

The Parables in Luke's Gospel Volume 4

Introduction

This is the fourth and final of the study booklets on the parables in Luke's Gospel. This is the largest of the four volumes as it deals with 9 parables in all.

Through these parables Jesus dealt with a variety of subjects, including prayer, the need for humility, and willingness to serve the Lord. But I want to highlight the last of the parables in this booklet, namely that of the fig tree in which Jesus stresses the need to be prepared for when he returns to judge this world and all who have lived in it. The closing words ask a very urgent question, and it is this: *'Will you be ready?'* I do this as a reminder that the parables Jesus told are not just interesting stories; they are more than this. They have been given to us to teach us important spiritual truths, and one of the chief of these is to prepare us to meet God.

It is my prayer that as you read this book prayerfully, with your Bible open to follow the references, that God will meet with you in a very special way so that you will indeed be a true follower of the Lord Jesus Christ and be able to answer *'YES'* to the question with which this book closes.

May God bless you as you read it.

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Chapter 1 Luke 16:1-13: The parable of the shrewd or unjust manager

1) The Setting (Luke 16:1)

In the previous three parables found in Luke 15 Jesus was addressing the crowd, including the Pharisees and teachers of the law. In this parable he was directing his words to his own disciples, but the crowd was still there and no doubt listened carefully to his words. However, the main emphasis of the parable is for the followers of Jesus, those who are known as Christian believers.

We must also say before looking at the parable in detail, that this is one of the most difficult passages of the Bible to understand. Therefore, we need to approach it with great care and in dependence on the Lord's help to teach us its meaning. It will help us to remember that in the parables not every detail has significance or is meant to be examined as if under a microscope. It is often the case that parables have one main lesson, and keeping that in our minds will help us.

2) The Parable (Luke 16:1-13)

Jesus said, *"There was a rich man whose manager was accused of wasting his possessions. So he called him in and asked him, 'What is this I hear about you? Give an*

account of your management, because you cannot be manager any longer.'

"The manager said to himself, 'what shall I do now? My master is taking away my job. I'm not strong enough to dig, and I'm ashamed to beg - I know what I'll do so that, when I lose my job here, people will welcome me into their houses.'

"So he called in each one of his master's debtors. He asked the first, 'How much do you owe my master?' 'Eight hundred gallons of olive oil', he replied. The manager told him, 'Take your bill, sit down quickly, and make it four hundred.'

"Then he asked the second, 'And how much do you owe?' 'A thousand bushels of wheat,' he replied. He told him, 'Take your bill and make it eight hundred.'

"The master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly. For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light. I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.

"Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will be dishonest with much. So if you have not been trustworthy with someone else's property, who will give you property of your own?"

"No servant can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and

despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money."

3) The Meaning of the Parable

a) A careful look at precisely what the parable says

This manager had wasted his master's money, just as the younger son in the previous parable had been wasteful (cf. Luke 16:1 with Luke 15:13). When the master discovered this, the manager was called in to give an account of himself. We are not told if the money was wasted through corruption, theft, or simply poor management and neglect. Bad management is most likely in the light of the interrogation he received in Luke 16:2, and since there was no legal action taken against him there was probably no fraud. The result of this was that he lost his job.

At this point he considered the options open to him. He was not strong enough to do hard manual labour and was too embarrassed to beg: "... *I'm not strong enough to dig, and I'm ashamed to beg...*" So he had an idea which he thought would secure his own welfare when he left his job. The course of action he took was thoroughly dishonest, and nowhere in the parable is his dishonesty commended - dishonesty is always wrong. However, it must be said that his plan was very shrewd and well thought out.

He called in his master's debtors and reduced the amount they owed. One who owed 800 gallons of olive oil, which is about 3000 litres, had his debt reduced to 400 gallons. One who owed 1000 bushels of wheat, which is about

35,000 litres, had it reduced to 800 bushels. He did not tell these debtors what he was doing, and they probably thought everything was honest and he was following his master's instructions. Each had to re-write his bill.

While he had no right at all to engage in this course of action, we cannot but recognise his shrewdness. He appeared to have spoken to his master on behalf of these debtors and to have pleaded their case and secured this reduction in their respective debt - making both himself and his master appear generous and kind! At the same time he placed his master in the predicament that if he changed the bills back to their original amounts, then the reputation of his generosity would have been severely tarnished! It was a very cunning plan indeed, because at one and the same time he had trapped his master and secured his own well-being. When he left his job he could go to these debtors and ask them to help him out, just as he had helped them!

Now this is where we must be very careful. Jesus said in Luke 16:8 that: *"The master commended the dishonest manager because he acted shrewdly."* It was his cleverness that was being commended **NOT HIS DISHONESTY**. Just as we might say, for example, when we have heard of a bank robbery and the remarkable way the thief entered the bank without being detected, that the thief was ingenious. **That does not mean we are agreeing with his dishonesty!** Nor are we saying the thief should not be brought to trial, just simply that he was

clever. So no one can claim that to be dishonest does not matter. Dishonesty is a very serious sin. The Bible teaches quite clearly that we are not to steal and we are not to lie (see Exodus 20:15-16). Jesus was not teaching us that it is good to be dishonest. He was simply pointing out that often unconverted people act with greater thoughtfulness than do his own followers at times (Luke 16:8). This man took care to think and prepare for what lay ahead, even though, sadly, he did it in a sinful way. **It was this point only that Jesus took up and applied to his disciples. It was his shrewdness, not his dishonesty that Jesus used.**

b) The Lord's application to the Christian believer (Luke 16:8b-13)

Jesus used this man's shrewdness as a rebuke to many believers. Luke 16:8b: *"For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light."* Jesus was saying that often the unconverted in the world around us are more careful over their earthly future than his followers are over their heavenly future!

Often God's own people are so careless and casual over their preparation for heaven, that their spiritual lives now on earth are almost bankrupt. It is as if sometimes believers forget that their lives of service down here will have a profound effect on their reward in heaven. Sometimes believers can live as if it did not really matter, and they are prepared to live at spiritual starvation level.

Some believers have little or no concern that their lives are to be dedicated to the Lord every minute. Jesus was warning against ignoring the future and challenged his disciples constantly to prepare for their reception in heaven. In other words, he was urging them to want their whole lives to be lived for God.

From verse 9 onwards, Jesus makes particular applications of this principle which we can put into the form of this question, **How are you using the things God has given you?** Christian believers are to use their earthly possessions in a way that is spiritual and which will bring the Lord's approval when we meet him face to face. Luke 16:9: *"I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings."* In other words, is your help and care and generosity something that is held so highly by other believers that, though they may die before you, they will be awaiting your arrival in heaven with great anticipation and joy? Is your life so full of Christ - *"who went around doing good"* (Acts 10:38) - that even lost souls have been affected by it and have been drawn to the Saviour because you displayed the love of Christ to them, so that they too will be glad when you are welcomed into heaven? How careful are you over these things? Will the Lord welcome you with that, *"Well done, good and faithful servant"* (Matthew 25:21 & 23)?

Just in case his listeners had misunderstood the parable, the Lord Jesus stated clearly that no dishonesty is to be

found in his followers, unlike that found in the dishonest manager. (Luke 16:10f) *"Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will be dishonest with much. So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else's property, who will give you property of your own?"* Jesus requires his disciples to be faithful and trustworthy in all they do, even in what may be considered as little things. This will mean that things such as dishonesty in business or shopping, cheating or bribing, or lying or swindling will not be part of our way of living. For these things are the evidence that the heart is not right with God. Although these things may have been true of us before we began to follow Jesus, and although they are true about many people in the world, they are not to be true about us any more, for we are God's children.

Further, Jesus added that we are to avoid the great danger of being materialistic. Luke 16:13: *"No servant can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and Money."* The Bible is full of people who thought they could do the opposite. Judas Iscariot betrayed Jesus for thirty pieces of silver (Matthew 26:14f). Ananias and Sapphira pretended to give all their money to God's work, but lied, because they kept some back for themselves (Acts 5:1-11). Demas fell

away from following the Lord, we are told in 2 Timothy 4:10 “... *because he loved this world...*”

4) Lessons

- i. As the dishonest manager made careful preparations for his future, so Christian believers are to live with their attention fixed on the future, on eternity and heaven. This is so that whenever the Lord may call us to leave this world and face him, we will be prepared and ready to go.
- ii. Unbelievers think only of this life, and make no preparations for the life to come, and perish as a result. How awful to have to face the Lord and be found lacking.
- iii. The believer’s rule is so helpfully put by Paul in 2 Corinthians 4:18: “... *we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is not seen is eternal.*” And in 1 Corinthians 10:31: “*So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.*”

Chapter 2 Luke 16:19-31: The parable of the rich man and Lazarus

1) Introduction and Setting

In Luke 16:14 Jesus was being mocked and derided by the Pharisees who are described like this: “*The Pharisees, who loved money, heard all this and were sneering at Jesus.*”

One of the great dangers that have ensnared men and women down the centuries is the love of money and material things. Again and again the Bible illustrates this and warns against it (e.g. see 1 Timothy 6:6-10 & 17-19; Hebrews 13:5). It is not that there is anything sinful about money or possessions themselves. The problem is with the way people respond to them which is so often wrong. The rich might want to keep it all selfishly for themselves, and the poor might lust covetously for more! When that happens it easily breeds indifference to spiritual matters. Solemnly, the Bible warns us that those who rely on these things rather than on the Lord are destined for hell, as this parable indicates.

2) The Parable (Luke 16:19-31)

Jesus said, “*There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man’s table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores.*

“*The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham’s side. The rich man also died and was buried. In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. So he called to him, ‘Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.’*

“*But Abraham replied, ‘Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you*

are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.'

"He answered, 'Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my father's house, for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.'

"Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.'

"'No, father Abraham,' he said, 'but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.'

"He said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'"

3) The meaning of the parable

a) Two vast contrasts (Luke 16:9-24)

[i] Before death (Luke 16: 19-21)

The scene that Jesus depicted was that of stark contrast. The rich man lived in luxury, having wealth beyond our wildest dreams. He had everything he needed, and the very best of everything as well - the finest clothing "*purple and fine linen*", a magnificent house, for the words "*at his gate*" in verse 2 indicate this was a typical rich man's dwelling, with an inner courtyard, and we can imagine the very best fittings and furniture that money could buy. His lifestyle was extravagant. Luke 16:19: he "*lived in luxury every day*". Here was a man who loved

himself, pampered himself, paraded himself, and, as we shall see, was extremely selfish.

The other character, Lazarus, lived in abject poverty (Luke 16:20). The exact opposite to the rich man, he was in need of everything. He had to be brought to the rich man's gate, so he must have been unable to walk, and, therefore, was also unable to work. He was covered in sores. He was so hungry he longed for anything that might fall from the rich man's table, even a few scraps. Added to all this, even the dogs tormented him, licking his sores. Here was a man too ill and too weak to be able to help himself.

We need to note two things at this point. Firstly, the rich man did absolutely nothing to relieve the suffering of the poor man he saw every time he went out of his house! Secondly, the poor man never once grumbled, complained, expressed jealousy of the rich man, nor blamed God for his sad condition! These tell us a great deal about the spiritual condition and difference of these two men, which now becomes clearer as the parable unfolds.

[ii] After death (Luke 16:22-24)

The contrast now was reversed, made greater, and fixed forever.

Lazarus, the poor man, discovered his misery was ended completely. He died, and was lovingly carried by the angels of God to Abraham's side. He was brought to paradise, to glory, to heaven. Heaven is described as

'Abraham's side' because he is the father of all who believe (Romans 4:11), and all believers are assured there is a place reserved in heaven for them (1 Peter 1:4). For Lazarus there was the joy and blessedness of being with the Lord's children in the Lord's presence, and all his suffering was over. Death was not the end of him, and that is important for us all to realise. There is more to come after this life. The fact that Lazarus went to Abraham's side teaches us that in all his earthly suffering he was a man who had trusted in God, and committed his life and his way to him. He lived as Proverbs 3:4-5 instructs: "*Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.*" This was what Lazarus had done.

The rich man, however, discovered that at death, his happiness ended. He died, but that was not the end of him either. He was not lovingly carried by the angels to heaven, but went straight to hell, and for him there was no comfort or joy. The picture Jesus presents is one of no hope at all, but dreadful suffering and agony (Luke 16:23). This self-centred individual, who made much of himself and his riches, and nothing of the Lord or the needy, was sent to hell. And there he was in indescribable misery and suffering. His suffering was increased by the fact that he could see the reality of heaven as the home of the righteous, but he realised its truth too late. He longed for relief for a brief moment because his agony was so severe. What a contrast to before death. Then he thought nothing

about relieving the suffering around him, and thought nothing of God!

Heaven and hell are **BOTH** very real places.

b) The just and eternal nature of heaven and hell (Luke 16:25-26)

Having pleaded with Abraham for some relief, the rich man is told two solemn and important truths.

[i] His present condition was totally just (Luke 16:25)
 "... Abraham replied, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony.'"

In his lifetime he had been blessed abundantly. He had received many good things, but his response to these had been totally wrong and sinful. There was no gratitude to God at all. There was no devotion of his life to the Lord's service. He had not used his blessings for God's glory. Here was a man who left God out of his life and filled it with his money, his possessions and himself! Therefore, there was no more good for him to receive; he had wasted his opportunity.

For Lazarus, the opposite was the case. His way had been committed to the Lord, and now the Lord blessed him.

[ii] Once death had occurred his condition is fixed forever (Luke 16:26)

Abraham said to the rich man, *“And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us”*. There was no possibility of change. The rich man could never come out of hell; neither would there ever be any relief for him. And the same was true for Lazarus; his condition was fixed and unalterable. He would never go from his place of joy, not even for a visit to the place of torment. A great chasm had been fixed between these two places. Heaven and hell are eternal conditions.

Lesson: We see the great danger of relying on money, material possessions, success in our careers and similar things. Those who leave God out of their lives, die without God, and perish forever. We must take heed of this solemn warning.

c) The rich man’s request for his brothers (Luke 16:27-31)

At last, but too late, the rich man begins to show concern for others. Luke 16:27-28: *“... I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my father’s house, for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.”* He certainly did not want them to go where he had gone.

The answer he received is very instructive. Luke 16:29: *“Abraham replied, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.’”* Men need to look nowhere else for the solution to their spiritual needs than to the Bible, the word of God, for that is where Moses and the Prophets are found. If we depend on God’s word and his promises, we can rest assured that we are eternally safe. For those who do receive the message of the Bible become God’s children, because it is in the Bible that we learn about sin, righteousness, judgment, and Christ, the only Saviour of sinners. We must not look anywhere else for the answer to our spiritual needs, nor must our loved ones.

The rich man was not satisfied with this answer, believing that if Lazarus had gone back from the dead, then his brothers would repent. But Abraham assured him that the teaching of the Bible is all that is required to bring men to seek God in repentance. Indeed, he said that if they did not believe what God had already revealed in the Bible, then they certainly would not believe if a miracle of someone rising from the dead occurred!

The human heart is always looking for the sensational or dramatic as the solution to its needs, and is not content to accept God’s appointed means. Therefore, we must ensure we rest on God’s word alone, and with all our hearts.

4) Application

Are you relying on material things and money, and leaving God out of your life? If so, you are in real danger. Therefore, repent and turn to Christ before it is too late.

If you are poor, but know the Lord Jesus as your Saviour, then you are richer than the richest man in the world, for you possess eternal life, and you are going to heaven. Therefore, rejoice in all that God has given you in Christ, be content, and continue to trust in him to supply all your needs.

Chapter 3 Luke 17:7-10: The parable of the master and his servant

1) The Setting (Luke 17:1-7)

This parable was spoken to the disciples (Luke 17:1), so it is teaching for Christian believers. Jesus had taught that things will occur which will cause people to sin, but the person through whom they come will be judged (Luke 17:1-3a). Therefore, Jesus' disciples were to guard themselves against this possibility. Jesus also said that his followers should always be ready to forgive those who sin against them. This includes rebuking sinful brethren (v3a), forgiving repentant brethren (v3b), and forgiving the brother who keeps on sinning against you every time he repents (v4). "*Seven times in a day*" stands for an unlimited number of times.

Upon hearing all of this, the disciples made a request (Luke 17:5). They asked the Lord to increase their faith.

They realised the difficult nature of what Jesus required of them, especially the teaching about forgiving those who sinned against them. This was something that went against their (and we must add, our) natural instincts which want to retaliate and seek revenge when hurt. (Contrast the example of Jesus in 1 Peter 2:21f.) They also realised, however, that it was possible to achieve the standard Jesus was setting, **BUT ONLY WITH HIS HELP**. If he increased their faith to lay hold of the necessary power, they could forgive others without limit.

Jesus encouraged them. Luke 17:6: "*He replied, 'If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, Be uprooted and planted in the sea, and it will obey you.'*" True faith, even small amounts, can accomplish great things. In a way, this encouragement also rebukes our unbelief when we do not pray to God with confidence. It is so easy to think our difficulties are too great for God to overcome. We need to fix the eyes of our hearts heavenwards to God instead of keeping them downwards and fixed only on our problems. But it also encourages us, for true faith, however small, makes those things we think impossible actually achievable! We are even able to forgive someone seven times a day, and forgive them truly, so the matter is finished with. It was at that point that the Lord taught his disciples using the parable about a master and his servant.

2) The Parable (Luke 17:7-10)

Jesus said, *“Suppose one of you had a servant ploughing or looking after the sheep. Would he say to the servant when he comes in from the field, ‘Come along now and sit down to eat’? Would he not rather say, ‘Prepare my supper, get yourself ready and wait on me while I eat and drink; after that you may eat and drink’? Would he thank the servant because he did what he was told to do? So you also, when you have done **everything you were told to do, should say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.’”***

3) The Meaning of the Parable

We need to understand something of the cultural significance of this story in order to appreciate its impact on the disciples, and how we should respond to it ourselves. The parable also comes across rather bluntly, but this is to misunderstand what the master/servant relationship was in the Middle East. To be such a servant brought security and a sense of worth. To be such a servant meant also that you accepted the master’s authority, so obedience to him was not at all questioned. It was understood as part of the relationship. The reference to the meal in verses 7-8 was not a late evening dinner, but the usual afternoon meal which was taken at approximately 3 pm. This is important, because this is not a case of harsh exploitation of the servant after long arduous hours in the fields. This was part of the normal day’s chores for the servant, which he expected and accepted. In such a situation no servant would expect to be served, as it was his normal task to prepare the meal for his master. Further,

as the master was not the servant, he did not eat with the servants (v8).

This lesson was repeated in verses 9-10. No servant would expect to receive special thanks or favours simply because he was doing his normal duty. (NB. The word ‘thank’ is actually ‘grace’ or ‘favour’, and, therefore, ‘thanks’ is a weak translation as more is intended. Jesus is not saying the master is ungrateful or inconsiderate.) By his obedience the servant had not earned or merited any grace or reward. The master was not especially indebted to the servant, for this was his normal work, not an extraordinary act, and was expected of him. This master did not owe his servant anything for carrying out his orders, and his servant did not expect any such reward.

In a similar manner, the obedient disciples of Jesus are to do what he expects of them diligently, not looking for or deserving special favour. The term ‘unworthy’, or ‘unprofitable’, as it is sometimes translated, does not mean ‘useless’ or ‘unfit’, but rather it means ‘not owed anything’, for they have simply done their duty. We do not serve the Lord in order to gain, but out of love and loyalty to our Master. Even when we have done everything Jesus commands we still have done nothing deserving of special reward.

There are really three main lessons in this parable. Firstly, Jesus expects his disciples humbly to obey him always. He is Lord. This is the main and most important lesson of the

parable. In this context this means that all of Jesus' followers are to forgive those who sin against them because he has commanded it. Our obedience is expected. Secondly, our obedience does not earn his favour (Luke 17:10). Salvation is by grace alone and not works (see Ephesians 2:8-9). Thirdly, this excludes all pride from those who do obey him and are progressing in holiness. Conceit is ruled out for God's children. It is so easy to despise Christians who fall into sin, especially if we have not committed the same sin! We must beware of becoming Christian Pharisees! (See Matthew 5:1-5.)

Some Additional Notes

In the parable of the wedding banquet in Luke 12 Jesus had already told his disciples he would serve them, and later on was found washing their feet (John 13:1-17). However, this did not mean he ceased to be their Master. Though we do receive amazing blessings from the Lord Jesus Christ we must never become presumptuous. He is always our Lord, and even though we are his friends and he ours, we are also his servants who are to do his will. He is always our Master to whom we owe both loyalty and obedience. Not that his commandments are onerous. 1 John 5:3: *"This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome..."* He is not like some harsh and cruel master, but rules us in his love and mercy and always has our good in mind. Because he is all wise, his will is always best, therefore, to obey him is to do both what is right and what is profitable. The parable lays

before us some important matters relating to our obedience to the Lord Jesus.

Chapter 4 Luke 18:1-8: The parable of the persistent widow

1) The Setting

This parable was spoken to the disciples of Jesus (Luke 18:1). Jesus was concerned to help his followers over the matter of prayer. So he gave them careful instruction aimed at one particular aspect of praying - persisting in it.

Before considering the immediate context of this passage we need to say a few things about prayer in general, and this matter of persisting in prayer. Prayer has been described as one of the most glorious, yet most difficult things to do. It is indeed glorious, because in prayer we enjoy communion with God. A greater privilege we cannot think of; we talk with the Creator of the Universe. In prayer we worship and praise him; we seek his honour and express our desire that his kingdom might grow on earth and we long for his will to be done; we bring all our needs to him for help; we seek his forgiveness and grace to be forgiving ourselves; and we gain strength and help to fight against sin, temptation and the devil himself. In prayer to God all things are covered, every need, every part of our lives - it is a wonderful thing. But surprising as it may seem, prayer is also one of the most difficult things to engage in, and for all sorts of reasons. Prayer is a spiritual activity and, therefore, faces many obstacles. Satan

opposes us when we pray, and constantly tries to prevent us. Our hearts struggle with it because of our own sinfulness (Galatians 5:17). We can be easily distracted by all sorts of other legitimate activities so that time for prayer is reduced or completely used up by other things. And we can become easily discouraged when answers do not come quickly.

It was this last obstacle, delayed answers to prayer that Jesus was concerned about in this parable. He knew it is all too easy for us to give up praying, even though we need to be praying all the time, both every day and frequently throughout the day. We can be tempted to think that God, our Father in heaven, is not listening to us or is not concerned for us. Now, we need to remember that if answers to prayer are delayed as far as we are concerned, the Lord has a good reason for that. He is the all-wise God, therefore, he never makes a mistake, knowing the best time to answer our prayers, so there is never a delay as far as he is concerned. Also, because God is good, he can never be unkind to his children and, therefore, will always do what is best for us. Sometimes we ask for things in the wrong way, and it is as we keep on praying that we begin to recognise this and our requests are brought into conformity with God's will. Sometimes such delays in answer to prayer are intended to test our faithfulness and, therefore, perseverance is essential to develop our confidence in God.

Further to this, there are other times when our request is in accord with God's will and is urgent, yet still the answer seems to be delayed. This is particularly true when the people of God are oppressed and facing persecution. Then alarm can fill our hearts. The answer to our fears at such times is believing prayer, communion with God, and not giving up. At such times Satan will tempt us to think prayer is a waste of time, or that God is displeased with us, or even tempt us to think there is no God at all! He will stop at nothing in order to prevent us from seeking God in prayer. We must resist the devil and draw near to God (James 4:7-8a). We must persist in prayer.

This brings us back to the immediate context of this parable. Jesus had just been speaking about the lengthy and difficult period of time before he returns to this earth again (Luke 17:20-37). And he immediately gave instructions to his disciples about prayer (Luke 18:1). This is interesting and instructive.

The days preceding his return will be like the days of Noah (Luke 17:26-27), and like those of Lot (Luke 17:28). These were very wicked times, when sinful men increased in their wickedness. And there is great temptation for a believer in that kind of situation to despair, thinking the end will never come, or to compromise with sin. The ungodly will oppose and oppress Christian believers during this period between Jesus' first and second comings. It is very hard to remain faithful in such situations and, therefore, it is absolutely essential that the

disciples of Jesus are continually prayerful. To endure to the end we need God's special help. And we need to wait patiently for God to vindicate us. Therefore, Jesus encouraged his followers to keep on praying in such difficult times, for their prayers will be heard and answered.

2) The Parable

“Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. He said: “In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared about men. And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, ‘Grant me justice against my adversary.’

“For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, ‘Even though I don’t fear God or care about men, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so she won’t eventually wear me out with her coming!’”

“And the Lord said, “Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?””

3) The Meaning

Jesus was drawing a comparison between the response of the unjust judge to the widow, and the response of God to Christian believers. If an unjust judge will answer a

widow who keeps petitioning him, how much more will God, who loves his children, answer them when they persist in prayer.

We need first of all to look at the position of judges in the life of the nation of Israel. When judges were appointed they were expected to act justly and without partiality. The instructions given by godly king Jehoshaphat to the judges he appointed are a good example. 2 Chronicles 19:5-7: *“He appointed judges in the land, in each of the fortified cities of Judah. He told them, ‘Consider carefully what you do, because you are not judging for man but for the Lord, who is with you whenever you give a verdict. Now let the fear of the Lord be upon you. Judge carefully, for with God there is no injustice or partiality or bribery.’”*

However, in this parable the judge was not just, but exactly the opposite (Luke 18:2 & 4), being ungodly and uncaring. He had no sense of shame, no sense of guilt when he did wrong. He did not see that it was shameful not to help the widow. He did not care (cf. Jeremiah 8:12). He was a very difficult man to deal with. Yet the widow still came to him.

The position and plight of widows in Israel is also important to consider. They were very needy and very vulnerable, being easy prey for the unscrupulous. Therefore, they were to be the objects of the compassion and help of the rest of society. Widows also had a legal position, as the instruction of Isaiah 1:17 states, *“Defend*

the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow”, was taken to mean that orphans and widows were to be dealt with first in law. But in this case the widow’s legal rights were being violated. Instead of being helped she was oppressed. She had no one to protect her against her adversary. In such cases God had commanded the judges to come to the aid of widows and give them special consideration. It has been suggested that money was involved in this case and that someone was trying to deprive the widow of what was hers by right. Her cry was for justice and protection, not revenge on the adversary.

However, the judge did not want to help her, and he did not care about his refusal at all! This, in effect, made him side with her opponent! It was well known that such unjust judges were often bribed, but a needy widow would not have had the resources to do this even if she wanted to! Something else that needs to be noted is that in the Middle East women do not normally go to court. This was considered a man’s domain, and too rough a place for a woman to be found. Therefore, the fact that this widow went to the judge made it all the more remarkable, and indicates something of the gravity of her case, and the judge’s initial refusal to help her all the more deplorable. Not having a man to represent her from her wider family indicated she was utterly alone and helpless! A sad case indeed!

At first the judge ignored her and refused to help. But as time passed and the widow persisted in pleading for help,

the judge, though acknowledging his ungodly and uncaring attitude, agreed to vindicate her. This was to prevent her from wearing him out (Luke 18:5) with her continual coming to him. The phrase “*wear me out*” was a prize-fighting term for a blow under the eye, and really meant he did not want her to give him a headache by her continual crying to him! Obviously she was irritating him, and he was weary. So to get some peace and quiet, he agreed to listen to her case and correct the injustice done by her adversary, being convinced she would never give up coming to him until he dealt with her.

The application to persistence in prayer referred to in verse 1 is obvious. If the widow’s needs were met by such an unjust and uncaring judge, how much more will the prayers of the people of God be met by their loving heavenly Father! However discouraged, hopeless, and helpless our situation might be, God is both able and willing to help us when we truly seek him in prayer. The situation of Christian believers is never as bad as that of the widow with the judge, for our relationship to God is that of children to their kind, caring and willing Father. We can rest assured our prayers will be answered.

When fear grips their hearts, believers are urged to pray, and pray continually and with confidence that God will answer and act in their best interests. This is a very encouraging lesson that Jesus is teaching us, and a real stimulus to go on praying, whatever the difficulties and however great our disappointments.

Jesus begins to expand on this in verses 6-8 to give further encouragement. In verse 7 Christian believers are described as God's "*chosen ones*". This is a delightful title that is full of the grace of God. It is a reminder that God has chosen each believer to belong to him. Often Christians speak of their conversion as the day they came to the Lord, but the Bible puts it in a more wonderful way: God chose us! How amazing! There was nothing attractive in us that he should want to choose us, for we are all sinners; unworthy and unlovely; but still God chose us. Truly, salvation is by the grace of God alone (see Ephesians 2:8-9). This wonderful truth that God has chosen us is taught throughout the Bible (see Deuteronomy 7:7f; John 15:16; Acts 9:15; Ephesians 1:4; 1 Peter 1:1). The followers of Jesus are the special objects of God's love and care. Therefore, how much more will God answer the prayers of his dear ones who pray to him day and night, and vindicate them.

True disciples of Jesus will pray day and night. Prayer is one of the marks of true Christians. This was how Ananias knew Saul of Tarsus had become a follower of Jesus for the Lord told him in Acts 9:11, "... *for he is praying...*"

Jesus went on to say how such prayers would be answered by God. Luke 18:8: "*I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly.*" The main fulfilment of this will take place when Jesus returns, when all the world will be compelled to honour him (Philippians 2:10-11), and when

his people will be vindicated for their trust in him and stand for his righteousness. All creation will see it. When the right time arrives for this, God will act swiftly (see 1 Corinthians 15:51-52; 1 Thessalonians 4:17; Revelation 20:11). So if you are a tried and persecuted follower of Jesus, keep on praying. God will give you strength to persevere and will vindicate you on the last day.

Jesus ended with a searching question in verse 8: "*However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?*" He was not implying that there will be no faith on the earth, because we know there will be many Christian believers on the earth when Jesus comes again. Rather, this was a challenge to his disciples to examine their hearts to see if they really did have this persevering faith in prayer that was typified by the widow in the parable. Were they, and are we, like her? This was a call to careful self-examination, which all true followers of the Lord Jesus Christ ought to do, and do regularly. The answer is 'YES' when we are seen actually to persevere in prayer, and not give up (Luke 18:1).

May the Lord give us grace so that we shall persevere in prayer, or as Paul puts it in 1 Thessalonians 5:17, "*pray continually*".

Chapter 5 Luke 18:9-14: The parable of the Pharisee and tax collector

1) The Setting

The setting of this parable is described in Luke 18:9 where we read, *“To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable...”* Self-righteousness and pride are twins, and were seen together in those to whom Jesus spoke on this occasion.

It was so sad that the phrase *‘looked down on everybody else’* meant not only that they despised others and treated them with scorn, but they did this continually. Here we see the ugliness of pride and arrogance, and it is not at all attractive. Further, these individuals were *‘confident of their own righteousness’*. They relied on themselves, because they thought they were so good and much better than everyone else! They trusted in themselves and felt they had no need of faith in God and his mercy. How little they understood the sad condition of their own hearts.

We learn from this an important lesson about pride. It blinds men to the truth about themselves. Indeed, their very pride was a sin, but they failed even to realise that! Pride has been likened to smoke from a wood fire which gets into the eyes, making it very difficult to see, even producing momentary blindness. And because these people were habitually doing this, they were continually blind to their own sins!

Consider these verses from the book of Proverbs about pride. Proverbs 13:10: *“Pride only breeds quarrels...”* Proverbs 16:18: *“Pride goes before destruction, a haughty*

spirit before a fall.” Proverbs 29:23: *“A man’s pride brings him low, but a man of lowly spirit gains honour.”*

The Bible repeatedly teaches us that God is grieved when men become proud. Proverbs 8:13: *“To fear the Lord is to hate evil; I hate pride and arrogance, evil behaviour and perverse speech.”* Proverbs 16:5: *“The Lord detests all the proud of heart. Be sure of this: they will not go unpunished.”* James 4:6: *“God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”* In the light of these scriptures it is not surprising to discover Jesus dealt with this subject very directly as he did with this parable.

2) The Parable

Jesus said, *“Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood up and prayed about (or to) himself: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men - robbers, evildoers, adulterers - or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’*

“But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat upon his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’

“I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

3) The Meaning

a) The background of the two men (Luke 18:10)

The parable starts with two men going up to the temple to pray. Most likely this was not a reference to private devotions but to a time of public worship. The temple was the scene, and the tax collector mentioned atonement in his request (translated as mercy in verse 13) which was probably a reference to the morning or evening sacrifice at which a congregation was present, and which were normally the only two daily public worship services. These were held at dawn and at 3 pm. That both men prayed individually is not a difficulty because such prayers were offered freely during the time of the burning of incense. This occurred after the sacrificial lamb had been killed, when atonement for sin had been offered, making it the most suitable time for the worshipper to approach God in prayer.

The Pharisees were a Jewish sect that adhered rigidly to the law of God, plus their interpretations of it. They were very strict. But they did not do this because they loved God, but because they loved themselves and wanted to be noticed as good men by others! They were famous for their very critical attitude towards everybody else other than their fellow Pharisees. They considered themselves very superior to others, and as far as righteousness was concerned, they thought there was nobody to compare with them, they were so good!

The tax collectors were entirely different. They were considered traitors, because they worked for the Romans who were the army of occupation at the time. Added to

that, many of these men grew very rich by overcharging on the tax levies, and then putting the difference into their own pockets. So many of them were thoroughly dishonest, who grew rich by exploiting others. Generally, they were considered a bad group of men.

b) The Pharisee's Prayer (Luke 18:11-12)

The Pharisee stood up to pray, and probably stood alone. If there were other worshippers present, the Pharisee would not have associated with them and would have ensured he kept some distance between himself and 'ordinary worshippers'. The Pharisees thought they were too good to mix with such people, and would become unclean if their clothes brushed against them!

He '*prayed about himself*', or '*to himself*' as some translations put it. Even though he addressed God in his prayer, it was not to worship God humbly and seek his mercy, but as an excuse to parade his own apparent goodness and to boast about it. We must say at the outset that this was not true prayer at all. Also, he would have prayed out loud so that others could hear how good he was. And by doing this he was proudly '*getting at them*'.

His words indicated two things he thought about himself. Firstly, what he was not like - '*I am not like other men*'. So he marked himself as different from others. He detailed what he meant, for he was not a robber, evildoer or adulterer. In other words he claimed he was not a rogue or swindler. And he contrasted himself proudly with the tax

collector, whom he considered was a thief and swindler! He considered the tax collector was an example of his list. So he singled him out as a man to be treated with contempt, despising the tax collector. It was a self-righteous attack on his fellow-worshipper. Then secondly, he revealed what he was like, saying, *'I fast twice a week'*. The only fast that was commanded by the Mosaic law was on the Day of Atonement (Numbers 29:7, Leviticus 23:29), but the Pharisees fasted on Mondays and Thursdays. So he was boasting that he did more than was required. He then added, *'I ... give a tenth of all I get'*. In the Old Testament tithes were levied on grain and fruit, wine and oil, and the herds of animals (Leviticus 27:30-32, Numbers 18:27), but this man tithed everything he got. Again he was showing how 'perfect' he was, and it was all by his own efforts. This was indeed self-righteousness.

c) The Tax Collector's Prayer (Luke 18:13)

The tax collector also prayed, but with an entirely different attitude from that expressed by the Pharisee, and which showed him to be quite different from what the Pharisee claimed. He was a humble man with a broken and contrite spirit. He stood at a distance. He did not consider himself worthy to draw close to the other worshippers. He would not look up to heaven. Again, he considered himself unworthy with nothing to boast of or to be proud about. And he beat upon his breast. This was an outward indication of his great sorrow and grief because he knew himself to be so sinful and to have failed God. This action

indicated extreme anguish and beating his chest indicated that all his sin came from his heart (see Matthew 15:19).

He pleaded with God for mercy. He did not parade proudly how good he was, but humbly sought forgiveness. The word translated '*mercy*' is not the normal word for mercy, but instead is the word for atonement for sins. Atonement was provided in the sacrificial system by the death of the animal sacrificed. The animal bore the wrath of God instead of the guilty sinner. This resulted in the sin being covered and the sinner being reconciled to God. These animal sacrifices all pointed towards the great sacrifice of Jesus on the cross as the all-sufficient, once-for-all sacrifice for sins (Hebrews 9:26-28; 10:12).

Here was a man heart-broken because he had sinned against God. A man who refused to trust in any righteousness of his own. A deeply repentant man who in hope cried out to God alone, longing that he would provide atonement for his sins. A man who was totally cast upon God, and who trusted only in what God could do to redeem his soul. A totally different man from the Pharisee.

3) The Application (Luke 18:14)

Jesus declared that it was the tax collector, not the Pharisee, who went home justified in the sight of God. He was the one God accepted, because he was the one whose heart was right. The Pharisee went through all the motions of worship, but it counted as nothing, because his heart was proud and arrogant. He actually increased his

sinfulness by the words he spoke and the attitude he displayed. But the tax collector humbled himself under the mighty hand of God, and God lifted him up, atoned for his sin and forgave him. Righteousness is God's gift to us; it cannot be gained any other way.

Jesus then declared a searching, yet vital, truth. All who lift themselves up in pride, like the Pharisee, will be brought low by Almighty God. And all who humble themselves, like the tax collector who knew and confessed his guilt and looked humbly to God for mercy, will be lifted up by God and welcomed.

This truly is mercy. Have you obtained it?

Chapter 6 Luke 18:18-30: The parable of the camel and the eye of a needle

1) The Setting (Luke 18:18-23)

These verses record a conversation that Jesus had with a certain ruler (Luke 18:18). In Matthew's account of this incident he is called a young man (Matthew 19:20). He is also described as very rich (Luke 18:23; Matthew 19:22; Mark 10:22), so he is often called 'the rich young ruler'.

This young man actually ran up to Jesus, fell on his knees (Mark 10:17), and then asked him the question in Luke 18:18: "*Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?*"

a) Eternal life

It was a very important question. Eternal life means to know God personally, and Jesus Christ whom he has sent (John 17:3). It is, therefore, life of the highest quality where God is loved and enjoyed and served, along with all the benefits that come from that. These benefits include forgiveness of all our sins, communion with God daily, the assurance of his presence and protection, his provision for our needs and constant care. And because it is eternal, it is life of endless duration, lasting beyond our earthly existence and death forever. Those with eternal life will not perish (John 10:27-30). They will go to be with Christ in paradise when they die (Luke 23:43; Philippians 1:23). They are assured that on the day of resurrection they will be given new glorified bodies (1 Corinthians 15; Philippians 3:20-21). Then they will be with all other believers and with the Lord forever (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). All of this is summed up by the term '*salvation*', and is the great blessing the Lord Jesus Christ **gives** to all who believe in him. So, as we said, this man's question was of the highest importance.

The fact that he asked it indicated he was spiritually concerned. He was anxious to know if he himself would be included in these blessings, and if at the end of time he would indeed share in the resurrection of the righteous (see Daniel 12:2). He wanted that assurance there and then, and the peace of heart and mind which it would bring.

b) A mistake

However, we must say that his question was really put in the wrong way. This rich young ruler wanted to know what *'he'* could do to gain this life. He thought it was something that could be achieved by his own actions. However, the Bible makes it abundantly clear that eternal life cannot be earned or merited by anything we may do, because we are sinners. Instead it has to be given to us by God, which he does when we become followers of the Lord Jesus (John 3:16; Romans 6:23). An example is seen in the previous parable to this one about the Pharisee and tax collector at prayer. If it were possible to earn eternal life this rich ruler would have had to obey God's law perfectly for the whole of his life, from beginning to end. That is something which was impossible for him and for us, because we all disobey God at times.

c) The real test

To correct his lack of understanding Jesus began by taking up some of his words. He had addressed Jesus as *'Good master'*, which of course he was, but the ruler's understanding of that was inadequate. Jesus possessed absolutely perfect goodness, and that is why he said to him in verse 19, *"No-one is good, except God alone"*. Jesus wanted him to realise that he was God (God the Son), and that God's standard was perfection. This meant that he was to take seriously all that Jesus said. To make this clear for the ruler Jesus quoted some of the Ten Commandments (Luke 18:20), which we find in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5. It is by truly understanding the law of

God that we become aware both of our own sin and its seriousness in the eyes of God (Romans 3:20).

The rich young ruler replied that from his childhood he had kept the things Jesus stated. But Jesus knew the true condition of his heart, and that there was one thing in this man's life which was a real stumbling block to him, namely his riches. Jesus told him (Luke 18:22): *"You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."* The real test of the young man's statement that he had given full obedience to God's law, lay where it would affect him most, in his attitude to his possessions. If he really was putting God first, and loving his neighbour perfectly, then he would have been willing to give up all he had.

Sadly, he did not do this (Luke 18:23). This man loved his money and his possessions more than he loved God. He had the wrong attitude towards his wealth. He was guilty of covetousness because he did not want to share with others - the poor and needy in particular - and he was guilty of idolatry because he put his money before God (Colossians 3:5). He had, in fact, broken many of the Ten Commandments, and to break one is to fall short of God's standard. He realised he could do nothing to gain eternal life, and that was a real blow to his pride. His wealth gave him no status with God. At that point he should have cried like the tax collector in Luke 18:13: *"God, have mercy on me a sinner."* Then he would have been given eternal life

as a gift from God, but he did not do so. It is at this critical point that Jesus, looking at this sad rich ruler as he went away, spoke to his disciples (Mark 10:32) and introduced the parable.

2) The Parable (Luke 18:24-25)

“Jesus looked at him and said, ‘How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God! Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.’”

3) The Meaning

a) An impossibility

What Jesus described in this parable was an impossibility. A camel was the largest animal in the land. The eye of a needle was a very small hole indeed. In other words, humanly speaking, there is no way at all for a camel to go through the eye of a needle. You may desire it, think that if it happened it would be sensational, or even go to a lot of trouble and engage the help of others in the venture, but such a task is completely impossible. It is too difficult.

This lesson is so obvious that we may well ask why Jesus used something so unmistakable? Part of the reason is that in spiritual matters we are so slow to see the obvious, especially when it comes to obtaining eternal life. This is because sin blinds our spiritual faculties, and human pride in particular makes us think we can contribute something towards our salvation. But the truth is that we cannot contribute anything towards our salvation. Jesus,

therefore, put it in such a striking way so that we would appreciate the lesson clearly.

b) An application

In this instance the application was to those who have riches. It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God! Jesus was revealing what enormous power possessions and wealth can have over their owners. Riches can prevent people from becoming followers of the Lord Jesus Christ. Wealth can make people feel completely secure and in control of their own destinies. It can, therefore, make them feel either that they have no need of God at all, or that they are so important God would automatically want them to be in his kingdom because they are wealthy. In other words, because they can make some contribution, that will gain them eternal life. All of this blinds them to their need of a Saviour, of their need to repent of their sin, of their need of God’s mercy. But God requires our absolute dependence on him alone, and that we seek his mercy through the Lord Jesus Christ. God has to save and give eternal life, or eternal life is impossible to gain.

c) A question answered

The disciples asked (Luke 18:26): *“Who then can be saved?”* They reasoned that if the rich are not acceptable then what hope does anyone else have? The truth that men are absolutely unable to save themselves or do something towards their salvation had sunk into their hearts and they

had really understood it. The lesson is simple but essential, **WE CANNOT SAVE OURSELVES!**

However, that does not mean no one can be saved, and Jesus assured them of that in verse 27: *“What is impossible with men is possible with God.”* God’s love and power are so great that he can save even the worst of sinners. Indeed, in the matter of salvation God has to do the work or no one will ever be saved. Wonderfully, God is gracious, and delights to show mercy to all who seek him for it. This is why he sent the Lord Jesus into the world to die for the salvation of a multitude of sinners. This was God’s work; he did it, not men.

d) An assurance given

Peter then declared that he and the rest of the disciples had left all to follow Jesus (Luke 18:28). The miracle of God’s grace had indeed taken place in their hearts! God had enabled them to put Jesus first before anything and anyone else, even their families. They had followed Jesus without any desire for reward.

Jesus reassured the whole group that they would not lose out as the rich young ruler had thought he would if he followed Jesus. In Luke 18:29-30 Jesus said, *“I tell you the truth, no-one who has left home or wife or brothers or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God will fail to receive many times as much in this age, and in the age to come, eternal life.”* He assured them that they would receive much more blessing than anything they had given up. The Lord would bless them even before the final

judgment. Already they had received his love poured into their hearts by the Holy Spirit, his forgiveness, his peace and his joy in believing. They would also have new spiritual relatives, the people of God worldwide. And the joys of heaven that last for eternity awaited them. And this was all because Jesus had loved them and was going to die for them on the cross.

How aptly this agrees with Paul’s statement about the Lord Jesus Christ in 2 Corinthians 8:9: *“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.”* He gave up all to give us everything! And because eternal life is his gift, it cannot be earned or bought, but in faith must be simply received.

Have you received it?

Chapter 7 Luke 19:11-27: The parable of the ten minas or pounds

1) The Setting

The earlier verses of this chapter from verse 1 to verse 10 records the conversion of the tax collector named Zacchaeus. This man is well known because he was small in stature and so climbed a tree in order to see Jesus as he passed by, because the crowds around Jesus were so large. Jesus stopped at the tree, called Zacchaeus by name, and then went for a meal in his home.

We have seen before the importance of hospitality in the Middle East, and also how tax collectors in Israel at this time were despised as traitors, because they worked for the Romans, and were considered as dishonest because many of them overcharged those paying tax and became very rich on the proceeds. They were also known to be selfish individuals who cared very little about the poverty of others. It is not surprising then to read in Luke 19:7: *“All the people saw this and began to mutter, ‘He has gone to be the guest of a sinner.’”*

However, the outcome of this was that Zacchaeus became a changed man. He became a Christian believer, a follower of the Lord Jesus. Then Jesus made this statement about Zacchaeus and about his own ministry. Luke 19:9-10: *“Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.”*

It was while the people were listening to this (Luke 19:11) that he told them this parable, and Luke adds these introductory words, *“... because he was near Jerusalem and the people thought that the kingdom of God was going to appear at once.”* The conversion of Zacchaeus, and the fact that Jesus was approaching Jerusalem, led many of the people to believe that the Messiah would appear in great glory and power and set up his earthly kingdom, defeating all their enemies. It was the Passover season when the Jews remembered the great deliverance God gave them from Egypt during the days of Moses, and so it increased

this prevailing view that the kingdom would soon appear. But they had failed to grasp that the Lord’s kingdom is a spiritual kingdom, not of this world, and is seen in the hearts and lives of its citizens, the followers of Jesus - not in a political earthly kingdom (see Luke 17:21; John 18:36). This parable, then, was to correct that view, and to lay a great challenge before the people to recognise Jesus as the Messiah, whom they should receive and submit to as their King.

There were four great lessons he wanted the people to understand.

- i. The kingdom which Jesus proclaimed was not confined to one nation only, but would include people from all nations.
- ii. The final revelation of the kingdom of God in glory would not take place immediately, but when he returns to earth at the end of time.
- iii. All his followers are to serve the Lord faithfully until that time comes.
- iv. The full revelation of the kingdom of God will result, not as some earthly political kingdom in Jerusalem, but in the final judgment, when the followers of Jesus will be rewarded according to their faithfulness, ushering in the new heaven and new earth, and those who have refused to serve and follow him will be punished.

2) The Parable

Jesus said, *“A man of noble birth went to a distant country to have himself appointed king and then to return. So he called ten of his servants and gave them ten minas. ‘Put this money to work,’ he said, ‘until I come back.’*

“But his subjects hated him and sent a delegation after him to say, ‘We don’t want this man to be our king.’

“He was made king, however, and returned home. Then he sent for the servants to whom he had given the money, in order to find out what they had gained with it.

“The first one came and said, ‘Sir, your mina has earned ten more.’ ‘Well done, my good servant!’ his master replied. ‘Because you have been trustworthy in a very small matter, take charge of ten cities.’

“The second came and said, ‘Sir, your mina has earned five more.’

His master replied, ‘You take charge of five cities.’

“Then another servant came and said, ‘Sir, here is your mina; I have kept it laid away in a piece of cloth. I was afraid of you, because you are a hard man. You take out what you did not put in and reap what you did not sow.’

“His master replied, ‘I will judge you by your own words, you wicked servant! You knew, did you, that I am a hard man, taking out what I did not put in, and reaping what I did not sow? Why then didn’t you put my money on deposit, so that when I came back, I could have collected it with interest?’

“Then he said to those standing by, ‘Take his mina away from him and give it to the one who has ten minas.’

“‘Sir,’ they said, ‘he already has ten!’

“He replied, ‘I tell you that everyone who has, more will be given, but as for the one who has nothing, even what he has will be taken away. But those enemies of mine who did not want me to be a king over them - bring them here and kill them in front of me.’”

3) The Meaning

The master in the parable, who went into a distant country to obtain a kingdom (Luke 19:12), is a reference to the Lord Jesus himself. After he had suffered death on the cross and had risen from the grave he would ascend back to heaven. There, God the Father would reward him for his faithful work for the salvation of sinners accomplished on earth, by exalting him to sit at his right hand, enthroned in heaven - which is where he is now. There he would be given kingship and rule over the whole universe for the benefit of his church, the family of believers - which has now taken place. Philippians 2:8-11: Jesus *“... being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death - even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”* Ephesians 1:21-23: God has raised Jesus *“... far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over all things for the Church,*

which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.”

The mention of ‘*a distant country*’ indicated that a long time would pass before he came back. So this man called in ten of his servants and entrusted them with a particular task while he was away from them. He gave each of them a ‘mina’ or ‘pound’, as it is sometimes translated, which was about three months’ wages. He carefully instructed them (v13): “*Put this money to work until I come back.*” They all had the same amount, and they were all to do business with it. There were to be no exceptions.

So it is with those who have received the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, receiving from him forgiveness for their sins and eternal life. Having received that good news, Christian believers are to put it to good use. And we do this in several ways.

- i. By living lives that show we really have been saved from sin and, therefore, commend the gospel to others - personal godliness.
- ii. By using every opportunity we have to tell others about the Lord Jesus Christ so that they may benefit from it as well as ourselves.
- iii. By doing all we can to encourage others engaged in this work, by prayer, giving, and personal encouragement, especially for missionaries and ministers of the gospel.

An example of this is a Christian lady I heard about recently who has been housebound for four years through ill health, yet who is a real witness for Christ, because she talks about him to everyone who visits her at home, including her neighbours and doctor! The responsibility every follower of Jesus has is to do everything possible to further the spread of the gospel that others may be saved.

The ruler in the parable then left for the far country, but in verse 14 he receives a delegation from some of his subjects who rebelled against his rule and did not want him to be their king. Sadly, this is a picture of the unbelieving Jews of Jesus’ day who soon crucified him, and of many in our world today who, having heard of the claims of Christ, refuse to submit their lives to him and honour him as their king! They persist in their sin and rebellion against him.

In the parable the ruler achieves his great aim (v15), and is crowned king, even though there were those who resisted him - they failed, he succeeded. What a lovely picture of the irresistible purposes of the Lord Jesus Christ. He may be opposed, but all such opposition will fail. Though his enemies crucified him, he rose from the dead and ascended to the throne of heaven, and now reigns as king.

Then the king returned and summoned the ten servants to give account of how they had used the money given to them. In the same way the Lord Jesus will return to earth one day, and will require all his followers to give account of the way they have lived and used the opportunities and

gifts they had to spread the gospel. The first two servants came and humbly reported that the money he had given them had gained more - ten times and five times (Luke 19:16&18). In response their king rewarded them in direct proportion to the profit each made. They were each entrusted with greater opportunities to serve the king, one having control over ten cities and the other over five. It will be like this when Jesus returns. All who have served him faithfully will be rewarded according to their faithfulness with further opportunities to serve him in the new heaven and earth that he will bring in.

Note that these faithful servants were faithful in (v17) '*a very small matter*', but their reward is considerably greater. Some may think that to have further responsibility is not much of a reward, but we need to remember that in the new heaven and earth, which is the home of righteousness (2 Peter 3:13), there will be no burden in serving Christ but all will be pure joy. The faithful followers of the Lord Jesus Christ now, will be made like him then (Philippians 3:20-21; Romans 8:29-30) - we shall be perfect! There will be no sin there to spoil it, and there will be none of the weaknesses and failings we are so conscious of now (Revelation 21:1-5; 21:27; 22:1-5). To serve him there will be the highest joy imaginable - it will be glory. All who have been faithful in devoting their lives to pleasing Christ and making him known - however small that work may appear in our eyes - will be rewarded a thousand fold. What a marvellous encouragement to live actively for Jesus and serve him now, especially when the

going is hard and we are opposed or even persecuted. In the end the Lord will honour all who have honoured him.

We have used the term 'reward', but strictly speaking it is a reward of grace, for the gospel we have to share was given to us. The ability to apply it to our own lives was given to us by the Holy Spirit. The opportunities to tell others about Jesus were given to us. The burden to pray and the ability to give to the work of the gospel again came to us from the gracious hand of God. Any conversions that may have resulted from our labours were the Lord's doing, and not ours. In short, from beginning to end we have to say it was all the Lord's work, and yet in his grace he rewards his children for what he has done in them and through them! Remarkable! Far above anything we have deserved!

But one servant came to his master (Luke 19:20f) who had done nothing with the money given to him. Further, he unjustly criticised his master (Luke 19:21), accusing him of being hard, and exploiting his servants by expecting them to give him something for nothing! How wrong he was, because his master did not reap where he did not sow, for it was the master who gave him the money in the first place! His master was not unfair nor austere. This man had wicked and deceitful views of the king. What he was doing, in effect, was to blame his master for his own laziness and unfaithfulness! Hence his master judges him according to his own words (Luke 19:22-24). The very least he could have done was to deposit it at the bank so it

could gain interest, but he refused and, therefore, it was taken from him.

Some have called this man a believer, but really his attitude and response indicated that his heart was no different from those who in verse 14 declared they did not want him as their king. He did not have a changed heart, he had no love for his master, and he refused to use his life in his master's service. That he is called a servant is a timely warning that many people call themselves Christians but their behaviour shows quite clearly that they have no love for the Lord Jesus Christ at all. This should cause us all to search our hearts to ensure that we are not false or counterfeit Christians, but genuinely do follow Christ.

What this man had was taken from him and given to the one who had the ten minas - much to the surprise of others (Luke 19:24-26). This is a further reminder that all who serve Christ faithfully will be blessed more and more (cf. John 1:16).

The final stage in the parable is most solemn (Luke 19:27). The king's enemies were punished for their rebellion and hatred of him! They were not punished for things of which they were not guilty, but neither did one of those guilty ones escape judgment. This is one of the most serious passages in all the Bible, because here Jesus is indicating the final punishment of all who fail to follow and serve him. Their rebellion and hostility will not be overlooked,

and they will perish forever from his presence (2 Thessalonians 1:8-10). The reason for this dreadful end is they have rejected the Saviour whose heart is so full of love and tenderness towards all sinners who turn to him for mercy. That love was so great that he willingly went to the cross for them, bleeding and dying in that appalling way to bring forgiveness of sins to sinful people. Such rejection of the Lord Jesus Christ is great sin and indicates great unbelief, and great unbelief will reap its proportionate punishment.

4) Application

The challenge of this parable can be summed up in these words of Paul. Galatians 6:7-10: *“Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.”*

Therefore, let us:

- i. ensure we really do follow Christ and know the transforming power of his love in our hearts,
- ii. live faithfully so that we influence the spread of the gospel in the world,

- iii. use every opportunity we have to tell others about the Lord Jesus Christ and how he is able to save sinners from their sin.

At times this may be very difficult, but remember that a glorious reward awaits us, a reward of grace that the Lord Jesus Christ will give to all who long for his appearing (2 Timothy 4:8).

Chapter 8 Luke 20:9-19: The parable of the tenants

1) Setting

The time was drawing near when Jesus would be crucified, and so it was the period when opposition to him was growing. In the forefront of that hostility were the religious leaders who tried every way possible either to discredit Jesus or find a reason to have him arrested.

A day or two previously Jesus had overturned the tables of those buying and selling in the Temple courts in Jerusalem (Luke 19:45-48), condemning the people with the words of Luke 19:46: *“It is written, ‘My house will be a house of prayer’; but you have made it a den of robbers.”* Over the next few days Jesus continued to teach the people in the temple. Then we read in Luke 19:47-48: *“But the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the leaders among the people were trying to kill him. Yet they could not find a way to do it, because all the people hung on his words.”* Tragically, instead of receiving the teaching Jesus was giving, these leaders continued to reject him, even though

he was the Son of God, the Saviour of the world. They refused to humble themselves and acknowledge they were sinners who were in great need of God’s forgiveness.

It was as Jesus was teaching that they came to question by what authority he was exercising his ministry (Luke 20:1-2). In reply, Jesus asked them a question in turn, saying that if they would answer his question, he would answer theirs. In Luke 20:3-8 Jesus said, *“John’s baptism - was it from heaven, or from men?”* They discussed it among themselves and said, *“If we say, ‘From heaven’, he will ask, ‘Why didn’t you believe him?’ But if we say, ‘From men’, all the people will stone us, because they are persuaded that John was a prophet.”* So they answered, *“We don’t know where it was from.”* Jesus said, *“Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.”* It was evident that they were continuing in their rebellion against him and were refusing to accept Jesus as their Lord and Saviour. It was in the Temple, with this hostile background, that Jesus proceeded to tell the parable of the tenants to the people, in the hearing of these opponents.

2) The Parable

Jesus said, *“A man planted a vineyard, rented it to some farmers and went away for a long time. At harvest time he sent a servant to the tenants so they would give him some of the fruit of the vineyard. But the tenants beat him and sent him away empty-handed. He sent another servant, but that one also they beat and treated shamefully and sent*

away empty-handed. He sent still a third, and they wounded him and threw him out.

“Then the owner of the vineyard said, ‘What shall I do? I will send my son, whom I love; perhaps they will respect him.’

“But when the tenants saw him, they talked the matter over. ‘This is the heir,’ they said, ‘Let’s kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.’ So they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.

“What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them? He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others.

“When the people heard this, they said, ‘May this never be!’

“Jesus looked directly at them and asked, ‘Then what is the meaning of that which is written: ‘The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone’?

Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed.

“The teachers of the law and the chief priests looked for a way to arrest him immediately, because they knew he had spoken this parable against them. But they were afraid of the people.”

3) The Meaning

a. Background information

An important piece of background information to this parable is the way the Old Testament used the symbol of a vineyard to describe the people of God. On a number of

occasions the nation of Israel was called the Lord’s vineyard (Isaiah 5:7), which he had planted (Psalm 80:8f; Jeremiah 2:21), and cared for, expecting it to produce good fruit. Its failure to do this in the past had frequently been a cause of sorrow for the Lord and brought judgment upon the people (see Isaiah 3:13-15, 5:1-7; Jeremiah 12:10; Ezekiel 17, 19:10-14; Hosea 10:1-2; Micah 7:1f). As the Lord’s vineyard, the people of Israel enjoyed special privileges in their relationship to God. He was their God, they were his chosen people. And it was considered that this relationship would never be broken. So immediately Jesus referred to a vineyard in this parable the hearts of his listeners would have realised he was talking about them.

As to the parable itself, the scene that Jesus pictured was a common enough occurrence in the Middle East at this time. There were many landowners who had planted huge vineyards which had been placed in the care of local tenants. Often these owners were foreigners who were absent for long periods of time. The tenants were expected to look after the vines and at the time of harvest to give a certain portion of the produce to the landowner. So again we find Jesus using familiar subjects to teach spiritual lessons.

b. The rejected servants

The meaning of the parable is not too difficult to understand. The owner of the vineyard was God himself. The vineyard symbolised the people of Israel, and the tenants were their spiritual leaders in particular. This

becomes clear from Luke 20:19: *“The teachers of the law and the chief priests looked for a way to arrest him immediately, because they knew he had spoken this parable against them.”*

At the harvest time the owner of the vineyard sent a servant to collect his share of the crop, but the tenants ill-treated him, and sent him away with nothing (Luke 20:10). The owner sent another servant whom they treated in an even worse manner, and a third who returned home wounded. Evidently these tenants were very rebellious and wicked individuals. All of this was a picture of how God had looked for a spiritual harvest from the people of Israel, and had repeatedly sent his servants the prophets to them in former times. These servants had urged the people to produce spiritual fruit - humble repentance, dependence on the Lord, and righteousness. Sadly, these servants of God had been rejected. In actual fact God had sent his servants the prophets to them on many more than three occasions, such was his patience and grace. However they had remained hard-hearted and continued to reject them, which meant they were actually rejecting God and his message through his prophets. Nehemiah gives a summary of this in Nehemiah 9:26 as Nehemiah confesses the sins of the nation to the Lord, *“But they were disobedient (i.e. the nation as a whole) and rebelled against you; they put your law behind their backs. They killed your prophets, who had admonished them in order to turn them back to you; they committed awful blasphemies.”* (See also

Jeremiah 7:25-26, 25:4-7; Matthew 23:34; Acts 7:52; Hebrews 11:36f.)

c. The rejected Son

Such was the owner’s desire for the right response from his tenants that he did not send an army to destroy them, though by that time they deserved it. Instead he did something quite remarkable (Luke 20:13). He sent his very own son, the son that he loved dearly. His expectation was that surely they would listen to him with due respect and love. He expected them to welcome his son, and respond to him in the right way.

What an amazing act of love for the owner to go so far to secure the required response from his tenants. Yet this was precisely what God the Father did in sending his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, not only into the world but to Israel as a nation in particular. God in heaven expected them to receive and follow Jesus and to turn from their sinful ways. This was why Jesus came, to show us the way back to God (John 3:16; 14:6).

But as the parable continues we discover in Luke 20:14-15 that the tenants did not respect the owner’s son at all! Instead, they plotted to kill him because he was the heir to the estate. Their intention was to keep the vineyard for themselves. (NB. They must have assumed that his father had died, hence making him the new owner of the vineyard. If he died and left no successors there were certain circumstances in which the ownership of the

vineyard could then transfer to the occupants - the tenants in this case.) So when the well-loved son of the owner arrived, they threw him out and killed him. This was the most wicked act imaginable. This was rebellion of the worst kind. This was the deepest, darkest evil possible. It is so remarkable in this part of the parable that Jesus knew this was what they were going to do to him! (See John 1:11; Mark 15:12-13; Acts 2:23.) He knew they would kill him and, remember, it was the spiritual leaders of the people who were the very ones who called for his crucifixion! (See Mark 14:53-65; Matt 26:63-67; Luke 23:13-18.)

It is quite remarkable that though Jesus knew this would happen to him he did not run away from the cross nor his enemies. This shows us how far he was prepared to go in his obedience to his Father's will and his infinite love for sinners. God sent him into the world to pay the penalty the sins of his people deserved! He died in the place of others. He suffered the Father's wrath and judgment for sins that were not his own! What agony he must have suffered, and what love he displayed in doing this for all who will believe in him.

d. The awful judgment

At this point in the parable Jesus solemnly declared (Luke 20:15b-16a), *"What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them? He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others."* Their wicked actions would reap their just reward; judgment would fall. Almighty God would call them to account with dreadful consequences.

Their death reminds us that the wages of sin is death (Romans 3:23). They would also lose the vineyard. In other words, the kingdom would be given to others!

At this prospect even the crowd was horrified and cried in verse 16, *"May this never be!"* Yet this is precisely what happened. The leadership of the people of God was taken from the Jewish rulers and given first to the Apostles and now to the elders of his churches around the world. The gospel was given to the Gentiles, and so the people of God, his vineyard today, are all who believe in Jesus, from whatever nation, and includes people from all over the world.

To reject the Lord Jesus Christ is a great sin and brings solemn judgment on all who refuse to believe in and follow him.

To make this point all the more compelling Jesus looked directly at them and quoted from Psalm 118:22: *"The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone."* The capstone was literally 'the head of the corner' or the chief stone of a building from which all the other stones took their position. It was usually large and heavy. Jesus was saying that this stone referred to him. In the building of the spiritual house, the church of God, all who belong must be built on the Lord Jesus Christ. (See Acts 4:8-12; 1 Corinthians 3:11; Ephesians.2: 19-22.)

Jesus went on to say in verse 18, *“Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed.”* Those who, in opposition and unbelief, strike themselves against the Lord Jesus will be severely hurt, and if they remain rebellious, when the Day of Judgment comes this stone will fall on them and they will be totally destroyed. Those who reject Jesus as the Messiah, the promised Saviour, whom God the Father sent into the world, will be doomed.

Jesus was solemnly, yet also we must say lovingly, warning the people in general and the leaders in particular what would happen to them if they persisted in turning their backs on him. This was a loving warning because it gave them time to reconsider and to repent before it was too late. That did not make the warning any the less real and the assured judgment less severe, but it gave them one further opportunity to reconsider their sinful ways and seek God before it was too late. Peter describes it like this in 2 Peter 3:9-10: *“The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.”*

It was so tragic that even after hearing Jesus give this clear description of them and this most solemn warning, the leaders did not change at all. They knew Jesus had talked

about them (Luke 20:19), but they refused to repent, continued in their rebellion and rejection of him, and began to plot how they might arrest him, which would eventually lead to his death, the very thing he had declared in the parable! It was as if they said they did not care what would happen to them, such was the hardness of their hearts.

4) Application

The great lesson of this parable is that we are not to reject the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the only Saviour of sinners. He is the one the Father has sent into the world. To reject him is to reject God, and this will bring dreadful judgment upon all who turn away from him.

To encourage us to do the right thing, we read these words in John 1:12, *“Yet to all who received him (ie. Jesus), to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God...”* We must turn from our sins and place our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ if we are to be saved.

Have you received him yet?

Chapter 9 Luke 21:29-31: The parable of the fig tree.

1) The Setting

Immediately before this parable Jesus had been instructing his disciples about two coming events. Some of the disciples had spoken to Jesus about the beautiful stones in

the Temple in Jerusalem, but Jesus prophesied that a time would come when none of these stones would remain on another (Luke 21:5-6). The temple would be destroyed. The disciples wanted to know when this would take place and what would be the sign they should look for (v7). They thought that the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the world would occur at the same time. (See also Matthew 24:3.) They were mistaken about this, therefore, Jesus showed them that the destruction of Jerusalem would take place a long time before the end of the world, which would occur when he would return in glory to the earth. They actually asked for one sign (v7), but as the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the world are two separate events, Jesus actually gave them two signs. In verse 20 the sign when Jerusalem would be destroyed was that armies would surround the city. This referred to the year AD 70. The sign of the end of the world is his return in glory (v27). There would be men who would falsely claim to be Jesus (v8). Jesus' disciples were not to follow them. Also there would be wars and revolutions (v9), but Jesus said, "... *the end will not come right away.*" It was, and still is, in the future.

Jesus then gave instructions about the events that would precede the destruction of Jerusalem in v10ff.

v10 There would be international hostility, and we know the Jews and the Romans broke into war in AD 66.

- v11 There would be earthquakes, famines and pestilences and fearful events
- in AD 61 there was a severe earthquake in Phrygia
 - in AD 63 the volcano Vesuvius erupted destroying Pompeii
 - famines occurred during the reigns of Claudius and Nero
 - for a year a comet appeared over Jerusalem looking like a sword.
- vv12-15 Before all this they would face persecution, giving them opportunities to witness about Christ to their persecutors
- Jesus would give them the words to say (v12-16)
- NB. We have examples of this in the book of Acts.
- vv16-17 Even members of their own families would turn against them because they followed Jesus, and they would be hated
- around AD 64 many Christian believers were tortured to death in Rome under the instructions of Nero the emperor.
- v18 But Jesus' followers would not perish in such times, because God would keep them and bring them to heaven
- though some of them would be killed they would not be harmed.
- v19 By remaining faithful to Jesus, his followers would gain life.

The destruction of the Temple took place in AD 70 when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem, slaughtering thousands of Jews. The sign that the Temple was soon to be destroyed was that they would see the armies surrounding Jerusalem (Luke 21:20). Jesus then graphically depicted the suffering that would take place in fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies when Jerusalem and its inhabitants would be destroyed (vv21-24). Jerusalem would be trampled on by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.

All this took place exactly as Jesus declared, and to this day the Temple site in Jerusalem is a Muslim not a Jewish sanctuary. These words of Jesus were fulfilled in their terrible detail. The Jewish historian Josephus tells us over a million people died and 97 thousand were taken as prisoners of war.

The end of the world, which would come much later than the destruction of Jerusalem, would take place when Jesus returned to earth (vv25-28). Linking verse 25 with Matthew 24:29, there will be great darkness with the sun and moon ceasing to shine and great upheaval in the heavens. Jesus said that on earth the nations will be filled with fear as the sea roars and the whole of the heavens is shaken (vv25-26). Catastrophic events will occur, resulting in the new heaven and the new earth (2 Peter 3:10-13). But most important of all, the Lord Jesus Christ himself will return. Luke 21:27: *“At that time they will see*

the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory” (i.e. Jesus - see Daniel 7:13). This is the last, the final sign that will indicate the end of the world has come.

While this event will bring great fear on the nations it will bring great blessing on Jesus' followers, Christian believers. Luke 21:28: *“When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”* Jesus urged his followers not to be discouraged or downcast as they see these events of history unfold, but rather to be filled with joyful anticipation that their final salvation is about to be revealed.

That word *‘redemption’* was used of slaves who were bought and sold in the ancient markets. On rare occasions someone might buy a slave then set him free. The price of this release was called the redemption money. Before becoming followers of Jesus, Christian believers were slaves to sin and unable to get free from it, but Jesus came and paid the redemption price, giving his own life, shedding his precious blood, that all who trust in him may be set free from sins penalty and power and eventual presence. (See Ephesians 1:7f; Romans 3:24; Titus 2:11-14; John 8:36.) At conversion the Christian believer becomes aware that he or she has been freed from the penalty their sin deserved. They experience release from the power of sin increasingly as they grow in grace and the knowledge of the Lord, but they do not enjoy deliverance from the presence of sin, either in themselves or in the

world around. But when Jesus comes again they will enjoy that final redemption even from the presence of sin.

- i. They will be transformed and become like Jesus so that sin will never again enter their lives. (See Philippians 3:20-21; 1 John 3:1-3.)
- ii. There will be a new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness reigns and all sin is excluded. (See 2 Peter 3:13; Revelation 21:27.)

This is the sure and certain hope that every true believer has, and is able to look forward to with great joy. We shall be with Christ and all the people of God forever.

It is at this precise point that Jesus told the parable of the fig tree.

2) The Parable

Jesus told them this parable: *“Look at the fig-tree and all the trees. When they sprout leaves, you can see for yourselves and know that summer is near. Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that the kingdom of God is near.”*

3) The Meaning

The lesson is simple. When the sap begins to rise in the fig tree (this tree comes into leaf a little later than many other trees), the tender young branches soon begin to put forth their leaves. A similar thing happens to the other

trees as well. This is a clear and unmistakable sign that spring has come and the summer period is very close.

In a similar way, when we see the signs that Jesus has just described in Luke 21:25 onwards, then we can look forward with great certainty that the kingdom of God is near. Jesus was referring to the kingdom in its final form, where the Lord Jesus will reign forever and ever in the new heaven and new earth. From there Satan and sin and death will be banished forever and never trouble us again. But more importantly, the Lord Jesus himself will be at the centre of all that takes place for the rest of eternity. Then we shall see the fulfilment of all that the apostle John wrote about in these passages in the book of Revelation.

Revelation 21:1-4: *“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.’”*

Revelation 21:22-27: *“I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb (ie. Jesus)*

are its temple. The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendour into it. On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there. The glory and honour of the nations will be brought into it. Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life."

Revelation 22:3-5: *"No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever."*

It was not surprising that the prospect of these glorious things caused John to close the book of Revelation with the words (Revelation 22:20-21), *"Amen. Come Lord Jesus. The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people. Amen."* And this glory awaits all true Christian believers.

Returning to Luke 21, Jesus said in verse 32, *"I tell you the truth, this generation (or race) will certainly not pass away until these things happen."* These words probably mean that the Jewish people will remain on the earth until the end of time. (See where 'generation' refers to the Jews

in Deuteronomy 32:5 & 20; Psalm 78:8; and Psalm 12:7 where it is translated 'people'.)

Then Jesus added that his words would never pass away (v33). All that he had declared would come to pass; nothing would be omitted. It is this which gives such comfort to Christian believers, especially when we face persecution. We know it will not last forever, but that Jesus will keep us safe and eventually bring us into his eternal kingdom. This is a real source of encouragement to our faith.

4) Application

Jesus closed this discourse with a timely word of application (vv34-36). If we want to be ready for when he comes, and to face that time, not with fear as will happen to many, but with confidence, then we need to take care over our lives now. We are to give careful attention to ourselves. We shall then avoid the dangers that grip and burden so many. Jesus mentioned three things. Firstly, dissipation, which is selfish and excessive indulgence in worldly pleasures. Secondly, drunkenness, which means being under the degrading influence of alcohol with all its attending miseries. Then thirdly, the anxieties of life, giving in to worry about the cares of daily living. These things control many, but they are not to control the people of God, the followers of Jesus. Those who are weighed down by these things will be unprepared for that final day and the judgment that comes with it. It will overtake them like a trap that suddenly springs closed on its victim (v34).

No one will escape or avoid that last day. It will affect the whole world (v35), and will finally and forever determine the final and eternal fate of every individual. Therefore we are to guard our hearts from sin and refuse to allow it to enter our hearts, fighting against it constantly.

To be able to stand against such temptations we must not lean on our own strength but upon the Lord's, by giving time to fervent prayer (v36). Only then will we be able to stand before the Lord Jesus with confidence, and not shrink away from him with shame into everlasting wretchedness. Only those who truly receive and follow the Lord Jesus Christ will be ready for when he returns.

Will you be ready?

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