Father Who watches over them. On the other hand, those who are His do have a Father Who watches over them, and Who knows that they have need of such things. They are therefore to trust Him for them and not let their minds be filled with doubts and worries about their provision, or be taken up with anxiety about such things.**

**‘The nations of the world.’ This is a typical Jewish description of the world. But here Jesus has included within it the unbelieving Jews. They are now no longer to be seen as God’s holy people. They are now simply a part of the world unless they join the new, true Israel by following Him.**

**12.31 “But seek you his Kingly Rule, and these things will be added to you.”**

**So what they should putting all their attention to is rather seeking the Kingly Rule of God. That should take up their full concentration. And then all the remainder will be added to them. Their attention should be on hearing Him and obeying Him, and doing His will. It is in the light of this that all that has gone before makes sense. It does not apply to the nations of the world. It applies only to those who are under His Kingly Rule.**

**It will be noted that this removes the need for us to pray for material things. As with our small children in our own families, we do not have to worry ourselves with such things. We may instead safely leave the provision of them with the Father, as our children leave them with us. We can then simply enjoy what we are given while busy about other things, more important things, the things of our Father. It is a confirmation that ‘give us today Tomorrow’s bread’ (11.3) had nothing to do with physical food, for that is something that those who believe will get without asking. (We can of course thank Him for His provision, but to pray for it would be unbelief). It refers rather to the bread that feeds our souls, the Bread of Life.**

**‘Seeking the Kingly Rule of God’ could signify:**

- 1). Seeking to advance the Kingly Rule of God over men’s lives by all means possible.**
- 2). Seeking the spiritual blessings of being within the Kingly Rule of God.**
- 3). Submission to the Kingly Rule of God ourselves.**

Verses 33-34 may suggest 2). But what has gone before must be seen as suggesting 1). Yet neither are possible without 3). We are surely therefore to see it as all three, for one is not possible without the other. Each suggests a different focus, which we should bear in mind when we pray the Lord's prayer which can cover all three, firstly submitting to the King, secondly looking out for the King's present work, and thirdly looking for the King's future blessing.

**As They Seek The Kingly Rule of God And Its Establishment Among Men They Must Recognise That It is Not All Just A Matter Of Numbers.**

**12.32 "Fear not, little flock; for your Father was pleased to give you the Kingly Rule."**

Jesus saw their thoughts and realised that they were puzzled about how the Kingly Rule of God could come about when they were so few. They had followed Him for some time and numbers had grown promisingly, and then they seemed to have fallen. Now they seemed again but few. And yet, they must have thought, surely if we are to bring in the Kingly Rule of God over men it will take a great army. But where were was this army? (John the Baptist had probably been thinking the same thing - 7.20). Why had Jesus allowed them to dwindle to so few? They still had completely wrong ideas about everything.

So lest they be afraid that somehow they would miss out on the Kingly Rule of God because of their small numbers, He assures them that it will not be so. They should recognise that the fact that they are here with Him is the guarantee of it. The Kingly Rule of God is in fact here in Him. And thus the Kingly Rule of God has already been given to them. They may see themselves as only comparatively few in number, 'a little flock', and may be asking themselves how the Kingly Rule of God can possibly come about with so few, but they will find that it will be so, for it is the Father's good pleasure to give to THEM the Kingly Rule of God. They must rest within God's own will and purposes.

Rather than waiting for large numbers to enrol, they will shortly discover that, few in number though they may be, God will begin to introduce His Kingly Rule through them. It is His gift to *them*, few though they are, because they are His sheep and His flock, and it will not fail because they are few in numbers. They need not think that because they are few they cannot belong to a King, or bring in His Kingly Rule, because kings usually have large flocks. A large flock is not required in this case, for He is more concerned about the quality. So let them seek to enter fully under His Kingly Rule now, ready for what is to come, and not worry about their numbers.

**We can compare for the idea of the flock, 15.4-6; Matthew 10.16; John 10.1-16, 27-28; Acts 20.28-29; 1 Peter 5.2, also Isaiah 40.11, and recognise that only God could have determined to bring in His Kingly Rule through a small bunch of sheep.**

### **The Resources That They Will Not Need (12.33-34).**

**12.33 “Sell what you have, and give alms. Make for yourselves purses which do not grow old, a treasure in the heavens which does not fail, where no thief draws near, nor moth destroys.”**

**But what will they require in order to fulfil their task? What resources will they need? Why, says, Jesus, they will require none. Any possessions that they have are too many. Spiritual warfare only requires spiritual resources. So let them start preparing now by selling what they have and giving it to the poor. That will then be stored in a safe place where nothing can diminish it. Then and then only will they be ready for their task (compare 9.3; 10.4).**

**So they are to cease being concerned about earthly possessions. They are to sell whatever they possess and give it to the poor, unlike the rich fool who tried to keep everything for himself. That way they will build up a treasure in Heaven, which will result in their minds also being fixed in Heaven. By that they will make for themselves wealth containers in Heaven which do not grow old, and a treasure in the heavens that is everlasting and continual, never failing, a treasure which no thief can steal and no moth destroy. And then they will be ready for their task in hand, in a state of total dependence on God.**

**The idea was not that of selling the family property. That belonged to the family. Nor was it for them to bankrupt their families by leaving them penniless. It was for each to rid himself or herself of their own prized possessions so as to turn them into heavenly gold. It was an act of faith, not charity. By doing so they would keep them everlastingly.**

**“Where no thief draws near, nor moth destroys.” Full barns were always a temptation to bandits and raiders, clothing a temptation to moths, but neither of such things can affect what is stored up in Heaven. Thus only what is stored there is really safe.**

**So Jesus is inculcating an attitude to riches. (What a contrast to those who claim that we should as Christians seek material prosperity as our right. That is the very opposite of this). He is seeking to deliver His disciples from the grip and deceitfulness of riches. These disciples were being called on to follow Jesus literally, and to depend on God utterly, and for that they would require no worldly possessions, indeed such possessions would be a hindrance. He is also wooing their minds away from thoughts of an earthly kingdom. All that they have is to be in Heaven.**

**All of us cannot live our lives like this. We do not live in a world of such free hospitality, nor can all of us fully devote ourselves wholly to ministry, although we can be wholly involved in God's work in the place where we are. We live in a totally different situation from them. However, the point for us is that we too should live as though we had no possessions, and rather treat all that we possess as His and available in His service. And we should ensure that they are not always on our minds. If they are then it is certainly time that we gave them all away, so as to rid ourselves of their shackles.**

**12.34 "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."**

**And the reason for this attitude is made clear. It is because where their treasure is, that is where their hearts will be. Jesus had in mind that those will only really live for Heavenly things who have stored up all their wealth in Heaven, and He says that we must have that in mind too.**

**This thought lies at the root of all that has been said. The Bible constantly warns of the danger of 'things' and of 'riches' which can get a grip on a man's heart so that he loses his dedication (Mark 4.19; 1 John 2.15; 1 Timothy 6.10). Satan even sought to tempt Jesus in this way, although there his offer was a little better than he offers to us (4.6). The aim of Jesus was in order to ensure that our hearts only desire one thing, and that to please our Lord.**

#### **What The Attitude Of His Disciples Should Be (12.35-40).**

**The parable that follows confirms that Jesus will have been previously laying out the background to them (we know so little of the much that He taught them). He had certainly told them that He would die, and rise again (9.22, 31, 44; 12.8 assumes it), and as Mark makes clear it was a lesson repeated a number of times (Mark 8.31; 9.12, 31; 10.45. Note how the verbs demonstrate that it was constant teaching). And we need not doubt that He had equally constantly repeated to them that He would return again (9.26). Furthermore every parable that He gave, like the one that follows, was a reminder of these facts, for without these facts such parables had a limited meaning.**

**So they had no real grounds for not appreciating what was to come. And possibly in theory they had taken much of it in. But it was not as something that was going to affect them here and now. For they were innocently complacent, and were totally shocked when it did happen. It was like theology is to all too many. Something to be brought out at religious moments, but not relevant to their daily lives.**

**Here Jesus seeks to make it relevant. For He portrays a situation when He will have gone away, and urges them that when that happens it will be necessary for them to remember that one day He will return unexpectedly. So these parables, while having individual messages to give, were also another way of bringing home to them the fact of His impending departure. Their aim was to make them continually think in terms of eternity (12.1-10) and to be ‘straight’ in their thinking, free from Satan’s attempts to keep the world in distortion and ignorance (13.10-17). They explained why they should live as he had called on them to do (12.22-34).**

### **The Parables of the Servants and the Thief, And The Warning Of His Unexpected Coming.**

**The first parable is about an important man who goes to a friend’s wedding feast, leaving his servants at home, so that they can keep all ready for his return. And like all good servants they are to await his return and are not to sleep until he has returned. It is then followed by a parable about a thief who comes when a householder is not expecting it.**

#### **Analysis.**

- **a “Let your loins be girded about, and your lamps burning” (35).**
- **b “And be you yourselves like to men looking for their lord, when he shall return from the marriage feast, that, when he comes and knocks, they may open to him straight away” (36).**
- **c “Blessed are those servants, whom the lord when he comes will find watching” (37a).**
- **d “Truly I say to you, that he will gird himself, and make them sit down to food, and will come and serve them” (37b).**
- **c “And if he shall come in the second watch, and if in the third, and find them so, blessed are those servants” (38).**

- **b “But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what hour the thief was coming, he would have watched, and not have left his house to be broken through” (39).**
- **a “You be also ready, for in an hour that you think not the Son of man comes” (40).**

**Note that in ‘a’ they are to be working hard in readiness, and in the parallel they are to be ready. In ‘b’ they should be watching for their lord, and in the parallel the master of the house should have watched for burglars. In ‘c’ the servants are blessed if they are found watching, and in the parallel the same applies. In ‘d’, and centrally The Lord will reward His faithful servants at Messiah’s table.**

### **The First Parable - The Servants in Readiness (12.35-38).**

**In this parable Jesus is dealing with the responsibility that all who claim to be His servants have for the whole world (the lord’s house), although those who originally heard it probably thought in terms of the people of Israel. The emphasis is on the responsibility of those who are put in position of authority by Him, whether high or low. The crowds and the Pharisees probably in fact saw in it just a pointer to the need to be faithful in serving God. (The beauty of parables is that each gathered from them the message appropriate for them). But to the disciples He is indicating that each is responsible for the service that is committed to him or her in readiness for His return. All are to be involved from the highest to the lowest.**

**12.35 “Let your loins be girded about, and your lamps burning,”**

**The parable begins with a description of what is required of the Lord’s servants. In modern terms we would say that they have to have their sleeves rolled up and the lights switched on so that they can go about their tasks with all their might. They have to be like those swotting up in the week before their examinations, concentrating all their attention and effort on it.**

**‘Your loins girded.’ The long robes they wore hindered work, and so they had to be gathered up and tucked in their belts. ‘Your lamps burning.’ Their lamps for which they were responsible all had to be continually refilled with oil and their wicks tended so as to give off a bright flame. In a large household this could be quite a task in itself.**

**12.36 “And be you yourselves like to men looking for their lord, when he shall return from the marriage feast, that, when he comes and knocks, they may open to him straight away.”**

**And the servants themselves had to be like men who were waiting for the return of their lord who could arrive at any moment. He had gone to a marriage feast (which would be of uncertain length), but all must be ready for his return, and when he did arrive and knock things had to be in such a state of readiness that they could open the door immediately. The picture is one of conscientiousness, bustle and preparation, and of all efforts being expended in one direction only, readiness for their lord's return so that everything was perfect in the household when he came.**

**12.37a "Blessed are those servants, whom the lord when he comes will find watching."**

**Jesus then points out that those servants who are found ready and watching when the lord returns will be truly blessed. Not that they were doing anything special. It was one of the main duties of servants to be at readiness waiting for the return of their master. They would be blessed because in fulfilling their duty they were pleasing their lord. They were doing what it was their duty to do.**

**12.37b "Truly I say to you, that he will gird himself, and make them sit down to food, and will come and serve them."**

**Indeed they will be so blessed that they will receive far more than they could ever have anticipated. It will become a special Servant's Day. The lord himself will tuck in his robes and sit them down at his table, and will himself come and serve them.**

**It is one of the quirks of human nature that through the ages important men have had 'servants' days' when precisely this was done. For one short day (or part of a day) the servants were sat at table and the masters and their families served them. (They then made up for it over the remainder of the year). In this case it was to be a special day as a reward for their hard work and loyalty, and for their being ready. But this time it would be the Master Himself Who would serve them. Once again Jesus gets over the point that the greatest are those who serve. Men and women would expect Him to come in order to sit at the head of the table and lord it over all. But even in His glory, He would come as One Who had come to serve. Note that it is this act that definitely identifies Whom the lord of the house represents, the great Servant of the Lord.**

**12.38 "And if he shall come in the second watch, and if in the third, and find them so, blessed are those servants."**

**And they must be in a state of readiness whenever he returns, whether in the second watch or the third. The Jews had three ‘watches’ to the night (as against the Romans with four), at which point guards would be changed, and new sentries posted. And the night was thought of in terms of those three periods of watching. Thus the idea is that they should be ready all night. (No servant could go to bed until the lord had returned from the wedding feast).**

**Note the ‘second’ and ‘third’. Compare 13.32. It denotes the passage of time to a final conclusion. It could be soon or it could be long. For the night indicates the whole period of time until the consummation. While there is the idea of imminence (they do not know when he will come) there is no thought of his necessary soon coming. It may well not be until the end of the third watch just before morning. Indeed it is a warning that His coming may not be as soon as they expected.**

**And blessed would be those servants who proved their loyalty and faithfulness by being ready every watch of the night.**

### **The Significance of the Parable.**

**Jesus mainly preached His parables openly before all, the crowds, the disciples and the Pharisees, and they had a message for all. That is why one Gospel writer can see a parable as directed at the one of these, while another might see it as directed at another. Both are right. They were directed at all three, but with a significant message for each, for while not all followed Jesus directly, all claimed to be serving God.**

**The main idea behind the parable is that of loyal service, hard work and readiness. To many of His listeners who were not ‘in the know’, whether Pharisee or of the general crowd, that is precisely what it would have conveyed.**

**Its lessons could therefore be seen as follows:**

- **1). To the crowds and the Pharisees it would indicate that men and women had to live in the light of God's requirements. They had to live loyally and industriously like servants waiting for their lord's return from a wedding, not an uncommon occurrence. In the Old Testament the favour or otherwise of God was regularly connected with brides and bridegrooms (Isaiah 62.5; Jeremiah 7.34; 16.9; 25.10; 33.11; Joel 2.16). And the result would be that one day God would reward them in His day of blessing. These were ideas of which the Pharisees would heartily have approved. Jesus probably hoped that some of them might even notice the detail of the parable and come and ask about it.**
- **2). Some may have gone further. They may also have thought in terms of the coming of the Messiah. God had promised His Messiah and that one day He would come. So they might have seen it as indicating that they must keep in readiness for that event, and that then they would have their part in the Messianic banquet. Many Pharisees would agree with this too. His parable thus had very much a present application for the Pharisees and the crowds even though they did not know of His second coming.**
- **3). To those disciples who had been observant of Jesus teaching and knew that He was the Messiah of God, and that He was to die and rise again, it should have meant more (it certainly would do later). They were intended to recognise that it was confirmation of the fact that He would be leaving them but that He would then return. Thus it was not only an indication that they must be diligent in service (and it was that) but it was also reminding them that He must shortly leave them and that when He did go they must not cease their work of proclaiming the Kingly Rule of God but must continue it faithfully until His return whatever happened. And they must do it without restraint so that when He did return all would be in readiness.**

**They would also recognise the symbolism of the night of waiting which revealed a world in darkness, and the permanent lights which represented the witness of God's people to the world which had to be kept shining. Compare 8.16; 11.33-36 and see 12.3 where what is in the dark will be brought to the light of God.**

- **4). But once the death and resurrection had taken place the parable would gather new meaning, again a meaning intended by Jesus Who at this time fully knew the significance of His death and resurrection. For then all who became His would know that Jesus had risen and been enthroned in Heaven, and that one day in accordance with His promises He would return. Thus they would see that they had to labour diligently, ever ready for His return, and yet at the same time recognise that they had no idea how long it would be before He returned. ('If he shall come in the second watch, and if in the third'). For they would recognise that the end of the third watch indicated an unending length of time, only limited by the consummation of which no man knew the date, not even Jesus (Mark 13.32).**

**And for them too it would promise to those who were faithful and hardworking, and who kept their light of witness and life shining brightly (8.16; 11.33-36; Matthew 5.16), that they would be blessed in that day and sit down at His table and He would serve them. They would enjoy the Messianic feast. They would enjoy the glory of Heaven. (Not for the Gentiles any hang ups about the land. Their eyes were firmly fixed on Heaven). They would drink wine with Him under His Father's Kingly Rule (22.18, 30).**

**They would also note the fact that He would serve them. This emphasised the fact that He Himself was the Servant of the Lord (3.22; 9.35; 22.27; Isaiah 53; Mark 10.45), and that to be in service was to be in the highest position in the kingdom. By it He would reveal Himself as their Lord. For under the Kingly Rule of God service and humility are the evidences of royalty (22.26-27). Sadly it was the part of the parable that many forgot.**

**So far from this parable as given being irrelevant to the crowds it indicates the genius of Jesus in containing a relevant message for all, from which all would benefit, a deeper message for those who would privately ask concerning its truth, and a further message for those who would follow after.**

### **The Second Parable - The Thief Breaking In (12.39).**

**12.39 "But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what hour the thief was coming, he would have watched, and not have left his house to be broken through."**

**The second illustration is of the arrival of a thief. No one knows when it will happen, for if they did they would be in readiness and it would not happen. ‘Broken through.’ The thief would enter a house by breaking through the mud walls of a typical Palestinian house. Again the point is that the only hope of avoiding it is to be in constant readiness. But here there is the added thought that for this man who was not in readiness, the Son of Man’s arrival will have the same unpleasantness as that which is experienced by the advent of a thief. The man has been caught out and the results will not be pleasant. He is one who has not been keeping in mind the Lord’s coming at all.**

**This parable gives us the warning that we must not read too much into every detail of parables. We are hardly to see a thief as a picture of Jesus in any other way than because he comes unexpectedly, and because his coming is unpleasant for the householder involved because he is not ready.**

**12.40 “You be also ready, for in an hour that you think not the Son of man comes.”**

**The lesson of both parables is then made clear. All are to be ready because the Son of Man will come in the very hour that He is not expected. Many in the crowd would be thinking in terms of the coming Messiah. Others might have gathered that Jesus was the Son of Man and have been puzzled. They may have related it to the way in which He kept arriving and then departing. But the disciples should have recognise that it had a deeper meaning, for they had been informed of His soon Departure and resurrection, while the early church would apply it totally to the second coming.**

**Peter’s Comment (12.41).**

**Peter may well have heard the mutterings in the crowd as different interpretations were suggested, and have recognised that the crowds did not really have the background (which the disciples had) in order to understand the parable. Perhaps that was what Peter was trying to clarify. Who was intended to benefit by it? Or perhaps his desire to be the greatest was showing through. Were Jesus promises only for the faithful few? Or perhaps he was puzzled as to how the return of their beloved Lord could be seen as a catastrophe by any true disciple.**

**12.41 ‘And Peter said, “Lord, do you speak this parable to us, or even to all?” ’**

**Peter clearly recognised that not all the crowd could be expected to understand the parable as he understood it. So he asks Jesus whether it is a parable for the inner circle or for all. Depending on that will depend its meaning for them. He had not yet caught on to the fact that parables contained a number of meanings, and each one who heard it gathered from it that of which he or she was capable.**

**This was the beauty of parables. All would learn, depending on the stage that they had reached, some one thing and some another. But for Jesus Himself, Who knew the deeper significance that lay behind them, the parables were richer far than for anyone else, even the disciples, for He knew the very essence of them, and the many applications that they could have.**

**Jesus does not answer his question directly but replies with another parable which this time deals with an individual, but then ends up more generally. Peter can then apply it to himself if he wishes, as may any other of the disciples. For in the end it is for all who will listen. Yet it is certainly a warning to Peter to ensure that in the future he does not go astray in his responsibilities as an Apostle, as indeed once or twice he nearly did, and might have totally had Jesus not prayed for him (22.31-34; Galatians 2.11-14).**

#### **The Parable of The Servants Good and Bad (12.42-48).**

**In reply to Peter's question Jesus tells a parable about an individual steward (although it expands to cover all level of servants at the end). It should be noted that again the parable is open to varied interpretation. The crowd could see the mention of the lord's coming as just a part of His comings and goings without reading into it the second coming. They would simply see it as a warning of the need to serve God faithfully, especially those of them who held positions of authority.**

**The disciples themselves who were in the know about His departure and second coming may have interpreted it of the second coming. But it is doubtful if even they did until much later. Originally they too probably saw it in terms of the lord's comings and goings, and as a warning of the necessity to be faithful and ardent in His service. They may have gone along with the crowd.**

**But there is little doubt that Jesus did in the end mean it to be understood of the Second Coming, and that the early church would have seen it like that. For Jesus was constantly trying to turn the thoughts of His disciples to the coming crisis and what lay beyond (9.22, 44 ; Mark 8.31; 9.12, 31; 10.45). It was part of the genius of Jesus that His parables could be multipurpose. We must not limit Jesus by our hidebound ideas and interpretations. He was both a genius and far-sighted.**

## **Analysis.**

- **a Peter said, “Lord, do you speak this parable to us, or even to all?” (41).**
- **b The Lord said, “Who then is the faithful and wise steward, whom his lord shall set over his household, to give them their portion of food in due season? (42).**
- **c “Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he comes shall find so doing” (43).**
- **d “Of a truth I say to you, that he will set him over all that he has” (44).**
- **c “But if that servant shall say in his heart, ‘My lord delays his coming,’ and shall begin to beat the menservants and the maidservants, and to eat and drink, and to be drunken, the lord of that servant will come in a day when he does not expect, and in an hour when he does not know, and will cut him asunder, and appoint his portion with the unfaithful” (45-46).**
- **b “And that servant, who knew his lord’s will, and did not make ready, nor did according to his will, will be beaten with many stripes, but he who did not know, and did things worthy of stripes, will be beaten with few stripes” (47-48a).**
- **a “And to whoever much is given, of him will much be required, and to whom they commit much, of him will they ask the more” (48b).**

**Note than in ‘a’ the question is as to whom the parable is addressed, and in the parallel it is to those to whom much has been given. In ‘b’ the steward is set over the household, and in the parallel the punishment for such servants is described. In ‘c’ the servant who is ready is blessed, and in the parallel the servants who are not ready are punished. And central in ‘d’ is the fact that the faithful servant will be set over all that he has.**

**12.41-42 ‘And Peter said, “Lord, do you speak this parable to us, or even to all?” And the Lord said, “Who then is the faithful and wise steward, whom his lord shall set over his household, to give them their portion of food in due season?”**

**Jesus replies to Peter's question with a question. In other words He says the choice is up to Peter and the other disciples what they apply to themselves. He is aware that it will be some time before they really appreciate its significance. In it He points to the fact that the lord in the parable seeks a faithful and wise steward. For 'faithful' compare 1 Corinthians 4.2. For 'wise, prudent' compare 16.8; 1 Corinthians 4.10; 10.15. The steward appointed will be someone who has already been tested and has proved his worth, both in loyalty and wisdom. And He is to be set over the lord's household with responsibility for feeding all the household, a picture certainly of the responsibility of the disciples, and later of the leaders of the early church (1 Corinthians 4.1; Titus 1.7; 1 Peter 4.10; see also 1 Corinthians 9.17; Ephesians 3.2; Colossians 1.25). Peter especially was appointed in order to feed His sheep (John 21.15-17), but this was as an indication of restoration for his failure when he denied Jesus. The same principle would apply to all the Apostles who proved faithful. So each could put himself in this position. And it would not be long before other faithful and wise stewards were appointed, including Paul. They too could pattern themselves on this steward.**

**His purpose was to be to feed the lord's household. He was set as a household manager over, at a minimum, the running of the dining areas, kitchens and stores. This was a vital job, for people in such a position had to be absolutely trustworthy. If a mistaken appointment was made it was always open to the appointee to poison the food. It was also a suitable position for one who was to minister the Bread of Life (John 6.35).**

**12.43-44 "Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he comes shall find so doing. Of a truth I say to you, that he will set him over all that he has."**

**He now points out that the steward is a slave. He is not there to better himself but to serve. If the slave faithfully carries out his function he will be blessed. He will both prosper and be happy. For when his lord pays him a visit and discovers that he is looking after the feeding of the household well he will appoint him over everything. (We see here reminiscences of Joseph - Genesis 39.3-4). Note the change from steward to slave. It is being emphasised that he is but a humble slave and not dealing with his own things but the things of his master. He is a servant and not a lord (compare 22.25-27) although as such he will be given great privilege (22.28).**

**12.45 "But if that servant shall say in his heart, 'My lord delays his coming,' and shall begin to beat the menservants and the maidservants, and to eat and drink, and to be drunken."**

**But far from being blessed is that slave if he takes advantage of his lord's absence to maltreat his master's property. Here is something totally unseemly, a slave behaving like a master and beating unnecessarily the other less important slaves, and using his master's goods to excess. He is going outside his station. Note how drunkenness is seen as the seal on his degradation. He has descended to the lowest depths. Here is a man who has got beyond himself, and thinks of himself what he ought not to think.**

**12.46 "The lord of that servant will come in a day when he does not expect, and in an hour when he does not know, and will cut him asunder, and appoint his portion with the unfaithful."**

**But the slave is so foolish that he has forgotten that his lord might come at any time. And when suddenly his lord does come he is caught out with nowhere to hide. And his lord is so angry that he has him decapitated, and sends him to join the unbelieving. He has proved himself to be totally unworthy to even be in the household.**

**An alternative is that the verb 'decapitated' be given a gentler meaning of being 'separated off' from the other servants. His sentence may then be to be put in the dungeons or the equivalent along with other grossly unfaithful and rebellious slaves.**

**'In a day -- in an hour.' These expressions are used fairly regularly in order to indicate the Lord's second coming, compare Mark 13.32; Matthew 25.13; Revelation 9.15.**

**12.47 "And that servant, who knew his lord's will, and did not make ready, nor did according to his will, will be beaten with many stripes,"**

**The question here is whether this is the same slave or another one. If the steward was decapitated it would certainly suggest that this is another one. This tagging on of an extra idea to a parable would also fit in with the way that Jesus suddenly tagged on an extra idea to the previous parable (verse 39). It is a vivid way of stressing a point. And we must remember that the lord will always have all his staff to call into account for their behaviour while he has been away.**

**There would therefore appear to be three gradings (threefoldness thus covering all the servants), the steward, the high level servant who was in the know about his lord's requirements, and the lower level servant who was not. This high level servant then is one who was under the steward, but who also knew what his lord wanted and had not made ready. He too had been faithless, although not going as far as the steward. He is not therefor decapitated and assigned with the unbelievers. Rather he is given a severe beating. This might suggest that he was rather seen as a believer who had to be disciplined, although the severe beating might indicate the fate of the unbeliever. It is, of course, picture language. It does not mean that beatings will be handed out at the second coming (even though what is handed out may in some ways be worse, 'he himself will be saved but only as through fire' - 1 Corinthians 3.15, compare 2 Corinthians 5.10).**

**12.48a "But he who did not know, and did things worthy of stripes, will be beaten with few stripes."**

**On the other hand the servant who did not know in depth what his lord required, presumably because he was a lower level servant, (although still required to be faithful), but who was still not as well behaved as he should have been, will also be given a beating. But this time a relatively mild one. Note that he had done things worthy of stripes. This suggests that he knew why he was being punished and recognised that he deserved it (not that in the modern day we can say that anyone ever deserves such severe treatment to be afflicted by men. But in those days it was the way of the world, and quite commonplace).**

**12.48b "And to whoever much is given, of him will much be required: and to whom they commit much, of him will they ask the more."**

**And the final lesson drawn out is that the more that is given to someone, of position and authority and trust, the more will be required of them. Those who are given the most trust will be expected to deliver more than those of whom that is not so true.**

**Note. It would be unwise to draw our theology from a parable. Parables illustrate theology not make it, for interpretations are always open to doubt and depend very much on viewpoint. Thus while learning the lessons we should not draw firm conclusions about what will happen in the afterlife from this parable. Some see some of the servants as erring believers. Others see all the erring servants as unbelievers. Each can draw his lesson as he will. But the theology of the afterlife must be drawn from elsewhere. End of note.**

**The Future Will Not All Be Rosy (12.49-53).**

**As Jesus contemplates the thought of the punishments which will be inflicted on the various unfaithful servants, it carries His thought forward on to what now awaits the world in terms of the severe treatment that is coming on those who called themselves His people, but were even now being unfaithful, and of those who were mistreating them and leading them astray (the chief priests, scribes and Pharisees in general), faithless servants all. They too were to be afflicted (13.35; 21.20-24), something which would in the end include the whole world (21.10-11). And He describes this in terms of ‘casting fire’ on them. Yet at the same time He brings out that He Himself would go through great suffering for them in order that some of them might be ‘made straight’, in order to deliver them from Satan’s iron control (13.16). Some would bear the fire directly, but in the case of some He would take part of the fire on Himself, for the fire of His judgment, and the suffering He would endure, are here inextricably bound together.**

**This idea was contrary to the expectation of the Jewish people, although it should not have been for they had had plenty of warning. They probably thought that they had experienced their tribulation and looked forward into a future in which it was their hope that they would enjoy a world of peace and plenty. That was what many believed that the Messiah would introduce without them needing to do much about it. While it might all begin with a bloody encounter, in the end the Messiah would triumph, and then Israel would be exalted. But the last thing that most of them recognised or considered was the need for a change within themselves. In their view it was not they who needed to change, but the world situation. They were all right as they were. Let the Messiah rather concentrate on setting the world right. Then they could have ‘heavenly bliss’ on earth and still be as they were, the only change being that they would be better off.**

**Yet it was the very need for Israel to change that had been brought home to Jesus from the very beginning. He had experienced rejection at Nazareth (4.16-30). He had experienced heart-numbing apathy in Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum and recognised that it would occur elsewhere (10.10-15). He had come to recognise that this whole generation would on the whole not listen to His words (11.29-32), that the whole generation was asleep (Ephesians 5.14). And along with this He was aware of the enmity of Herod (9.9 13.31), and the plottings of the Scribes and Pharisees, and the growth of their hatred against Him (6.7, 11; 9.22, 44; 11.15) because they too would not receive His words. And so with this recognition had come the realisation that what was necessary was something that would shake up the world, something that would in fact split the world into two (12.1-12, 51-53).**

**He thus saw it as necessary for Him to kindle a fire that would set the world alight, partly through His own suffering, and partly through what would follow. It was not to be a cosy fire. It was a fire that would bring division. For He recognised the division that would arise between those who would confess Him and those who would deny Him (12.8-9); between those who were His friends (12.4), and those who would seek to slay them (12.4); between those who received the gift of His Holy Spirit (11.13) so that the Holy Spirit would guide them when they needed Him (12.12), and those who blasphemed against the Holy Spirit by hardening their hearts against His word (12.10). And He knew that in danger of being included among these last were Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum (10.13-15) and many others. And that later they would persecute His disciples because they did not want their apathy disturbing. Thus He had no illusions about what lay ahead, and it clearly disturbed Him deeply**

**‘I am come to cast fire on the earth.’ This was a wake up call to His disciples. Did they really think that nothing was happening, and that He did not seem to be doing anything? Did they not see that He was already casting fire on the earth, for the unbelievers in Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum had already been consigned to judgment, together with the cities whose dust they themselves had shaken from their feet. And they would soon see more. For He knew that what He was bringing would be earthshaking to the world, so that the world might be stirred from its apathy, and from the grip of Satan (13.16), and that this could only be through fire, both through the fire of His words, and through the fiery judgments that would accompany them. And in parallel with this fact was that He Himself must also be overwhelmed by suffering. It is this last that makes this whole idea in character with Jesus. The suffering for both comes because there is no other way, none will deny the sufferings in the world, but He wants them to see that He Himself will suffer most at the heart of it.**

**And what fire would He cast down? In context it would be a fire that would first consume Him as He bore the sin of others (12.50; 17.25), it was a fire that would take the false sense of peace from the world (12.51), it was a fire that would divide men and women in their thinking (12.51-53), it was a fire of persecution that would affect those who followed Him (6.22-23; 12.4; 21.12-18; John 16.2), it was a fire that would soon engulf Galilee and Jerusalem in Roman flames (21.20-24), it was a fire that would bring nation against nation, and kingdom against kingdom and bring natural disasters (21.10). And this would only be the beginning of sorrows. It was the fires of Revelation that would result from His opening of the seven-sealed scroll, the scroll opened by the Lamb Who had been slain (Revelation 5 onwards). It was a fire that would determine the whole future of the world.**

**Yet it was His longing that both would come to a speedy fulfilment, both the fire and the suffering that He must face, and He looked forward to neither. He would be glad when they were over. He would no doubt feel the same when out of His own suffering as the slain Lamb He opened the seven seals which brought into train the whole of the future (Revelation 5).**

**Perhaps the words that now follow were the result of His contemplation of the failure of the Servants in His parable concerning the future. As He contemplated the faithless steward who had had to be decapitated, and the high level slave who had had to be given a sound beating, and the low level slave who had also had to be beaten, even if it was a milder beating, it may well have brought home to Him that they were a picture of what lay ahead for mankind. For whatever the level of their punishment all would be servants who had failed Him in the purpose that He had for them, and these servants were thus typical of the failure of the world, who would suffer tribulation in century after century. So what He would now say may well have been because He saw in them a picture of the world's failure, and especially of the failure of His people, and wanted to do something about it. By 'beating' the people He hoped to bring them to their senses, to bring them to listen to His words.**

**For in the end that parable had been about the world as it awaits His coming, and its concentration had been on the failure of those given responsibility within it, whether secular or spiritual, to fulfil their responsibility. It was because of the recognition of this failure that He was aware of the steps that He must Himself take in order to minimise it. By casting down fire on the world, partly in the form of His words, and the words of His followers, and partly through the resulting judgments, and by Himself suffering for it to the very depths, He would hope to produce success from failure. For when God's judgments are in the world, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness (Isaiah 26.9-10 and see Isaiah 59.9-19)**

**Perhaps also the words that had followed the parable, 'to whoever much is given, from him will be much required', further reminded Him of Israel's failure in their responsibility to the world. They had failed to move the world and so it was His responsibility as representing the new Israel to do so. He would not be a faithless servant.**

**But whatever it was something had moved Him to make this momentous declaration, this awesome pulling back of the curtain of the future, in order to bring home to them the great uncertainty of that future, both for his listeners and for the world, an uncertainty which would at least partly be due to Him. (It was, of course, uncertain from the world's viewpoint, not from His). And it was a declaration unlike any that He had made before (although He would later expand on it in chapter 21). For they were direct words of the judgment that was coming on the world as a result of His coming, even though it was a judgment tempered with mercy for those who responded. And it was a judgment which would result from His own actions.**

**Fire was an apt picture of the future. The fire of God would shortly come down on His disciples (Acts 2.1-3), Israel would shortly know the fire of judgment in their rebellion against Rome. His own people would experience the fire of persecution (1 Peter 4.12), the world would face continual fire (Revelation 8.5, 7, 8, 10; 9.2, 17, 18), and would in the end be destroyed by fire (2 Peter 3.7). The final Judgment would result in fire for all but His elect (3.17; Revelation 20.15). For the fire is His fire whether for righteousness or for judgment.**

**So Jesus declares that in order to give them a 'wake-up' call, and in order to try to save them from this final failure, He would 'cast fire' on them, a fire which would result in judgment on the majority and blessing on the few. This would partly be by means of His words and their effects (see here Jeremiah 5.14; 23.29). For like Moses His words would include blessings and cursings. In one sense His enlightening word would spread like wildfire throughout the world, dividing the world into those who heard it (and had their eyes opened and were turned from the power of Satan to God - Acts 26.18) and those who failed to do so and reacted against it, and experienced the fires of judgment. And yet there was a very real sense in which it would also be His powerful word that would bring about the judgments that would follow. The future of all depended on His word, whether of salvation or judgment.**

**Some hint of this has already come out in His words concerning Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum. These were powerful words which had themselves sealed the fate of those cities. But it would also occur through His future words, which while helping the righteous would seal the fate of the unrighteous. For through His words, which were effective in carrying out what they declared (Isaiah 55.11), He would bring some into salvation and others into suffering and judgment, and yet even this latter was so that some of them might escape the final Judgment. They were words which were pressing on His heart, and which were bursting to come out. And it was clearly something that He did not like the thought of.**

**In a sense these next verses can be compared with 9.21-24. There out of the blue He had unexpectedly revealed an in-depth description of His own relationship with the Father, and what it could mean for His own. For a brief moment He had opened Heaven to us, and manifested the glory of both Father and Son. It has been called ‘the bolt from the Johannine blue’ because of its similarity to the teaching of Jesus in John’s Gospel. Here also out of the blue He opens Heaven and reveals a summary of the future and of how unpleasant it will be for Israel, and eventually for the world. It will be a future of fire. And what is most poignant is that it will be a future that would be brought about by Him, a future that must be understood in terms of 13.5, 34-35; 17.22; 19.27, 42-44; 21.6, 10-26, even though out of it will come also the redeemed. As a Lamb Who has been slain He will open the scroll of the future (Revelation 5 onwards). We might call it ‘a bolt from the Revelation blue’.**

**His momentous words were as follows:**

**“I have come to cast fire on the earth,  
And how I wish it was already kindled.”**

**“And I have a baptism (‘an overwhelming’) to be baptised with,  
And how am I straitened (afflicted) till it be accomplished!”**

**Do you think that I am come to bring peace on the earth?**

**I tell you No, but rather division.**

**For there shall from now on be five in a house,**

**Divided three against two, and two against three,**

**They will be divided father against son, and son against father,**

**Mother against daughter, and daughter against her mother,**

**Mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law, and daughter-in-law against her  
mother-in-law.”**

**We can see at once that there is something very ominous about these words. Notice how their significance is almost tearing Him apart. ‘How I wish it was already kindled -- how I am afflicted until it be accomplished.’ Note also the contrast of the first as only being ‘kindled’, for the fire will burn long into the future, and the second as being ‘accomplished’, that is, as something that will succeed and be fulfilled in His lifetime.**

**And it is also deeply significant that the fire that He has come to cast on earth, is paralleled with the overwhelming suffering that He Himself is going to endure. If He must bring suffering and judgment on the world, as He must, they must be made to recognise that it is from the travail of His own soul (Isaiah 53.11). He too will endure great suffering on behalf of the world. For it is through both these means that He seeks to bring salvation to all in the world who will respond. That is precisely the significance of the final verses in the group (12.51-53). They indicate that some will respond and others will not. And it will be His fire that will be what causes the division between them.**

**So His way ahead is to bring fire down on the world, and for Himself to experience it by Himself enduring fiery trial, a concoction which will bring salvation to those who believe in Him. It is not a cosy view, but one of salvation through suffering, first His and then theirs, (both for believers - Colossians 1.24, and for unbelievers) and will later be vividly portrayed in terms of ‘the suffering Lamb as it had been slain’ Who will open the seals of the scroll which contains the world’s destiny of suffering (Revelation 5.1 onwards). And He cannot wait until it has begun (has been kindled) for it is through this process that the world’s redemption will finally be worked out.**

**Putting it briefly in one sentence we could see Him as saying, ‘You have heard what I said about the servants who will fail Me, and how they will suffer. Do not think that suffering is only for them, and that you will escape suffering, nor that I have come to bring you peace and an easy time. For I am rather bringing you into something which is going to put you too through much anguish and will rend you in two. And yet remember as it does so, that I have suffered too along with you, and for your sakes, and that its purpose is to make you consider righteousness and truth and partake of the benefit of My suffering. For it is when God’s judgments are in the earth that the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness (Isaiah 26.9)’.**

**Let us analyse the passage further:**

- **a “I came to cast fire on the earth, and how I wish it was already kindled!” (49).**
- **b “And I have a baptism to be baptised with, and how I am straitened till it be accomplished!” (50).**
- **c “Do you think that I am come to give peace in the earth? I tell you, No, but rather division” (12.51).**
- **b “For there shall be from now on five in one house divided, three against two, and two against three” (52).**

- a “They will be divided, father against son, and son against father; mother against daughter, and daughter against her mother; mother in law against her daughter in law, and daughter in law against her mother in law” (53).

Central to the interpretation of the above is ‘c’, which must determine the overall trend of the whole passage. It declares that Jesus has come not to bring peace but division, and that their whole conception of the Messiah has, up to now, been wrong. Thus we would expect to find reference to both lack of peace and division throughout the verses. Certainly both are apparent in the second half, and thus in view of this we would expect to find in the first part the cause of this lack of peace and of division, an answer to why they will be so divided and why there will be no peace. This makes it clear that the fire that is cast on the earth, and the baptism with which He must be baptised are what in some way must bring all this about. That must be the first basis of any interpretation.

The second point that we need to take into account is that the order of the phrases probably suggests that the casting of fire which begins to affect the world precedes or parallels the ‘baptism’, the overwhelming suffering that He is to experience, rather than follows it. And nothing is more certain than that the seeds of Israel’s suffering commenced almost immediately, being already foreshadowed in 13.1-5, which is the firstfruit of suffering, and had indeed been already guaranteed by the declarations on the apathetic cities, and the apathetic current generation, and will be guaranteed from now on (10.10-15; 11.29-32). With these pointers in view we will now consider the passage in more depth.

The first thing to recognise is the passion behind both ideas. There is a depth of feeling here that indicates deep emotion. ‘How I wish it were already kindled, how I am afflicted until it is accomplished.’ He is foreseeing two things, which must in some way be related, that are tearing at His very heart, and He longs that they were behind Him. It gives Him no pleasure to cast fire on the earth. We will look initially at the first in its Scriptural background.

**12.49 “I have come to cast fire on the earth, and how I wish it was already kindled.”**

Apart from the problem of translating the last part of the verse, which probably does not affect the meaning of the whole, the main question here is as to the significance of the ‘casting of fire on the earth’. The general impression gained by such a phrase would be that of causing disturbance and ferment and trouble, and finally of bringing judgment on those spoken of. For that is the usual idea behind the thought of the ‘casting of fire’ (compare 9.54).

**The alternative has been mooted that it indicates the fire of the Holy Spirit and therefore refers to the Gospel going out like fire around the world accomplishing His purpose, something which was the desire of His heart. This last idea is attractive, and had this verse stood by itself, and had there been no other Scriptures dealing with the topic, this might have been feasible. But a major problem of this interpretation is that it is against the tenor of the passage as a whole, which is one of sadness and heartache, and it is also against the tenor of other Scriptures. Besides when fire is connected with the Holy Spirit it is never thought of as ‘cast, thrown’.**

**The truth is that what Jesus appears to have in view here is not pleasant. It is in contrast with 5.32 which declares the other purpose of His coming. There He says, ‘I have come -- to call sinners to repentance’, which is the other side of the story. Here He has come to ‘cast fire’.**

**On the other hand we may certainly see the idea as partly included, although more probably in terms of His word being the fire, a fire which does have its effect on the hearts of believers, but also has its effect in judgments coming on the world. For the work of the Holy Spirit is undoubtedly a part of the fire that He would bring on the world, as He fulfils Himself as ‘the Spirit of burning’ and ‘of judgment’ in establishing purity in the world (Isaiah 4.4).**

**But to understand precisely what is in mind we must turn to the Scriptures. For there are a number of references in Scripture that we need to take into account in order to illuminate the picture:**

- 1). In 3.16 reference is made to the Coming One as ‘baptising/drenching/overwhelming in Holy Spirit and fire’, and this is immediately interpreted in terms of producing fruitfulness (by means of heavenly rain) for some and the burning up of others like the chaff (3.17). If we accept John’s own explanation therefore the Holy Spirit produces the ripe grain of believers while the fire is very much a consuming fire, the fire of judgment, for the burning up of the chaff. At first sight it is tempting to compare the words there with this passage here where again the fire and baptism are in close parallel. But here the baptism is rather one of suffering that comes on Him and overwhelms Him, whereas there He is the One Who will do the overwhelming. And furthermore there the baptism represented drenching rain producing fruit, whereas here the baptism is of suffering, and thus very different circumstances are in mind. Nor is there the thought in John’s words of the ‘casting of fire’. Rather it is men who themselves will be cast into the fire (3.9), and the fire is rather present to consume. They will be overwhelmed by fire. Nevertheless even so the basic idea behind the word ‘fire’ there is that of judgment, which certainly also applies here.

We may certainly include in the fire there the fire of purifying and purging, for in the Old Testament God’s judgment on the many regularly purges the few. But purging never takes place without judgment, those purged come out of judgment (e.g. Zechariah 13.8-9; Malachi 3.2-3; 4.1-3). It is a great and terrible day (Malachi 4.5), and it has begun in John the Baptist (Matthew 11.14).

- 2). In Isaiah 4.5 there is reference to the ‘spirit of burning’, which is also ‘the spirit of judgment’, and this refers to judgments which are coming on Jerusalem in order to purify Jerusalem and remove its filth in the last days. And this last will be by the burning up of the evil, the emphasis being on Jerusalem’s final purifying by the purging of what is evil through the fires of judgment. So the ‘burning’ is severe judgment that is seen as the means by which evil is removed. The consequence will be that the righteous are brought through the fire and the remainder are destroyed by it. This is probably a little closer to what is in mind in Jesus’ words, but again there is there no thought of ‘casting fire’.

- **3). In Ezekiel 10.2 the man clothed in linen, who is an angel, is to take coals of fire from between the cherubim who bore the throne of God, a throne on which God was revealed in fire, and scatter (or sprinkle) them over the city. The significance of this would seem to be the same as in Isaiah 4, that as a result of the activity of God through His agents the people of Jerusalem would suffer destruction, while a remnant would escape, those who had been sealed by God. But this time the idea of the ‘scattering’ or ‘sprinkling’ of coals of fire on the people is clearly introduced. The scattering of fire is an act of judgment on the city. There would then be a remnant remaining whom God would preserve because His mark was upon them (9.4). The final aim was the preserving of the remnant, while judgment came on the unrighteous who had spurned God’s words through Ezekiel and Jeremiah, and all this would be by the ‘strewing’ of fire.**
  
- **4). The same idea as in 3). occurs in Revelation 8.5 (compare verses 7, 8, 10) where the ‘casting of fire’ on the earth from the heavenly altar indicates God’s intention to work in judgment. The consequence of that fire would be a series of judgments, many of which involved fire, which could not touch those who were sealed by God (9.4), but which, while theoretically intended to bring the world to repentance (9.21), would on the whole not succeed in its purpose because of the sinfulness of man, although we are no doubt to see that some will repent. It is mankind as a whole that does not repent. In the final analysis the casting of fire on it resulted in judgment on the world, with some being saved through it.**
  
- 5). In Acts 2.1-4 God comes in flames of fire on the Apostles and those who are with them, but this cannot really be seen as ‘cast on them’, even though in Acts 2.17 the Spirit is to be ‘poured forth’. And in Acts 2.18 fire is again a symbol of judgment as connected with the Holy Spirit. Thus even the flames on the Apostles signify judgment as well as mercy. His fire will come on the world through them.**
  
- 6). Other examples of fire being brought down on people (and therefore ‘cast down’ on them by God), can be found in 2 Kings 1.10, 12, 14 which are in mind in Luke 9.54. Compare also 17.29.**

**7). As background to all this we should see the words of Isaiah 26.9, 'when God's judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness'. In other words as a result of His judgments while the majority perish, the minority are made to consider their ways.**

**Strictly speaking then the 'casting of fire' would seem to indicate 3). and 4). supplemented by 2 and 6), but seen in the light of 7). The word used in Ezekiel for 'scattering' (there it was coals of fire) is not the same as that used in verse 49 for 'casting', but the idea is similar, and the passage in Revelation, which would appear partly to be based on Ezekiel, does use the same verb as in verse 49 (ballo). Compare also Habbakuk 3.13 LXX which speaks of 'casting death on the heads of the wicked'. In each case the idea is the same, fire (or death) directed from above onto the earth. It would seem that 'casting', where used of things like fire and death, regularly indicates judgment. It is true that we might bring in here Matthew 10.13 which speaks of 'casting peace', but that is the act of one person towards another rather than the act of God or of Jesus, while the casting of fire here is specifically seen as bringing anything but peace (verse 51). But it does serve to confirm that just as peace can be passed on by being 'cast on' men through someone's words, so can judgment.**

**The general idea then of the casting forth of fire would appear to be something which results in God's activity among the people, on the whole bringing judgment on them, yet recognising that some will come through purified and finally unscathed as a result of it, because the mark of God is on them, with the result that it produces from among the whole a small group of the righteous (a little flock - verse 32) who come out of the midst of the suffering. Compare for this Isaiah 6.13. This would fit well here with the verses that immediately follow where there is to be a division, even between peoples of the same family, between those who come to follow Jesus, and those who settle for judgment because they reject His words, between the righteous and the unrighteous.**

**But, as we have previously mentioned, there is one further thing to bear in mind before seeking to interpret verse 49 and that is its context. For it immediately follows verses which have been describing God's punishment on those, both high and low, who had failed Him in the administration of His world, those of whom He might have expected better. In verse 46 the faithless steward had been 'cut asunder'. In verse 47 the prominent slave who had failed had been savagely beaten. In verse 48a the lesser slave, who had also failed, had received a lesser beating. And Jesus had then declared in verse 48b, 'to whoever much is given, of them much will be required'. Thus verse 49 (if we see it as introduced at all) is introduced as in a context of punishment being afflicted on those who have been favoured and have failed to respond with faithfulness.**

**So both context and background Scriptures demand that we see this casting of fire on earth as a judgment on those in mind, even though it is a judgment which will result in a remnant coming through to blessing. And the positioning of the verse prior to the thought in verse 50 suggests that that judgment will begin prior to His final suffering, although we might possibly see it as being ‘kindled’ by it.**

**This could further indicate that we must see His ‘words’ as His means of casting the fire. For elsewhere His word is ‘cast’ into the ground like a seed (13.19). Jeremiah describes God’s words in these terms when he says, “For this reason thus says the Lord God of hosts, Because you speak this word, behold, I will make my words in your mouth fire, and this people wood, and it will devour them’ (Jeremiah 5.14), and again ‘Is not my word like a fire? says the Lord, and like a hammer which breaks the rock in pieces?’ (Jeremiah 23.29). There is thus a precedent for words, especially words of judgment, being likened to fire. Compare also how it is emphasised that God’s words to Moses came out of the midst of the fire (Deuteronomy 4.12, 36; 5.22; 9.10). And how fire would come out of the mouths of the Two Witnesses in the last days (Revelation 11.5). Yet this explanation will not do just by itself, for fire being cast has a specific meaning elsewhere as we have seen, while the word is only seen as ‘cast’ when seed is in mind, not fire.**

**That His words can be seen as a judgmental fire has already come out in His claim that what He has taught will condemn that generation in the last Day (11.29-32). But they are not the only words that will condemn them, for there are also His own later words of judgment (13.5, 34-35; 17.22; 19.27, 42-44; 21.6, 10-26) which come over as a sentence on them. It may be that He saw the effect of all these as being ‘kindled’ when they finally crucified Him, and put the seal on their own judgment.**

**By these words He is declaring God’s judgment on the Jewish people, a judgment which He knows is coming because of their rejection of Him and His message, something which has by now become obvious (10.13-16; 11.29-32). Much had been given to them. Now much will be required of them. But it must not be limited to Israel. The fire is cast ‘on the earth’. But He finds no pleasure in the fact and wishes that it was all over. Certainly the imminence of such judgment is assumed in 11.51, illustrated immediately in 13.1-5, and repeated in 13.34-35, and in 21.10-11, 25-26.**

**Thus we must see Jesus here as suggesting that through His words and signs He is ‘casting fire’ on the people in a way which will bring judgment on the many (11.29-32; 10.10-16), a judgment that will result in fire (3.9, 17). His words will judge them in the last Day (John 12.47-48). This brings out that it is always a dangerous thing to be opened up to the truth, for if it is rejected it becomes the instrument of condemnation (John 3.18). As He Himself said ‘I do not judge you. He who rejects me and does not receive My sayings has a judge, the words that I have spoken will be his judge on the last Day’ (John 12.47-48).**

**Of course it was true that in some cases they would also result in men and women responding and being refined, His words would burn in men’s hearts, that was a very real part of their purpose, but in the majority of cases they would bring His hearers under the judgment of God because they refused to hear them (6.49; 11.29-32), and into judgment because of the power of His words. In other word He is recognising, and drawing the attention of others to, the fact that His presence not only saves but judges, and that He is only too well aware that that judgment will not only happen in the last Day, although it will happen then, but for some was already approaching, a fact epitomised in 13.1-5. Not only Jerusalem (although that suffered worst) but the whole of Palestine, and even the whole of Jewry, would groan over the Roman invasion in 66-70 AD and its consequences (13.35; 21.20-24). And the world would continue to groan. Thus were all to recognise the world-shaking nature of His presence among them. The One Whose eyes are like a flame of fire brings mercy for His own and judgment on the erring church and on the world (Revelation 1.14; 2.18).**

**“And what do I desire, if it is already kindled?” or “How I wish that it was already kindled.” These are both possible translations. If we translate as the former this may indicate that the casting down of the fire having begun through His words and acts, He is satisfied that it is already kindled, and therefore He has nothing further to desire in that regard. But more probably it should be translated as the latter in which case it indicates His longing for that fire, the basis of which has been sown in His words, to be kindled into flame in order to produce its effects. He wants His words to burst into flame and bring about their ends one way or another. He longs to see God’s purposes moving forward, and recognises that in the end it can only be through the cross. It is that that will bring into stark focus the response of men and women to Him, the response that for many will issue in condemnation, but for others will result in life. Then will be the judgment of this world (John 12.31). Then will the glowing fire be fully established in its work of condemnation or salvation, of judgment or redemption. Then will come God’s judgment on Israel, out of which will spring salvation for all who believe, and yet at the same time even worse judgment for unbelieving Israel. Either way the words bring out the intensity of His feeling concerning the matter. His whole heart is in what He is doing.**

**Having all this in mind we may summarise the significance of the fire cast on them as follows:**

- It refers to His words both of salvation and judgment which He has already declared, and which have been proclaimed, which are yet to achieve their full effects. It is partly these words that will cause the divisions to be found within families and in the world.**
- It refers to His words yet to be spoken which will more and more emphasise judgment, although being continually paralleled by words of comfort, mercy and hope for His own. And we must see Him as very much aware that when He speaks what He declares comes about, whether it refers to salvation or judgment.**
- It refers to His coming control of history through His power and authority, through which His word will go forth triumphantly on behalf of those who are being saved (Matthew 28.18-20), while at the same time resulting in judgment being poured on those who refuse to believe (John 12.47). As a result of His control of history suffering will come on the whole world (a suffering largely brought on it by itself) with the aim that through that suffering many might be brought to righteousness. This too will continually result in divisions in the world and in families and households.**

**Thus the fire that Jesus cast on the world and kindled, will carry on in its effects throughout history, resulting in salvation for ‘many’, but judgments on the majority, and will do so until the end when the unrighteous and the world will finally be consumed by fire (Revelation 20.15; 2 Peter 3.10).**

**12.50 “But I have a baptism (‘an overwhelming’) to be baptised with, and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!”**

**However, if that fire is to be effective redeemingly something extraordinary will be required, the baptism of suffering of Jesus, that is, the experience for Jesus of being ‘overwhelmed’ by suffering (the word baptizo is known to signify ‘overwhelm’ in secular Greek). For alongside the suffering of the world Jesus Himself must be overwhelmed by suffering, in order that He might redeem out from a suffering world those who are His, those who have been given to Him by His Father (John 6.37-39). And paradoxically the suffering of Jesus will also be for many like the casting down of fire on them, for by their rejection of it they will bring judgment on themselves (John 3.17-21).**

**So Jesus is only too aware that before His fire cast on the earth can be fully effective, it will be necessary for Him to suffer, to die and to rise again (9.22). In the end it is only through the cross that ‘refining’ by means of His word can be offered to men and women. And the result of His fire being cast down and ignited, and of His suffering, will be that the world will be divided between those who respond to Him, and those who reject Him and even hate Him. Note the wonder of what is said. The One Who casts down the fire also came to bear that fire on Himself so that He might deliver His own from eternal fire.**

**“And how am I straitened till it be accomplished!” Once again the intensity of His feeling comes out. Compare the previous final comment in the last verse. It is not just that He is conscious of stress at what He must face, He is also filled with a burning desire for it to come about, a desire that ‘afflicts’ Him (straitens Him) by its intensity. He yearns for the salvation of His people, and it is through His suffering that it will be ‘accomplished’ or ‘fulfilled’. Thus His suffering is seen as His present destiny, the accomplishment that He must bring about, as He treads the path laid down in Isaiah 53 (22.27, 37; 24.25-26; compare Mark 10.45; Acts 2.22-24; 3.18; 4.27-28; 7.52; 8.32-35 etc). And through it He will accomplish salvation for ‘the many’ (Isaiah 53.11; Mark 10.45; 14.24, compare Acts 13.39; 26.18), and judgment on the remainder. By it He will make men ‘straight’ and free them from Satan’s power (13.10-17).**

**12.51 “Do you think that I am come to give peace in the earth? I tell you, No, but rather division.”**

**Having spoken of the fire that He is casting on the earth He now stresses what its result will be, that rather than His coming and His suffering as the Messiah uniting the people of Israel and leading them into a period of peace and plenty, (while they simply stood by and waited, which is what they were expecting), it will rather disturb and divide them, causing harsh divisions between them, a situation brought out quite clearly in the Book of Acts where there is continual division caused by the preaching of the word. His truth is open to all, but because it will only be received by the few (although often called ‘many’ e.g. Mark 10.45) and will be rejected by the majority it will cause dissension and disagreement.**

**12.52 “For there shall be from now on five in one house divided, three against two, and two against three.”**

**Indeed it will even divide families. For from now on houses will be divided. (The dissension apparent in the house (verse 45) will continue). In houses where there are five, three will be divided against two, and two against three. Looking at verse 53 the five would seem to be father, mother, the son and his wife, and the daughter. Such will be the strong feelings caused by His ‘fiery’ words that family division will result, and that at a time when the sense of family was very strong. The ‘five’, the number of covenant, might indicate the idea of the covenant community. The old covenant community will be torn in two.**

**12.53 “They will be divided, father against son, and son against father; mother against daughter, and daughter against her mother; mother in law against her daughter in law, and daughter in law against her mother in law.”**

**The division will occur where it might be least expected, for it will even disturb the close relationship between father and son, and between mother and daughter, as well as that with the in-law who had come to live with them, where normally dutiful obedience would be expected. The pattern, if not the detailed thought, is taken from Micah 7.6. There it was an indication that the time of salvation was coming (Micah 7.7). Note that each relationship is first mentioned, and then mentioned in reverse. This takes into account that sometimes the believer will be the father as against the son, and sometimes it will be the son as against the father. But the result will be the same in either case.**

**The Crowds Should Therefore Take Heed. They Must Recognise That Now Is The Time They Have Been Waiting For And That They Should Therefore Agree With Their Adversary (Jesus And His Words) While There Is Yet Time (12.54-59).**

**Having spoken His momentous words Jesus now turns to the crowds and takes up the fact that they can detect the signs that indicate what the weather will be, but fail to gather the signs, such as those just mentioned, that reveal that the time of salvation is here. They are knowledgeable about the heaven above, and yet they are unable to discern the real heavenly signs, the ones that really matter, such as His own words, wonders and signs, and what has been described in the previous passage, the likelihood of Jesus suffering at the hands of His enemies, the effects on family life of His message which will be a fulfilment of prophecy, and the fire of judgment that is inevitably coming on them, both in fulfilment of Scripture, and because of their continual belligerence towards the Romans revealed in their continual hot-headed responses (Palestine was in ferment at that time, and was like a can of fizzy drink. It only had to be shaken for it to overflow. Or like a wineskin of wine in old wineskins, waiting for it to ferment and burst).**

**Analysis.**

- a He said to the crowds also, “When you see a cloud rising in the west, straight away you say, ‘There comes a shower,’ and so it happens”, and when you see a south wind blowing, you say, ‘There will be a scorching heat,’ and it happens” (54-55).
- b “You hypocrites, you know how to interpret the face of the earth and the heaven (56a).
- c “But how is it that you do not know how to interpret this time?” (56b).
- b “And why even of yourselves do you not judge what is right?” (57).
- a “For as you are going with your adversary before the magistrate, on the way give diligence to be quit of him, lest haply he drag you to the judge, and the judge shall deliver you to the officer, and the officer shall cast you into prison, I say to you, you will by no means come out from there, until you have paid the very last penny” (58-59).

Note that in ‘a’ we have two parallel ideas, and in the parallel there are two parallel ideas, both indicating the consequences of their judgments. Interpreting the heaven and earth correctly results in the expected weather, the anticipated consequences, and failing to judge what is right also results in what might be seen as the anticipated consequences. In ‘b’ they can judge the weather, but in the parallel they cannot judge what is right. But the purpose of the pattern here is again in order to centre on the vital point in ‘c’, the fact that the people are unable to discern the time.

**12.54** ‘And he said to the crowds also, “When you see a cloud rising in the west, straight away you say, ‘There comes a shower,’ and so it happens.”

Jesus has now turned His concentration back on the crowds who have been drinking in His words, even if they have failed to fully understand them. He draws their attention to weather signs which they use in order to know what weather to expect. A cloud rising in the west will be coming in from the sea and will therefore contain a large quantity of water which is just waiting to fall once it is affected by land. Thus such a cloud regularly indicates rain.

**12.55** “And when you see a south wind blowing, you say, ‘There will be a scorching heat,’ and it happens.”

**The south wind comes up from the hot wilderness warmth of the Negeb and beyond, and thus will inevitably bring scorching heat as the wind blows the heat of the wilderness into the land. In the conditions pertaining in Palestine both situations were the inevitable result of the different winds.**

**12.56 “You hypocrites, you know how to interpret the face of the earth and the heaven, but how is it that you do not know how to interpret this time?”**

**But Jesus considers that if they can take the trouble to note the signs of changing weather, they might also have taken the time to note the signs occurring through His ministry which are fulfilments of Old Testament prophecy (4.18-19; 7.21-23), and thus have recognised that the last days were there. They were all ‘experts’ on the weather. Why were they not equally experts in interpreting the Scriptures? The very words are a strong indication to them to wake up and recognise that this was the Lord’s acceptable time (4.19).**

**‘Hypocrites.’ They make a great play of being ‘the people of God’, but inwardly they are more interested in the weather. Their profession is simply on the whole an act, for they do not live it out.**

**12.57 “And why even of yourselves do you not judge what is right?”**

**And their failure to observe the signs that reveal the presence of the time of opportunity explains why they do not see what is the right course for them to take in view of His coming. They are failing to recognise the urgency of the situation. They are failing to make the right judgments. So He now illustrates their position by utilising the example of an urgent situation with which all were familiar.**

**12.58 “For as you are going with your adversary before the magistrate, on the way give diligence to be quit of him, lest haply he drag you to the judge, and the judge shall deliver you to the officer, and the officer shall cast you into prison.”**

He depicts their response to Him in terms of debtors who are in danger of being dragged before pagan courts where they will be shown no mercy, and it is because they have refused to seek conciliation with their creditors. If only they had put in some kind of effort and admitted their debt, and had come to some kind of agreement with their creditor before they came in front of the magistrate all would have been well, and arbitration before a Rabbi might well then have solved the problem. Israelite law was notoriously favourable towards debtors (Deuteronomy 15.1-9). But if they do not then they may be dragged before a civil court, and once they reach the civil courts, (because by their refusal to conciliate they have in essence rejected God's word as the measure by which to be judged and can no longer look to it), they will experience the courts full severity. It is clear that the creditor has chosen this approach as being more effective, for both methods were available in the Palestine of that day. The result will be that the whole process of the civil law will go into motion and they will end up in prison. By his obstinacy in refusing to be reconciled the debtor has put himself beyond mercy. The 'magistrate' is the court official who introduces the case, the 'judge' is the one officially appointed to give the verdict, 'the officer' is the gaoler who seals their fate.

In the same way if only they will come to agreement with Him before Judgment Day comes, then they will save themselves from having judgment made against them there. But if they refuse they simply bring on themselves their own fate.

12.59 "I say to you, You will by no means come out from there, until you have paid the very last penny."

For if they do not come to agreement with Him let them be sure that every sin will have to be accounted for, they will be made liable for their whole debt. This is not an indication that eventually they will be able, as it were, to find a way out of their final punishment, for it is clear that in their case their final debt can never be repaid. It is only in earthly situations where debts can hopefully some time in the future be paid off so that a way of final escape can be seen as possible. But the heavenly court will be uncompromising. As they have failed to respond to Jesus it will demand from them every last sin. The phrase is really declaring that such a possibility of release is out of the question. It will never happen.

The earthly hope of being saved from the debtor's prison would be the arrival of a kinsman redeemer to pay his debt for him. But those who have failed to conciliate with Jesus have forfeited their Kinsman Redeemer.

The Fire Has begun To Fall. Let Them Therefore Learn Their Lesson From It (13.1-5).

**Having declared that He will cast fire on earth, preliminary examples of it are now given, one an act of the civil authority, and one an ‘act of God’. But He warns that they must not see the unfortunate people involved as having been selected out by God because they were particularly sinful. Rather it should reveal to them that God’s judgments are continually in the earth and they should therefore learn righteousness from them. For next time it may be them to whom such things occur, and besides, in the end all who are unrepentant will definitely perish. Thus they should take them as a warning and repent before it is too late. They should come to Him to be ‘made straight’ (13.13). As described in the previous verses let them ensure that they are reconciled to their Accuser before it is too late.**

### **Analysis.**

- **a ‘Now there were some present at that very season who told him of the Galileans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices’ (1).**
- **b ‘He answered and said to them, “Do you think that these Galileans were sinners above all the Galileans, because they have suffered these things?” (2).**
- **c “I tell you, No. But, except you repent, you will all similarly perish” (3).**
- **b “Or those eighteen, on whom the tower in Siloam fell, and killed them, do you think that they were offenders above all the men who dwell in Jerusalem?” (4).**
- **a “I tell you, No. But, except you repent, you will all similarly perish” (5).**

**Note that in ‘a’ the position is declared, and in the parallel the consequence. In ‘b’ Jesus asks a question about one example, in the parallel He does the same with another example. Central to all in ‘c’ is the fact that all who do not repent will perish.**

**13.1 ‘Now there were some present at that very season who told him of the Galileans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices.’**

**Hot news has arrived from Jerusalem of Pilate's latest atrocity. Galileans offering their sacrifices in the Temple (anything from two upwards) have at the very time of their bringing their sacrifices been slain in the Temple courtyard on Pilate's orders. We have no details of this particular occurrence, but it is typical of Pilate. It may be that they had already been marked men, and that Pilate had simply been waiting for them to arrive at the Temple where he could be sure of finding them at the particular feast, or it may be that while in the Temple they were seen as having fermented trouble resulting in a quick and merciless reaction.**

**The vivid language may not be intended absolutely literally. If they had brought their sacrifices and were waiting for them to be offered, rather than offering them themselves, it would equally apply. Indeed had their blood actually landed on the altar the incident would probably have become even more serious, for it would have been seen as the vilest of sacrilege.**

**Why the informers told Jesus is not explained. It may be that they hoped to stir Jesus up to supporting retaliatory action, or to trap Him into saying something unwise against the authorities. Or it may be that they were citing them as an example of the kind of people in mind in 12.57-59, who having not become reconciled with God have received their just deserts. But whatever the motive it would appear that someone had suggested that their manner of death clearly indicated their special sinfulness.**

**13.2 'And he answered and said to them, "Do you think that these Galileans were sinners above all the Galileans, because they have suffered these things?"'**

**This confirms that there had been some suggestion that they had brought their suffering on their own heads, or possibly even the suggestion that for someone to be killed while actually in the process of bringing a sacrifice must prove what dreadful sinners they were. The idea has become fixed in some people's minds that these were particularly sinful Galileans. Note Jesus' description of them as having 'suffered'. It connects back with the suffering He is bringing on the world (12.49). They are examples of the fire that is coming on the earth.**

**13.3 "I tell you, No. But, except you repent, you will all similarly perish."**

**Jesus' reply is that that their deaths do not indicate that they were worse sinners than anyone else. They were not necessarily the more guilty because they died violently. Judgment is not always so direct. And then He seizes the opportunity to apply the lesson. Let them in fact recognise that unless they repent they will all perish similarly. Let the judgments that are in the earth teach them righteousness before it is too late.**

**Some have seen in this a hint concerning the coming desolation of Jerusalem when many would perish ‘in the same way’ because they had failed to respond to Jesus’ message of love and forgiveness. Had they done so the destruction of Jerusalem would never have happened. But it seems more likely that He is thinking rather of the last Judgment.**

**13.4 “Or those eighteen, on whom the tower in Siloam fell, and killed them, do you think that they were offenders above all the men who dwell in Jerusalem?”**

**He then takes another example, this time of an ‘accident’ that had happened in the vicinity of Jerusalem. Siloam was the reservoir from which Jerusalem’s water supply came. The tower may have been a watch tower, or it may have been connected with the aqueduct that Pilate built. Whatever tower it was it had clearly simply collapsed. So here the deaths had been purely connected with what could be called ‘an act of God’, that is, something not resulting from men’s actions. Was this then any different?**

**13.5 “I tell you, No. But, except you repent, you will all similarly perish.”**

**And His reply is that that is no different. Whether applying to a Galileans or to inhabitant of Jerusalem the same principle applies. Sudden deaths are not to be seen as necessarily resulting from the sinfulness of the persons involved. And the same warning is given. If they do not want to perish in a similar way they must repent, for in the end all who do not repent will perish everlastingly.**

**The implication is clear. Firstly that deaths by violence or accident do not necessarily indicate the special sinfulness of the people involved, and secondly that all such should be seen as a warning to be ready for the day of judgment, and as an indication of the fire that He has come to cast on the earth. Like the debtor in the previous verses they need to be reconciled to God before it is too late.**

**In The Light Of His Warnings They Should Ensure That Their Lives Are Fruitful So That They Will Not Be Cut Down (compare 3.9).**

**Jesus now applies His warnings that they be reconciled with God while there is yet time (12.57-59), and repent before it is too late (13.1-5) by means of a parable that applies to them the teaching of John the Baptist (3.9). It is a warning that if their lives are not fruitful they will face God’s judgment when the proper time comes. Even the fig tree must be ‘made straight’ (13.13).**

**From this point on we find an interesting sequence typical of Luke, a man who plants a fig tree, a woman who is bent double and is healed, a man who sows a mustard seed in his garden, and a woman who places leaven in flour. Note the distinction between the sexes. Luke constantly seeks to balance the sexes (see Introduction).**

**Analysis.**

- **a He spoke this parable, “A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it, and found none” (6).**
- **b “And he said to the vinedresser, Behold, these three years I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and have found none” (7a).**
- **c “Cut it down. Why does it also act as a burden on the ground?” (7b).**
- **b “And he answering says to him, “Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and feed it with manure” (8a).**
- **a And if it bear fruit from then on, well, and if not, you shall cut it down” (8b).**

**Note that in ‘a’ the owner sought fruit and found none, and in the parallel if it still did not bear fruit it should be cut down. In ‘b’ he speaks to the vinedresser about its condition, and in the parallel the vinedresser answers him by explaining how he might treat its condition. Central to all in ‘c’ is that the tree should come under judgment because it is fruitless.**

**13.6 ‘And he spoke this parable, “A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it, and found none.” ’**

**In the Old Testament fruit trees were regularly seen as symbols of Israel, especially the vine in the vineyard (Psalm 80.8-15; Isaiah 5.1-7; 27.1-4; Jeremiah 2.21; Hosea 10.1). But a fig tree would be an equally good symbol (Hosea 9.20) for it is often seen in parallel to the vine (Deuteronomy 8.8; 1 Kings 4.25; 2 Kings 18.31; Psalm 105.33; Joel 1.7) and was regularly found in vineyards. Compare the fig tree which Jesus cursed which was clearly figurative of either Israel, Jerusalem or the Temple (Mark 11.13, 20).**

**But Jesus may deliberately have used the fig tree rather than a vine as a symbol so as to indicate individual lives within ‘his vineyard’, one of those planted in the vineyard of Israel, for the vine would have indicated Israel as a whole. The main point of the story, however, is that the tree should have borne fruit, but that the owner finds no fruit on it, presumably at a time when fruit would be expected. It is a picture of many of Jesus’ listeners.**

**13.7 “And he said to the vinedresser, Behold, these three years I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and have found none. Cut it down. Why does it also act as a burden on the ground?”**

**It appears that the owner had given it three years in order to see if its fruitless condition was permanent. He wanted to give it every opportunity. But when it still proved to be fruitless he called on the vinedresser to cut it down and prevent it from filling up useful space where another tree could be planted and from taking the nutrients out of the ground to no purpose.**

**13.8 “And he answering says to him, “Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and feed it with manure, and if it bear fruit from then on, well, and if not, you shall cut it down.”**

**The vinedresser then suggested that the fig tree be given one more chance to prove itself. He will turn over the soil around it and feed it with manure, Then if it produces fruit all will be satisfied, and if it does not then it can be cut down.**

**The parable is based on the same idea as lies behind John’s words in 3.9. The fig tree represents God’s supposed people who should be fruitful. Over a complete period of three years (a period which is a sufficient and complete test) they had been tested and had not been fruitful. The warning is then of judgment to come because they are fruitless. The owner is probably God the Judge of all the world. The vinedresser is probably intended to be Jesus Who was here to nourish Israel and was giving them one last chance. The vinedresser’s suggestion indicates that this is their last chance. If they remain fruitless they will perish. The words clearly indicate that He considers that the people have been given every opportunity, and are now being given their last opportunity. If the people still fail to respond to His teaching then only judgment awaits them, and He wants them to know that God is in full agreement with Him on the matter. If they will not be made straight then they will perish. It will be noted that parables of fruitfulness occur both sides of the story of the woman who was made straight, stressing that that story is to be seen as more than just a miracle story, but as an indication of God’s purpose for His own, a making fruitful of His elect.**

**The Woman Who Was Made Straight And Delivered From Satan (13.10-17).**

**This story is central to this section of Luke, as is demonstrated by the chiasmus. We may ignore such literary methods, but we can be sure that Theophilus was fully aware of them. In it Jesus sets free a woman who is totally bent double and releases her from Satan's power. It is a picture of what He has come to do for Israel, and for all who will respond to Him, and descriptive of what this section is all about, the making straight of people and their deliverance 'from the power of Satan to God' (Acts 26.18).**

**There is an interesting parallel in the passage between the woman who was bent double and the Ruler of the synagogue who could not see past the end of his nose. I remember one day walking in the passageways of the London Underground. Walking towards me was a man who was bent double, so badly that he could not see ahead. He was probably very similar to this woman. I moved to one side to give him room, but from behind me quite unexpectedly came another would be passenger who did not move aside, for he was blind. Before I could give a warning they collided. The doubled up man swore and said angrily, 'Can't you see that I am unable to see my way ahead.' Quickly I said, 'He's blind' and to his credit he immediately apologised to the blind man, and expressed his regret.**

**A similar thing happens in this story, the collision between a woman who was bent double and a blind man. For the Ruler of the Synagogue was as blind as a man could be. He had just seen an amazing miracle of deliverance, and he wrote it off as a piece of everyday work, as though people regularly popped in to the synagogue to be healed because it was a surgery. He was blind to the glorious working of God, a typical representative of the men who opposed Jesus. And glorious working it was for it was symbolic of what God will do for all who come to Jesus.**

### **Analysis of the passage.**

- a He was teaching in one of the synagogues on the sabbath day (10).**
- b There was there a woman who had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and she was bowed together, and could in no wise lift herself up (11).**
- c When Jesus saw her, he called her, and said to her, "Woman, you are loosed from your infirmity" (12).**
- d And he laid his hands on her, and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God (13).**

- **e And the ruler of the synagogue, being moved with indignation because Jesus had healed on the sabbath, answered and said to the gathered crowd, “There are six days in which men ought to work” (14a)**
- **d “In them therefore come and be healed, and not on the day of the sabbath” (14b).**
- **c But the Lord answered him, and said, “You hypocrites, does not each one of you on the sabbath loose his ox or his ass from the stall, and lead him away to watering?” (15).**
- **b “And ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan had bound, lo, these eighteen years, to have been loosed from this bond on the day of the sabbath?” (16).**
- **a And as he said these things, all his adversaries were put to shame, and the whole crowd rejoiced for all the glorious things that were done by him (17).**

**Note that in ‘a’ he is teaching in the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and in the parallel the crowd rejoice at the glorious things done by Him. In ‘b’ the woman is bound, and in the parallel she is loosed. In ‘c’ Jesus looses the woman, and in the parallel speaks of the loosing of domestic animals. In ‘d’ she is healed, and in the parable the crowd is told not to come to be healed on the Sabbath. In ‘e’ in striking contrast to all that happens around him the Ruler of the Synagogue declares his sterile regulation, ‘there are six days in which men ought to work’. The point here is that he was totally blind to the fact that it was God Who was working.**

**13.10 ‘And he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the sabbath day.’**

**This is the last mention of Jesus teaching in a synagogue, although that is not necessarily decisive, for such visits are usually only mentioned at this stage when specifically connected with incidents, and Luke in the main drops the incidents too, although the latter undoubtedly carried on to the end. It was on the Sabbath day, and Jesus was there, having been invited to teach.**

**13.11 ‘And behold, a woman who had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and she was bowed together, and could in no wise lift herself up.’**

**‘And behold.’ This may well indicate that He suddenly spotted her while He was teaching. What He spotted was a woman who was bent double and could not straighten herself. In view of the connection with an evil spirit it was probably skoliasis hysterica, a partly psychological condition. Others see it as spondylitis ankylopoietica indicating a fusion of the spinal bones. The one may, of course, have resulted in the other.**

**The woman had been affected in this way by an evil spirit for ‘eighteen years’. A connection with the ‘eighteen’ who perished at Siloam may well be in mind, with the thought that she too was suffering because of sin in the world. She was bowed double and could not lift herself up. She was a picture of a world bent double by sin, and unable to stand tall.**

**13.12 ‘And when Jesus saw her, he called her, and said to her, “Woman, you are loosed from your infirmity.” ’**

**When Jesus saw her He called out to her, “Woman, you are loosed from your infirmity.” This was probably the equivalent of a command to the evil spirit to leave her, for with Jesus deliverance from evil spirit was always by His word.**

**13.13 ‘And he laid his hands on her, and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God.’**

**But while released from the evil spirit she had been so long in that condition that she could not straighten herself, and so Jesus went over to her and laid His hands on her and immediately she was made straight. And the not unsurprising result was that she glorified God. By this it was openly revealed that Jesus could make crooked people straight.**

**It should be noted that nowhere else does Jesus cast out evil spirits by any other means than His word. Thus here also we should see that He casts out the evil spirit by His word before He touches her. The evil spirit is to be seen as unclean in an unusually in depth sense. The earthly Jesus wants no contact with unclean spirits, for they cannot be made clean. The laying on of hands is then used in order to heal the physical impediment so as to give assurance to the woman.**

**13.14 ‘And the ruler of the synagogue, being moved with indignation because Jesus had healed on the sabbath, answered and said to the gathered crowd, “There are six days in which men ought to work. In them therefore come and be healed, and not on the day of the sabbath.”**

**But the ruler of the synagogue, who led the synagogue committee, was angry. Possibly he recognised that he might be called on by certain of the Pharisees to explain why he had allowed this to happen in his synagogue on the Sabbath day. An enquiry might even have led up to a beating. But the fact of his anger suggests that we are to see his feeling as personal as well.**

**And yet his anger is directed at the crowd. Perhaps he felt wary of challenging a person with the powers that Jesus had. Or indeed perhaps he did not wish to. He may even have been secretly sympathetic, but dared not show it, while recognising that he had to make some protest. Perhaps he even acknowledged that as the miracle had happened God was clearly not displeased with it this time (it is so difficult accusing someone whose miracles actually happen of not being pleasing to God. It took certain types of Pharisees to argue like that). It may be that it in fact was the reaction of the crowd that angered him, as they surged around and clamoured for more. So he covered himself by rebuking the people who were gathered there. He pointed out to them that there were six days in every seven in which men should work, and therefore that if they wished to be healed they should come on a day other than the Sabbath. The weakness of his position comes out in the fact that Jesus was not a doctor. Had He been the ruler may have had a point. But everyone knew that only God could have done what had happened that day. Possibly that was what the ruler had recognised and had thus felt that it would probably be unwise to rebuke God by rebuking Jesus. He would feel that he was on safe ground in rebuking the crowd.**

**In Pharisaic eyes, however, he was totally in the right. The only healing that was allowed on the Sabbath was dealing with possible life threatening conditions to the minimum required.**

**13.15 ‘But the Lord answered him, and said, “You hypocrites, does not each one of you on the sabbath loose his ox or his ass from the stall, and lead him away to watering?” ’**

**Jesus answer was not to the ruler alone. He addressed the group of bristling opponents. He clearly saw that there were a group whose attitude demonstrated their backing of the ruler’s words, for He addresses them in the plural. He accuses them of saying one thing and doing another (as being ‘hypocrites’) because, as all knew, they were all ready to loose their ox or ass on the Sabbath day so as to lead it to watering as long as it was not being used for work (some members of the communities connected with Qumran would have said they were wrong even to do that). Later it would be stipulated that they could also pour water into its trough, although could not themselves hold a bucket to its mouth, and that too may already have applied. So relaxation of the Sabbath was allowed for domestic animals even when their lives were not in danger.**

**13.16 “And ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan had bound, lo, these eighteen years, to have been loosed from this bond on the day of the sabbath?”**

**So if they were willing to loose domestic animals on the Sabbath day so as to water them (not a life threatening condition as other provision could have been made), why did they cavil at Jesus for loosing from her tether a woman who had been bound for eighteen years, who was of far greater worth than a domestic animal as she was a daughter of Abraham (a full Jewess)?**

**‘Daughter of Abraham’ may well indicate that He was asserting that she was a godly woman, something that some may have doubted because of her condition. See 3.8 where children of Abraham signifies those who claim to be in the right with God. Was it not right then to also loose her on the Sabbath?**

**‘Eighteen years’. This was three times six. Possibly He was saying that they should recognise that she had completed not just ‘six days’ but six years, three times over, and had not been loosed on any of them, because they were unable to loose her, and thus it was right that at last she be loosed by God on the ‘seventh’ day, the Sabbath, on a day when God was at work.**

**‘Loosed.’ Compare 4.18. This example was probably chosen to be the centrepiece of this section in which the word of deliverance and the Kingly Rule of God is in mind precisely because it illustrated so well Jesus’ commission to ‘loose the captives’ and to ‘loose those who are oppressed’.**

**It should be noted that Jesus does not just defend His healing on the Sabbath, but seems to suggest that it was right that it happen on the Sabbath. This might be seen as confirming that to Him the Sabbath pointed forward to the ‘rest’ of the people of God into which He wanted all to enter. It was thus the most suitable day for healing and revealing the compassion of God. After all Satan had still been at work in the woman on the Sabbath day. Was he then to have it as his sole preserve?**

**13.17 ‘And as he said these things, all his adversaries were put to shame, and the whole crowd rejoiced for all the glorious things that were done by him.’**

**‘All his adversaries were put to shame.’ The result of His words was that all His adversaries were put to shame (compare Isaiah 45.16 which is within the Servant narratives and may thus to Luke be Messianic, and contrast Isaiah 50.7). But meanwhile we must not lose sight of the wonder that had been done before their eyes. Luke does not for he declares ‘the whole crowd rejoiced for all the glorious things that were done by Him.’ They gave glory to God and their full approval to what He had done (compare Exodus 34.10). Such an ascription is a tendency of Luke, see also 2.20; 5.25, 26; 7.16; 13.13; 17.15; 18.43; 23.47; Acts 3.8-9; 4.21; 11.18; 13.48; 21.20.**

**The Kingly Rule of God Will Grow From Small Beginnings Just as A Mustard Seed Becomes a Great Bush And A Little Leaven Leavens The Whole Lump (13.18-21).**

**Having revealed how Jesus can loose men from Satan’s power, and can make the crooked straight, Luke now gives us two parables of Jesus which illustrate how that is going to come into effect by the spread of the Kingly Rule of God, not by a sudden eruption of force, but by the gradual spreading of its growth and influence. They bring home a slightly different message from the parable of the fig tree which illustrated the fact that men will be judged by the fruit they bear. Both, however, connect with fruitbearing. They are in parallel in the chiasmus for the section. Note here how Luke, in his typical way, introduces one example where a man is involved, and one where a woman is involved. All, both men and women, are to be involved in the spreading of the Kingly Rule of God. But they represent two slightly differing angles. The mustard seed growing to become a large bush emphasises its gradual growth to large proportions. The leaven working throughout the flour emphasises the influence that spreads from man to man and woman to woman until all are reached.**

**Analysis.**

- **a He said therefore, “To what is the Kingly Rule of God like? and to what shall I liken it?” (18).**
- **b “It is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and cast into his own garden, and it grew, and became a tree, and the birds of the heaven lodged in its branches” (19).**
- **c And again he said, “To what shall I liken the Kingly Rule of God?” (20).**
- **b “It is like to leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, until it was all leavened” (21).**

- **a And he went on his way through cities and villages, teaching, and journeying on to Jerusalem (22).**

**Note how in ‘a’ he asks what the Kingly Rule of God is like and in the parallel describes how it progresses. In ‘b’ He says it is like a grain of mustard seed and in the parallel says that it is like leaven. Central to all in ‘c’ is the question, what is the likeness of the Kingly Rule of God? That was the question of the hour.**

**13.18 ‘He said therefore, “To what is the Kingly Rule of God like? and to what shall I liken it?”**

**Note how the ‘therefore’ connects these illustration of the Kingly Rule of God with the previous passage. Having again revealed His continuing power over Satan, and His continuing deliverance of people from his control, Jesus now intends to make clear to His disciples that the Kingly Rule is already present and active in their proclaiming of it.**

**13.19 “It is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and cast into his own garden, and it grew, and became a tree, and the birds of the heaven lodged in its branches.”**

**Jesus then pointed out that it was like a grain of mustard seed, the smallest seed known to the farmers of Palestine. Yet when a man sowed this tiny seed it grew until it became a large bush, sometimes even up to twelve feet (four metres) high, so large that the birds, who loved the small black mustard seeds, could come and lodge in its branches (compare especially Ezekiel 17.22-24, where a sprig planted in Israel will grow until it is a blessing to all the world so that the birds nest in its branches; and Daniel 4.21 where the birds represented captive nations). Of all the herbs it was a phenomenon. No other herb grew like it. Thus the Kingly Rule of God would grow from small beginnings (12.32) by the spreading of the word, becoming larger and larger, and would reach out even to other than Jews as ‘the birds of the air’ gathered on its branches to partake of its blessings.**

**‘Garden.’ In Matthew 13.31, in a different context, the mustard seed was sown in ‘the field’, i.e. the countryside. That the latter did happen is supported in Rabbinic sources. This would suggest that in Palestine there were different agricultural approaches towards the growing of mustard ‘trees’ from seeds, which is quite likely, for they were herbs. They could thus be grown in the countryside, or in gardens. There is thus no need to require a Gentile environment because of the use of ‘garden’, although it is always possible that Luke is translating in accordance with the general custom of his readers in growing mustard bushes.**

**13.20 ‘And again he said, “To what shall I liken the Kingly Rule of God?”**

**Jesus then asks the question a second time. Among the Jews something vouched for a second time was seen as certain and secure.**

**13.21 “It is like to leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, until it was all leavened.”**

**But He has another purpose in the second illustration and that is to introduce women into the equation. So He selects as His second example a woman’s occupation, bread-making. The woman puts a little leaven in the flour and soon it spreads throughout the whole. In the same way, so should women (and all) spread the Good News of the Kingly Rule of God from one to another until it has reached all.**

**Leaven is a piece of dough kept back from the previous batch which has fermented. It is put within the new dough and ferments the whole, until the whole is affected. And here the thought is that it is used because it results in a better product. It is an apt picture of the God’s word. It is introduced from outside and commences its work once it is received, and goes on until the whole is affected. It stands here too as a warning. Do not think that you can receive but a little of Christ. Once Christ is allowed in He will not cease His work until the whole is transformed.**

**‘Three measures of meal.’ A standard measurement signifying sufficient for the task in hand.**

**13.22 ‘And he went on his way through cities and villages, teaching, and journeying on to Jerusalem.’**

**Having established the principle Jesus then went out to put it into practise. He went through their cities and villages preaching, and this preaching would necessarily include the preaching of the Kingly Rule of God. Indeed in a sense that was what all His preaching was about, the Kingly Rule of God in its many forms. And as He did so He went on towards Jerusalem. For it was what He would accomplish at Jerusalem that would cause the triumph of the Kingly Rule of God.**

**The Call To Enter And Be Saved (13.23-24).**

**This appeal, following the description of how the Kingly Rule of God will spread, parallels the descriptions of the Galileans and men of Siloam who perished. Those too ‘perished’, they were unable to enter in. And the warning was then given that they should enter in while they may, ‘except you repent you will all perish similarly’. So is it easy not to enjoy the privilege of entering into the Kingly Rule of God, and it is therefore rather necessary that they ‘strive’ to enter in.**

**It can be analysed as follows:**

- a And one said to him, “Lord, are they few who are saved?” (23a).**
- b And he said to them, “Strive to enter in by the narrow door.” (23b-24a).**
- a “For many, I say to you, will seek to enter in, and will not be able.” (24b).**

**Note the contrast of ‘a’, ‘few will be saved’, with the parallel ‘many will not be able to enter in’. Central in ‘b’ is the need to enter the narrow gate.**

**13.23a ‘And one said to him, “Lord, are the ones who are being saved few?”**

**This is the first outright use of the word ‘saved’ in the main body of Luke apart from in a context where it can have a double meaning (i.e. healed - 7.50; 8.36, 48, 50; 17.19; 18.42), although compare 6.9; 9.24, 56 where ‘saving’ to eternal life is clearly in mind (see also 8.12; 17.33; 18.26; 19.10). It does, however, link back to 1.77 where John was to bring ‘the knowledge of salvation’ to His people, to 1.69 where the ‘horn of salvation’ was coming from the house of David, to 2.11 in which was declared the coming of ‘a Saviour’ Who would be ‘the Lord Messiah’, and 2.30 where Simeon declares, ‘My eyes have seen your Salvation’. Thus we have been expecting ‘salvation’ at some stage to come to the fore. Here it probably has the same meaning as inheriting eternal life with all that that involves of being transformed (compare Acts 2.47; 1 Corinthians 1.18; 2 Corinthians 2.15). Their eyes are firmly fixed on the coming of the heavenly Kingdom.**

**If we compare Isaiah 49.24-25 LXX with Luke 4.18 salvation is seen as the aim of the Servant for His own, and this ties in with the deliverance of the woman who was Satan’s captive (13.16). Compare also Isaiah 51.14; 59.1; 60.16 (LXX). Thus to be ‘being saved’ means to be in a position where they are being delivered spiritually from Satan’s power, and have been given eternal life, are experiencing His saving power in their lives, and are guaranteed the eternal hope of eternity in the presence of God.**

**13.23b-24 'And he said to them, "Strive to enter in by the narrow door, for many, I say to you, will seek to enter in, and will not be able."**

**The Lord refuses to answer their technical question (it was a popular question among some of the learned). Rather than thinking speculatively, they should be thinking personally. The question is, Are they themselves being saved? He therefore tells them to strive (agonise) to enter in by the narrow door, the door into the Kingly Rule of God. The idea has been compared with that in Matthew 7.13-14 but it was clearly spoken at a different time, and the emphasis, while similar, is not the same. Matthew is talking about passing through a gate with the purpose of walking in a way, and the emphasis is on the way. Here the emphasis is on the need for a decision to pass through a door. It is clearly a difficult decision, and the door is 'narrow' (stenos). Only few can enter at a time, and others are pressing in to get through it. The word 'stenos' is associated with the ideas of affliction and sorrow, and this ties in with 9.24. It is a door that is demanding, and yet it must be entered before it is too late, and it takes effort. They must not be satisfied until they have passed through the door. The Kingly Rule of God suffers violence, and the violent are to take it by force (Matthew 11.12). This door signifies commencing the hard way of discipleship. It signifies thrusting all else aside and choosing to enter under the Kingly Rule of God. Nothing must be allowed to stop them entering it (what a contrast to our 'easy believism'). We can compare here Jesus declaration, 'I am the door, by Me if any man enter in he will be saved' (John 10.9). The idea is the same. Response to the Shepherd King assures salvation. They will, of course, then enjoy the presence of the master of the house, but that is not described here. The concentration is on the decision to enter, and the determined effort that they should put into it.**

**We should note that then as now salvation was a gift. But Jesus was making them aware of the final cost of the gift. It would initially cost them nothing, all they had to do was press through the door, but it would then demand everything. For it is the door to the Kingly Rule of God, and it involves God becoming King in their lives. It is equally true today. Salvation is yours if you but receive Christ. But beware, for you are welcoming in the Kindler of Fire (12.49). You are a fool if you think otherwise. Any other Christ than One Who will take possession of you is not the Christ of the Gospels. The striving was because of the thought of what they would have to leave behind. There was no room through that narrow door for their baggage.**

**We should also note that there is only one door, and that a narrow one. 'There is no other name under Heaven given among men by which we must be saved' (Acts 4.12). Not for Jesus one of many doors. There is only one.**

**But there will come a day when even that door can no longer be passed through. The implication is that it will have been closed. Hope will have gone. And men will seek to enter in and will not be able. His listeners would rightly have in mind the end of the world. Jesus certainly would too, but possibly He also had in mind the dreadful and savage slaughter that would take place during the coming rebellion against Rome and the destruction of Jerusalem (verse 35), when many would then wish that they had listened to Jesus. However, even more certainly He Himself also has in mind the day of His coming to gather His elect (Matthew 24.31). Both these would be final events which meant that for those caught out it would be too late. They would find themselves unable to truly repent. They would suffer remorse, not spiritual transformation, and they would be lost. All because they had failed to enter through the door while it was open.**

### **The Parable of The Closed Door (13.25-27).**

**The thought of the failure to enter through the doorway into life now issues in a parable. But there is a change in thought here to a crisis point in the future. The master of the house has risen up and closed the door. And meanwhile there are those who want to enter the house, probably because it will provide shelter from danger (compare Isaiah 26.20-21). This parallels the inability to read the signs of the times and the carrying off of the debtor to suffer the consequences of not responding to his Great Creditor in 12.54-59, which also had in mind states of unreadiness. Here they are like men who have ignored the master of the house. So they too are caught in a state of unreadiness. They have not submitted to His Kingly Rule. They have not come to be made straight and delivered from Satan. And now it is too late. For when they want His protection it is not available.**

**13.25 “When once the master of the house is risen up, and has shut to the door, and you begin to stand outside, and to knock at the door, saying, ‘Lord, open to us’, and he will answer and say to you, ‘I do not know you, from where you are,’”**

**Many interpret this of a banquet to which later arrivals are refused entry, but that is not really the impression given here. In such cases the master does not rise up and shut the door, he simply tell his servants to refuse entry to any more. Nor have guests in stories ever striven to enter a banquet through a narrow door, nor is there any hint of a banquet (verse 29 is not part of the parable). More possible is it that night time has come and the doors are shut because no further visitors are expected. Such a situation had previously resulted in the lord having to knock at his own door (12.36). The picture may therefore be similar to 11.5-7. But that then leaves open the question as to why men come knocking at the door at such an hour. Of course, we can simply say that it was because, like the friend at midnight, they had awoken to their own need. After all, while Jesus was on earth, had he not said that the door would be opened, because ‘to him who knocked it would be opened’. The idea would then be that now that the master of the house has arrived back and is calling His servants to account He has shut the door, and the promise has been rescinded. But it still does not explain why they want to come in. And it also assumes too much by incorporating ideas from other parables.**

**The impression given here is rather of an emergency situation. It is a picture where the master has taken personal charge and ensured that the door is shut. Thus the thought may well be that danger threatened. He arose and did it himself because it was necessary for him to check the safety of the premises. This would explain why people came clamouring at the door. And it would explain why he would not let them in. You do not let outsiders in at dangerous times.**

**But what kind of situation would fit in with such a picture? The answer in fact lies in Isaiah 26.20-21. There we have exactly this situation. It is set in the context of the last days and of the Lord coming in judgment, and the command is to ‘enter your chambers and shut your doors behind you’ because of the tribulation that is coming on the world. This would exactly explain why the master rises and shuts the door, and does not leave it to servants. It is because danger threatens (Isaiah 26.20-21; compare Genesis 19.10). It is because end time tribulation has come on the world. Isaiah 26.20 fits the situation exactly for it has in mind the final judgment, as the parable also does here where the last chance is seen to have gone. Others see it as the doors being shut because the guests have arrived, but that is less likely. Quite apart from how unusual that would be, we must not read in other parables.**

**But the point is that while it was day, and all was going well, they did not want entry. However, now danger loomed and they desperately wanted entry because they recognised that His house would provide their only place of safety.**

**Judgment is coming on the world and they have suddenly awoken to the fact that they have nowhere else where they can find shelter. All they have trusted in is now in vain, and the only one who can possibly help them is this particular householder. But it is too late, the master has shut the door until the danger is past. There is no place of escape. If only they had striven to enter while they were able.**

**Thus those outside panic. Awful danger is threatening and they have no place of salvation. They are in the same position as the people in Isaiah 2.17-21. But they do not want to flee to caves which cannot protect them. And so they knock desperately at the door and cry, 'Lord, open to us.' All too late they recognise the master's status. But He replies that He does not recognise or acknowledge them. They have never been in His employ, and He has no responsibility for them. They are as good as strangers.**

**13.26 "Then will you begin to say, 'We ate and drank in your presence, and you taught in our streets,' "**

**Their desperate reply will be to try to call to His mind past times. They had eaten and drunk with Him, He had taught in their streets. As we know there are many who could have said such, so many that He could not possibly, in His humanness, remember them. There is no doubt now as to Who is indicated by the Master of the house. These are those who have had much to do with Him, but who had rejected His word. They had rejected the fire of His word, now the fire of His anger must come on them.**

**There are some today who base their confidence and hope on the fact that they participate in the Lord's Table and hear the Lord's teaching through His word and through His ministers. But it is not enough to do that. We must enter through the door of full commitment and yielding of ourselves to Him. We must believe in Him. We must open our lives to Him calling on Him that we might be saved and asking Him to do it. But we must ask Him before it is too late. Then He will work faith in our hearts and transformation in our lives.**

**13.27 "And he will say, 'I tell you, I do not know from where you are. Depart from me, all you workers of iniquity.' "**

**And His reply is simply, that He does not know from where they are. They are strangers to Him, for they are workers of iniquity. They have dwelt in places where He would not venture. They have done things that He could not condone. And by their behaviour they have revealed themselves as strangers to Him, as having no part in Him. They are known by their fruits.**

### **The Consequences Of Their Rejection (13.28-35).**

**The parable having been completed the actual facts are now described. Having been refused entry through the door of salvation they will suffer the deepest possible regret. This passage parallels that where there were stewards both good and bad who would be called to account (12.41 on), for He had come to send fire on earth which would cause great disruption and judgment and division between families (12.41-53). Here too God's stewards are called to account, and here also everything will end in judgment for those who have rejected Him.**

### **Analysis.**

- **a “There will be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth, when you shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, within the Kingly Rule of God, and yourselves cast forth outside” (28).**
- **b “And they will come from the east and west, and from the north and south, and will sit down (recline) within the Kingly Rule of God” (29).**
- **c “And behold, there are last who will be first, and there are first who will be last” (30).**
- **d In that very hour there came certain Pharisees, saying to him, “Get you out, and go from here, for Herod desires to kill you” (31).**
- **c And he said to them, “Go and say to that fox, ‘Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I am perfected’, nevertheless I must go on my way today and tomorrow and the day following, for it cannot be that a prophet perish out of Jerusalem’ (32-33).**
- **b “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which kills the prophets, and stones those who are sent to her! How often would I have gathered your children together, even as a hen gathers her own brood under her wings, and you would not!” (34).**

- a “Behold, your house is left to you desolate, and I say to you, ‘You shall not see me, until you shall say, Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.’ ” (35).

Note that in ‘a’ there is desolation, while there are also those who bless the Lord, and in the parallel there is desolation, while Jerusalem, representing Israel, will not be able to come to Him until they bless Him. In ‘b’ the prophets and those who believed them will come from everywhere to the Kingly Rule of God, while in the parallel those who slew the prophets, whom He wished to gather to Him, will not come. In ‘c’ the first will be last and the last first, and in the parallel we have the contrast between Herod and Jesus. Central to the whole is Herod’s desire to kill Jesus.

13.28 “There will be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth, when you shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, within the Kingly Rule of God, and yourselves cast forth outside.”

Those who have found the door closed against them will then have the chagrin of seeing all those whom they had previously honoured entering as faithful servants (12.44) into the heavenly Kingly Rule of God, while they themselves are cast out and put with the unfaithful (12.46). They will be in such anguish at it that they will ‘weep and gnash their teeth’ (not here a picture of Hell, but of deep and unbearable disappointment). Some, however, see it as gnashing their teeth in anger at the One Who had done this to them, as they ‘look in through the door that was closed against them’ and see what they have missed. But it is likely that we have now moved on from the parable (and besides the door was closed).

‘Weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ Weeping expresses sorrow and regret (see 6.25; Acts 20.37; James 4.9; 5.1), the gnashing or grinding of the teeth pictures anger and hatred (compare Job 16.10; Psalm 35.16; 37.12; 112.10; Lamentations 2.16; Acts 7.54)

‘Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets.’ Apart from Jesus and possibly John the Baptist they had honoured the memory of all these great men. But while they honoured the faithful servants, they did not honour the lord of the house. It is their rejection of Jesus which has sealed their fate. It is no good looking back to figures of the past if we ignore the One Who towers above them all and Who is present with us to save. Their chagrin would be increased by the fact that they had always considered themselves to be sons of Abraham and therefore heirs of his promises, and now they were to be excluded from them.

**‘Yourselves cast forth outside.’ The fact that they are ‘expelled’ demonstrates that this is not talking about the door that they refused to go through, or the door that was shut against them. As they had not passed through those they could not be ‘thrust forth’ from them. So these words are not to be seen as a continuation of the parable, but rather as an explanation of the consequences. They will be thrust out from any hope when they face judgment on their future, as with the servant in the parable (12.46).**

**13.29 “And they will come from the east and west, and from the north and south, and will sit down (recline) within the Kingly Rule of God.”**

**And even worse for them to see would be those who would flood in from all parts of the world, as the prophets had prophesied, who would also as faithful servants take their places in the Kingly Rule of God. The idea would include returning ‘exiles’ who have subsequently believed (Isaiah 11.11-12, 15-16; 45.6; 49.12 and often), but both Jesus and Luke probably saw it as including Gentiles as well (Isaiah 42.6; 49.6). It would seem as though all the world was included, and yet they would be left out!**

**‘Recline.’ They will share in the Messianic banquet while their Master serves them (12.37).**

**13.30 “And behold, there are last who will be first, and there are first who will be last.”**

**For at that final day everything will be turned upside down. The humble and rejected will be exalted. Those at the back of the picture will be brought to the front. Those who were God’s ‘nothings’ will become great. Those at the back of the queue will be brought to the front. While those who saw themselves as hugely important will find themselves ignored and left out. Those who sought the first place will be given the last. As the parallel in verses 32-33 demonstrates, the great king of the Jews (of Galilee and Peraea) will come to nothing (this is not stated but is clearly implied), while the dishonoured prophet Who is going up to Jerusalem to be rejected and to die will ascend the throne of Heaven.**

**13.31 ‘In that very hour there came certain Pharisees, saying to him, “Get you out, and go from here, for Herod desires to kill you.” ’**

**We do not know how genuine this warning was. Perhaps these were Pharisees who admired Him. But it may simply be that they hoped by this means to frighten Him off and prevent Him from carrying on with His work. Or they may even have hoped to drive Him into Judea where they had more influence and could get rid of Him themselves. Or Herod might have asked them to warn Him off (his conscience was still burdened by what he had done to John the Baptist).**

**13.32 ‘And he said to them, “Go and say to that fox, ‘Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I am perfected.’ ”**

**But Jesus replies without fear. As in His reply to John the Baptist He points to His signs and wonders. Let him consider those. (Even for Herod the door was open if he would listen). But Jesus’ words were not this time spoken in the hope that they would be effective. They had revived the one who lay in Herod’s dungeons, they would leave unmoved the one who sat on the throne. Indeed His reply is probably acknowledging that He knows that He will not have long to live. He has only ‘today and tomorrow’, that is a comparatively short while. Nevertheless He knows that it is within God’s plan, for its ending on ‘the third day’ indicates completeness. Perhaps again He has Hosea 6.1-2 in mind. This would suggest that His perfecting at least includes the resurrection. Meanwhile He will continue His ministry, casting out evil spirits and healing the sick as He has always done. He will not be put off that by Herod’s threats. Let the fox bark as he will. And then in God’s perfect timing His career will achieve all that it has set out to do. He will be ‘perfected’, not at Herod’s choice but at God’s. To his listeners ‘perfected’ signified that He would consider His work complete, to Him it indicated that having risen from the dead as the perfect sacrifice for sin He would be enthroned as Messiah and Lord and share once more the glory of His Father (John 17.5).**

**“Go and say to that fox.” This is probably saying that Herod is nothing to be afraid of, for he is but a fox, not a lion or a wolf or a bear. He tries to roar, but all he does is bark. Whoever heard of running away from a fox? Some, however, see it as suggesting that he was to be seen as sly in his behaviour (a Jewish view of the fox), or even as despicable, like a scavenger, or a wrecker of vineyards (Song of Solomon 2.15). Or possibly like a fox which is content to linger among the ruins and does not seek to build them up (Ezekiel 13.4). In all cases they are only concerned for themselves and their own welfare. Foxes are of advantage to no one but themselves. But Jesus was not wont to insult people, even kings, so we must see it as a warning not name-calling.**

**13.33 ‘Nevertheless I must go on my way today and tomorrow and the day following, for it cannot be that a prophet perish out of Jerusalem.’**

**Yet although there is yet today and tomorrow, and then the next as well, He must use it to go on His way to Jerusalem. Time is short and He does not have time to waste on Herod. For when ‘the third day’ comes He must be at Jerusalem so that He can die there. So until then Herod cannot touch Him.**

**‘Must (it is necessary).’ Note the sense of the divine necessity. He knows that death awaits Him in Jerusalem and He is determined to be there in God’s timing. There is no other place for Him to die in. It is Jerusalem that has sealed its own fate by its sinfulness and hypocrisy, and must bear the guilt of His death, as it had prophets before Him (11.51).**

**13.34 “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which kills the prophets, and stones those who are sent to her! How often would I have gathered your children together, even as a hen gathers her own brood under her wings, and you would not!”**

**He then turns His grieving attention to Jerusalem. He may well have said something like this each time He visited it (compare Matthew 23.37), for Jerusalem, the supposed holy city, represented all that He had come to die for. And it probably almost broke His heart. He saw it as the supreme murderer of prophets. Compare 2 Chronicles 24.20-21; Jeremiah 26.20-23. See also 1 Kings 18.4, 13; 19.10; Nehemiah 9.26 for murdered prophets not slain in Jerusalem, for in symbol Jerusalem stands for the whole of Israel.**

**Jesus then declares that His longing had been to take Jerusalem and its people under His wings, like a mother bird does her chickens, gathering them together to Himself. Compare for the idea Psalm 36.7; 57.1; 61.4; 63.7; 91.4. Thus He was here taking to Himself the prerogative of God. But He points out that they had rejected Him. They had refused to respond. (The Rabbis would later talk about proselytes coming under the wings of the Shekinah, which confirms that this is a totally Jewish picture, for they would not have copied Jesus).**

**‘How often.’ This seems to confirm a number of visits to Jerusalem, more even than Luke hints at. It confirms what we find in John.**

**13.35 “Behold, your house is left to you desolate, and I say to you, ‘You shall not see me, until you shall say, Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.’ ”**

**And the result of her rejection of Him could only result in the desolation of her house, either of the Temple or of the city (linguistic considerations might suggest ‘the city’, that is, the people of the city, for it bears a pronominal suffix making it personal to the people). A desolated and forsaken people of Jerusalem would one day bear witness to their failure to receive Him (compare chapter 21.20-24).**

**And now He was leaving them and they would not see Him again until they greeted Him with the words from Psalm 118.26, “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.” This may be referring to:**

- 1). To the future visit on which they welcomed Him on His entry into Jerusalem with similar words to these (19.38). Although if so it would be sarcastic and cynical. But that is unlikely. Pilgrims were welcomed at every Passover with the same words. None would see that as momentous. Yet the momentous first half of the sentence requires an equally momentous second half.
- 2). It may be suggesting that the total desolation of every Jew as a result of what would happen to Jerusalem would only be remedied for those who turned from it to recognise their true Messiah, to 'see Him' and to acknowledge Him. Then their house would no longer be desolate for they would see that in His rising again they had a new Temple (John 2.19-21) of which they could become a part (Ephesians 2.11-22).
- 3). Or it may be His way of pointing out that although Jerusalem may be desolated, it will yet be renewed, so that some of its inhabitants (Jewish, Arab and other Christians who live in Jerusalem) will welcome Him when He comes in His Messianic glory, as He has promised.
- 4). Most likely it may be declaring prophetically that one day Jerusalem would reluctantly have to admit what He is, in spite of their unbelief. Jerusalem might fail, but it would have to finally admit that the Messiah that it had rejected had not failed, because they would see Him coming in judgment and in glory (Revelation 1.7).

**A Sabbath Meal At A Pharisee's House; The Healing of A Man With Dropsy (14.1-6).**

It is unusual in Luke for us to be given the full details of the setting, yet in this passage Jesus is invited into the home of a 'Ruler of the Pharisees'. And there He eats bread with him and his companions, companions who are 'watching' Him (and whom in verse 7 He will liken to people at a marriage feast). They would certainly all have claimed to be 'servants of God', and fellow-servants with the Ruler. They would also have acknowledged that in one way or another they were waiting for the Messiah.

**But when we note that in the chiasmus of the Section (see introduction above) this incident parallels the householder who should have been in readiness for the thief to come (12.39) and the parable of the servants who were waiting for their 'lord', and who were expected to be in the house ready and waiting for their lord's return from the wedding feast, and meanwhile were to be about their duties all becomes clear. As we have observed there are a number of connections between the pictures presented. Here are God's servant waiting in the house, along with the householder, and under God's scrutiny. Just as they have Jesus under their scrutiny.**

**Jesus was also there as God's Servant. He too was to be about God's business, and when He saw there a man suffering from dropsy, He knew what His responsibility was as a faithful and wise servant. It was to heal the man. But He also knew that He was surrounded by disapproving 'servants'. Indeed what He would do would even be disapproved of by His host, the householder. Nevertheless, He knows that He must be faithful to the One Who has called Him to be His Servant. If not He Himself would be accused of faithless service and thus lose the blessing from His Father. The parallel with the dual parables is clear.**

### **Analysis.**

- **a When He went into the house of one of the rulers of the Pharisees on a sabbath to eat bread, they were watching Him (1).**
- **b Behold, there was before Him a certain man who had the dropsy (2).**
- **c Jesus answering spoke to the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, "Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath, or not?" (3).**
- **d But they held their peace (4a).**
- **c And He took him, and healed him, and let him go (4b).**
- **b He said to them, "Which of you shall have an ass or an ox fallen into a well, and will not straightway draw him up on a sabbath day?" (5).**
- **a They could not answer again to these things (6).**

**Note that in ‘a’ they were watching Him to test Him out, and in the parallel they could not answer His statement. In ‘b’ there was a man who had fluid in the skin which made his skin fall, and in the parallel reference is made to animals which themselves fall into a well. In ‘c’ Jesus asks if it is lawful to heal on the Sabbath, and in the parallel He does so. Central in ‘d’ is the fact that they make no reply. They have nothing that they can say against His actions.**

**14.1 ‘And it came about, when he went into the house of one of the rulers of the Pharisees on a sabbath to eat bread, that they were watching him.’**

**The description here is unusual for there were no rulers of the Pharisees. It may, however, merely signify that the man was both a ruler of the Jews, and also a Pharisee. Or it may suggest some privileged position among the Pharisees. The former is most probable. But Luke’s aim in speaking of the Pharisee as ‘a ruler of the Pharisees’ may be in order to suggest that that we are to see this house as like ‘the ruler’s house’ (12.36). And he is possibly to be seen as comparing with the householder of the parable in the chiasmus parallel (12.39) whose servants were expected to fulfil their duties (12.35-40).**

**(It is true that the parallel is not wholly exact, but the implications are all there. Exactness was not possible when the master of the house in the parallel was either God or the Lord).**

**As the servants were in the lord’s house in the parallel parable, so Jesus has come into this man’s house and is surrounded by those who would claim to be His fellow-servants. And here He eats bread with them. But the fellow-servants who surrounded Him were Scribes and Pharisees who were all watching Him. In this last regard it is possible that the sick man had been put there deliberately, but not necessarily so. The situation may simply have been that Jesus was under general surveillance, just as the servants were in the parable. Indeed the Scribes and Pharisees were under surveillance too, although they may not have considered the fact. But certainly as the Servant of the Lord Jesus knew that He was always under God’s surveillance in order to see that He would do what was right.**

**The meal would be the main meal of the day following the synagogue service, a meal to which it was quite normal to invite guests. On the Sabbath there would be three meals, all of course cooked on the previous day (there were even instructions in the traditions of the elders on how and how not to keep it warm lest any ‘cooking’ occur on the Sabbath), but the midday meal was the main one. On other days there would only be two meals and the main meal would be towards evening. Being in the house of a leading Pharisee there would be jars of water set apart there which provided ‘clean’ water for the washing rites which all would be expected to observe.**

**14.2 ‘And behold, there was before him a certain man that had the dropsy.’**

**There before Him Jesus saw a plain case of a man with the dropsy. This was a horrible disease in which water under the skin made the skin sag and ‘drop’. It meant that his limbs and tissues were swollen with excess body fluids. It was a condition that was understandably associated with uncleanness and immorality. Man has always been disposed to blame other people’s problems on the people themselves, although never applying such a criterion to their own situation.**

**‘And behold.’ This may be intended to indicate that his presence was a surprise and purely circumstantial.**

**14.3 ‘And Jesus answering spoke to the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, “Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath, or not?”’**

**Jesus ‘answers’ the lawyers and Pharisees. This may indicate His response to the man’s mute appeal, or it may signify that He recognised the unspoken question in the minds of the Pharisees who were watching Him. What follows may be seen as suggesting the latter, for, aware that He was being watched, Jesus turned to the Scribes and Pharisees who were present with a question. It was a very simple one, that nine times out of ten they would have dealt with very quickly. “Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath, or not?”’**

**Now if He had been a doctor their answer would have been immediate and clear. ‘Only in the case of a life-threatening illness.’ But He was not just a doctor. And none other could heal like He did. How did you say to such a person, ‘You cannot ask God to heal on the Sabbath, for God is not allowed to heal on the Sabbath.’ But nor were they willing to give Him permission. So they were in a quandary.**

**14.4 ‘But they held their peace. And he took him, and healed him, and let him go.’**

**So they said nothing. They no doubt reclined there tight-lipped and observant, waiting to see what He would do. Perhaps He would think better of it. But Jesus was a faithful servant, and when they said nothing Jesus took the man, and healed him, and let him go. And who could criticise Him when they had refused to forbid it? It is reasonable to assume that the man was there because he had chosen to come, because he wanted to be healed. He had come in faith. And once again Jesus had revealed that He could make men right.**

**14.5 ‘And he said to them, “Which of you shall have an ass or an ox fallen into a well, and will not straightway draw him up on a sabbath day?”’**

**Then Jesus turned to those who were watching Him through narrowed eyes and asked them which of them, if a domestic animal had fallen into a pit on the Sabbath, would not lift it out. Strictly speaking they should only have done so if its life was being threatened, but in practise all knew what they would do. No decent person could leave an animal struggling in a pit. For like many today they were more caring for animals than for humans.**

**Note how the ‘falling’ of the animal into the pit parallels the disease of a man whose skin was ‘falling’ because of liquid under the skin.**

**Some leading MS (including p45, p75, B and W) have ‘son’ instead of ‘ass’. It certainly makes the argument more powerful, and is textually strong. It is probably correct and strengthens the statement. No one would conceivably leave their own son, presumably a child, in a well when he had fallen down it. Even at Qumran the helping of a son out of such a situation was permitted on the Sabbath. But it was not the same at Qumran for an ox.**

**14.6 ‘And they could not answer again to these things.’**

**They had no answer to give. How do you accuse a man of blasphemy when He heals successfully in the name of God? So they had nothing to say. But they had plenty in their thoughts, and it was probably not very pleasant. For their silence did not mean that they were satisfied. Only that they were biding their time. How often this happens when men’s prejudices are being laid bare and they are not willing to admit it. Instead of admitting that they might be wrong they simmer and determine how they can justify themselves by getting their revenge.**

**Sometimes what Jesus did on the Sabbath aroused great anger (3.6). At other times, as here, less so. But it all had a cumulative effect. And the cumulative effect in the hearts and minds of those who failed to enter into His own position that it was right to do good on the Sabbath, was that He was seen as a person with little regard for the Sabbath. They might have accepted that occasionally He might possibly have had some justification, if only it had been occasionally, but the point was not that. The point was that He kept on doing good on the Sabbath, and showing compassion, in spite of what people thought. He did not seem to know where to stop or to have any regard for how they thought. And it was that aspect of things that took hold of their minds, and it was the only aspect that was passed on when they spoke of it to others. Jesus, they would say, may claim to be a prophet, but really He was a Sabbath-breaker. Their minds had become so tunnel-visioned that they completely overlooked the fact that every example of ‘work’ that they criticised was connected with, and was the result of, a remarkable miracle (4.38; 6.6; 13.14; Mark 1.21; John 5.9; 9.14), and was an act of God’s mercy..**

**This then brought them to a place where they had to make a decision. Was He really to be seen as the Son of Man Who was Lord of the Sabbath and therefore as having the right to make binding decisions about it, something which the clear evidence of God's working through Him pointed to (they never once denied that a miracle had been done. The whole point was that it had), or was He simply someone who stretched things beyond the limit, thereby revealing His casual attitude towards God? The majority of them decided on the latter, and therefore sought to condemn Him as One Who led astray of the people. So they closed their minds to all else. But at the heart of the matter lay a crucial question. Which mattered most to God? Did He prefer them to fulfil all His ritual requirements as interpreted by their own teachers to the utmost extent, regardless of human need, or did He prefer them to relax them when they might result in a failure to do positive good, and to reveal compassion, something which might be seen in God's eyes as an even greater requirement, especially when what resulted was so obviously of God. They chose the former. Jesus chose the latter. (Many today have sadly overthrown both attitudes. They have made the Sabbath a day for doing whatever they want. They are therefore wrong on all counts and are despising God even more).**

#### **The Warning Against Being One Of Those Who Seeks Out The Chief Seats (14.7-11).**

**This passage is parallel in the chiasmus with those who are to seek, not food and clothing, but the Kingly Rule of God, and to have their minds set on Heaven (12.22-34). Those described here are the opposite of that. They are concerned to have the chief seats on earth, and to exalt themselves. They seek glory on earth (how like the disciples, and the Pharisees, and how opposite to what God wants them and us to be). And in their self-conceit they think that one day in eternity God will give them the same credit.**

**But Jesus' point here is that those who are truly seeking the Kingly Rule of God with all their hearts, with no thought of status, will take the humble place, and will in the final Assessment be 'moved up higher', while those whose eyes are fixed on obtaining honour and status for themselves will in the end discover that they have lost both. They will be told to 'go down lower' and will have to descend to 'the lowest place'. Thus it is not only teaching them a lesson in humility, it is pointing them towards life under the Kingly Rule of God.**

#### **Analysis.**

- **a 'He spoke a parable to those who were bidden, when He marked how they chose out the chief seats, saying to them' (7).**

- **b “When you are invited by any man to a marriage feast, do not sit down in the chief seat, lest it chance that a more honourable man than you be invited by him” (8).**
- **c “And he who invited you and him shall come and say to you, ‘Give this man place,’ and then you will begin with shame to take the lowest place” (9).**
- **b “But when you are invited, go and sit down in the lowest place, so that when he who has invited you comes, he may say to you, “Friend, go up higher.” Then you will have glory in the presence of all who sit at meat with you” (10).**
- **a “For every one who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted” (11).**

**Note how in ‘a’ He marked out how men chose the chief seats, and in the parallel points out that such people will be humbled. In ‘b’ the man is advised not to take the highest place, and in the parallel he chooses the lowest place. In ‘c’ the central emphasis is on the shame of being removed from the highest place.**

**14.7 ‘And he spoke a parable to those who were invited, when he marked how they chose out the chief seats, saying to them,’**

**Jesus noted how the Scribes and Pharisees who had come for the meal at the leading Pharisee’s house carefully chose the chief seats so that their superiority would be recognised. The couches would be placed at small tables and set in a U shaped formation with the host at the bottom of the U, reclining on his left elbow at table with his feet spread outwards on the couch, which would usually hold three diners. The most honoured guest would be to his left, and the next most honoured to the right (compare Peter and John at the last supper - John 13.23-24). The least honoured would be on a couch furthest away from the host. This gives Jesus the opportunity to teach a lesson in humility. But behind it there is also a warning about their attitude towards God, and what their attitude should be in His service, and what in their hearts they should be seeking. Note His indirect approach. He knows that direct reference to their status seeking will only cause offence.**

**14.8 “When you are invited by any man to a marriage feast, do not sit down in the chief seat, lest it chance that a more honourable man than you be invited by him,”**

**Jesus instances a marriage feast. This is because a marriage feast would be more formal and the placing of guests tightly controlled. But it was also so that they might recognise in it a reference to the coming 'Messianic feast'. The Rabbis regularly taught by telling stories which at first appeared to have a single simple meaning, but which on further examination actually contained hidden references. Thus they would always be looking for deeper meanings in stories.**

**Jesus' warning was against being overly self-important. When they went to such a feast, and especially when they thought of the possibility of the great final feast with God, they should not think in terms of the chief seats. This would only make them arrogant. And the consequence might well be that they found that others who were considered to be more important came along, and it would be discovered that they had taken their seats. There is a great danger for us all that we consider ourselves more important than we are.**

**14.9 "And he who invited you and him shall come and say to you, 'Give this man place,' and then you will begin with shame to take the lowest place."**

**And the result would be that the host would say to them, 'You are sitting in this man's place'. Then with shame they would have to leave their choice place and move lower, but as all those lower seats would by now already be full, (distinguished guests regularly arrive the latest, and those who saw themselves as less distinguished would arrive early, as this man had), they would, filled with shame, have to take the lowest place. Their dishonour will be obvious to all.**

**14.10 "But when you are invited, go and sit down in the lowest place, so that when he who has invited you comes, he may say to you, "Friend, go up higher." Then you will have glory in the presence of all who sit at meat with you."**

**What they should rather do is come early and take the lowest seat in the first place. Then the host will see them there, and recognising their deserved status will come and say, "Friend, go up higher." Then all who are at the meal will recognise their promotion and they will be appreciated by all.**

**This is not intended to be a subtle strategy explaining how they could gain glory for themselves. A person who thought like that would deservedly find himself left in the lowest place. It is rather a warning against pride and arrogance and practical advice on how to avoid being humiliated. It is advice on the importance of allowing others to decide their status and give the recognition of what they deserved, rather than their deciding on it for themselves. John and James would have saved themselves similar humiliation if they had remembered this when they sought to oust Peter and the others (Mark 10.35-45). The other disciples meanwhile, equally desirous of the highest place, were angry about it. So Jesus had to rebuke all of them, and teach them the lesson that it is by humble service and having the heart of a true servant that such a place would be obtained. It is the one who serves, not seeking status, who will be given the highest place. Thus the one who will achieve it will be the one who least expects it. Indeed the highest place will be in the servant's quarters where Jesus is.**

**14.11 "For every one who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."**

**As so often the story is capped by a maxim. The one who exalts himself will find that he is at some stage humbled. He will find that he thinks more highly of himself than others think of him, and the result will be that all will at some stage know it, and he will be brought crashing down. And if it does not happen in this world, then it will happen in the Judgment. But the one who humbles himself will find that he is unexpectedly exalted, and it will come as a complete surprise, and if he belongs to Christ he will receive his reward, partly because he does not expect one.**

**The efforts of the self-seeker will have been put into attaining for himself the highest degree of status, into glorifying himself, and will prove finally to have been wasted effort. He will have become a victim of 'the pride of life'. And even though he never learns it in this life, he will certainly learn it in the world beyond the grave. For death is a great leveller. The efforts of the second will have been directed at glorifying God, without any regard for status. They will thus have genuine God-like quality and have been genuine. So will such people be seen as worthy of true honour, and nowhere more so than in the world beyond the grave.**

**The Great Supper Will Be Attended By Unexpected Guests Because Those First Invited Have Made Excuses In Order To Avoid Attending (14.12-24).**

**In the previous parable Jesus had hinted at the danger of not partaking in the future life because they were too proud. Now He makes clear that most of those present will not be there in the everlasting kingdom because they have refused the King's invitation to partake in the Kingly Rule of God. The introduction and the parallel have a twofold message.**

- **Firstly the need to be concerned for the poor and needy. Here the injunction is to invite the poor and needy to his table. In the chiasmus the parallel is with the story of the rich fool who also ignored the poor and needy and grasped for riches and a good time (12.13-21).**

**Some have suggested that Jesus would not have spoken to his host in this vein. But they overlook the fact that Jesus was a recognised prophet. That was why He had been invited. And people, even Pharisees, expected a genuine prophet to speak strongly to them, and be straight with them. And besides Jesus was a Galilean, and they were much more open and straight than the southerners.**

- **But secondly there is also a second, deeper message, and that is that many of those first invited, the religious Jews, who thought complacently that their place in God's kingdom was secure, will not enter under either the present or the future Kingly Rule of God, because they have refused His invitation, while many from among the outcasts and the Gentiles will.**

**There are similarities between this parable and that in Matthew 22.1-14. The two parables indicate the flexibility of Jesus' mind and His ability to adapt His stories so as to get over different points. We can tend to forget that like us He had to sit and consider how He could reach His audience, and that He would learn from experience, commencing with a simple story and then later expanding it in order to make it more powerful. Many of us have done the same thing time and again until the stories become quite sophisticated (or at least we think so) although it is necessary to ensure that they do not become overloaded. But Jesus never made that mistake. The Rabbis on the other hand were not noted for the simplicity of their stories.**

#### **Analysis.**

- **He said to him also who had invited him, "When you make a dinner or a supper, do not call friends, nor your brothers, nor your kinsmen, nor rich neighbours, in case they also invite you in return, and a recompense be made to you" (12).**

- **“But when you make a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they have no means with which to recompense you, for you will be recompensed in the resurrection of the righteous” (13-14).**
- **When one of those who sat at meat with him heard these things, he said to him, “Blessed is he who will eat bread within the Kingly Rule of God” (15).**
- **But he said to him, “A certain man made a great supper, and he invited many, and he sent out his servant at supper time to say to those who were invited, ‘Come, for all things are now ready’ ” (16-17).**
- **“And they all with one consent began to make excuse. The first said to him, ‘I have bought a field, and I find it necessary for me to go out and see it, I beg you, have me excused’ (18).**
- **“And another said, ‘I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am on my way to prove them. I beg you, have me excused’ ” (19).**
- **“And another said, ‘I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come’ ” (20).**
- **“And the servant came, and told his lord these things. Then the master of the house being angry said to his servant, ‘Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in here the poor and maimed and blind and lame’ ” (21).**
- **“And the servant said, ‘Lord, what you commanded is done, and yet there is room’ ” (22).**
- **“And the lord said to the servant, ‘Go out into the highways and hedges, and constrain them to come in, that my house may be filled’ ” (23).**
- **“ ‘For I say to you, that none of those men who were invited shall taste of my supper’ ” (24).**

**Note how in ‘a’ he is told not to call those whom he knows, and in the parallel none of those invited will eat of his supper. In ‘b’ he is to call the needy, and in the parallel the needy are finally called. In ‘c’ one present says ‘Blessed is he who will eat bread within the Kingly Rule of God’, and in the parallel even after the Lord’s command there is still room because those who were invited had not responded. In ‘d’ he invites many friends to his supper, and in the parallel he invites the needy, and in a threefold centre in ‘e’ the point of the story is brought home, all those who were first invited made excuses.**

**14.12 ‘And he said to him also who had invited him, “When you make a dinner or a supper, do not call friends, nor your brothers, nor your kinsmen, nor rich neighbours, in case they also invite you in return, and a recompense be made to you.” ’**

**The passage begins with Jesus suggesting to His host, the ruler who was a Pharisee (verse 1), that when next time he makes a supper or dinner he should not invite those who will return his invitation and thus recompense him for what he has done. For there is no goodness in that. It is simply a part of the social round. It may earn him a reputation as being a good host, but it will earn no plaudits from God.**

**Jesus is not, of course, discouraging family gatherings. He is rather using them to get over His point that the poor and needy should not be overlooked, and that what we do for them counts even more than what we do in this way for our families. We must remember that He had Himself attended many such gatherings (Martha and Mary had not invited the poor and the maimed, the lame and the blind - 10.38-42). Jesus would have encouraged all kinds of relationships if they were leading to the betterment of men and women. But He desired especially that they would not forget the poor.**

**14.13-14 ‘But when you make a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they have no means with which to recompense you, for you will be recompensed in the resurrection of the righteous.’**

**What he should rather do is invite the poor and needy, who have no way of recompensing him, and then he will be blessed, and he will receive his recompense in the heavenly kingdom, a recompense far greater and more lasting than any recompense on earth. The promise of blessing on those who give to those who have nothing is a constant one in the Old Testament (see Deuteronomy 15.10-11; Proverbs 11.24; 19.17; 28.27).**

**‘The resurrection of the righteous.’ The righteous are those who have walked rightly before God and are pleasing to Him. They are in the end ‘the righteous’ because they have been made righteous in Christ (1 Corinthians 1.30; 2 Corinthians 5.21). The resurrection of the righteous is a constant New Testament theme, and follows on from the resurrection of Jesus (1 Corinthians 15.23). Elsewhere we learn that it is a resurrection of both the righteous and the unrighteous (10.12; Acts 24.15; John 5.29; Romans 2.5-6), but here Jesus is concentrating on the positive side of it. The Pharisees also firmly believed in the resurrection, which had been taught in Daniel 12.2-3. The thought here is not that by doing this they will inherit eternal life, but that those who do inherit eternal life, and have done this will be rewarded. Jesus may well have recognised in the heart of this Pharisee, partly revealed in his invitation to Jesus, that he would eventually be, if he was not already, one of the righteous.**

**14.15 ‘And when one of those who sat at meat with him heard these things, he said to him, “Blessed is he who will eat bread within the Kingly Rule of God.” ’**

**Someone present overheard what Jesus had said and piously and complacently declared, “Blessed is he who will eat bread within the Kingly Rule of God.” All present there hoped to do so and would have re-echoed his sentiment. All who heard it would nod agreement. They thought that even if no one else was there, they would be. But Jesus, Who was very much aware that not all of them would be there, issued a warning in the form of a parable.**

**The language that the man uses, which echoes the terms used by Jesus, suggests that the man had been listening to some of Jesus preaching, and was aligning himself at least with that aspect of it, while of course interpreting it in terms of Pharisaic thinking. He wanted the prophet to realise that there were at least some who sympathised with Him. To ‘eat bread’ was shorthand for enjoying a good meal.**

**14.16-17 ‘But he said to him, “A certain man made a great supper, and he invited many, and he sent out his servant at supper time to say to those who were invited, ‘Come, for all things are now ready.’ ” ’**

**So Jesus spoke to them in a warning parable. The parable was about a man who made a great supper and invited many of those whom he thought were suitable. It was normal in those days, on such an occasion, first to issue the invitations in a general way without necessarily naming the exact date, and then to send a message to inform the guests once the feast was set up and ready. They in general had no calendars and diaries by which to remind themselves of such invitations. The Midrash on Lamentations 4.2 says, 'none of them would attend a banquet unless he was invited twice'. In view of the parallel two expeditions of the servant at the end in order to bring in the lowly we may possibly see this twofold invitation as referring to John followed by Jesus, or Jesus followed by the missions of the Apostles.**

**So the man followed tradition and sent his servant out to call the guests. He did what courtesy demanded. It was clearly quite an exclusive supper for only one messenger was needed.**

**The whole parable was probably based on an actual incident that had taken place in the past and was well known. A rich tax-collector, Bar Ma'jan, had arranged a banquet for city councillors, but, when they would not come, despising him for what he was, he gave orders that the poor should come and eat of it so that the food should not be wasted. Jesus, always on the look out for a good illustration, has taken up this tale and expanded on it, and given it a deeper meaning.**

**What did the supper signify? The Messianic banquet was such a feature of belief in those days that we have little difficulty in seeing it as indicating the hope of salvation, and the need to come under the Kingly Rule of God where that salvation was worked out. Jesus would have associated this invitation with His proclaiming that 'the Kingly Rule of God is at hand' (Mark 1.15). For that was why He had come (4.43; 8.1; 9.2).**

**But who are these first invitees? Certainly they would include those present at the feast. The parable was told for them. But we must not limit it to them. The idea is not so much to identify a class of people as a type of people, those who would outwardly have professed that they would welcome the invitation, but in their hearts were not willing to do so. This went beyond the Scribes and the Pharisees. It represented all who gave the appearance of being 'friends' of God, but in fact were not so, as indicated by their refusal to respond to Jesus. But it certainly included many of the Scribes and Pharisees as well (compare 11.52). As with all His parables Jesus left it open for men to apply as they would. Those who were guided by the Spirit would come through to the truth.**

**And finally we must ask, who is the servant? We need look no further than the prophecy Isaiah. Isaiah speaks constantly of the Servant of the Lord Who will come to restore Israel and Judah, and bring back His people to Him. In the short run, as indicated by the twofold invitation and the twofold outreach of verses 21-23, Jesus may have had John the Baptist and Himself in mind. In the longer run this would include Jesus, the Apostles and the early church. Jesus certainly saw Himself as the Servant (22.27, 37; Mark 10.45). And Acts 13.47 expands the idea to the proclaimers of the Good News. But in the end it is ‘the Servant of the Lord’ Who is in mind. Those who had eyes to see would recognise Who was meant.**

**14.18 “And they all with one consent began to make excuse. The first said to him, ‘I have bought a field, and I find it necessary for me to go out and see it, I beg you, have me excused.’ ”**

**The excuses are to some extent patterned on the excuses offered to Israel’s fighting men before they went to war, (excuses which were probably not intended to be taken up as an examination of them demonstrates. See our commentary on Deuteronomy 20.5-7). There it was a house, a vineyard and a wife that gave the excuse. Here it is a piece of land (which could be a vineyard), a yoke of oxen and a wife. In Deuteronomy they were probably excuses offered in order to enable the men to refuse them, which would then nerve them for the fight and remind them of what they were fighting for. But there is no hint of warfare in this passage, apart possibly from the fight of faith. But they still excuse themselves.**

**We can take the excuses as either artificial or genuine. If the former they were typical of the excuses people make when faced up with the truth of the Gospel, if the latter they are evidence of ‘the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches and the desire for other things’ that make the word unfruitful (Mark 4.18-19). But either way they were a deep insult. Only the most urgent of catastrophes could excuse not responding to such a final invitation when it followed one already given and technically, if not actually, accepted.**

**One of those invited excused himself, making as his excuse the fact that he had bought a piece of land and needed to go out and examine it. But all would know that he could have done this at any time, and that the evening was not the best time for such a venture anyway. His need to see it suggests that his agent had bought it for him. He is deliberately depicted as wealthy. But the idea is either that he was just making an excuse, or that he was too taken up with his possessions to be willing to forsake them in order to go to the supper, that is, to enter into the Kingly Rule of God.**

**‘All with one consent.’ Apo mias probably signifies ‘unanimously’, although some have translated ‘all at once’, immediately’. But the point is clear. All took the same view.**

**14.19 “And another said, ‘I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am on my way to prove them. I beg you have me excused.’ ”**

**The second of those invited excused himself, making as his excuse the fact that he had bought five yoke of oxen and needed to go and test them out. Again he was a wealthy man. A poorer man would be lucky to have one or two oxen. Again the oxen were bought on his behalf by his agent, and no doubt his final approval was needed. But again late in the day was not the best time to choose for the purpose. This too was clearly an excuse. He was too taken up with his occupation to have the time or the inclination to attend the supper. The warning here was of allowing our jobs and occupations to so possess us that they prevent us responding to God’s invitation into the Kingly Rule of God, because of what it might involve. There is no necessity that should prevent us responding to that.**

**14.20 “And another said, ‘I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.’ ”**

**The third does not make excuses. He baldly rejects the invitation and states that as he is newly married he cannot be expected to leave his wife in order to attend the supper. His wife (or his begetting of an heir) means more to him than the one who has invited him, and in the final analysis, more than the Kingly Rule of God.**

**And yet it is an excuse for if need arose, such as a summons from the king, or a fire on his farm, he would certainly be ready to leave his wife for an evening, or even more than an evening. His refusal was a great insult. There was really no excuse for his not attending. It indicated his contempt for the invitation.**

**Note how the threefoldness of the excuses indicate that they cover all possible excuses, of which there would be many, for three indicates completeness (just as two will later indicate certainty of witness - verses 21-23).**

**14.21 “And the servant came, and told his lord these things. Then the master of the house being angry said to his servant, ‘Go out quickly into the main streets and side roads of the city, and bring in here the poor and maimed and blind and lame.’ ”**

**So the servant returns to his lord and informs him of what all the invitees have said, and the excuses that they have made. Then the master of the house was furious, and he commanded the servant to go throughout the city, and bring in ‘the poor and maimed and blind and lame’. He will hold his feast, which is already prepared, and he will make sure that he has guests. For these will be pleased to come to his supper.**

**‘The poor and maimed and blind and lame.’ These are the very ones for whom God’s salvation is promised and were the ones who had been flocking to Jesus (4.18; 7.22; Isaiah 35.5-6). They are as described in verse 13.**

**14.22 “And the servant said, ‘Lord, what you commanded is done, and yet there is room.’ ”**

**But the servant then informs him that he has fully obeyed his command, but although he has scoured the city he can find no more guests there, and yet not all the couches are filled. Note the emphasis on the obedience of the servant. His exertions are in total contrast with the ungrateful invitees who refused the final invitation.**

**This failure to fill up the couches at the feast was in indication of the multitudes that Jesus knew would yet enter under the Kingly Rule of God. They would soon not be a little flock, for after those who were first called there would be room for many more..**

**14.23 “And the lord said to the servant, ‘Go out into the highways and hedges, and constrain them (strongly urge them) to come in, that my house may be filled.’ ”**

**Then the lord tells his servant to leave the city and go out into the countryside. There in the highways and under the hedges he will find hungry men and women, for there were many such in those days, and he must use his full powers of persuasion so as to bring them to the feast, to fill up the empty places. They will naturally be reticent. Who could believe such good luck? And Eastern courtesy would require a first refusal. But he is to persevere. (He is by himself. There is no thought of violent compulsion. Compare Acts 28.19; 2 Corinthians 12.11; Mark 6.45). The hedges are those that surround the properties of the rich men who have refused his invitation. These people are those ‘on the outside’, who would not have expected an invitation.**

**This second sending out, along with the first, witnesses in a twofold way (two is the indication of a satisfactory witness) to the readiness of God to receive all who will come, and it confirms the twofold rejection made of those who had by their actions refused the double invitation at the beginning. Now they were doubly rejected. There was to be no doubt that their exclusion was now final. The door had been closed on them (13.24-25), for the master is determined at all costs to fill his house with others. It should be noted that the two expeditions, as had the two invitations, mirror what has already happened with John the Baptist and Jesus, and with the twelve and the seventy. The Servant has gone out a number of times already, as the Scribes and Pharisees would well know. They are an indicator of persistence.**

**14.24 “ ‘For I say to you, that none of those men who were invited shall taste of my supper.’ ”**

**And His parable ends on the sombre note that none of those first invited will taste of his supper. These words are addressed by Jesus to His hearers, as the plural ‘you’ makes clear. He is enforcing the application of the parable so that they will not overlook it, and letting them know that it is His Supper that is in mind, that is, the Kingly Rule of God, where they may feast with Him. The finality in mind here parallels 13.24-25. The parable was spoken in the first place to the Scribes and Pharisees. It was a warning to them that if they refused His invitation to enter under the Kingly Rule of God present in Him, they would find that rather than being blessed in the Kingly Rule of God (verse 15), they would be rejected from it once and for all.**

**There may be in mind here the custom of sending food from banquets to guests who had been unable to attend (compare Nehemiah 8.10-12), so that Jesus is stressing that this does not apply here because their reasons for not attending were invalid. Let them take note. Once the door is closed. There will no longer be hope.**

**But it also contained a wider message for a wider audience, a message for some of His disciples who were probably with Him, and for those who would hear it from their lips. For Jesus was a master strategist. (And He may well have told the parable a number of times in different ways in different contexts. A good story is always worth repeating). It informed them that while the Scribes and Pharisees would on the whole not enter under the Kingly Rule of God, many ordinary people, and even outcasts, would be delighted to do so. They would come in their lameness and their blindness and their relative poverty, humbly and gratefully, to receive His salvation and His blessing. Blessed are the poor who seek Him, for the Kingly Rule of God is theirs (6.20). Like the crooked woman they would come to be made straight.**

**But the distinction between those in the city (Jerusalem) and those outside would certainly suggest to Luke and his readers that the invitation was also intended to go out to the Gentiles. For Jerusalem symbolised the Jews in Gentile eyes, and outside it would indicate the Gentiles. It is quite probable also that Jesus had this in mind, for He had a number of times made clear His interest in the Gentiles (4.25-27; 7.9; 11.31-32), and He knew that the Servant was to be a light to the Gentiles (Isaiah 42.6; 49.6). But as always it was open to His hearers to apply it for themselves in their own thinking.**

### **The Call To Discipleship (14.25-35).**

**Luke closes this section off as he opened it by showing Jesus as challenging His disciples and His would be disciples to consider what was involved in what they were setting out to do. He wanted them to recognise fully what was involved. His challenge to put Him before their own families is a reminder of the division that His coming could cause within families (12.51-53; compare 8.19-21). His call for them to bear their crosses was a reminder of His words to His disciples in 9.23-27.**

#### **Analysis.**

- **a There went with Him great crowds, and He turned, and said to them (25).**
- **b “If any man comes to Me, and does not love less (‘hate’) his own father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple” (26).**
- **c “Whoever does not bear his own cross, and come after Me, cannot be My disciple” (27).**
- **d “For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he have that with which to complete it? Lest haply, when he has laid a foundation, and is not able to finish, all that behold begin to mock him” (28-29).**
- **e “Saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish” (30).**
- **d “Or what king, as he goes to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and take counsel whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends a deputation, and asks for conditions of peace” (31-32).**

- c “So therefore whoever he be of you who does not renounce all that he has, he cannot be My disciple” (33).
- b “Salt therefore is good, but if even the salt has lost its savour, with what shall it be seasoned? It is fit neither for the land nor for the dunghill. Men cast it out” (34-35a).
- a “He who has ears to hear, let him hear” (35b).

**Note in this example the beautiful balance of the chiasmus. Let any part drop out and it loses its balance. In ‘a’ the crowds come to hear Him, and in the parallel Jesus calls on those who to hear who will hear properly. In ‘b’ love for Him is strongly contrasted with their attitude towards all others, and in the example of the salt ‘good salt’ is contrasted with all other salt. In ‘c’ bearing the cross is necessary for a disciple, and in the parallel a man’s renouncing all that he has is necessary for being a disciple. In ‘d’ the weighing up of a situation of a builder is described and in the parallel the weighing up of a situation of a king is described. Central to all in ‘e’ is the question of one who commences but cannot finish what he commences.**

**The chiasmus may well be the work of Jesus, reworked by Luke by taking the last part of the last sentence and contrasting it with the hearing crowd.**

**14.25 ‘Now there went with him great crowds, and he turned, and said to them,’**

**Great crowds ‘went on together with Him’, as He went on His way to Jerusalem, and they included many would be disciples who were not aware of why He was going there. For in the crowds would be people with different hopes. Some loved to hear Jesus’ stories, others were convinced that He was a great prophet, still others wondered whether He was the Messiah biding His time, and still others were full of enthusiasm and were considering following Him fully.**

**But Jesus did not want men to follow as disciples unless they had counted the cost. They could believe on Him, and commit themselves to the Kingly Rule of God without doing so. But for them to become His disciples and follow Him involved an extra cost, and He wanted to ensure that if they did follow Him they had taken this into account. So He wanted to warn them what discipleship might involve.**

**14.26 “If any man comes to me, and does not love less than me, his own father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.”**

**The first cost was with regard to family. As He had demonstrated earlier, now that He was fulfilling His ministry His own family, who had actually sought to interfere with that ministry, even though He loved them, counted as less to Him than His new spiritual family, which consisted of those who heard the word of God that He spoke, and did it (8.19-21; Mark 3.31-35).**

**In the same way those who ‘come to Him’ in order to follow Him must recognise that He must then mean more to them than their families. They must respond to His way of life and His words. They must love their families less than they love Him. This very claim reveals that Jesus saw Himself as more than simply a man, that He saw Himself as having the right to claim a man’s total submission.**

**The word used here is regularly translated in modern versions as ‘hate’ and that is what it does often mean. But we must beware. No word in one language translates exactly into another. Thus *miseo* does not always mean ‘hate. It can mean ‘love with a lesser love’. Consider the following examples:**

- **In Genesis 29.30-31 LXX we read of Jacob that ‘he loved Rachel more than Leah’, and it goes on to say ‘and when the Lord saw that Leah was ‘hated’, (that is ‘not loved like Rachel was’). Thus the comparison is between two levels of love.**
- **In Deuteronomy 21.15-17 a man has two wives, one of whom he loves more than the other. The point is not that he hates the second wife, but that he does not love her like he does the other.**
- **In 2. Samuel 19.6 the charge is made that David loves those who loved him less than he loved Absalom. It could hardly be thought that he was seen as hating them. The charge is that he does not love them as he ought.**
- **In Proverbs 13.24 we are told that ‘he who spares the rod hates his son.’ Taken literally that would be nonsense. If he hated him he would not spare the rod. The point being made is that a loving father should punish the son whom he loves, because he loves him and wants him to grow up rightly. If he does not he is demonstrating that he has a lesser love.**
- **In Romans 9.13 we read, ‘Jacob I loved and Esau I hated’ because the latter would serve the former. Again the idea is not that the Lord hated Esau. Rather it is that His love for Jacob was the stronger because He had chosen him, while he had put Esau in second place. He had a lesser love for him, although it was still great enough to bless him (Genesis 27.39-40).**

**In the same way it is quite clear that ‘hate’ is not what is meant here. Even if there were no other argument to prove that it becomes clear from the fact that Jesus includes the man as ‘hating’ Himself. But if the word is taken literally no normal, rational man would ever really do such a thing, however much he may hate his own selfishness, and the sin that sometimes possesses him. He simply loves himself less. And this meaning is confirmed in that Jesus has already told His hearers to love their enemies and not only those who love them (6.27, 32, 35).**

**So the Old Testament LXX background indicates quite clearly that ‘hate’ is not always the correct translation for miseo. When it speaks of God loving Jacob and ‘hating’ Esau this simply means that He has set His love on Jacob and not on Esau, because Jacob is His chosen one, His beloved. Esau is not loved in the same way, and is ‘loved less’. In the same way for people to ‘love Jesus’ is to set their love on Him and choose to follow Him. By it they have made Him their chosen Master. To ‘hate’ their families indicates that they leave them, however reluctantly, in order to follow Jesus, and that they will not allow their lesser commitment to their families interfere with their greater commitment to Jesus. Given the choice they, however grievously, turn their backs on their families (compare 9.59-62). If they are faced with a choice between obedience to Jesus and obedience to their families, they will choose obedience to Jesus. For they ‘love’ Him, and their families they ‘love less’. And the point here is that this is what following Jesus calls for.**

**14.27 “Whoever does not bear his own cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple.”**

**The second cost is with regard to manner of life. The idea here has already been dealt with in 10.23-27. A man who would follow Jesus must be like a man who bears his cross on the way to execution. He leaves his past behind never to be enjoyed again. He follows Jesus wherever it may lead, even in the pathway of suffering and, if necessary, death. He renounces all his past life. He dies to himself. He is totally committed to Jesus no matter what lies ahead. All those present of mature age would have seen what happened to men who took up their crosses, and many were seen as having been patriots. They had chosen the way of the cross once they had become insurgents, whether they eventually ended up there or not. Jesus’ disciples must be willing to take it too.**

**14.28-29 “For which of you, desiring to build a tower (farm mansion), does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he have that with which to complete it? Lest haply, when he has laid a foundation, and is not able to finish, all that behold begin to mock him,”**

**But Jesus does not want them to take the decision lightly, and therefore illustrates this in terms of a builder of a tower or ‘large farm house’ (a farmhouse on the grand scale - many of his hearers would be farmers). Does not such a builder work out the cost before laying the foundation? For there is little point in laying the foundation if he will not be able to finish building the house. This brings out the size of the enterprise. It is no light thing that he is taking on.**

**But if he lays the magnificent foundation and then is unable to do any more work because the money has run out everyone will jeer at him and mock him. Why had he been such a fool? Why had he tried to participate in such a grand scheme? So in order to avoid this he should prepare a budget beforehand in order to ensure that he has enough to finish the project. And then he may make his free choice as to whether to go ahead or not (compare the men in 9.57-62).**

**14.30 “Saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish.”**

**For if he fails people will say scathingly, “This man began to build, and was not able to finish.” In the same way therefore those who are considering leaving all and following Jesus should consider whether they are really willing to follow Him all the way, lest when they fail and return to their towns they are jeered at for their failure. Here the builder has a free choice and could choose to build or not as he desired (as with the disciples in 9.57-62). And so have all who hear His words.**

**14.31-32 “Or what king, as he goes to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and take counsel whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends a deputation, and asks for conditions of peace.”**

**Jesus then gives a second example. We note here that in chapters 13-14 He continually reveals His delight in twofold illustrations. Two examples of sudden death (13.1-5), two visits to seek fruit (13.6-9), two activities in healing the crooked woman (13.12-13), two examples of animals led away to water (13.15), two examples of the expansion of the Kingly Rule of God (13.18-21), two examples of doors to be entered (13.24, 25), two examples of those who enter the Kingly Rule of God (13, 28, 29), two repetitions of the idea of ‘today and tomorrow and the third day’ (13.32, 33), two repetitions of Jerusalem (13.34), two contrasting visits to Jerusalem (13.34, 35), two examples of those falling in a well (14.5), two choices of places in which to sit and two examples of consequences (14.7-11), two choices of invitations to the Supper (14.12-14), two invitations to the banquet (14.16-17), two sendings out of the servant to bring in replacement guests (14.21-24), two examples of the cost of discipleship (14.26-27), and now two examples of counting the cost (14.28-32). These twofold examples emphasise choice, witness and certainty.**

Here then we have the example of a king who is faced with a choice that he cannot avoid. Unlike the builder he did not choose the situation in which he found himself. And his choice is whether to resist or unconditionally surrender. He must weigh up his own forces, he must weigh up his enemy's forces, and then he must make his decision whether to fight or sue for peace. The impression given is that he has little choice against overwhelming force, although it may be that Jesus expected them to have in mind the many Old Testament situations where God overcame such overwhelming odds. Either way the choice has to be made. In a sense this was the position that the Apostles had found themselves in when Jesus called them by approaching them and saying, 'follow Me' (5.27; Mark 1.17; John 1.43). They had not chosen the situation. They had been put on the spot. And they had then had to decide what response they would make.

Various suggestions have been made as to whom the enemy king represents. Are they to weigh up whether they are willing to stand up to Satan and the kings of the world knowing that in spite of their fewness (12.32; 13.23) they have God on their side? Are they to recognise in the enemy king the total superiority of God, and thus surrender to Him? Are they to recognise in the enemy king the total superiority of Jesus which gives them no real choice but to yield and follow Him in unconditional surrender as those whom He has 'vanquished' by love? As with all Jesus' parables we must apply it to our situation. But the main point of the stories is that they face men up with a decision, and a consideration of the cost and the choice to be made.

14.33 "So therefore whoever he be of you who does not renounce all that he has, he cannot be my disciple."

Looking back therefore at the two examples of what discipleship will cost in terms of loss of family and of all their past life, and in terms of the possible hardness of the way (verses 26-27), each one must now choose whether he will renounce all and follow Jesus, or whether he will not, for if he will not he cannot be Jesus' disciple.

The choice is given to us too. In some ways it is not as stark. Most of us are not called on to leave everything (although for some it may happen). Yet in other ways it is more difficult, for hourly, daily, weekly and monthly we have to renew our surrender and recommit our lives and all our time and all our possessions to Him, so that we might be good stewards, not counting anything that we have and are as our own. It is a daily 'crucifixion' that is required of us.

14.34-35a "Salt therefore is good, but if even the salt has lost its savour (literally 'if it become foolish'), with what shall it be seasoned. It is fit neither for the land nor for the dunghill. Men cast it out."

**Jesus then finishes with a warning of the danger of becoming a disciple and then losing the very ‘virtue’ which makes us useful in His service, our totally dedicated hearts. He does it in terms of salt. Salt is good. It offers great benefits to man while it retains its saltness. It can be used to season food. It can preserve food. It is offered as a an essential part of sacrifices. There is evidence that in some forms (as salty earth) it can fertilise the ground (this is certainly known in modern Egypt). It can kill weeds, although care must be taken not to contaminate the ground. It can prevent dunghills from fermenting too quickly so that they can be preserved for later use. But in all cases only if it retains its saltness.**

**In order to understand this idea of losing its saltness we have to recognise what the Palestinian meant by ‘salt’. The word was used of what was gathered from the shores of the Dead Sea, or obtained by evaporation from it, the crystals of which included both what we call salt, and carnallite. It would then be stored as ‘salt’. In some cases the salt content might be dissolved away and this would leave the savourless carnallite which they would still have described unscientifically as ‘salt’. Thus when they came to their store of ‘salt’ they discovered that it had lost its savour and was useless. So they ‘threw it away’. And, says Jesus, professing Christians who have lost their savour may just as well be thrown away, as they will be at the Judgment.**

**‘Lost its savour.’ The word used here means literally that it had ‘become foolish. The parable is being half applied. It is foolish men, men who do not trust God, who lose their savour. In Mark 9.50 the salt is described as more literally having ‘lost its saltness’. It has been suggested that this is a matter of translation from the Aramaic tradition, and that both are in their own way correct. In Hebrew (and therefore probably in Aramaic) the root ‘tpl’ can mean ‘saltlessness’ (tapel - Job 1.6) and ‘folly’ (tiplah - Jeremiah 23.13; Job 1.22; 24.12). Thus Mark or his source can be seen as having translated in one way, Luke or his source as having translated in the other (Semitic languages had no vowels and thus either meaning to tpl is possible).**

**14.35b “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”**

**Jesus then finishes this passage, and the whole section, with the plea that men and women might hear His words. Let those who have ears to hear, hear. This could signify that they must ensure that they listen, mark, learn and inwardly digest. Or that only those to whom God gives ‘hearing’ will understand. Both are true, for the one complements the other. The question therefore that each of us must ask is, have we got hearing ears?**

