

CERTAINTY.



CERTAINTY.

**THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST
ACCORDING TO LUKE**

**Sermon Series Guide & Small Group Study
Advent 2021 / Spring 2022 / Fall 2022 / Spring 2023**

Certainty: The Gospel of Jesus Christ According to Luke

Written by David Holcomb

© 2021 River Oaks Community Church

1855 Lewisville-Clemmons Road

Clemmons, NC 27012

riveroakschurch.org

TABLE OF CONTENTS



Forward	i
Introduction	iii
The Gospels According To ... (chart)	ix
<u>Part One - Advent of the Savior</u>	
Mary, Do Not Be Afraid (Luke 1:26-38)	2
The Magnificat Song of Praise (Luke 1:39-56)	8
Birth of the Baptizer (Luke 1:67-80)	14
O Little Town, O Blessed Salvation (Luke 2:1-7, 22-40)	20
For Unto You Is Born (Luke 2:8-21)	26
<u>Part Two - Ministry of the Savior</u>	
Preparing the Way (Luke 3:1-22)	34
Defeating Temptation (Luke 4:1-13)	40
The Ministry of Jesus Begins (Luke 4:14-30)	46
Calling the First Followers (Luke 5:1-11, 27-32, 6:12-16)	52
Only God Can Heal and Forgive (Luke 5:12-26)	58
Lord of the Sabbath (Luke 6:1-11)	64
The Great Sermon - Part 1 (Luke 6:17-36)	70
The Great Sermon - Part 2 (Luke 6:37-49)	76
Compassion For All (Luke 7:1-17)	82
Grace to Go in Peace (Luke 7:36-50)	88
Released from Bondage, Sent with a Mission (Luke 8:26-39)	94
The Glory of Jesus Revealed (Luke 9:28-48)	100
The Harvest is Plentiful (Luke 10:1-20)	106
Who Is My Neighbor? (Luke 10:25-37)	112

TABLE OF CONTENTS

(CONTINUED)



Part Three - Journey of the Savior

Lord, Teach Us to Pray (Luke 11:1-13)	120
Woe to the Hypocrites (Luke 11:37-12:3)	126
Wealth and Worry (Luke 12:13-34)	132
People, Get Ready (Luke 12:35-48)	138
Use the Narrow Door (Luke 13:1-9, 22-35)	144
Table Manners and a Banquet Invitation (Luke 14:7-24)	150
The Cost of Discipleship (Luke 14:25-35)	156
Lost and Found (Luke 15)	162
Kingdom Money Management (Luke 16:1-31)	168
Faithful and Grateful (Luke 17:1-19)	174

Part Four - Passion of the Savior

Approaching God (Luke 18:1-17)	182
Rich Man, Small Man (Luke 18:18-30, 19:1-10)	188
The Return on Ten Minas (Luke 19:11-27)	194
The Authority of Jesus is Challenged (Luke 20)	200
A Warning to Watch Out (Luke 21)	206
The Lord's Supper at Passover (Luke 22:7-23)	212
Betrayal and Denial (Luke 22:31-62)	218
On Trial (Luke 23:1-25)	224
Crucified and Buried (Luke 23:26-56)	230
An Empty Tomb (Luke 24)	236
The Life of Jesus (map)	243
Prayer Journal	244
Sources Consulted	250

Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the Word have delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.”

LUKE 1:1-4

T **OF THE**
R **LORD**
S **IS UPON**
THE M E

FORWARD

Scripture is clear about the great goal of our spiritual growth: that we be conformed to the likeness of Jesus Christ. (Romans 8:29) In order for that to happen, we must first know Jesus as Savior and Lord. But we must also know about him – his teachings, his example, and his priorities. In the Gospel of Luke, we learn Jesus’ ways, we see his heart, and we are challenged by his teaching.

Luke is particularly rich in its presentation of God’s love and mercy through Jesus. Whether healing a child, delivering a demonized man, or forgiving a woman who was scorned by society, Jesus demonstrates the compassion of a caring God. Jesus confronts our tendency to self-righteous judgmentalism through his teaching and example.

My hope is that our study of Luke will change us – that we will be shaped toward greater Christlikeness, as individuals, and as a church. May the Holy Spirit so shape us through the inspired words of Luke that we boldly take God’s love and truth into our own community and world!

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

Luke 4:18-19

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "David Beaty". The script is fluid and cursive, with the first name "David" and last name "Beaty" clearly distinguishable.

Pastor David Beaty

LUKE

INTRODUCTION

LUKE, the author of the Gospel of Jesus Christ bearing his name (one of four such inspired accounts of the life and ministry of Jesus within God's Word), is mentioned in several New Testament passages.

One of the most notable references is from the Apostle Paul's letter to the Colossians, where he writes of "*our dear friend Luke, the doctor*" (Colossians 4:14). This straightforward and personal description, coupled with the frequent use of "*we*" throughout the book of Acts (which Luke also penned), strongly implies Luke was a close companion of the Apostle Paul, accompanying him in travel and providing necessary assistance. In fact, it is reasonable to assume that Luke was likely the first medical missionary of the Christian faith, which could explain the high profile he gives to the healing ministry of Jesus.

Early church leaders and historians (e.g., Jerome and Eusebius), identify Luke as a native of Antioch, explaining the emphasis on Antioch in Acts. It is also the consensus that Luke was of Gentile descent, making him the only known Gentile author of any book of the Bible. This is even more remarkable when we consider that Luke is responsible for the greatest number of words in the New Testament, and behind only Moses and Ezra in all the Bible.

Within our study, this background into the life of the author is critical for us to keep in mind. It will be key to our discovery of Jesus as **Servant**, giving significance to those most often overlooked in society. It will be key to our understanding of Jesus as **Great Physician**, ministering to those most aware of their need. And it will be key to our observance of what is truly at the heart of this book, the mission of Jesus – *to seek and to save* (Luke 19:10) – a mission for which all followers of Jesus, the **Savior**, are called to join.

As a result of Luke's profession and personality, the style of his Gospel account is scholarly, meticulous in detail, filled with wonderful context and historical references. However, within the details, the reader also discovers that Luke, much like what is emphasized of Jesus, is ultimately a "people person."

It is in the final letter written by the Apostle Paul, where we clearly observe Luke's propensity to care for and serve others. Luke had stood by Paul in missionary travel, in difficult trials, and in challenging situations, however now Paul sits in a Roman prison, ready to be "*poured out as a drink offering*," (a reference to his imminent death), and he writes to Timothy:

"Do your best to come to me soon. For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica. Crescans has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia. And Luke alone is with me."

- 2 Timothy 4:9-11

Throughout this orderly account, the beloved physician Luke, the people person with a heart for the hurting, marvels at how the Almighty God could also be a people person. God, moved by love for us, would come to dwell with us, walk with us, suffer, and die for us. Never distant nor uncaring. God with us, came down from on high to a fallen world to seek those who were lost and reconcile them to the Father. Truly, according to Luke, Jesus is the Son of Man, God in flesh, fully divine, and fully human.

From the humble birth in a Bethlehem manger, to the Christ child matching wits with the Temple leaders, to the culmination of a ministry for which perfect righteousness was made available to sinners by way of the life, death, and resurrection of our Savior, Luke highlights the humanity God chose to use as a vehicle to confront the darkness of this world with the light of His Kingdom. And God chose Luke to author this aspect of His One-Story narrative.

*"Throughout Luke's Gospel, we discover why a mere man should become the object of our faith, hope, and worship: His confrontation of evil. His welcoming of sinners. His obedience to the Father. His willingness to suffer on our behalf. His conquest over death. And His open invitation to His adopted brothers and sisters to become a new race of humanity. Luke painstakingly presents Jesus as human, but one who is extraordinary, not only because of his divinity, but also because of his character."**

- Charles R. Swindoll

* Charles R. Swindoll, Living Insights New Testament Commentary: Luke (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishing, 2017) 1.

CERTAINTY: THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST ACCORDING TO LUKE

The title selected for this study is one we are prayerful will accomplish dual objectives throughout our time in this series.

One objective is our desire for all of us to grow in the knowledge of God's Word and the distinctive characteristics of its sixty-six divinely inspired books. When we look for these unique elements in Luke, we don't have to look very hard. Luke gifts the reader a wonderful statement of purpose in his introduction. We read:

"Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the Word have delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught."

– Luke 1:1-4

As if it were the thesis statement of a dissertation paper, Luke opens with an explanation for what we are about to read. This is distinct to Luke in that he goes to great lengths to provide us with a backdrop of how this all came together. Luke first acknowledges that others had taken the time to give a narrative account of the life and ministry of Jesus.

In the Bible, there are the accounts written by Matthew, Mark, and John, however, we don't often consider there were "many" other written accounts in the 1st century that had been completed and passed along. The Gospels were not written in a vacuum amongst a few friends and associates.

In addition to the many written reports, Luke as a companion of Paul, and likely acquaintance of the first followers of Jesus, compiled and compared many eyewitness reports as well. Like no other account, Luke's declares upfront, *"I am not an eyewitness, but I am a historian, and as a historian, I have checked many sources, many documents, and many spoken testimonies. You can be certain of what follows."*

Further, having conducted the research over an extended period, Luke is convinced of his calling to provide an *orderly account* (meticulous detail and attention to chronology, which was unusual in this time), so that Theophilus, and all who would read, could be certain of what is faithfully preached, taught, and read about Jesus Christ. Luke writes with this passion for strengthening our faith and assuring us of the truth of the Gospel. So, **Certainty** is a nod to the purpose and theme of Luke.

The second and more significant objective in arriving at this title is that it is our prayer for each of us to gain greater confidence, more complete assurance, and a richer, deeper certainty of the Gospel truth during our study of Luke.

We pray that many will be introduced to Jesus and gain Gospel certainty for the first time. We pray that many with troubling curiosities will find answers in Gospel certainty that alleviate doubt. We pray that many who currently walk in the assurance of Gospel certainty will be moved to share the way to that very same certainty in personal service and evangelism.

Wherever you may be in relation to trusting the Gospel truth of all that you have heard and read, Luke's desire was for your certainty in these matters. Please know that we share in that desire for you as well.

AS YOU BEGIN

One of the great joys of writing this guide has been the creation of weekly units and how well the Gospel accounts truly lend themselves to discussion and reflection. The narrative style of Luke covers many well-known passages, parables, miracles, sermons, and more, in a highly ordered and chronological manner, which is unique to first-century writing.

As you open to the weekly unit, you will discover the key verse for the week's passage. You will also find a small section titled *Historical Insight*. The intent is to recognize the methodology of Luke by introducing us to a key person(s), place, or event within that week's passage. The Gospels are historical narratives, and we should become acquainted with more of the historical tapestry within the pages of Scripture. There is no more appropriate place to do that than with Doctor Luke.

Next, the weekly study questions are intended to emphasize the scriptural passage, generate group conversation, and/or personal reflection, and

lead us to individual and collective application. You are encouraged to respond initially without the assistance of a study Bible or group collaboration. Following the first pass, enhance your responses with commentaries and discussion.

As with prior studies, the guide has been created with significant white space (for sermon notes, thoughts, questions, and study answers), a closing prayer, and prayer journal pages in the back for daily quiet time and prayer requests and praises.

Finally, to do justice to a comprehensive study of Luke, this guide is organized into four distinct seasonal sections, which follow the scheduled sermon series.

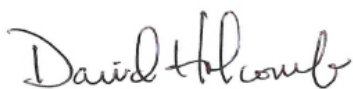
To begin with an Advent section is appropriate for Luke, followed by sections connected to geographical and episodic seasons of Jesus' life and ministry. Part two highlights the ministry in Galilee, while part three takes place along the journey to Jerusalem. A fourth and final part focuses on the Passion week in Jerusalem. We have Luke to thank for ordering his account in an especially systematic manner.

Now, as we grow in our loving, learning, and living out of God's Word through the Gospel of Jesus Christ According to Luke, **may we all know with certainty** the mission of Jesus, and our commission to live it out on His behalf and through His power.

"Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things."

- Luke 24:44-48

Because he lives,

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "David Holcomb". The script is cursive and fluid, with the first name "David" and last name "Holcomb" clearly distinguishable.

David Holcomb

Discipleship Pastor, River Oaks Community Church

GO NEWS



THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO...

ACCORDING TO...	MATTHEW	MARK	LUKE	JOHN
WRITTEN TO:	Jews	Romans	Greeks/ Gentiles	All Nations
CHRIST AS	King	Servant	Savior/ Messiah	Son of God
HIGHLIGHTS	Sermons	Actions	Parables	Allegories
TONE:	Prophetic	Practical	Historical	Spiritual
KEY WORD	Fulfilled	Immediately	Son of Man	Believe
OT QUOTES	53	36	25	20
OT ALLUSIONS	76	27	42	105

PART 1

5 UNITS

ADVENT

OF THE SAVIOR



Luke Chapters 1-2

PART ONE UNIT 1

MARY, DO NOT BE AFRAID

Luke 1:26-38

And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus." – Luke 1:30-31

HISTORICAL INSIGHT

MARY, Mother of Jesus, is widely thought to have been born in Nazareth, a Galilean town of around 500 people. Mary, who would have been called Miriam (Hebrew *Myriam* and Greek *Maryam*), spoke Aramaic with a likely Galilean accent, (Matthew 26:73). She also would have understood Latin from the strong Roman presence in her region, Greek as the primary language of commerce, and Hebrew as the language of all Jewish worship and teaching. While her age in the Luke nativity narrative is not known for certain, it is certain that in Palestine during the time of Jesus' birth, women ordinarily married around the age of 13 or 14.

Views toward Mary have historically (and unfortunately) been skewed toward two equally dangerous extremes, dependent upon which side of the Roman Catholic-Protestant schism one sits. On one side, Roman Catholic doctrine has tended to exalt Mary to a position of dispenser of grace – even co-savior alongside her Son – and interceder for piety. On the other side, Protestant doctrine has often reduced Mary's role to the extent that she is an afterthought, ignoring Luke 1:42, which clearly states this obedient woman had not only "*found favor with God*", but that she is "*blessed among all women*" to carry the incarnate Son of God in her womb!

In all reality, Mary is, as the Council of Chalcedon* affirmed, the *theotokes*, or *God-bearer, mother of God*. This is not a title given to confer a divine status on Mary, but to defend the truth of the deity of Jesus. She was a blessed recipient of God's grace, but not a dispenser of His grace. Mary is to be honored among women as a faithful and favored servant within the Lord's plan of salvation.

* Council of Chalcedon (A.D. 451) was held to repudiate the single nature of Christ and defend the fully human, fully divine natures of Christ.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. The reading of the “Christmas Story” often begins with the birth of Jesus foretold by the angel Gabriel – a birth worthy of worship and celebration. What special ways do you and your family celebrate the birth of Jesus? How do you (or will you) worship the Savior’s first advent this season?
2. It is thought possible that Luke spoke with Mary as one of the “eyewitnesses” to his gospel account. If you could interview Mary, what would you ask her?
3. What does it mean that Mary “*found favor with God*” (Luke 1:30)?

STUDY QUESTIONS

4. What five claims about Jesus did Gabriel tell Mary (Luke 1:32-33)? Which one of these five is most encouraging or hopeful?

5. On the surface, Luke 1:36-37 seems like an afterthought, or a bit out of place. Why do you think Gabriel shared the news of Elizabeth's pregnancy with Mary? What are the differences and similarities between the circumstances of Elizabeth and Mary?

6. Do you believe that *"nothing will be impossible with God"* (Luke 1:37)? Have you ever experienced this truth? Is there a correlation between experiencing this promise and believing as Mary did (Luke 1:38)?

STUDY QUESTIONS

7. What is your view of Mary? What is your “theology” about who Mary is and her role in our faith? Have your perspectives changed over time?
8. Having learned and loved this passage of Scripture, how are you called to live it out?

CLOSING PRAYER

Our souls magnify the Lord. Our spirits rejoice in God our Savior. Lord, we are forever grateful that you have looked upon your humble servants to bless us with the assurance of eternal salvation and an eternal presence with you. We are grateful for those you have placed in our lives to encourage us and speak the truth to us. We pray for spiritual growth in our life that is guided by your Spirit so that you might lead us to encourage and mentor others. We thank you for your servants, Zechariah and Elizabeth. May we be encouraged by their examples to be a blessing to others in our words and deeds, and to genuinely believe there is fulfillment in all that you speak, even when it seems impossible to us. Amen.



PARTONE UNIT 2

THE MAGNIFICAT SONG OF PRAISE

Luke 1:39-56

And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed." – Luke 1:46-48

HISTORICAL INSIGHT

ZECHARIAH AND ELIZABETH, the parents of John the Baptist, were godly, righteous, and devout servants of the Lord, (Luke 1:5-6). As the details of their story unfold, we are also told they are both old and childless. This reality would prove important to the news received by Joseph and Mary, and the understanding of God's power.

Zechariah was a priest at the temple in Jerusalem within the division of Abijah. The temple priesthood was divided into 24 divisions with each division serving twice a year for a week at a time (1 Chronicles 24:4-19). Abijah was the eighth division and was serving their week when Luke writes of Zechariah entering the temple to burn incense. While fulfilling this duty, the angel Gabriel appeared and announced that the prayers of bearing a child had been answered. Despite their old age, they would have a son named John, the forerunner of the promised Messiah.

Elizabeth was also from the priestly tribe as a descendant of Aaron, brother of Moses. It is thought that she and Mary were cousins by way of Mary's mother, with her father being a descendant of King David. The difference in age between cousins is notable, as well as the similarity of their improbable pregnancies.

We observe the maturity in Elizabeth's faith and knowledge of God when Mary arrives for her visit. Along with the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit, Elizabeth immediately recognizes that Mary is carrying the Messiah, the promised Lord, and Savior.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Mary's song of praise (Luke 1:46-55) could be thought of as the original Christmas carol. What is your favorite Christmas song? What is the theology or biblical message of the lyrics in your song? Consider the lyrics of *Hark, the Herald Angels*. What scriptural truths do you recognize?

2. After receiving Gabriel's promise, Mary went "*with haste*" to her cousin Elizabeth. Who do you run to with unbelievable, exciting, life-changing news to share? What is it like to hear life-changing news from others?

3. Elizabeth speaks into Mary's circumstances in a way that is like the Apostle Paul mentoring Timothy. What spiritual guidance does Elizabeth provide to Mary? As cross-generational relationships are critical for spiritual maturity, who is the Elizabeth (Paul) in your life that you look to for guidance? Who is the Mary (Timothy) in your life whom God has called you to mentor?

STUDY QUESTIONS

4. What happens when Mary greets Elizabeth (Luke 1:41)? What is the significance of these happenings?

5. Elizabeth said Mary was “*blessed among women*” (Luke 1:42). Have you ever received a spoken word of affirmation, or blessing, from someone? Have you spoken an affirmation of blessing over someone? (For both, describe if a ‘yes’ response / reflect if a ‘no’ response).

6. Luke 1:46-55 is known as Mary’s *Magnificat* (Latin for the first word of her song). What do the opening verses tell us about a proper response when coming before God? What lines of Mary’s song resonate with you?

STUDY QUESTIONS

7. The *Magnificat* is filled with Old Testament allusions and quotes from the Law, the Psalms, and the Prophets. What does this say about Mary? Do you recognize any of the references? With a study Bible or online search, list at least one Old Testament passage used in her song.
8. Having learned and loved this passage of Scripture, how are you called to live it out?

CLOSING PRAYER

Our Most High God, we praise you as the Almighty for whom nothing is impossible. We praise you for your plans and ways that are beyond all we can comprehend. We praise you for taking on flesh, as the One who is fully divine and yet also fully human. We praise you that your Word reveals to us your nature as Jesus, the Son, sent by the Father, conceived by the Holy Spirit, born in purity, to live, die, and arise in purity, that we might one day stand before you in your righteousness and purity. We thank you for your blessed servant, Mary. May her heart, obedience, and faithfulness be an encouragement to us. May we also find favor in your eyes as faithful and just, and may we be willing to trust and serve in whatever ways you desire of us. May all of our days be lived according to your Word. Amen.



PARTONE UNIT 3

BIRTH OF THE BAPTIZER

Luke 1:67-80

*And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High;
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways.*

— Luke 1:76

HISTORICAL INSIGHT

JOHN THE BAPTIZER, while not mentioned by name in these prophetic words, is the subject, or the child, central to his father's prophecy. Born of Zechariah and Elizabeth, and thereby related to Jesus, John will be known as the fearless preacher from the wilderness who would fulfill his father's vision (Luke 1:68-79), that of the angel Gabriel (Luke 1:17), and the Prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 40:3-5), as the one going *in the spirit of Elijah to prepare the way of the Lord*.

As a child in the wilderness, John grew strong in spirit until his public ministry began (Luke 1:80). This has led some to consider that because Zechariah and Elizabeth were old, they gave him over to one of the ascetic sects inhabiting the wilderness east of Jerusalem, e.g., Essene or Qumran communities. They cite the similarity to Hannah having consecrated Samuel to the Lord by entrusting him to Eli (1 Samuel 1). However, Scripture paints John as a solitary figure and never suggests his membership in any group.

John became known as "*the baptizer*" for baptizing his followers in the Jordan River as a sign of repentance before God. Symbolically, the unclean person went into the water, repented of wrongdoings, and came out of the water as clean. His preaching, his baptizing, his unorthodox style, and his unique wardrobe (Matthew 3:1-5), were all purposed to identify and announce the coming Messiah. All of which culminated when Jesus came to be baptized and the long-awaited Christ made himself known.

The death of John at the hands of Herod Antipas (Matthew 14:1-12), was the result of John's public reproof of Herod's divorce and unlawful second marriage to his niece. The Jewish historian Josephus also notes Herod's fear of "*the great influence John had over the people*" (Jewish Antiquities 18.5.2).

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Advent is celebrated across the four Sundays prior to Christmas. Each Sunday focuses on one theme, or virtue, of our faith. What are these four weekly virtues? How do you commemorate Advent? What memories or questions do you have about Advent?

2. Zechariah is holding the newborn baby John when the question is asked by neighbors and relatives, “*What then will this child be?*” In what you know of John’s life and ministry, how would you have answered them? What do you think would have surprised them most?

3. The response by Zechariah (Luke 1:68-79) is known as the *Benedictus* (Latin for the first word of this song). Like Mary’s *Magnificat*, the *Benedictus* is filled with Old Testament allusions and quotations. Do you recognize any of the references? With a study Bible or online search, list at least one Old Testament passage used in her song.

STUDY QUESTIONS

4. What are the most encouraging and gratitude-filled lines of Zechariah's *Benedictus* (Luke 1:68-79)? Summarize the theme in ten words or less.

5. What is John's ordained role in God's plan for salvation (Luke 1:76-79)? What is the role of Jesus? What imagery resonates with you? How might that imagery prompt you to share the good news?

6. What does it mean that John "*grew and became strong in spirit ... until the day of his public appearance to Israel*" (Luke 1:80)? How might we grow and become strong in spirit? How might our children?

STUDY QUESTIONS

7. Before this study, what came to mind when you heard the name, John the Baptist? Did it fully capture the significance of how God prepared his life for preparing the way of Jesus?

8. Having learned and loved this passage of Scripture, how are you called to live it out?

CLOSING PRAYER

Blessed Lord, you are God of all, for you have redeemed your people. Your tender mercy has brought salvation to all people with the forgiveness of sins. You are the light to those who sit in the darkness and the guide to the way of peace. Thank you, Lord, for revealing to us your plan of salvation. We are humbled that you would use those like ourselves to fulfill your plan. We are hopeful that we might be as watchful, faithful, obedient, and concerned with preparing the way for your second advent, your return, and the redemption of all things, as those who have come before us. We thank you for your servant, John. May his life be an encouragement to each of us. May we, like John, follow the call on our life with the same zeal and passion for your glory and honor. May we also boldly proclaim the truth with grace, as we share and show the good news of your salvation. Amen.



PARTONE UNIT 4

O LITTLE TOWN, O BLESSED SALVATION

Luke 2:1-7, 22-40

And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. – Luke 2:7

HISTORICAL INSIGHT

JOSEPH, the earthly father of Jesus, pledged in marriage to Mary, was a direct descendant of King David. He was from Nazareth in Galilee, spoke Aramaic, and likely mastered the same multi-language skills as his wife, Mary.

The Bible tells us Joseph was a carpenter (Matthew 13:55). Interestingly, the original word for carpenter, ‘*tekton*’ was used as often for identifying stonemasonry and metalworking, as it was woodworking. Regardless of the specific craft, Joseph worked with his hands and was known locally as a skilled artisan.

Even though Jesus is sometimes referred to as the “*Son of Joseph*” (Luke 4:22), the Gospel writers clearly recognized Joseph was not the biological father of Jesus through their nativity accounts, which affirm the Holy Spirit’s conception. However, this recognition did not diminish the importance of Joseph as an earthly father, one pictured with his family at the Temple during Passover (Luke 2:41-52). This role for Joseph appears to conclude with his death, which most believe occurred before, or during, the time of Jesus’ teaching ministry.

While there are no recorded words of Joseph in Scripture, we can conclude that he was a just, honorable, and faithful man (Matthew 1:19). He was quick to obey the angel of the Lord on several occasions (Matthew 1:24-25, 2:14-15, 2:19), and was respectful of authority, both those of government and the law of Moses. This humble, God-fearing, hardworking man, was used in a significant way to care for, provide, and protect the earthly family of our Savior and Lord.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. The Roman census (Luke 2:1) was taken in order that *“all the world would be registered.”* Why do you think this census was necessary? Have you ever completed a census? Have you ever worked for a census? Have you researched genealogy with past-century census documents?
2. This was not the first Roman census, but it was the first to include Jews. What do you think the discussions might have been in the mostly Jewish towns in preparation for this census? What fears? What hopes?
3. Isaiah 57:15 speaks to the place where God *“calls home.”* What thoughts about Isaiah’s truth come to mind when you read there was *“no room in the inn?”* (Note: Whether “inn” was a guest room or traveler’s inn, the certainty is the typical sleeping arrangements were not available).

STUDY QUESTIONS

4. Who are Simeon and Anna (Luke 2:22-40)? How do you describe them to someone unfamiliar with this passage? What is a prophetess and what is it not? What do their words say about Jesus?

5. In the prelude to the birth of Jesus, there are four expressions of praise and song – Mary, Zechariah, the angelic choir, and Simeon. What do you think this says about Luke? What might this say about God? Which one line from Simeon's song (Luke 2:29-32) most resonates with you?

6. What is the reaction of Joseph and Mary to Simeon's song? What would be your immediate thoughts had Simeon spoken Luke 2:34-35 about your child?

STUDY QUESTIONS

7. Very few would ever recognize Jesus in the same way as Simeon and Anna. What was it about them that might have allowed for this special insight and incredible moment of revelation?

8. Having learned and loved this passage of Scripture, how are you called to live it out?

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord, you amaze us with the fulfillment of your One-Story plan of redemption. You have divinely orchestrated the plans of governments and economies and households, since before the beginning. You have blessed the faithful with glimpses of your glory and the privilege of your presence. You have provided and protected those who are humble, obedient, and weary from long journeys. We thank you for your servant, Joseph, and the trust he had in your promise, risking great shame and humiliation. Like Joseph, may we also work hard with our hands, for our families, and in Kingdom service. May we trust in the assurance of your sovereignty and may we never cease to marvel at what is said of You. Amen.



PARTONE UNIT 5

FOR UNTO YOU IS BORN

Luke 2:8-21

And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior, who is Christ the Lord." – Luke 2:10-11

HISTORICAL INSIGHT

SHEPHERDS, keeping watch in their fields by night ... most of us are familiar with the role of the shepherds within the Christmas narrative. However, since much of our modern perspective is shaped by medieval European culture, and the emphasis placed on Christmas lore at that time, the shepherds of Luke 2 often lose their true professional identity and theological significance.

Josephus, the highly respected early-century Jewish historian, estimated that close to 256,500 lambs were used for temple sacrifice at the annual Passover celebration in Jerusalem (Wars of the Jews 6.9.3). These lambs were required to be spotless, without blemish, and less than one year old. Since most sacrificial animals were acquired near the temple, most of these sheep were raised in the surrounding area.

As a result of the Passover demand, the hills around Jerusalem, including that little town of Bethlehem just five miles from the temple, were a lamb factory controlled by temple priests and religious leaders. The shepherds were humble, but they were more than simply a small band of local bumpkins moving a few sheep around.

It's possible that many of their lambs would eventually become Passover lambs. Does that sound familiar? Recall the reaction of John the Baptizer when he says of Jesus in John 1:29, "*Behold, the Lamb of God.*" All of this seems to be in play the night the angels appeared with good news and those shepherds of the field dropped everything to go and see for themselves.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. When the angels appeared to the shepherds, we are told that “*the glory of the Lord shone around them*” (Luke 2:9). What a dramatic sight, followed by a multitude of heavenly hosts! What is the most dramatic night light or night experience you have ever seen? How do you describe it to others?

2. The first two chapters of Luke have been moving toward the birth of Jesus. As you think about this narrative, which individual(s) most resonate with you? What do you like about them? Did you learn anything new about the nativity details, personalities, characters, or theological truths?

3. What does the angel first tell the shepherds in this passage? Where else have we heard these words? Why does this seem to be the obligatory introduction from angels?

STUDY QUESTIONS

4. The angels share the good news about Jesus by using three titles for Jesus. What are they? What is the significance of each title?
5. What happens when the angels leave the shepherds? What do you suppose the shepherds said to one another at this moment? If you had been in the shepherd's sandals, what would have been the most unbelievable proclamation that you just heard from the angel?
6. What was the shepherd's response upon arriving at the manger? Knowing the Scripture, do you think they discussed Isaiah 7:14? How would you have entered the area of this newborn baby? In awe? Cool and calm? Worshipful? Overly excited? Respectful? Fearful?

STUDY QUESTIONS

7. Why do you suppose God chose shepherds to first receive news of Jesus' birth? Why do you think God didn't announce it to the religious leaders first?
8. Having learned and loved this passage of Scripture, how are you called to live it out?

CLOSING PRAYER

Glory to God in the highest, and on earth may there be peace among those for whom His grace has been given and received. Lord, we celebrate you in this season, and in all seasons, that you became incarnate in order that we might know your salvation. We are forever grateful this was fulfilled in your timing, in your way, for your reason, and that we are on this side of your earthly life and ministry. We praise you Lord for how you showed humility in all ways. We thank you for your servants, these faithful and believing shepherds. May we know the same urgency of seeking your presence, and in finding it, may we give you glory and praise for all that you have opened our eyes to in your Word. Amen.



PA RT 2

14 UNITS

MINISTRY

OF THE SAVIOR



Luke Chapters 3-10

PART TWO UNIT 1

PREPARING THE WAY

Luke 3:1-22

John answered them all, saying, "I baptize you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire." – Luke 3:16

HISTORICAL INSIGHT

HEROD, tetrarch of Galilee*, listed among the governmental and religious leaders of Luke 3:1-2, was one of the most prominent rulers in the region of Galilee throughout the ministry of Jesus. A client king of Rome, from a lineage of Arabians, converted to Judaism, Herod followed Jewish religious law and thought of himself as a Jew first, but also with loyalties to the emperor.

The name Herod comes up several times in the New Testament, from Matthew 1 to Acts 26. Importantly, Herod is the family name of the ruling Herodian dynasty in Israel, under the authority of Rome, from between 39B.C. to nearly A.D.100. There are three rulers named Herod in the biblical records.

Herod the Great (Herod I), King of Judea from 39 – 4 B.C., sent out the magi and later issued the edict to murder infant male children in an attempt to kill the baby Jesus. Next, Herod Antipater (also nicknamed Antipas), son of Herod the Great, was the tetrarch of Galilee from 4 B.C. – A.D. 39. He takes part in both the execution of John the Baptist and the trial of Jesus. Finally, Herod Agrippa I, nephew of Antipas, is Judean King in Jerusalem from A.D. 41 – 44. Agrippa is listed in Acts as hearing the defense of the Apostle Paul.

The wickedness of Herod Antipas is evident in both the death of John the Baptizer and his ongoing desire to kill Jesus. It is Herod Antipas whom Jesus calls a “fox” in Luke 13:32-33, and Herod Antipas who receives Jesus from Pilate to ridicule and beat before sending him back to Pilate. We are told Herod and Pilate become friends on this day where before they had been at odds.

* Tetrarch means “ruler of one quarter.” When Herod the Great died, Jewish rule of Israel was split four ways among his sons and daughter.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. The “*wilderness*” in this passage is the Judean Desert. It’s barren and hot with little vegetation or water. What experience do you have in a place most like this wilderness? How long would you want to “camp out” there? What aspects of spiritual strength might you gain from time in the wilderness?
2. Why do you think the overview of politicians and religious hierarchy was necessary to include (Luke 3:1-2)? What does it tell us about God’s character and his ways? What’s a ‘*tetrarch*’?
3. Describe the ministry of John the Baptizer – the content of his message, his style, his objective. What prompted John to begin preaching? Have you ever been prompted to begin Kingdom ministry by a similar prompting?

STUDY QUESTIONS

4. Who came to hear John preach? What are the clues in John's message about who will eventually benefit from the ministry of Jesus? What do you think John's ministry of "*preparing the way*" was intended to do? (Hint: It was more than simply communicating that the time of Jesus was near).

5. What did baptism mean for those baptized by John? What does baptism mean (and not mean) for those baptized in the name of Jesus? Have you been baptized? Do you have questions about baptism?

6. What "*fruits*" are given as evidence of genuine repentance before God? How does this teaching further the understanding of "*preparing the way*" for Jesus? In what way is John's message foreshadowing the teaching of Jesus?

STUDY QUESTIONS

7. *Modalism* is a theological error that suggests God is one person who manifests Himself in three distinct modes, but only one at a time. How does Luke's account of the baptism of Jesus refute this error of modalism? Where else in the Bible is there evidence against modalism?
8. Having learned and loved this passage of Scripture, how are you called to live it out?

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord, we are humbled before you, recognizing that we are not worthy to untie the straps on your sandals. Yet when we confess our sins before you and submit to you as Savior, you are faithful to forgive and cleanse us from unrighteousness. Your mercy and grace are beyond our comprehension. May our gratitude be lived out with much Kingdom fruit; with generosity, honesty, and integrity, as we bear witness to a changed heart and a life on mission for your glory. Lord, may we have the boldness and courage to proclaim your name before those, like Herod, who may curse, ridicule, and persecute us. May we mourn for leaders who don't know you and may we pray for their salvation. Amen.



PART TWO UNIT 2

DEFEATING TEMPTATION

Luke 4:1-13

(And Satan said) "If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours." And Jesus answered him, "It is written, "You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve.'" – Luke 4:7-8

HISTORICAL INSIGHT

THE CITY OF JERUSALEM, mentioned as the setting of the final temptation of Christ, is one of the world's oldest continuously inhabited cities. The earliest Pharaonic records (recovered in Egypt) speak to the village of Jerusalem of the 2nd millennium B.C. The Bible first references Jerusalem by way of Melchizedek, the "*King of Salem*" (Genesis 14:18-20).

Around 1,000 B.C., King David captured the small village of Jerusalem from the Jebusites and Canaanites. David then established his palace, brought the Ark of the Covenant to reside there, extended the boundaries, and declared that henceforth Jerusalem would be the capital of Israel.

From David through the time of Jesus, the Bible and secular sources alike tell the history of Jerusalem. Solomon's Temple was constructed in 960 B.C., and when the kingdom was divided in 922 B.C., Jerusalem was left as the capital of Judah. From there, many kings ruled until the Babylonians attacked in 586 B.C., and exiled the people to Persia, leaving Jerusalem desolate. Rebuilding the city began as the exiled Jews returned starting in 539 B.C.

The Greek occupation of Jerusalem by Alexander the Great took place in 331 B.C., followed by Roman occupation with Herod the Great appointed king in 39 B.C. Soon, the city became a major center of Jewish pilgrimage, with thousands of pilgrims arriving annually for Passover from all parts of the Empire.

It's important to consider the historical significance of Jerusalem to both Jewish citizens and Roman occupants. This is helpful when reading about New Testament tensions, festivals, religious sects, parables, end-time language, and more.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. We all face temptations, sometimes daily. What are some of the harmless, or non-spiritual ways you are tempted? How do you try and overcome those temptations? Are there practical steps to overcoming temptation?
2. What do you recall about the fall of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3)? What temptations were involved? What went wrong?
3. What is the parallel between the temptation in Eden and that of Jesus (Luke 4:1-13)? What are the similarities and differences? How do Romans 5:18-21 and Hebrews 4:14-16 speak into this connection?

STUDY QUESTIONS

4. What do we learn about preparing to face our temptations in Luke 4:1? Describe the reality and the hope relative to temptations in 1 Peter 5:7-10?
5. What three temptations does Satan present to Jesus? What do they represent? In what ways do you face similar temptations as that of Jesus?
6. To many Jews, it was assumed God's blessing and personal success were incompatible with suffering and shame. How does Satan use this logic to tempt Jesus? How can this unbiblical logic lead to our giving into temptations? What is your understanding of God's blessings on your life?

STUDY QUESTIONS

7. How did Jesus respond to each of the three temptations? What should we learn from his example? Based on the example of Christ, reflect on your greatest temptations (the harmful and spiritual ones). How do you want to face them?
8. Having learned and loved this passage of Scripture, how are you called to live it out?

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, we praise your name as that which is stronger than any temptation. We praise you Lord as the One who demonstrated perfection in the face of counterfeit glory and power. We are grateful that, unlike the first Adam, you overcame sin for our sake. We pray Lord for the wisdom and desire to know your Word in order that we might resist the enemy of this world with your words. May your truth be more desirable to us than the pleasures of this world. Lord, as evidence of your power, we acknowledge your authority and divine timing of world events. As evidence of your words, we acknowledge your heart for Jerusalem, the city of David, and her people. That in this great city you offered yourself up to fulfill the eternal plan of redemption for us. In all of this may we live in the peace and knowledge of your absolute sovereignty. Amen.



PART TWO UNIT 3

THE MINISTRY OF JESUS BEGINS

Luke 4:14-30

And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. And he began to say to them, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." – Luke 4:20-22

HISTORICAL INSIGHT

NAZARETH OF GALILEE, the childhood hometown of Jesus, is in the northern Galilee region of Israel. It is about fifteen miles west of the Sea of Galilee and was no more than a “dot on the map” throughout the early centuries.

The setting for Gabriel’s appearance to Mary and the carpentry trade of Joseph, Nazareth was estimated to have had a population of about 500 residents, most of whom would eventually reject their most famous citizen (Luke 4:24-29).

From historical records, biblical text, and archaeological discoveries, it is known that Nazareth was held in contempt by many in 1st century Palestine, “*Can anything good come out of Nazareth?*” (John 1:46). These slights were likely due to Nazareth being known as a highly conservative farming village with close family bonds. These were simply not the kind of people for which the more sophisticated of the day – philosophers, religious sects, city dwellers - would give much thought.

Burial sites and synagogue excavations reveal very modest, traditionally Jewish, characteristics. The water well, or what is referred to today as “the Nazareth Fountain,” is believed to have been present at the time of Jesus. While the structure itself was likely rebuilt multiple times, the function and location are very much one for which Mary, and her children, hauled water for the family.

Today, Nazareth, the once sleepy hamlet, is a vibrant city with a population of over 75,000. It is governed by the Jewish state and populated by a Muslim majority, yet it retains a rich Christian history.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. It was an honor to read the Hebrew Scriptures in the synagogue. Have you had the opportunity to read Scripture in public? Describe that experience. What thoughts do you have about reading Scripture aloud? What expectations of reverence do you have for the reading of Scripture?

2. What is the meaning of the prophetic words Jesus read in the synagogue (Isaiah 61:1-2)? How did this meaning differ from before Jesus read it aloud, and now that Jesus has read it aloud?

3. Imagine you knew Jesus growing up in Nazareth and you recently heard rumors of his healing and teaching ministry. You join him in the synagogue and hear him declare himself the Messiah. As his friend, what is your immediate response? At best, you think ...? At worst, you think ...?

STUDY QUESTIONS

4. Jesus knew what the people were going to ask him for, what was it (Luke 4:23-24)? What emotion does Jesus exhibit with his response? How do you put that same expectation on Jesus today?

5. Why did Jesus reference the proverb, “*Physician heal yourself?*” What type of healing were the people seeking? What type of healing was/is Jesus most concerned we receives?

6. “*But in truth, I tell you*” (Luke 4:25-27) This teaching moment is critical to our understanding of God’s Kingdom. What was the spiritual condition of Israel during the time Jesus describes? What was unique about the widow Zarephath and leper Naaman? What is the gospel implication?

STUDY QUESTIONS

7. The citizens of Nazareth understood Jesus' claim of Messiahship and his teaching of an all-peoples salvation. How did they know exactly what Jesus meant? Given this, do you understand their response (Luke 4:28-30)? Describe the reaction of those today who believe they are "saved" by faith in God, but not in Jesus when they are confronted with gospel truth.
8. Having learned and loved this passage of Scripture, how are you called to live it out?

CLOSING PRAYER

Father, we give you honor and glory and praise as the One who was sent to bind the brokenhearted, to free the spiritual captives, and to release the prisoners of darkness to a life of light. We pray, Lord Jesus, that we may never turn away from your presence. We acknowledge you as Messiah and are eternally grateful that you brought salvation to all people. May this understanding motivate us each new day. May it transform our words, attitudes, and behaviors so we are more like you. And may we know the kind of humility as demonstrated by you and your hometown - despised, mocked, and insignificant in the world's eyes – yet, good, can and did, come out of even Nazareth. Amen.



PART TWO UNIT 4

CALLING THE FIRST FOLLOWERS

Luke 5:1-11, 27-32, 6:12-16

And the Pharisees and their scribes grumbled at his disciples, saying, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?" And Jesus answered them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance."

— Luke 5:30-32

HISTORICAL INSIGHT

THE FISHERMEN – Simon Peter, Andrew, James, and John, are described as fishermen within the Gospel accounts of Jesus calling his first disciples. These four are two sets of brothers who were part of a small, yet flourishing fishing industry along the Sea of Galilee (also called Lake of Gennesaret and Sea of Tiberius).

Fishermen in the time of Jesus were a hardworking and hardy group. They fished year-round and generally through the night. They were also few in number. As only certain areas of the lake supported industrial catches, and as fishing was not viewed as a career of high sophistication, many 1st century fishermen lived on the fringes of society.

These four men were likely casting their nets for *musht*, a fish caught in the northern region of the lake. It grows up to 15 inches long and can weigh up to three pounds. It has few bones and is said to be especially tasty. Only two other commercial fish are found in the freshwater Sea of Galilee; biny (carp) and sardines. Both were caught and sold in large numbers during this time.

While Simon Peter, Andrew, James, and John move on from their fishing roots and are involved in many pivotal moments within the Gospel narrative and in the life of the early Church, the images and themes surrounding their prior occupation are used by Jesus for many lessons along the journey – no doubt to the delight of the fishermen, and the enlightenment of many others.

STUDY QUESTIONS

- 1.** Have you had a leader (teacher, coach, friend, boss) in your life who has made a lasting, favorable impact on you? What characteristics of this individual made you want to “follow” him or her? What characteristics of this leader have you attempted to demonstrate in your own life?

- 2.** Simon Peter is among the first to be called a disciple by Jesus. What do you notice about Simon’s reaction to the miraculous catch of fish (Luke 5:8)? Why would he respond in this way?

- 3.** Jesus tells Simon, James, and John they would no longer be catching fish, but doing what? What do you notice about their response? How do you respond when God makes calls on your life (to serve, to share, to go)?

STUDY QUESTIONS

4. What does it look like to *“leave everything and follow Jesus?”* How close have you come to being “all-in” to the call of Jesus? Have you considered Jesus is often calling us to leave the “big things” (career, home, friends, money), and the “past things” (attitudes, behaviors, thoughts, words)?

5. Jesus next selects Levi (aka, Matthew), as his follower (Luke 5:27-32). What is Levi’s occupation? How was this a radical choice? How might this choice impact the dynamics of the twelve? Describe an experience where you have entered a group with preconceived biases about another member?

6. What does Jesus do in preparing to call the remainder of his disciples (Luke 6:12-16). What do you generally do in the days and nights before significant decisions, conversations, or events? What advice do you have for someone struggling with critical life choices?

STUDY QUESTIONS

7. Jesus has called his twelve disciples (Luke 6:12-16). List the twelve and write a word or two description of each – occupation, trait, event, alternative name – that might help you recall them (see Mark 3:13-19). What is the definition of a disciple? Are you called to be a disciple? Why or why not?
8. Having learned and loved this passage of Scripture, how are you called to live it out?

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord, in all things we follow you. Thank you for choosing us to be your disciples in this world. May we learn, love, and live out your Word so that we might go and make disciples of others, in your name, for your glory. We are humbled that you would take us from all walks of life, from all social standing, from the in-crowd and the outcasts, from the honored and the despised, to be united in you. May we know the enthusiasm and faith of Simon, James, and John, that we may leave all for your call. That you might make us fishers of the men and women in our lives. Lord teach us to set aside our biases and prejudices against others. Let us see that when you call us to follow you have purposed our paths to intersect and let us embrace the diversity of backgrounds, ages, professions, nationalities, and more. Amen.



PART TWO UNIT 5

ONLY GOD CAN HEAL AND FORGIVE

Luke 5:12-26

“But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins” – he said to the man who was paralyzed – “I say to you, rise, pick up your bed and go home.” And immediately he rose up before them and picked up what he had been lying on and went home, glorifying God. – Luke 5:24-25

HISTORICAL INSIGHT

THE PHARISEES emerged in the records of Judaism during the time of the Maccabean Revolt (165 B.C.). As the Jews won back Jerusalem from the Seleucids (Macedonian Greek dynasty) and restored the Temple, the Pharisees formed, bringing together scribes and lay leaders who believed in restoring the Oral Torah, as opposed to the written tradition of the priestly Sadducees.

While the New Testament often casts a bad light on the Pharisees (mentioning them ninety-eight times), they were quite important to Judaism. They extended religious practices outside of the Temple, proving especially helpful when the Temple was destroyed in A.D. 70 by the Romans. They also instilled greater piety among Jews, and taught of an afterlife, unlike Sadducee teaching.

Pharisees were known for their willingness to engage political leaders on behalf of God's people, their desire that all Jews have access to worship, and their acceptance of all Hebrew Scripture, not just Torah (the first five Old Testament books). Their well-known schools of philosophy, like the school of Gamaliel from which Paul studied (Acts 22:3), had strong reputations far beyond Jerusalem.

The Pharisees were concerned with preserving God's oral instructions to Moses, yet they were not priests nor government officials. Interestingly, most scholars believe Jesus would have aligned closely to the Pharisee's practices and convictions and could have been mistaken as a Pharisee. Unfortunately, the Pharisees saw themselves as the appointed gatekeepers of a strict Judaism. Jesus challenged their self-righteousness, which created the tension found throughout the New Testament.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Within the ministry of Jesus, Luke recounts sixteen episodes of supernatural healing. Some might say healing was Jesus' superpower. If you could have any one superpower, what would it be? How would you use it?

2. When Jesus encounters the leper, what do you notice about the leper's condition (Luke 5:12-16)? What does the leper specifically ask to receive? When did Jesus respond to the leper? The Gospel according to John refers to these miracles as "*signs*." What was this "sign" pointing toward?

3. What are the two things Jesus instructed the cleansed leper to do? Why did Jesus ask this of the healed leper? (Hint: Both seem connected to the plans Jesus had for his ministry).

STUDY QUESTIONS

4. A paralytic is lowered beside Jesus while he is teaching (Luke 5:17-26). When Jesus saw the faith of those who brought this man, Jesus said something unexpected. Why did Jesus say this? (Hint: Jesus is making important public declarations).

5. Who is sitting with Jesus while he taught (Luke 5:17)? How does this episode conclude (Luke 5:26)? What does that demonstrate about the presence of Jesus, even among the most ardent skeptics? Does it surprise you that Nicodemus in John 3 was a Pharisee?

6. What is revealed about Jesus in these early days of his ministry? What new insight do you find in this passage about the person and work of Jesus?

STUDY QUESTIONS

7. Christ was welcomed by “sinners.” They did not avoid him but were drawn to him. In a like manner, our changed life should be attractive to a lost world. We have the Good News and can be used of the Holy Spirit to enable life transformation. Are unbelievers drawn to followers of Christ today? Why or why not? (Substitute “me” for “followers of Christ.”)
8. Having learned and loved this passage of Scripture, how are you called to live it out?

CLOSING PRAYER

Our most loving and gracious God, how grateful we are that you have the power to forgive our sins. Our greatest need. Our greatest sickness. Our greatest prayer. Because you restored us to yourself through the work of the Son, you healed our souls and assured us of an eternal future in your presence. A future for which our bodies and minds will also be forever healed. May we pray for the spiritual sick as we pray for the physical needs around us. Lord, we also come humbly before you, praying that we might not become self-righteous and proud in our attempts to worship you. We pray that we might understand the Pharisees as those who were God-fearing, well-intentioned in their desire to honor your holiness and help your people. Yet, many became blind to the truth of grace by their own glory. May we not become blinded by our own glory. Amen.



PART TWO UNIT 6

LORD OF THE SABBATH

Luke 6:1-11

But he knew their thoughts, and he said to the man with the withered hand, "Come and stand here." And he rose and stood there. And Jesus said to them, "I ask you, is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or destroy it?" And after looking around at them he said to him, "Stretch out your hand." And he did so and his hand was restored. – Luke 6:8-10

HISTORICAL INSIGHT

SCRIBES are often mentioned in the New Testament as alongside the Pharisees and Sadducees. Unlike their religious peers, scribes were not recognized as an official religious or political party. The scribes were more of a profession than a group, utilized by the Pharisees and Sadducees (and others) for interpreting Jewish law and writing religious and legal documents. In short, the scribes were the “lawyers” of 1st century Judaism.

In addition to their legal and administrative duties, scribes were also called upon to teach Jewish law. In fact, the Gospel accounts often refer to the scribes as *“Teachers of the Law.”* As a result of these responsibilities, many scribes took great pride in their designation as the most knowledgeable and credible interpreters of the Torah and Hebrew Scriptures. This would inevitably lead to tension with Jesus, who is the perfect interpreter, and fulfillment, of the Scriptures.

While most scribes were opposed to Jesus and his teaching, desiring that he be put to death, their curiosities and love of learning led them into many conversations with Jesus. In fact, Luke records one notable instance when Jesus seems to be praising a *“teacher of the law”* for his questions and responses (Luke 10:25-28). Of this instance, Mark would also record Jesus telling the scribe, *“You are not far from the kingdom of God.”* (Mark 12:34).

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. When you are gifted a full day of rest, how do you spend it? What activities do you prioritize? What is the goal for that day? How does it impact your physical, mental, emotional, and/or spiritual condition?

2. When Jesus is confronted by the Pharisees and scribes on the issue of observing the Sabbath (Luke 6:1-11), what was the religious interpretation of Sabbath and where did that originate?

3. According to Exodus 31:12-18, why did God initiate a Sabbath for his people? Was it a good thing? Were the Pharisees and scribes wrong for wanting to preserve it? How did they manipulate and misinterpret it?

STUDY QUESTIONS

4. On the subject of Sabbath, Jesus is involved in two incidents that draw the criticism of the religious leaders (Luke 6:1-11). With each of these, what does Jesus do and why did the Pharisees and scribes respond as they did?

5. How does Jesus use Scripture (1 Samuel 21:1-6) to demonstrate the intent of Sabbath against the legalistic observance? How does this encourage you to continue pursuing the learning, loving, and living out of God's Word? Describe any examples of when the knowledge of Scripture has or would have been, helpful?

6. Jesus says that he "*came not to abolish the law, but to fulfill it*" (Matthew 5:17). How do his actions represent fulfillment rather than a violation of God's law? If Jesus did not come to abolish the law, (think, ten commandments), what should be our response to Sabbath?

STUDY QUESTIONS

7. Why were the religious leaders “*filled with fury*” (Luke 6:11) even as a man’s hand was healed? What was at the heart of their fury? When have you responded in an irrational way – with bitterness, anger, or animosity – and in hindsight your response should have been joy or satisfaction?
8. Having learned and loved this passage of Scripture, how are you called to live it out?

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord, you are Lord over all things. You are creator, sustainer, and all-sovereign God. You are Lord over your law, and you are the fulfillment of that law. You have freed us from the tireless pursuit of legalism, and yet, Lord we pray that you have given us, through changed hearts, a desire to obey your law as a witness to our set-apart nature and as evidence to our love and honor of you. May the Sabbath be a blessing to us, and not a burden. May Sabbath be a foreshadowing of our eternal rest in you. May we desire a rhythm of rest that is grounded in communion with you. And Lord, humble us, save us from our pride, keep us from thoughts of superiority and self-righteousness when it comes to knowing and interpreting your Word. May the scribes of your day be a warning and a lesson to our day. In the name of Jesus, Lord of the Sabbath, we pray. Amen.



PART TWO UNIT 7

THE GREAT SERMON - PART 1

Luke 6:17-36

*And he came down with them and stood on a level place,
with a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of
people And he lifted up his eyes on his disciples,
and said, ... – Luke 6:17...20*

HISTORICAL INSIGHT

THE SERMON ON THE PLATEAU (aka, the Sermon on the Plain) is remarkably similar to the more well-known Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7. The scene of a great multitude, along with the tone and structure of the teaching itself, both give credence to this being an abbreviated account in Luke of the same event in Matthew. Further, as it has been noted by many commentators, the shorter text might be the result of Luke's redaction of overly Jewish content for the purpose of his Gentile-targeted record.

However, because of the geographical descriptions - Matthew says, "*Jesus went up on a mountain*" and Luke writes, "*Jesus came down with them and stood on a level place*" - most theologians allow for the possibility that Luke and Matthew are writing about two separate teaching events. Jesus certainly taught often, and it would seem likely that he would continue to teach a similar message.

Following the sermon, Jesus and his disciples entered Capernaum, a fishing village along the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee. Because of this detail, most believe the sermon took place in the rolling foothills region just a few miles outside of Capernaum. This location would also make sense in that Luke comments on the people from Tyre and Sidon coming to hear Jesus. These were seacoast towns along the Mediterranean. At some 40 miles away, they were far enough to be amazed that word had spread and to show the interest these people had in seeing Jesus, but close enough that travel was easily made.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Name a current speaker, teacher, or subject expert whom you would make time to see in person. Would you still go if the only way of sitting under their instruction was to walk five miles to see them? What about a sporting event or concert experience? Describe an experience where attendance took great sacrifice – the anticipation, the sacrifice, the result.

2. Luke writes that people came from all Judea, Jerusalem, Tyre, and Sidon. Do you know where these cities are located? Importantly, what would this indicate about the crowd coming to Jesus? What does that tell us about the mission of Jesus?

3. Jesus begins the sermon in Luke by teaching the beatitudes balanced against four “*woes*” (Luke 6:20-26). How do you summarize this upside-down perspective of God’s Kingdom? If you had traveled days to hear Jesus and these were the first words of his teaching, what would you think it meant to follow him? What might be your thoughts about this possible Messiah?

STUDY QUESTIONS

4. Jesus provides several kingdom imperatives as priorities for following him (Luke 6:27-36). List one that you generally have no problem living out. Now, list two that the Lord is stirring you to be more consistent in living out.

5. Jesus describes a disciple's reward as being "*great*" (Luke 6:35-36). When Jesus associates greatness with being called a son of the Most High, what do you think he means? What is he teaching with this list of attributes?

6. Give a title to the first half of this sermon (Luke 6:20-36). How would you paraphrase what Jesus is teaching to someone unfamiliar with Jesus? What is the one-word description for what Jesus is asking (commanding) for the life of a sold-out disciple?

STUDY QUESTIONS

7. In addition to teaching, Jesus is also healing. If you were an eyewitness to these healings, how would your receptivity of the words in the sermon be different than if you were not an eyewitness to the healings? How does John 20:29 speak into this thought?
8. Having learned and loved this passage of Scripture, how are you called to live it out?

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord, you know we sit many centuries away from your sermon on the Galilean hillside. We have not heard your voice carry across the crowd of thousands who sat in silence, amazed at every word you spoke. We did not witness the numerous healings and signs you demonstrated at that time. And yet because of this, you call us blessed for receiving by faith your grace. You inspired and preserved your words in order that we might sit under your teaching. You speak to us in the stillness of the Holy Spirit's indwelling presence. You allow us to witness the healing of lives, the salvation of souls, and the work of your hand in our world even now. May we desire to imitate your mercy and kindness that you might call us sons and daughters of the Most High. Amen.



PART TWO UNIT 8

THE GREAT SERMON - PART 2

Luke 6:37-49

“Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do what I tell you? Everyone who comes to me and hears my words and does them, I will show you what he is like.” – Luke 6:46-47

HISTORICAL INSIGHT

THE FIG TREE was known well by all who came to hear Jesus teach. As a result, it was common for Jesus to use the fig tree as an example in his parables. Not only were figs cultivated throughout Palestine, but how they grew and what they represented made for wonderful imagery.

The fig tree is a shade tree with large leaves (see Genesis 3:7), growing to nearly twenty feet in height. Mentioned over fifty times in Scripture, the fig tree was important for both nutritional and economic reasons. In fact, in the Old Testament when there was prosperity it was said “*every man sat under his own fig tree*” (1 Kings 4:25), but when judgment and destruction were pending, the “*fig trees were destroyed*” (Jeremiah 5:17).

The fig tree produces two crops annually. For centuries, the first crop has been eaten fresh and the second dried out for winter. Now imagine a fig tree that produces no fruit. This is the tree that Jesus curses along the road to Jerusalem (Mark 11:12-25). Also, the fig tree is the last tree to produce leaves each year, which made it a teachable example of how believers will know when the end of the age was near (Mark 13:28).

Like an orange tree to Floridians, an apple tree to the Pacific Northwest, or a coconut tree among islanders, the fig tree in first-century Palestine would have produced the fruit of choice. It's no wonder that when Jesus began his teaching ministry, the fig was the very first of the parable objects to be referenced.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Parables are short stories using simple, common subjects to illustrate a much deeper spiritual or moral lesson. What parables, or analogies, have you used to teach complicated lessons? What simple stories have taught you a valuable life lesson? What is your favorite analogy?

2. Jesus continues to describe the characteristics of a transformed life by listing four behavioral expectations (Luke 6:37-38). What are these? What do the promised results mean to a believer? What don't the promised results mean to a believer?

3. What is a hypocrite? Do you know the origin of this word? What makes someone a hypocrite (Luke 6:41-42)? When, if ever, is it ok to help take the speck out of someone's eye?

STUDY QUESTIONS

4. Why is “*to be known by our fruit*” a critically important understanding for followers of Jesus? How would you teach the parable of the fruit to a child unfamiliar with figs or grapes? Is it judging someone when you make decisions about them based on the fruit they bear? For example, in relationships? Why or why not?

5. What is the message of the parable of the two foundations for followers of Jesus (Luke 6:48-49)? How do we best ensure our foundation is built upon the rock? What is your foundation built upon? What is the application of this parable for parents?

6. Based on the Sermon on the Plateau teaching, intended to define discipleship to Jesus Christ, are you a disciple? Are there areas of the sermon you refuse to accept? Are there areas you struggle at following, but desire to follow?

STUDY QUESTIONS

7. What do you imagine the various conversations sounded like for the many thousands returning home from Capernaum? If you were in the crowd, what would you tell your friends and family when you returned home?
8. Having learned and loved this passage of Scripture, how are you called to live it out?

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord, we know that following you is difficult. It's the narrow gate of speaking and behaving and loving and thinking in ways that are counter to our fallen nature. But we also know that nothing is impossible with you, that you strengthen us to do all these things through the presence of your Spirit. We desire to follow you in the ways you have taught us. We desire that as a fig tree bears figs, we, as your disciples bear good fruit, Christlike fruit. As we do, may our foundation in you be solid. May it be built on your Word and our reliance on you in our daily walk. Give us your discernment and wisdom in our most intimate relationships. May we not become judgmental, but may we be cautious of those claiming your name yet bearing no fruit. Amen.



PART TWO UNIT 9

COMPASSION FOR ALL

Luke 7:1-17

And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her and said to her, "Do not weep." Then he came up and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still. And he said, "Young man, I say to you, arise." – Luke 7:13-14

HISTORICAL INSIGHT

CENTURIONS in the early first century were Roman army officers responsible for between 80 and 100 soldiers. Most centurions owed their position to their military prowess and battle-tested resumes, and not to family connections as was the case throughout much of the Roman Empire. They also enjoyed good pay and elevated social status because of their position.

In addition to battlefield command, centurions often engaged in a wide range of community activities; general policing, customs work, tax system oversight, and the supervision of capital death penalties (see Mark 15:39 for an example of this responsibility and an insightful centurion moment).

Although the New Testament centurion examples appear to have been well respected and presented in a positive light, most historians note the disdain for centurions among the general population. One issue that Gentiles and Jews could both agree on was the cruel, violent, and self-serving tactics displayed by Roman officers.

Interestingly, the centurion represented in Luke 7 is thought to have been detached from a Roman army unit, as there was not a presence of forces in Galilee at this time. Instead, it is likely he belonged to royal troops of Herod Antipas (remember him with John the Baptist). Rulers appointed by Rome, like Herod, were expected to maintain an army and organize them in the Roman way with as many former Roman soldiers as possible. While not all details of the centurion are known, what is clear is that the centurion had sympathies for the Jews, and he was not one himself.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Have you ever been viewed with skepticism because of your title, your job, or your affiliation with a certain group? What was that like? How did you interact with those who didn't trust you? Have you ever had contempt for someone, without knowing them personally, simply because of their job, title, or group affiliation? What do you most regret about that experience?

2. The story of the centurion would have surprised followers of Jesus on many levels (Luke 7:1-10). What surprises you most about what happens? What does this episode reveal about Jesus and his kingdom?

3. What does Jesus reinforce in his comments to the crowd (Luke 7:9-10)? Based on these comments, what greater sign is meant by what the group found when they returned to the centurion's house?

STUDY QUESTIONS

4. How is the centurion a wonderful example of salvation by grace through faith? What is said and done to indicate deliverance by faith and not by works? What can we make of the centurion's heart or posture before Jesus?

5. Compare Luke 7:11-17 with 1 Kings 17:17-24, in which the prophet Elijah raises a widow's son from the dead. How does the raising of the widow's son by Jesus show him to be a greater prophet than Elijah?

6. Jesus purposely "*touched the bier*" (Luke 7:14), as the funeral procession assembled. What is the 'bier' and why would touching it be a big deal? Knowing this, why did Jesus purpose his actions in this way?

STUDY QUESTIONS

7. With these two healings, the record of Luke highlights a significant aspect of Jesus' ministry and character. Do you know what that is? How can you and I demonstrate the same?
8. Having learned and loved this passage of Scripture, how are you called to live it out?

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord, in recognition of your power, we worship you. In recognition of your purpose, we follow you. In recognition of your love for us, we love you. And in recognition of how you cared for those around you, we humbly ask for the ability, the willingness, and the opportunity to demonstrate compassion to others. Let us serve others who are hurting. Let us help others who are down and out. Let us speak kind words, respectful words, words of life, to those who hear very few of these words. May the example of the centurion remind us to seek the heart of those around us, not simply accept the worldly, preconceived perceptions of them. We pray for your compassion on us, and your compassion through us. Amen.



PART TWO UNIT 10

GRACE TO GO IN PEACE

Luke 7:36-50

And he said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." Then those who were at the table with him began to say among themselves, "Who is this, who even forgives sins?" And he said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

— Luke 7:48-50

HISTORICAL INSIGHT

ALABASTER FLASKS are instrumental to the four Gospel accounts of Jesus being anointed with oil or perfume, over his head, or on his feet. Three of these accounts take place in Bethany, shortly before the time of his crucifixion and resurrection. The fourth account occurs halfway into Jesus' three-year public ministry around Galilee when he is anointed by "*a woman of the city*."

While these appear to be at least three unique incidents (Matthew and Mark are likely describing the same event), the mention of an alabaster container – box, vial, or flask – is important. This is because the alabaster containers were used to hold the most fragrant and expensive perfumes and oils. Whether a foreshadowing of Jesus' burial or an indication of great adoration and worship for the forgiveness of sins, the very best was sacrificed in these acts of humility.

Alabaster, originally '*Alabastron*,' named for the location in Egypt for which the materials were most often sourced, is a strong, but pliable white marble. The alabaster flask was likely comprised of this marble, however by the early first-century marble stone from Israel was also used for this purpose.

The usual shape of the container was a long, narrow-necked vase without handles. When sealed with wax, the fragrance would last for decades, making these flasks the perfect container for one-time use perfumes, as when the alabaster box is broken open in Mark 14. When used with a stopper, the perfume could be portioned.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Have you ever given something away, as an act of gratitude or adoration, that was especially personal and valuable? Why did you do this? Did you ever regret it? Have you ever received something like this unexpectedly from someone else? What did that mean to you?

2. Why do you think Jesus was invited to dine with the Pharisees at Simon's house? Does it surprise you that Jesus attended? What would you do if invited to a home in which you knew your host was hostile to the gospel, and where questions regarding your faith were likely to come up?

3. While Jesus is dining, a woman enters the house (Luke 7:37-39). Who is she and what is her likely occupation? Given the setting of this dinner, what do the actions of this woman tell you about her?

STUDY QUESTIONS

4. Jesus responds to the Pharisee's thoughts with a parable (Luke 7:41-43). Who represents the woman in his parable? Have you experienced the truth of this parable in your own life? Have you observed the reality of it in others?
5. Why did Jesus tell the woman, "*Your sins are forgiven*" (Luke 7:48)?
6. What was at the heart of the woman's actions? In what ways do you express your heart toward Jesus? What do you think she told her friends and family after leaving the presence of Jesus? Out of your experience with Jesus, what do you most often tell your friends and family?

STUDY QUESTIONS

7. Do you know that everyone who confesses Jesus as Lord and believes that God raised him from the dead, hears the words of Luke 7:50? Have you heard these words? Do you walk and live in the assurance of this “*peace*?” If not, what questions do you have?

8. Having learned and loved this passage of Scripture, how are you called to live it out?

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord, your Word moves us to worship your saving grace and redeeming power. We are humbled by your willingness to forgive us, all sinners, no different than the woman at Simon's house that evening. We pray that our hearts reveal similar gratitude and love for you as the woman who anointed you with oil. May we be willing to adore you with all we have in whatever way you call us. May the alabaster flasks in our lives, filled with those items most valuable to us, be poured out as a sacrifice at your feet. May we not be held captive by our possessions, all of which will one day rot or be destroyed. In all of this, may we hear your voice assure us with the most eternally significant words we can ever know, *"Your faith has saved you; go in peace."* Amen.



PART TWO UNIT 11

**RELEASED FROM BONDAGE,
SENT WITH A MISSION**

Luke 8:26-39

But Jesus sent him away, saying, "Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you." And he went away, proclaiming throughout the whole city how much Jesus had done for him. – Luke 8:38-39

HISTORICAL INSIGHT

THE GERASENES (alternatively, the *Gadarenes* and *Gergesenes*), are central to a short missional episode recorded in the Gospels around the Sea of Galilee.

Having got into a boat on the Capernaum (western) side of the lake, Jesus and his disciples cross to the other side. A storm arises, for which Jesus calms, and they sail on to the “*country of the Gerasenes*,” (Luke 8:26, Mark 5:1). However, Matthew refers to their landing in the “*country of the Gadarenes*” (Matthew 8:28).

To further complicate the matter, early church documents refer to the “*region of the Gergesenes*.” On the surface, this is highly confusing. However, when considering the regional identifiers that are intentionally selected by the Gospel writers and early commentators, the picture becomes clearer.

For Luke and Mark, Gerasa was the capital city of this large region. It was 30 miles southeast of the Sea of Galilee. For Matthew, he chose the largest coastal city, Gadara, about six miles from the shore. Both cities would have been familiar to readers who were not familiar with much on the eastern side of the lake. For the early church, the exact location of Gersa (also, Khersa) was used. Along a high cliff, the ruins of this small village of Gergesenes can still be seen today.

Just as one can, at the same time, be from the village of Clemmons, and Forsyth County, and North Carolina, the references here use similar logic. All referencing a single location, yet all utilizing identifiers best understood by the intended readers.

Finally, with herds of pigs, these were not Jewish villagers. And this short, cross-lake voyage was theologically significant to the mission of Jesus and the salvation of all people.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Have you ever lived or worked on a farm? If so, what did you like most about it? If not, and you could one day, what animal would you raise on a farm? As a “farmer” how would you respond to your animals attacked by coyotes? By disease? By poachers?
2. Have you ever been taken on a trip, but weren’t sure why until after you arrived? Jesus takes his disciples to the other side of the lake for what ultimately becomes two primary reasons, or divinely instructed lessons. Can you identify these lessons (Luke 8:22-39)?
3. In this passage, there is a theme of fear and faith. Who demonstrates fear, and what are they afraid of? Who demonstrates faith, and what did they trust in? When have you experienced fear because of what Jesus required of you?

STUDY QUESTIONS

4. Demon possession in the New Testament is real. Satan's influence over the world today is real. Have you ever been in the presence of demon possession? Can you describe it? If not, what are your thoughts or observations about the reality of, and deliverance from, Satan's control? Throughout Scripture when demons realize the presence of Jesus, what happens? What does that tell you?

5. How do you describe the demon-possessed man (Luke 8:27-29)? What do you feel for him? While maybe not actual demons, what other ways can we be "*seized and kept in chains*" by the world?

6. Describe the freedom this man must have felt after the demons left his body? In what ways have you experienced this kind of freedom in Christ? In what ways are you prayerfully seeking to be freed today?

STUDY QUESTIONS

7. Considering this “healing” as the latest of many miraculous signs, what has Jesus now demonstrated his complete power and authority over? (Hint - there are four.) What remains for Jesus to demonstrate his power over?
8. Having learned and loved this passage of Scripture, how are you called to live it out?

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord, you are the authority over all things. You have demonstrated your power over illness, over death, over nature, over demons. And for our eternal sake, you have demonstrated your power and authority over the grave. Let us live and walk in that realization. Let us know the freedom and joy and hope that is found in your power and authority. Lord Jesus, we praise you for your mission to the other side of the lake, for we reside on that other side and are thankful you are an all-people, all-nations God. May we honor you in faith and never fear your presence or your call on our lives. Amen.



PART TWO UNIT 12

THE GLORY OF JESUS REVEALED

Luke 9:28-48

As he was saying these things, a cloud came and overshadowed them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. And a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is my Son, my Chosen One; listen to him!" – Luke 9:34-35

HISTORICAL INSIGHT

MOSES AND ELIJAH appeared on the mountain with Jesus, and in Luke 9:31 we read that they were talking about his departure. Why Moses and Elijah? What was it about their lives and history that would be theologically significant to this moment of transfiguration?

First, Moses was instrumental in receiving and writing the Torah, or Law. He had been chosen by God to lead his people out of Egypt and deliver them to the Promised Land (Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy). The account of this exodus from captivity resulted in great respect and honor for Moses among Jews, centuries after it occurred.

Elijah was considered the most faithful and powerful of Jewish Prophets. Living in the northern kingdom of Israel during the 9th century B.C., Elijah defended the worship of Yahweh against the pagan god Baal. He performed miracles on behalf of God and departed this earth in a flaming chariot. The account of Elijah's ministry resulted in much reverence and honor for Elijah among Jews, centuries after he was taken to heaven.

So, in Luke 9:35-36 when God says, "*Listen to Him!*" and Jesus is left alone by himself, God is affirming Jesus as the greater Moses and greater Elijah. He was the fulfillment of the Law and the prophecies of the Old Testament, and now both must give way to Jesus as the new covenant promise.

There are additional signs and symbols in the foreshadowing lives of Moses and Elijah. Ultimately, God used them both to prepare the way for Jesus, the One whose departure from this world would lead to eternal deliverance for believers.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What comes to mind when you think about friends spending time on a mountain? What experience have you shared on group hikes or adventures? Where can you truly say that the view was worth the climb?

2. For Jews, the title “*Christ*” implied an anointed king who was worthy of glory and power. How does Luke 9:26-35, 42-43 confirm this title on Jesus?

3. What does the Transfiguration (Luke 9:28-36) reveal about Jesus? What did Peter not understand? In fact, God did not wait for Peter to complete his thoughts, instead, he came over them and spoke, “*As he (Peter) was saying these things ...*” (Luke 9:34).

STUDY QUESTIONS

4. What do you suppose Peter, John, and James knew about Moses and Elijah before this moment of transfiguration? How did this moment change their understanding of Jesus? *“And they kept silent and told no one”* (Luke 9:36), how would you have kept silent about this?

5. The subject of the disciple’s *“astonishment”* is phrased in an interesting and intentional way. What specifically is this phrasing (Luke 9:43)? What is the underlying implication of this verse?

6. The disciples were in the presence of Jesus, the Christ, Messiah, the One greater than Moses and Elijah, and yet his words startled and confused them (Luke 9:44-45). What do you suppose they were thinking? Why were they afraid to ask Jesus anything about this?

STUDY QUESTIONS

7. What attributes should we desire to live out in order to be “*great*” in God’s Kingdom (Luke 9:46-48)? Describe a time in which you debated (even in your own mind) your comparative standing against others in the knowledge of God’s Word, or level of service to others, or amount of giving, or any other area of faith and life?
8. Having learned and loved this passage of Scripture, how are you called to live it out?

CLOSING PRAYER

King Jesus, we bow in recognition of your majesty and glory. You are the most majestic and mightiest prophet, priest, and king. You are the Father's Chosen One, who in all humility took on flesh to live among us and be delivered into the hands of man by your own will. Lord, we are grateful that you have allowed us to know the ways you worked through your servants Moses and Elijah as pointing forward to your greatness. May their lives be an encouragement to us, that we might live as obedient servants pointing forward to your return. May we live in self-denial, humbled to be the least important person in the room, and rejecting the prideful desires for greatness among others. Keep us from the comparisons which discourage us and those comparisons which discourage others. Remind us daily Lord that with our eyes on you we are less able to compare. Amen.



PART TWO UNIT 13

THE HARVEST IS PLENTIFUL

Luke 10:1-20

“The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.” – Luke 10:2

HISTORICAL INSIGHT

SODOM, the very mention of it evokes images of an original “sin city” and the violent destruction by sulfur and fire rained down on her and Gomorrah in Genesis 19:24-25. Throughout Scripture (Deuteronomy 29:23, Ezekiel 47:11, Isaiah 13:19-20, Jeremiah 49:17-18, Zephaniah 2:9, Luke 10:12, 2 Peter 2:6, Jude 7, and elsewhere), Sodom is a reminder, and warning, of God’s judgment.

While the lesson of Sodom is clear, the location of Sodom is less clear. However, over the past half-century archaeologists and scholars have landed on two competing sites, with the consensus that one, or the other, does mark the Sodom spot.

The first proposal as the lost city of Sodom was discovered in 1973. A large, abandoned city on the edge of the plain, south of the Dead Sea. It is referred to as Bab edh-Dhra. Covering approximately 10 acres, there is evidence of a city gate, a catastrophic abandonment of the city in the time of Sodom (2000 B.C. +/-), a covering of ash with structures heavily damaged by fire, and a match to the geographical coordinates as one of “the five cities of the plain” in Scripture.

The more recent proposal of a possible location is north of the Dead Sea in an area called Tall el-Hammam. It shows what archaeologists believe to be evidence of a meteorite or meteorite-like destruction. While the case can be made through biblical interpretation (good scholarship and good intention) for directional, geographical, and dating matches to Scripture, it is generally deemed less reliable than the evidence of Bab edh-Dhra.

Many bronze-aged cities have been lost to time, decay, erosion, or other means, and while we might not ever know the exact location of Sodom (God said it would never be inhabited again), we do know the historical reality of this world-renown population, and even the most atheistic archaeologists agree with that.

STUDY QUESTIONS

- 1.** It's been said that "teamwork makes the dream work" or, "many hands make light work." What do these sayings mean to you? Describe a memorable experience of working alongside others to accomplish a significant task.

- 2.** Jesus sent out seventy-two disciples for one of the first recorded mission trips of all time. How did he send them? On the surface this seems less efficient, but what do you think Jesus knew about sending out in this way? Do you see a connection with the wisdom of Ecclesiastes 4:9-12?

- 3.** Our understanding of this passage relies on our understanding of the 1st-century cultural context. What was the underlying message of these specific instructions? What tone was Jesus setting for the mission? How can we apply the spirit of the message to our living on mission?

STUDY QUESTIONS

4. Before these followers of Jesus “*go their way*,” what does Jesus instruct them to do (Luke 10:2-3)? What is one way of incorporating this same instruction into our daily lives? The environment for which they are sent doesn’t sound pleasant. What is the modern equivalent to this environment?

5. While the imagery of Luke 10:10-12 is not a literal recommendation for today, the spirit of this passage remains true. What do these verses tell you about your role in evangelism? If you are uncertain about fulfilling your role, how does Luke 10:16 encourage you?

6. As the disciples returned, even as many had surely rejected their message, what was the state of their heart? How did Jesus redirect their celebration? What are examples of our rejoicing in the lesser things today?

STUDY QUESTIONS

7. Jesus desires his followers to be engaged in kingdom ministry. What is your current level of ministry involvement? Do you have someone to go alongside you in ministry? Are you part of a team that is sent out to share the good news? If not, be honest, is it an issue with priorities, attitude, understanding, fear, or something else?
8. Having learned and loved this passage of Scripture, how are you called to live it out?

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord, we thank you for sending us out on your behalf. What a great privilege and responsibility to proclaim your name and tell the story of your glory. May we be burdened with urgency for the lost around us. May we prioritize our going out over our staying in. Provide us opportunities to go in twos, and in threes, and in groups with others. Eliminate the barriers that are keeping us from worshiping, serving, growing, and going today. Strengthen us for rejection and remind us that many in this world will always reject you, we are simply the messengers. Remind us also of the judgment on Sodom. Your judgment will once again be swift and severe, yet while there is time, those living in Sodom today can still be reached Lord, through the Holy Spirit's convicting power and our willingness to obey your call. Amen.



PART TWO UNIT 14

WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR?

Luke 10:25-37

And he answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself." And he said to him, "You have answered correctly; do this and you will live." – Luke 10:27-28

HISTORICAL INSIGHT

THE SAMARITAN—hero of Luke 10:25-37—was an unlikely character for Jesus to use as a model of kingdom mercy in his parable. The shock to the scribes would have been like Jesus telling an audience today of an injured victim being overlooked by a preacher and small group leader, only to be helped by a devoted agnostic.

To understand the disdain Jews held for Samaritans is to understand the history of Samaria. The land belonged to the tribe of Ephraim and Manasseh. It is located between Jerusalem and Galilee, in central Israel. In fact, John 4:4 emphasizes that Jesus *“had to pass through Samaria”* traveling to Galilee from Judea.

Within the northern kingdom of Israel, Samaria was the capital city. It was attacked by the Assyrians in 733 B.C. Unlike the Babylonian captivity of the southern kingdom of Judah, the Assyrians exchanged their captives (2 Kings 17:24). In other words, some Jews were exiled, while others remained captive in Samaria. They would intermarry, and as a result, a divergent faith developed.

Therefore, the impurity of the Samaritan’s “Jewishness,” was a significant offense to non-Samaritan Jews, even centuries later. The Samaritans reestablished a monotheistic faith in God but considered the true temple of worship to be the one they constructed on Mount Gerizim (John 4:21-24), furthering the disdain. In fact, most Jews crossed the Jordan to avoid passing through Samaria.

The tension from years of bigotry was addressed by Jesus and the early church to create unity and equality among the Christian Jews and Gentiles. Today a few hundred Samaritan Jews reside in Nablus and practice Passover in the ruins of Mount Gerizim. They accept the five books of the Torah as canon and have an amiable relationship with orthodox Judaism.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Describe a time you were away from home and helped by a stranger? Describe a time you helped a stranger, or were the first on the scene of an accident? What instincts do you have when you see someone in need of help but are concerned that it could be dangerous?

2. What was the initial question that the lawyer (scribe, teacher of the law) asks Jesus (Luke 10:25)? Have you ever been asked that question or some variation of it? What did Jesus say? Does that surprise you or make sense?

3. In the story, who are the first two individuals to pass by the injured man (Luke 10:30-35)? What were their religious roles? What excuses do you think they used for not helping?

STUDY QUESTIONS

4. It's likely the priest and the Levite used several excuses for not aiding the injured man. What is the most common excuse you use when the opportunity to lend a helping hand presents itself? Are there valid and invalid reasons for not helping someone in need?

5. The Samaritan is mentioned as the one who proved to exemplify the meaning of "*neighbor*." What is your definition of a neighbor? What does it mean to be a good neighbor?

6. With agreement from the lawyer, Jesus confirms the definition of neighbor (Luke 10:37). In this teaching, what is an important attribute for treating others as neighbors? How can you show this attribute to others?

STUDY QUESTIONS

7. On a practical level, the lesson of the good Samaritan is clear, love others as yourself, show mercy, and be selfless. What is the lesson of the good Samaritan from a theological standpoint? Ultimately, who is the Good Samaritan?
8. Having learned and loved this passage of Scripture, how are you called to live it out?

CLOSING PRAYER

Heavenly Father, God of all mercy and compassion, guide us and enable us to show mercy to those in need around us. Remove our biases and reservations of others who need help. Help us break down the walls of hostility between ourselves and others, so that we might not despise or avoid others because of their ethnicity or nationality, but we might have neighbors in our lives, those we are called to love and embrace and assist as equally valued created images of you. Lord, before we judge the priest and Levite in your parable, let us search our own heart for the excuses we make daily for shunning others. And as we search our hearts, may we find the gratitude for your mercy and grace, extended to each of us as dead in our sin, that we might be renewed in life. You are our Great Samaritan. Amen.



PART 3

10 UNITS

JOURNEY

OF THE SAVIOR



Luke Chapters 11-17

PART THREE UNIT 1

LORD, TEACH US TO PRAY

Luke 11:1-13

Now Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he finished, one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.” And he said to them, “When you pray, say: Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread, and forgive our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone else who is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation.”

– Luke 11:1-4

HISTORICAL INSIGHT

BREAD is mentioned some 500 times in the Bible. It was a staple of both the Old and New Testament diet. Scripture calls bread vital to existence, a cause for alarm when one was without. Bread is said to be the primary source of meals eaten at home and those packed for travel. Bread was so prominent, that often “to eat bread” was synonymous with “to have a meal,” regardless of what else was served.

In Luke 11, the use of bread in the Lord’s Prayer is a prayer for the Lord’s provision of those things which sustain everyday life (including daily nutrition). For example, in the teaching of urgent and bold prayer, we read that three loaves are thought to be an adequate meal for a guest.

Bread was normally baked at home, although the purchase of large quantities was becoming an option in the early first century. Making bread began with “flour,” which was generally crushed wheat or barley prepared by a mill, or mortar and pestle. Next, liquid would be added, and dough needed. Finally, leaven (optional) was added, and the bread was baked. Variations with added ingredients (beans, lentils, millet, oil) were common.

Loaves of bread in the day of Jesus were shaped differently than modern loaves - round and flat versus today’s raised oblong. Although, many Middle Eastern breads do retain the round and flat shape today as ideal for baking with hot rocks, stone ovens, and flat plates. With these loaves, one can envision the custom of giving thanks, breaking (or tearing) bread, and sharing. Ideal for the Passover supper and the sacrament of communion.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Have you ever been taught a prayer? What were the words of that prayer? Do you pray that prayer today? What are your thoughts about formal or structured prayers? What about written, recited, or repeated prayers?
2. Could you eat bread every day? What is currently in your diet that might be thought of as your “daily bread?” What do you think the broader sense of “*daily bread*” is in Luke 11:3?
3. The Lord’s Prayer (Luke 11:2-4) is referred to as the “Model Prayer.” How does it provide a model for believers? What general aims, or categories, do you recognize within the prayer as helping us organize our prayers?

STUDY QUESTIONS

4. What are the lessons of the two illustrations Jesus uses to teach about prayer – a friend at midnight and a son’s request (Luke 11:5-13)?
5. What are the greatest challenges you face to having a consistent and faithful prayer life? Have you approached prayer as the friend seeking bread in the illustration? What prayers have you thought about giving up on?
6. God certainly can answer our prayers immediately, however, based on the biblical evidence, what does God generally value more than immediacy? (Jeremiah 29:4-11 is a wonderful example).

STUDY QUESTIONS

7. John Calvin wrote of this passage, “*We must not think God takes no notice of us, when he does not answer our wishes: for he has a right to distinguish what we actually need.*” Restate this thought in your own words.
8. Having learned and loved this passage of Scripture, how are you called to live it out?

* John Calvin, *Commentary on Harmony of the Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke* (The Edinburgh Printing Company, Edinburgh, Scotland, translated by Rev. William Pringle in 1846, original 1555) 353.

CLOSING PRAYER

Our Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation. Lord, we bow humbly before you, in reverence and honor to your name, the name above all names. We pray that your will is done in our lives and in our world. We pray that your Kingdom might advance in our day, that many may come to know you, and those who know you may come to imitate you more each day. We pray for the needs that we have today. Those needs that we share with others and those needs that are unique to each of us. We are grateful that you provide for our daily bread in many ways, provision that we don't take for granted. We know that we have not been perfect in our obedience. We confess those sins and repent. We ask your forgiveness and correction. We know that our forgiveness of others is directly tied to receiving your forgiveness. Protect us from temptation. Shield our eyes and our hearts. Make your path known in our lives. Amen.



PART THREE UNIT 2

WOE TO THE HYPOCRITES

Luke 11:37–12:3

“Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. Nothing is covered up that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. Therefore, whatever you have said in the dark shall be heard in the light, and what you have whispered in private rooms shall be proclaimed on the housetops.” – Luke 12:1-3

HISTORICAL INSIGHT

ABEL AND ZECHARIAH appear in this critique of the Pharisees as Jesus uses their martyrdoms to represent the deaths of all the Hebrew Scripture martyrs.

Abel, the second son of Adam and Eve, was righteous and faithful, known for bringing pleasing sacrifices before God (Genesis 4:1-10, Hebrews 11:4). While Abel pleased God, his older brother Cain displeased God. This angered Cain and in the earliest manifestation of fallen, sinful humanity, Cain murdered Abel.

There are over two dozen Zechariah's in Scripture. Jesus is thought to have been using one of two options. Both are within the scope of possibility and neither poses any interpretative challenge to the meaning of this passage. With certainty, the Pharisees knew which Zechariah Jesus was naming.

The first possible Zechariah is the minor prophet of the late 6th Century B.C. He was the son of Berechiah, as referenced in Matthew (Zechariah 1:1, Matthew 23:35). His cause of death is unknown, but could easily have been temple-related, as was the case with the second possible Zechariah. Chronologically, with Abel, this Zechariah creates a bookend to all the martyrs of the Old Testament.

The second possible Zechariah was the son of Jehoiada and was Solomon's high priest in the 10th Century B.C. (2 Chronicles 24:20-22). The description of his death is recorded and matches the one Luke provides. Despite a different father's name, many note the Hebrew word "*son*" can be used for multiple generations, meaning Jehoiada could have been the grandfather and Berechiah the father. This Zechariah creates a bookend with Abel of the Old Testament martyrs when arranged by the canon of the Hebrew Scriptures (Genesis to Chronicles).

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Have you ever said something in private that you shouldn't have said, and it was revealed to others? Have you ever done something you shouldn't have done and tried to hide it, but were found out? Were you more ashamed of what you did and said, or upset that you were found out? What is your reaction to the old saying, "the truth will eventually come out"?

2. Jesus speaks harshly to the Pharisees, criticizing them for various behaviors and attitudes. What were his main criticisms (Luke 11:37-54)? How do you guard against similar criticisms?

3. For those of us who are teachers, leaders, parents, and disciple-makers, why is the warning to the lawyers regarding the "*key of knowledge*" (Luke 11:52) especially important? How might we "*hinder*" others from entering into knowledge? How can we assist others in entering into knowledge?

STUDY QUESTIONS

4. The word “*leaven*” is used in several teaching moments by Jesus. Why does leaven (yeast) make for a good analogy? What are the characteristics of leaven, particularly in the bread baking process?

5. Imagine you were a guest around the table with the Pharisees when Jesus dined with them. Describe your initial thoughts as you listen to Jesus speak. What is the mood in the room when Jesus goes away? Now imagine you are a disciple listening to Jesus (Luke 12:1-3). Describe your thoughts, hopes, and concerns about what he tells you.

6. What is literally meant by “*Woe to you!*” as expressed six times in this short passage? How was Jesus using this phrase?

STUDY QUESTIONS

7. The term “*hypocrite*” is used more loosely today than in the early centuries. What is hypocrisy? What caution should you take before declaring someone a hypocrite, or accusing them of hypocritical behavior?
8. Having learned and loved this passage of Scripture, how are you called to live it out?

CLOSING PRAYER

Heavenly Father, guard our hearts. Help us remain humble before you and others. Keep us from accusing others of hypocrisy without the knowledge of their heart, their motives, their situations, or circumstances. We know that you judge, and we do not. Protect us Lord from those who distort your truth and mislead your people. Give us your wisdom. Most of all, we ask you Lord to keep us from behaving as hypocrites. We know that our testimony is a witness to your character. May we be true to who you are and what you would have us be. May our words and deeds be tested against the light of day as truthful and honest and of integrity. And Lord, through the mention of Abel and Zechariah, you have reminded us of those who have been obedient to you, filled with worship and praise for you, and have been martyred in your name. May we have their courage and strength should it be required. Amen.



PARTTHREE UNIT 3

WEALTH AND WORRY

Luke 12:13-34

And he said, 'I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry."' But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and things you have prepared, whose will they be?' So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.' – Luke 12:18-21

HISTORICAL INSIGHT

KING SOLOMON, the third king to rule Israel, was the son of King David. The history of Solomon's reign is recorded in 1 Kings 1-11 and 2 Chronicles 1-9, where Kings provides an emphasis on the political history of the monarch – the good, the bad, the ugly – and Chronicles is overall more optimistic about Solomon with an emphasis on the religious affairs and positive attributes of the king.

Both accounts of King Solomon include a reference to the forty years he sat on the throne over Israel (1 Kings 11:42, 2 Chronicles 9:30). By way of the biblical lists of kings, in agreement with the extra-biblical records of Egyptian and Assyrian royal families, most have dated Solomon's rule as 970 – 930 B.C. This also aligns with the geopolitical realities of the era and mid-iron age references.

Known for his wealth, wisdom, and writings, Solomon's life achievement was the building of God's temple in Jerusalem. He is also credited with authoring *Song of Solomon*, *Proverbs*, and *Ecclesiastes*, along with *Psalms* 72 and 127, among his “3,000 proverbs and 1,005 songs” (1 Kings 4:32).

While much is made about his wisdom and riches, the lesson of Solomon was his disobedience. In all his wealth and knowledge, Solomon did not pursue purity. His many wives and idol worship were an abomination to the Lord, ultimately leading to a divided kingdom. Ironically, and perhaps fittingly, while 9th century B.C. archaeological evidence is rare of any civilization, a Mesha Stele pointing to the ‘*House of David*’ has been uncovered. Yet, in all of Solomon's glory, no physical evidence of his kingship has yet been discovered.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Have you ever said something in private that you shouldn't have said, and it was revealed to others? Have you ever done something you shouldn't have done and tried to hide it, but were found out? Were you more ashamed of what you did and said, or upset that you were found out? What is your reaction to the old saying, "the truth will eventually come out"?

2. What does Jesus mean by being on guard against covetousness? (Luke 12:15) What does covetousness look like? How do you guard against it?

3. Retell the parable of the crop owner for a modern audience (Luke 12:16-21). How do many today act like the rich man in terms of a future vision? What is the spiritual implication of this parable?

STUDY QUESTIONS

4. The encouragement not to worry or be anxious can sometimes be interpreted to be carefree or even lazy in our responsibilities. What do you think Jesus meant by this teaching (Luke 12:22-31)?

5. Jesus asks his followers to consider the ravens and the lilies as examples of God's provision (Luke 12:24-28). What is your immediate thought when you hear this passage? What is the purpose of thinking about birds and flowers? How could this passage be twisted in an unhelpful manner?

6. Describe the treasures of heaven. Which of these are you most encouraged by? Describe one of your possessions that cannot be stolen or destroyed? How has your perspective on personal possessions changed over time?

STUDY QUESTIONS

7. Being completely honest with yourself, list at least five “treasures” in your life? Do you notice any common thread or theme to these treasures?
8. Having learned and loved this passage of Scripture, how are you called to live it out?

CLOSING PRAYER

Heavenly Father, how easily we covet the things of this world. The things which are of no eternal value yet consume us and steal our devotion to you. Guard our hearts. Allow us to use the resources you have gifted us in ways that advance your kingdom. Let us walk through life with an eternal perspective and great urgency for each day. We pray for the wisdom of Solomon on matters of planning and our future. The wisdom of Solomon as he sought your guidance and not his own. Discernment of knowing when our possessions, our power, our pride are consuming us, that we might not end this earthly journey as the Solomon outside of your will. Calm our worries, release us from the anxieties in matters we cannot control, strengthen our trust, lighten our burdens, give us your peace. Amen.



PARTTHREE UNIT 4

PEOPLE, GET READY

Luke 12:35-48

“But know this, that if the master of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have left his house to be broken into. You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.”

— Luke 12:39-40

HISTORICAL INSIGHT

SERVANTS AND MASTERS are prominent throughout the New Testament, as both literal and metaphorical references. Their frequency demonstrates how common servanthood, (slavery is the better translation), was in the world of the earliest Christians. In fact, Gaius, a second-century lawyer claimed that the *“principal distinction made by the law of nature within the empire was all human beings are either free or slaves.”**

It has been estimated that twenty percent of the population living under the Roman Empire was enslaved (30% in Rome). Many were prisoners of war, e.g., *“97,000 captured slaves following the Jewish revolt against Rome.”*** Others were born into slavery or sold themselves to pay off debt or for an improved standard of life.

While servants performed household chores and tasks, because of the nature of procurement (captured peoples), many were better educated than their masters and served as doctors and teachers. Some servants would rise to a place of supervision, referred to as “manager” or “steward.” They were given responsibility over other servants in the household.

Servants of a household lived, worked, and leisured together. They became a family unit unto themselves, as evidenced by the funerary inscriptions of the day. They had no legal standing within the Roman empire and could not marry.

Without rights, servants were often abused. At best they were invisible. That’s why the inclusion of servants in the Church, and instruction of fair treatment, was radical and counter cultural.

* The Institutes of Gaius (c. A.D. 170), a textbook of legal institutions (1.9).

** Jewish War, Josephus (A.D. 75), Jewish historian for Rome (6.384, 420).

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. If we asked your spouse or best friend about your approach to being on time, what would they say? Are you someone who thinks being early is on time, or someone who slides right in at the stated time? Why do you think you are either way? Regardless of your natural tendencies, are there times you are more ready than others? How does that speak to priorities?
2. Whom do the servants represent in this parable (Luke 12:35-48)? Whether faithful or unfaithful, who are those servants today? Who is the master?
3. Summarize this teaching in a phrase or single sentence. What is the emphasis? What is the tone? How do you receive the message of this teaching?

STUDY QUESTIONS

4. There are many views and “prophecies” about the return of Jesus. When does Jesus say he will come back? What do you tell someone who asks you about when Jesus is coming again?

5. As a “*wise manager, set over the household*” (Luke 12:42), what should that look like in your day-to-day walk? Do you think of yourself as an intentional manager of the household? What are the results of acting in this way? Do you desire to be called “*blessed*” by Jesus?

6. What is the punishment for neglecting the master’s instructions (Luke 12:45-48)? Does this seem harsh? What do the consequences speak to relative to genuine faith and commitment?

STUDY QUESTIONS

7. “Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required, and from him to whom they entrusted much, they will demand the more” (Luke 12:48). How does this verse apply to evangelism? How does this verse apply to discipleship? How does this verse apply to worshiping, serving, growing, and going?
8. Having learned and loved this passage of Scripture, how are you called to live it out?

CLOSING PRAYER

Heavenly Father, while we were unworthy of serving your household, you purchased us with your blood. You brought us into your family to love you, honor you, glorify you, and serve you. May you always find us at work in your kingdom ministry. You are the one and only Master of our lives. Convict us and encourage us in your expectations of our devotion to you. Prompt us to readiness. The time of your return is unknown. May we live as if it is today. May we share and show your gospel love as if you were returning soon. May we be urgent, intentional, and faithful in all that we do and say, managing well all the spiritual riches you have left under our charge. Come, Lord Jesus, come. Amen.



PARTTHREE UNIT 5

USE THE NARROW DOOR

Luke 13:1-9, 22-35

“Then you will begin to say, ‘We ate and drank in your presence, and you taught in our streets.’ But he will say, ‘I tell you, I do not know where you come from. Depart from me, all you workers of evil!’” – Luke 13:26-27

HISTORICAL INSIGHT

THE TOWER IN SILOAM is only referenced once in the Bible. Jesus used it as an example of a great calamity as he taught on the errors of retribution theology (aka, bad things to bad people, good things to good people). Despite the single mention of the tower, the area known as Siloam goes back to that of King Hezekiah and the late eighth century B.C.

Siloam is located on the southeastern end of Jerusalem. The archaeological evidence indicates this site originally fed Jerusalem with a system of tunnels and aqueducts connecting the Gihon Spring with the city. This was the first Siloam pool of the Bible (2 Kings 20:20). While this pool remains undiscovered, even as many of the tunnels can be traversed today, a second pool of Siloam has been unearthed. It is the Second Temple-period pool appearing in the account of Jesus healing a blind man (John 9:7-11).

The discovery of the “miracle pool” was made in 2004 when workers were digging to repair large water pipes south of the Temple Mount. Initially, two stone steps were identified. After extensive excavation, the remains of a pool over two hundred and twenty-five feet long and slightly trapezoidal in shape were unearthed. It is thought the original pool might lay below this one.

The purpose or utilization of the tower in Siloam has been debated for centuries. All agree that it was a structure of significant height that was well-recognized throughout Jewish Palestine. The calamity was well-known and seemingly recent to the time Jesus was teaching. Some propose the tower was a guardhouse around the King’s Gardens in Siloam. Others believe it was integral to the aqueduct system related to the pools. And still, others suggest it was a prison tower because of the emphasis on sin and guilt in the teaching.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What is the greatest global calamity you can recall in your lifetime? Where were you at the time? How did you hear the news? What were you thinking as you watched and heard about the catastrophe?
2. Those listening to Jesus were familiar with the common belief that disaster and sudden death signified God's displeasure. It was thought that suffering was correlated to immorality. Have you ever heard someone make that accusation? What is generally said when someone is attributing God's judgment to someone's personal circumstances?
3. Jesus adamantly denounces this way of thinking and proposes a truth for a new way of thinking. What was this truth?

STUDY QUESTIONS

4. What aspects of God's character does Jesus highlight with the parable of the barren fig tree (Luke 13:6-9)? What expectations does God have of genuine belief that we can understand from this parable?

5. The narrow door of salvation (Luke 13:22-30) was a lesson taught at a time when many heard Jesus speak, but few committed to following him. How does that describe today? How does the reality of Jesus saying to many, "*I don't know you,*" make you feel? What encourages you about this passage?

6. Jesus is making his way toward Jerusalem when he hears that Herod, who is in Jerusalem, wanted to kill him. Who warns Jesus? Does this surprise you? Why do you think he received this warning? How did Jesus respond? Does this surprise you? Why?

STUDY QUESTIONS

7. Describe what Jesus is referring to as he turned his attention to Jerusalem (Luke 13:34-35). What emotions do you pick up from these words?
8. Having learned and loved this passage of Scripture, how are you called to live it out?

CLOSING PRAYER

Heavenly Father, the God of all salvation, we bow humbly before you in recognition of your all-knowing sovereign will on this world. We are grateful that we don't always get what we deserve. We are grateful that while the consequences of our actions are certainly deserving and often real, your judgment is not one of constant retribution. We stand assured in our faith, having received redemption through your grace and not our works. We walk in the confidence of the cross through the narrow door. May the urgency of knowing that many will turn to you after it is too late, motivate us to share and show your love. We look forward with great expectation to your return and to our reclining at table with you in your kingdom. Amen.



PART THREE UNIT 6

TABLE MANNERS AND A BANQUET INVITATION

Luke 14:7-24

“But when you are invited (to a wedding feast), go and sit in the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he may say to you, ‘Friend, move up higher.’ Then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at table with you. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.” – Luke 14:10-11

HISTORICAL INSIGHT

WEDDING FEASTS AND BANQUETS were among the most important social events held within the historical and cultural contexts of the Bible. The custom of a meal as central to the significance of the occasion first appears in the ancient Near East as early as the 8th century B.C. Adopted by the Greeks, and later perfected by the Romans, the coupling of food with celebration and conversation was practiced throughout the early A.D. Greco-Roman world (including Jewish Palestine).

Wedding Feasts were often the culmination of a days-long wedding celebration and were particularly meaningful for traditional Jewish marriages. Banquets were often used to host teachers for lectures or writers for literary discussions. The latter were referred to in Greek as *symposia*.

“Reclining at table” (Luke 22:14 / Last Supper) refers to the practice of a low table that is central to those who are reclining around it. This was the most common form of banquet seating. Diners reclined on couches and were attended to by servants. Jesus is often pictured as reclining at meals. Less frequently, tables and chairs were used, as in the wedding feast parable (Luke 14:7-11).

Regardless of furnishings, social status was almost always considered in determining seating arrangements. Proximity to the host, the featured guest, or head of the table, was well-thought-out. Distinguished seats of honor would be identified. While this was most understood by the wealthy Roman socialites, seating by rank is well attested to in Jewish society as well, as evidenced in the Dead Sea Scrolls (*1QS* 2:11-12), and with the challenges of favoritism and self-importance for which both Jesus and Paul encountered.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Have you ever sat at the “head table” of a dinner or banquet meal? What did you enjoy about that experience? Have you ever sat at the back table of the banquet? What did you enjoy about that experience? Did either signify how important you were to the hosts, relative to those around you? Explain.

2. What does Jesus say about those choosing to sit in the places of honor at the wedding feast (Luke 14:7-9)? Can you relate to selecting seats that have been reserved for others? How did you feel?

3. What is the lesson of the wedding feast parable (Luke 14:7-11)? If you were told to always consider yourself the least important person in the room, what would that mean to you? Is it natural or difficult for you to seek lesser self-importance? What are the dangers or cautions to this approach?

STUDY QUESTIONS

4. What do you think the “*man who had invited him*” thought when Jesus gave instructions on whom to invite to his banquets (Luke 14:12-14)? How difficult is it for you to do something as intimate and time-consuming as hosting others in your home? Do you assume your guests will repay you in kind?

5. What do you notice about the sequence of events relative to communication and preparation for the great banquet (Luke 14:16-17)?

6. In the parable, the invited guests make excuses for not attending the banquet. What is the parable a “picture” of regarding following Jesus? What are the spiritual excuses for not accepting the invitation? What are the consequences of not accepting the invitation?

STUDY QUESTIONS

7. What is the lesson of the parable (Luke 14:12-24)? Which of the characters in the parable are most like you?
8. Having learned and loved this passage of Scripture, how are you called to live it out?

CLOSING PRAYER

Heavenly Father, we pray for humility. We pray that you might save us from our pride and replace our self-centeredness with concern for others. Allow us to be filled with your joy and find great contentment as the least important person in any room. Knowing we are of great importance to you is the assurance and affirmation we most seek. In genuine humility we look forward to that day we are exalted in your Kingdom. And Lord, we are forever grateful to have received the invitation to your eternal banquet. That we might worship you forever because you sought us out among the outcasts and rejected, is beyond our understanding. And because there is still room at your banquet, let us be urgent and intentional with sharing that invitation. Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God. Amen.



PART THREE UNIT 7

THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP

Luke 14:25-35

“If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.” – Luke 14:26-27

HISTORICAL INSIGHT

SALT was indispensable in first-century Palestine. Obtained from a variety of locations and used for various purposes, salt was such a common household item that it made for an ideal metaphor for biblical instruction.

A major source of the salt that flavored food was along the Egyptian border, where salt was mined and distributed across the Mediterranean. For rock salt, used in the preservation of meats and fish, Jebel Usdum, a ten-mile-long hill composed mostly of rock salt at the southern extreme of the Dead Sea was a primary source. For religious sacrifices (Leviticus 2:13), ground control, and fertilizer additives, the Dead Sea itself was the primary source. When the water evaporated from pools it left behind coarse-grained salts.

For cooking and flavoring, the early century uses were not much different from today. It was a pleasant and savory addition to otherwise mundane staples. For preservation qualities, salt was necessary for keeping meats and fishes from decomposing as they were dried and stored. The same preservation principles were thought to be at work with fertilizer, or the manure pile (Luke 14:35), although some doubt whether it was as helpful as originally thought.

While salt was of great importance to the daily life of Jewish families, it was also of great importance for temple sacrifices – the symbolic “food of God.” The covenant of God with the people of Israel is referred to twice as the “*salt covenant*” (Numbers 18:19, 2 Chronicles 13:5).

In all its uses, salt was good ... if it kept its saltiness.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What is your favorite food condiment? What is your favorite seasoning or spice? How do you use it? What is your preference for salt to flavor food?

2. Name a public construction project, or personal project, that has been left halfway completed? What words come to mind describing it? What does it indicate about the planners, funding, vision, or priority of the project?

3. Jesus lists some difficult demands for those who would follow him (Luke 14:25-33). How do you summarize those demands for someone wanting to learn more about following Jesus?

STUDY QUESTIONS

4. What is significant to Jesus speaking to “*great crowds*” (Luke 14:25)? What do you expect to happen to the great crowd when Jesus finishes? How do you receive this teaching on discipleship?

5. How do we “*bate our own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters*” (Luke 14: 26)? Paraphrase this verse in a way that retains truth and increases understanding for someone new to their faith.

6. Why is this passage often referred to as *the cost of discipleship*? Which of the “*costs*” are most difficult for you to accept? What people, things, habits, words, entertainment choices, attitudes, etc., have you given up being a follower of Jesus? Which of these do you need to turn from to follow Jesus more completely? Is following Jesus costing you anything?

STUDY QUESTIONS

7. How are followers of Jesus like salt? How do believers retain their saltiness?

8. Having learned and loved this passage of Scripture, how are you called to live it out?

CLOSING PRAYER

Heavenly Father, we desire to be your disciples. Help us to count the cost of following you in order that we might fully commit ourselves in devotion to you and your kingdom. Help us to know those things you are asking us to put away, to turn from, or to love as lesser than you. Help us count the cost of how you are asking us to serve others, in our church and in our community. Give us the strength to endure that we might finish what you have started us out to complete. Let us be salt in this world. Let your love and your gospel truth be a light of flavor to the darkness of this world. Let us live out the many purposes that you have for your followers to impact the world. May we retain our saltiness through an ever-increasing relationship with you. Amen.



PART THREE UNIT 8

LOST AND FOUND

Luke 15

“Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.” – Luke 15:7

HISTORICAL INSIGHT

TAX COLLECTORS have never been the most popular of professionals, but they were especially resented in first-century Galilee and Judea. In fact, Luke records how the possibility of additional taxes was enough to give rise to rebellion under a leader by the name of Judas the Galilean (Acts 5:37).

Taxes were more than a question of finances. The sentiment of most Jews was that of resistance. They insisted on being masters of their own land, and each new tax only added to the yoke of Roman oppression.

Perhaps most infuriating was the tax collection system. Poll and land taxes were collected by Roman officers. However, taxes on exports, imports, and commerce were contracted out. The third-party contractor paid Rome an agreed-upon fee and could keep the remainder as profit. These collectors were known as *publicani* and would typically subcontract the actual collection process across the region. Subcontractors were legally protected to increase taxes and retain the profits.

One interesting reflection on this system came from the Tax Law of Palmyra (A.D. 137). These tariff regulations were enacted to clean up historical abuses *“in order to avert in future the disputes that had arisen between tax collectors and merchants, tradesmen and others from whom taxes were due.”*^{*}

Of New Testament note, these subcontractors hired Jews to work and to oversee the collector booths. Jews taking part in the Roman tax system were often wealthy and known as traitors to fellow Jews. Zacchaeus appears to be a supervisor over collectors (Luke 19:1-10), while Matthew (Levi) was a booth collector with his tax office near Capernaum (Mark 2:14).

* The Journal of Roman Studies, Volume 74, JF Matthews, November 1994, pp. 157-180.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. How do you feel when you lose something of personal significance? Describe a time when that happened and what you did to look for it. Did you finally decide to give up looking, or are you still hopeful? Describe a time when you were certain you had lost something for good, only to find it.

2. Chapter 15 of Luke includes three “Lost and Found” parables. What is lost in each of the parables? How do you relate to these things that are lost? What could you substitute in each one to better understand the point?

3. In the parable of the lost sheep (Luke 15:1-7), how long does the shepherd search for the lost sheep? Why was the shepherd willing to leave the ninety-nine alone? Have you been the one? Do you rejoice over found “*sinners*”?

STUDY QUESTIONS

4. What are the similarities between the lost sheep parable and that of the lost coin (Luke 15:8-10)? What is Jesus trying to get across in these illustrations? How does the mission of Jesus (Luke 19:10) illuminate these parables? Based on this passage, complete the sentence: If followers of Jesus are to be like Jesus, then ...

5. The prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32) focuses on three characters – the younger son, the older son, and the father. Describe the personalities of these three characters. Who do they each represent? In what ways do you resonate with any (or each) of these three?

6. Why did the younger son want to leave home? How does that translate into a modern prodigal lesson in the spiritual sense?

STUDY QUESTIONS

7. When the younger son realizes the mistake of his ways, what does he do (Luke 15:17-19)? How does this inform the path to eternal salvation?
8. Having learned and loved this passage of Scripture, how are you called to live it out?

CLOSING PRAYER

Our gracious and merciful God, our Great Shepherd we were lost, but now are found. The angels rejoiced and heaven sang for the transformation of our hearts. We give you great praise and glory and honor for the ways you sought us out and found us. For many of us, we were lost in the world, consumed by pleasure and self-centeredness, and your Holy Spirit found us, convicted us, and turned our hearts toward repentance and belief. We can never repay the debt we owe for your salvation, but we can follow you faithfully. We can remain in your household and reject the allure of the world. We can devote ourselves to learning, loving, and living out of your Word. We can join with you in the urgency of seeking and saving the lost, living on mission, and enabling life change through the gospel and the power of the Holy Spirit. We were lost, but now are found. Amen.



PART THREE UNIT 9

KINGDOM MONEY MANAGEMENT

Luke 16:1-31

The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all these things, and they ridiculed him. And he said to them, “You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God.” – Luke 16:14-15

HISTORICAL INSIGHT

ABRAHAM AND LAZARUS are both mentioned in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. As with all his parables, Jesus used everyday people and objects familiar to his audience. In this setting, Jesus is teaching a group of Pharisees, or religious Jews, familiar with Abraham and struck by the name given to the beggar, Lazarus.

Remembered in Scripture as the father of the Israelites and the figurative father of all the redeemed, Abraham was called by God (Genesis 12:1) to leave his home in Mesopotamia for the promised land – the land of the covenant from which God promised to multiply Abraham’s offspring and make them into a great people and a blessing to the nations.

Abraham’s call set him apart from those practicing polytheism, including himself prior to turning to God. As a monotheistic god, God alone is fully sovereign, the Almighty, creator God, Yahweh. Even today, Abraham is highly regarded among Jews and Christians as the father of our faith. To be carried to Abraham’s side is to be ushered into an honorary place in heaven.

Regarding Lazarus, it has been noted that he is the only named character of any parable. Because of this, many have interpreted Lazarus to be an actual person, someone the Pharisees might also know. More likely, the name was used for the beggar to make two specific points.

First, Lazarus is the Greek name of the Hebrew *Eleazer*, meaning “God supports” or “God helps.” Only God has helped this poor beggar during his life. Second, there is an emphasis on a great reversal, whereby the rich man is nameless at death and the beggar’s name is remembered – the last shall be first.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Has money ever been a problem for you – lack of money, greed, carelessness, addictions, debt, or something else? How much money is enough? What would you do if you were gifted one million dollars?

2. What is the lesson of the manager and his shrewdness (Luke 16:1-13)? How are we to understand “*shrewdness*” in this teaching? Have you ever been shrewd in business dealings? What is the contradiction between this sort of behavior and being more Christlike?

3. “*You cannot serve God and money*” (Luke 16:13). Explain why this is true to someone who claims to serve both God and money equally well. What experience do you have with times of serving money before God?

STUDY QUESTIONS

4. What does the warning of making friends in unrighteous ways (Luke 16:9) imply relative to applying this passage?

5. Jesus validates the teaching of the Old Testament while also validating the arrival of the new covenant (Luke 16:16-17). What do you say to someone who tells you they don't believe we need the Old Testament anymore?

6. For whose benefit was Jesus telling the parable of the rich man and Lazarus? What was the lesson?

STUDY QUESTIONS

7. How should the parable of the rich man and Lazarus affect our willingness to share the gospel?
8. Having learned and loved this passage of Scripture, how are you called to live it out?

CLOSING PRAYER

Heavenly Father, we are tempted by the allure of wealth in many ways. We are told of the comfort and security and power and fame that accompany wealth. Help us resist the idolatry of wealth. Help us recall how you resisted the same temptations, enabling us to find all we need, our daily bread, by your hand. Lord, we are grateful for blessing us in what we do possess. For some of us, it is little. For some of us, it is much. For all of us, may we see money as a means to daily provision and a tool for kingdom ministry. May our hands and hearts be open to those in need and may you prompt us, convict us when we are clenching our fists tightly. Lord, we are grateful for your Word. You have fulfilled all that is written and by faith we have received the good news of your redeeming love, the power unto salvation. Amen.



PARTTHREE UNIT 10

FAITHFUL AND GRATEFUL

Luke 17:1-19

The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith!" And the Lord said, "If you had faith like a grain of mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it would obey you." – Luke 17:5-6

HISTORICAL INSIGHT

LEPROSY is one of the most well-known physical ailments in Scripture. It was the scourge of the ancient world and those who contracted this highly contagious disease – lepers – were relegated to outcast status, ceremonially unclean, and required to live on the fringe of society.

Infectious bacteria identified as *mycobacterium leprae* – a rod-shaped bacterium related to tuberculosis bacterium – is the cause of leprosy, which is known today as “Hansen’s Disease,” named after Gerhard Henrik Hansen (1873) when the bacterium was officially described and defined.

It is easy to think of leprosy as a skin disease, but it is the nervous system that the mycobacterium leprae attacks, leading to a loss of pain sensation, disfigurement of the limbs, and changes to various facial features. Those plagued by Hansen’s Disease also experience numerous complications because of skin decay and rot.

It is thought that those called “*lepers*” in the Bible, and by early century communities, included a much wider range of patients. It is certainly likely that those with Hansen’s Disease were among the lepers of Scripture, but the term would have also included many others with varying skin conditions, facial and orthopedic disfigurements, respiratory distress, and more. In fact, the word ‘*leper*’ in the Old Testament, ‘*tsara’ath*’, included mold (mildew) diseases as well.

Evidence of leprosy has been uncovered from as early as 600 B.C. in India, China, and Egypt. It remains a health concern in many parts of Africa, Asia, and Latin America today.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Have you ever been away from home and been helped by a stranger? Describe what happened? How did it impact you? Have you ever helped a stranger, or been first on the scene of an accident? What instincts do you have when you see someone in need of help, but it could be dangerous?

2. What are the three ways Jesus instructs believers (Luke 17:1-4)? [Hint - one is a warning and two are imperatives]. Which of these are most challenging for you to live out? What are the challenges of the Church living these out, particularly if she is influenced by the world?

3. How do you define faith? How would you define your life of faith? When have you experienced seasons of strong faith? Seasons of weaker faith?

STUDY QUESTIONS

4. In what ways do you increase your faith? In what ways do you aspire to increase your faith moving forward?

5. Do you like to be recognized for a job well done? Even when “*well-done*” was the expectation? The teaching of the unworthy servant seems harsh, but what is Jesus conveying to his disciples with this lesson?

6. When Jesus healed the lepers, it was both a miracle and a sign. When you consider the request, the action, the result, and the concluding remarks, as a sign, what was this healing pointing us toward (Luke 17:11-19)?

STUDY QUESTIONS

7. Before judging the lepers, who did not show gratitude to Jesus for healing them, consider the blessings you have taken for granted. Acknowledge the ways Jesus has been merciful to you by completing: “Thank you Jesus for ...”

8. Having learned and loved this passage of Scripture, how are you called to live it out?

CLOSING PRAYER

Heavenly Father we are convicted by the lessons you have provided your followers. In them, we find opportunities to be more like you and a light to the world. Lord, help us guard our words, actions, and attitudes so that we might not be the cause of temptation and sin to others. Give us a heart that repents, forgives, and is gentle in rebuking others. Increase our faith by your Word, in our prayers, through your presence in our daily walk. And Lord we are sorry for the times we equate our work to your pleasure in us and grace toward us. We cannot exceed your expectations by our own doing. We rely on your mercy to save us from ourselves. We are grateful for all that you have done and will do in our lives. We don't want to take your provisions for granted. May our hearts be so filled with gratitude that it spills over on the world around us. Amen.



PART 4

10 UNITS

PASSION

OF THE SAVIOR



Luke Chapters 18-24

PARTFOUR UNIT 1

APPROACHING GOD

Luke 18:1-17

“Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.” – Luke 18:16-17

HISTORICAL INSIGHT

JUDGES in first-century Palestine were part of a multi-layered structure of religious and civic autonomy for the Jewish people, despite the constant threat of Roman magistrates and locally appointed Prefects interfering and overruling judgments.

The Judicial System was grounded in the idea of a Sanhedrin – the Hebrew word for assembly or council of justice. In Jerusalem, a court of seventy-one sat as the Great Sanhedrin. They heard not only the local cases of religious, political, and civil law but also acted as the Supreme Court for appeals from various regions.

In every other city for which there were more than one hundred and twenty men, a court of twenty-three sat as a Lesser Sanhedrin. For villages of less than one hundred and twenty-three men, three judges were appointed.

Each court included a *nasi*, or prince of the court, who served as chief justice. Most of the members of the court were Sadducees, Rabbis, Priests, and possibly Pharisees as well. The qualifications to judge included: *“wisdom, meekness, and fear of God, hatred of mammon (money), love of truth, to have the respect of man, and to be masters of a good name.”**

The Sanhedrin used Old Testament law and strict moral and civil code for administering justice. Judgments on breaking religious restrictions, personal property disputes, divorce, and criminal charges, up to and including capital punishment, were generally received as binding by the community, even though individual judges might be inclined to self-righteousness and corruption.

* John Gill, Commentary on Luke 18:2, Exposition of the Bible, (Maimon. Hilch. Sanhedrin, c. 2. sect. 7), 1999.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Have you ever heard someone reference “the innocence of childhood?” What is generally meant by this phrase? What do you miss most about the childhood season of your life?
2. How is the judge described in the parable of the unjust judge (Luke 18:1-8)? What point was Jesus making in using this type of judge?
3. In what ways does the promise of Jesus through this parable about the widow encourage you? What applications can you make from the teaching?

STUDY QUESTIONS

4. Summarize the lesson Jesus was teaching with the parable about the Pharisee and the tax collector (Luke 18:9-14). In what ways have you acted like the Pharisee? How do we combat self-righteousness in our own hearts?
5. Jesus is using a few common themes in many of his parables. What have you noticed Jesus emphasizing often through his parables? Where else do you recall similar words as those in Luke 18:14?
6. Jesus says the way one receives the kingdom of God is important. What does he mean by this? What are the qualities of a child-like faith?

STUDY QUESTIONS

7. If you spend much time with children, what are ways you are intentionally encouraging their faith? If you do not spend time around children, what are ways you can encourage the faith of children (and their parents)? What are ways we can discourage childhood faith if we are not careful?
8. Having learned and loved this passage of Scripture, how are you called to live it out?

CLOSING PRAYER

Heavenly Father, we desire to cry out to you day and night, knowing you hear our prayers and are pleased in our reliance on you. We know you are a just and righteous God who is preparing for us an eternal home. A home in which all the injustices of this fallen world will not be remembered. May we have the strength and persistence to return to you each day, each hour. Lord, as we draw near to you, shield us from the attraction of self-righteousness. May we hold no contempt for others in our place before you. May this be true in our view of children. Give us patience and discernment to encourage the children to come to you and let us never be a barrier to a child seeking to know you. In all of this, we pray for your grace and mercy on us, sinners, unworthy of your glory. Amen.



PARTFOUR UNIT 2

RICH MAN, SMALL MAN

Luke 18:18-30, 19:1-10

And Jesus said to Zacchaeus, "Today, salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost." – Luke 19:9-10

HISTORICAL INSIGHT

ZACCHAEUS was a chief tax collector in the city of Jericho, a prosperous trading city northeast of Jerusalem along the Jordan River valley. His position was akin to a “regional manager” with oversight of multiple tax collector booths throughout the Jericho region.

In this role, Zacchaeus collected a predetermined amount of tax revenue from the individual booths, and in turn, paid a predetermined amount of tax revenue to a final level of oversight before the taxes reached Rome. At all levels of the tax system, profits exceeding the predetermined amounts could be held by the collectors. It should be of no surprise that tax collectors were often wealthy.

Most local collectors, like Zacchaeus, were Jewish citizens, considered traitors to their nation. They were protected by Roman authorities and despised by Jews for aligning with the occupiers in overtaking their own people. Many viewed the tax collectors as opportunists who were looking out for their own interests by stealing from their neighbors.

Luke writes that Zacchaeus was “*small in stature*” (Luke 19:3). Because of this, perhaps he had faced the challenges of social rejection that gave him no reservation about becoming a tax professional. Physical prowess was certainly central to the Greco-Roman culture, and it would be reasonable to think Zacchaeus faced some amount of bullying, including being passed over in a wide variety of opportunities and responsibilities.

Ultimately, Zacchaeus was convicted. He took the initiative and experienced a life-changing transformation. He is a testimony to what can happen in the presence of Jesus to anyone, who above all else, is willing to serve the God who saves.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. When was a time you tried to see something exciting or interesting, but there were crowds in the way? Or you just weren't tall enough to see it? What did you do?

2. How do you describe the rich ruler who approached Jesus with an eternally significant question (Luke 18:18-30)? What was he hopeful to hear?

3. What point was Jesus making by telling the rich ruler to sell his possessions and follow him? Were the commandments not enough to bring eternal life? Does this mean eternal life is only for those who sell all their possessions?

STUDY QUESTIONS

4. Since the beginning, wealth has been a primary obstacle to our devotion to, and contentment in, Jesus. Why is wealth such an obstacle? What is it about wealth that makes it such a powerful idol?

5. Jesus calls his followers to a pattern of present suffering followed by a future blessing, or treasure in heaven (Luke 18:22) – a similar pattern found in the life of Jesus. How does expecting this pattern help us fight the temptation of idols? How does knowing we share this pattern with Jesus help us grow in our faith?

6. What are the similarities and differences between the rich ruler and Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10)? As their stories both end, what is the condition of the heart for both of these men?

STUDY QUESTIONS

7. It can be said that the mission statement of Jesus is found in Luke 19:10. According to Jesus, why did he come into this world? If followers are to pursue Christlikeness, what does that say about Luke 19:10?
8. Having learned and loved this passage of Scripture, how are you called to live it out?

CLOSING PRAYER

Jesus, Lord and Savior, by the power of the Holy Spirit, break the chains of idolatry that the wealth of this world has on our hearts. Enable us to fully embrace an eternal perspective of your kingdom and let loose of those possessions that prevent us from fully committing our lives to you. Grant us the curiosity to know you better and love you more. We, like Zacchaeus, have encountered your presence and you have changed our hearts. We pray that we will never lose the hunger to be in your presence, to know you better, to love you more. Lord, you came to seek and save that which was lost. We were lost, now we are saved. Impress upon us the urgency to be used in your mission to earth. Help us seek, so that you might save. Amen.



PARTFOUR UNIT 3

THE RETURN OF THE TEN MINAS

Luke 19:11-27

“The first servant came before him, saying, ‘Master, your mina has made ten minas more,’ And he said to him, ‘Well done, good servant! Because you have been faithful in a very little, you shall have authority over ten cities.’”

– Luke 19:16-17

HISTORICAL INSIGHT

MINAS, mites, talents, drachmas, and denarius were the currencies of first-century everyday life. The frequent references to money were a good way to connect common features of daily life with deeper spiritual truths and lessons. However, as helpful as these references were to those using these currencies, they can present modern readers with some difficulties.

How much was a mina? What was the relative value of a denarius? By obtaining a basic idea of worth and purchasing power, we can better understand and appreciate what those values would have meant to the original audiences. This enables the truth of the lessons to translate across the many centuries.

The most common of the monetary standards in first-century Palestine was the Roman unit of coinage, the **denarius**. It was roughly equivalent to the Greek **drachma**, and often used as one day's wage. So, an average worker earned about 300 denarii a year. This is the value of the perfume used to anoint the feet of Jesus (John 12:1-8). In the parable of the lost coin (Luke 15:8-10) one silver coin, a drachma, was lost. It's one thing to lose a quarter in the sofa, but a day's wage!

Larger values included the New Testament **talent**, a Roman unit equal to 6,000 denarii (or twenty years of wages). So, in the parable of the unforgiving servant (Matthew 18:23-35), 10,000 talents was a way of saying "millions of dollars." And the **mina** (Luke 19:11-27) was a unit equal to 100 drachmas, meaning even the servant given one mina had a sum of about four months salary.

On the opposite end of the standard was the **mite**, or tiny copper coins called lepta. Two lepta equaled a quadrans, which was a small fraction of a denarius. The widow had two mites, roughly three U.S. dollars, and gave it all (Mark 12:41-44).

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Are you a saver or a spender? What are the advantages of each? How would you invest \$100 for someone returning for their investment in a year?
2. Nearing Jerusalem, what is on the mind of the disciples? Describe how you imagine the setting as Jerusalem appears in the distance? (Luke 19:11)
3. Who is the nobleman in the parable? Who are the servants? Where is the “*far country*” (Luke 19:12-13)?

STUDY QUESTIONS

4. What does the parable of the ten minas tell us about knowing the character of our Master (Luke 10:11-27)? How do we know that Jesus is gracious and compassionate, and not severe?

5. What are followers of Jesus called to do with the gifts, talents, and resources they have been given? How do you currently put your 1, 5, or 10 minas to work for the kingdom? What do you aspire to invest in the kingdom?

6. How do you understand the distinction between the parable lesson of working for the kingdom and the caution about working for your salvation?

STUDY QUESTIONS

7. The biblical idea of stewardship is that of managing the resources for which you have authority, influence, or ownership. With 1 being “poor” and 10 being “excellent,” rate your current practice of kingdom-minded stewardship. What are specific ways you can better steward your abilities, knowledge, relationships, possessions, and more?
8. Having learned and loved this passage of Scripture, how are you called to live it out?

CLOSING PRAYER

Heavenly Father, we wait expectantly for your return and the fullness of creation's redemption, a full restoration of all things. In our waiting, may we not be idle. In our anticipation, let us not lose sight of all that you have called us to do for you in this world. In our desire for the "then and there," help us steward well all that you have given us for the "here and now." In your return, find us investing in kingdom ministry. In the little or the much you have gifted us, help us be faithful to you, your people, and your Church. Lord, we know your judgment is real and severe. We know your judgment is just. May the knowledge of this judgment move us with great urgency to share the story of your grace and mercy with others. Amen.



PARTFOUR UNIT 4

THE AUTHORITY OF JESUS IS CHALLENGED

Luke 20

But he looked directly at them and said, “What then is this that is written: The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone? Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him.” – Luke 20:17-18

HISTORICAL INSIGHT

THE CHIEF PRIESTS in the day of Jesus were a group of priests with the day-to-day responsibilities for the temple. The term “*chief priests*” was understood to include all the temple priests and those top officials with the greatest authority as members of the Sanhedrin – the High Priest, Captain of the Temple, Director of the Weekly Course, Director of the Daily Course, the Temple Overseer, and the Treasurer.

Additionally, the heads of the twenty-four priestly classes responsible for conducting the weekly services were members of the chief priests. Zechariah, the father of John the Baptizer, was a member of the Abijah class and was serving his week in the temple when the angel Gabriel appeared to him (Luke 1:5-9).

The chief priests prided themselves in following strict Mosaic Law because of their lineage to Aaron, the brother of Moses and first High Priest. While there were certainly many who genuinely desired to serve God and the people in a righteous way, the upper-class lifestyle and overly political nature of the priesthood had become more of an abuse of power than a life calling to service and worship. In fact, many argued that neither Mosaic Law, nor anywhere in the Torah, was the concept of a Sanhedrin, nor many “*chief priests*,” supported.

The High Priest, like all priests, was of the tribe of Levi and the Aaronic line. From Aaron to Phannias ben Samuel, the final High Priest before the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in A.D. 70., the High Priest had the highest position among all priests. For most of the life and ministry of Jesus, the High Priest was Joseph ben Caiaphas, who served between A.D. 18-36.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Describe your posture toward those in authority over you? Do you find it natural to comply with authority or to resist authority? What do you generally do when you disagree with someone who has authority over you – boss, teacher, police, government, homeowner association?

2. What questions have you been asked about your faith from unbelievers? Were any of those questions intended to entrap you or start a debate? How did you respond? How could you have better responded?

3. How did Jesus respond to those attempting to “*catch him in something he said*” with their questions (Luke 20:20)? What do you notice about the tone and manner in his response (Luke 20:1-8, 19-44)?

STUDY QUESTIONS

4. What is the point of the parable of the wicked tenants and the vineyard owner (Luke 20:9-18)? Who is the owner of the vineyard? The beloved son? The tenants?

5. Jesus uses biblical reasoning to challenge those who are questioning him. What biblical logic was Jesus using to answer the question of paying taxes to Caesar (Luke 20:24-25)? What biblical truth did Jesus emphasize with the Sadducees regarding a resurrection of all believers (Luke 20:37-38)?

6. Do any of the statements or actions by Jesus in Luke 20 seem especially provocative or surprising to you? Which ones? Why?

STUDY QUESTIONS

7. Why were the religious leaders, from scribes to the chief priests to the Sadducees, all intent on delivering Jesus over to the Roman authorities? What issues did they have with Jesus?
8. Having learned and loved this passage of Scripture, how are you called to live it out?

CLOSING PRAYER

Heavenly Father, we humbly submit and bow down to your authority. Authority over all heaven and earth. Authority over our lives, relationships, careers, and plans. Authority due to the One who became the Cornerstone, fulfilling all prophecy, and atoning for our sins with his blood. Under your authority, Lord, we desire to know you better and love you more. We desire to live out the Word you have inspired and preserved for us. We demonstrate obedience to you, not to gain your love and earn our salvation, but to recognize your authority. Give us wisdom and courage to answer the questions of those who don't call you Lord. Give us kindness and respect and discernment to respond to those who try to entrap us or debate us. May we hide your Word in our hearts, that we might respond as you would respond. Amen.



PARTFOUR UNIT 5

A WARNING TO WATCH OUT

Luke 21

“But watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap. For it will come upon all who dwell on the face of the earth. But stay awake at all times.” – Luke 21:34-36

HISTORICAL INSIGHT

THE TEMPLE OF JERUSALEM was originally constructed under the supervision of King Solomon, David's son, in the middle 10th century B.C. It sat atop the Temple Mount in the capital city of Israel and was the crowning achievement of Solomon's reign. Details of the Temple construction, from preparation to dedication, are found in 1 Kings 4-9 and 2 Chronicles 2-7.

The Temple was destroyed by the Babylonian attack in 586 B.C. The people of Jerusalem were exiled to Persia and released in 538 B.C. The Temple was rebuilt in 516 B.C., beginning the Second Temple period in Jewish history. It would not come to a close until A.D. 70 when the Temple was destroyed by the Roman forces.

Before the Second Temple period ended abruptly, a massive renovation was begun by King Herod the Great, who ruled Judea between 39 B.C. and A.D. 4. The renovation started in 20 B.C. and took about ten years to complete. However, work continued in some form for over seventy years.

When it was officially dedicated it was recognized as one of the largest sacred sites in the Roman empire. Herod had designed four enormous restraining walls to strengthen the inner Temple Mount Plaza, which was roughly 173 sq. yards. One of those walls remains today, the Western Wall, which by itself is 530 yards long.

The destruction of this noble dwelling place of God, and testimony to the history of a promised people, was one of the most tragic events in Jewish history. Today, archaeologists have uncovered gates, tunnels, water cisterns, market stalls, and more. These findings remind us of the moment Jesus looked to his disciples and foretold the day when the stones of the Temple would all fall (Luke 21:5-6).

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What is the most breathtaking architecture you have ever seen in person? What specifically do you recall about the construction, décor, or details of that place? Imagine someone told you it would soon be destroyed. What would your thoughts be?

2. Jesus is preparing to share the most significant words yet on his future return, however, notice where the disciples have turned their attention (Luke 21:5). In what similar ways do you lose focus regarding attention to Jesus?

3. The destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem would have been inconceivable to everyone but Jesus (Luke 21:6-9, 20-24)? How were these prophecies fulfilled? What does fulfillment of Jerusalem's destruction mean to you?

STUDY QUESTIONS

4. Believers often look to these passages with great curiosity and attempted prognostication. But what is Jesus telling us is most important relative to end times? (Luke 21:13-19). How does that apply to you? If your “*opportunity*” were tomorrow, what would you do with it?

5. What is the point of the fig tree parable (Luke 21:29-33)? How do we know “*this generation*” was not that of the disciples? Is it possible that your generation could be “*this generation?*”

6. Jesus concludes his words on the coming Son of Man with a warning (Luke 21:34-36). Summarize that warning. In what ways are you already heeding this warning? In what ways have you ignored the warning?

STUDY QUESTIONS

7. These are the final days of the ministry of Jesus. The week celebrating the Feast of Unleavened Bread would include the Passover meal. How do you picture the scene around Jesus in these final days? In what way does Luke paint that picture?
8. Having learned and loved this passage of Scripture, how are you called to live it out?

CLOSING PRAYER

Heavenly Father, O how you loved your people, Israel. How you had compassion for the people and were filled with sorrow from their rejection. Yet, you turned yourself over to them to fulfill what had been written. You allowed destruction on this grand city of David and beautiful house of worship, in order that all might know you are above all the works of man. We wait ready for your return. If we are the generation to receive your second coming, we pray to be ready. Keep us from those things that will distract us from readiness. Grant us the wisdom and words to share in those opportunities to bear witness. Our minds cannot imagine the new Jerusalem you have prepared, and our hearts can hardly contain the anticipation. The kingdom of God is near. Amen.



PARTFOUR UNIT 6

THE LORD'S SUPPER AT PASSOVER

Luke 22:7-23

And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." And likewise, the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood."

— Luke 22:19-20

HISTORICAL INSIGHT

THE PASSOVER MEAL, shared by Jesus and the disciples on the night before his crucifixion (Luke 7-23), was a celebration rich in meaning and ritual. This festival meal commemorated God's mercy on the people of Israel as the plague of death swept across Egypt and God's deliverance of his people from slavery to begin their journey to a promised land.

While Jesus instituted a new meaning in the elements of the Passover meal, the indication is that he and his disciples celebrated in a traditional manner. This would have included the preparation of a lamb, the removal of leaven from the house, and foot washing. Jesus in this new covenant engaged these rituals with new expectations and kingdom understanding.

While reclining at table, there would have been four ritual cups of wine. The Mishnah (a collection of Jewish oral traditions compiled in A.D. 200), states that even the poorest man in Israel must drink from the four cups, *"even if it means selling all his possessions."* These four cups represent sanctification, deliverance, redemption, and praise. Jesus takes one of the cups and calls it a *"new cup, the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you"* (Luke 22:20).

The meal begins with a prayer, or Kadesh, and all drink from the first cup. Then a pattern of prayer, singing of Hallel Psalms (Psalms 113-118), drinking the next cup, dipping the bitter herbs, breaking the unleavened bread, ceremonial hand washing, quoting of Scripture (Exodus 6:6-7), reciting of traditional blessings, and retelling of the deliverance story, continue throughout the meal.

* The Mishnah, Pesachim 10:1

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What is your favorite holiday meal? What do you specifically enjoy about sharing a meal with others around a special day or purpose? Do you have any traditions you practice for these meals?

2. What is the significance of Passover? Why was it called the day of Unleavened Bread? What preparations were necessary for the meal (Luke 22:7-13)?

3. Jesus ate the Passover meal as practiced by all Jews (Luke 14-16). Have you shared a Passover meal with others? Should Christians celebrate the Passover meal? What does it commemorate for Christians?

STUDY QUESTIONS

4. What new meaning did Jesus give to two of the Passover elements? What questions do you have about the meaning Jesus assigns to these elements (Luke 22:17-21)? What connection does this moment of Passover have with the current practice of Communion, Eucharist, or Lord's Supper?

5. What does the word "Eucharist" mean? What is the connection between this word and the first cup of Passover? What is the connection with Luke 22:17?

6. Communion is a time for looking back, looking around, and looking forward. Using the words and example of this passage, what do you think is "looked for" with each of these?

STUDY QUESTIONS

7. What is it like to be called out in public? What is it like to be called out in public though nobody knows it is you being called out? How do you deal with guilt and private shame? Had you been in the room, what would have been your reaction to hearing that one of you would betray Jesus (Luke 22:21-23)?
8. Having learned and loved this passage of Scripture, how are you called to live it out?

CLOSING PRAYER

Heavenly Father, the God of the Passover and Deliverer of his people, we praise you. We acknowledge that as you saved your people Israel, you have rescued us. As the angel of death passed over the homes marked with the blood of a lamb, death has passed over those of us marked by the blood of the Lamb. Lord, we pray that as we partake of the communion bread and cup, our hearts are aimed toward you, filled with worship and gratitude. May we know the bread as the body that was broken for us. May we know the cup as the blood that was shed for our sins. May your sacrifice not be taken for granted. May we share in the bread and the cup with you, and with all who have called you Lord, having confessed your name, and believed in your resurrection power. Amen.



PARTFOUR UNIT 7

BETRAYAL AND DENIAL

Luke 22:31-62

And immediately, while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed. And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the saying of the Lord, how he had said to him, “Before the rooster crows today, you will deny me three times.” And Peter went out and wept bitterly.

— Luke 22:60-62

HISTORICAL INSIGHT

JUDAS ISCARIOT is remembered as one thing – the disciple who betrayed Jesus. His name has become synonymous with ‘*traitor*’ and his motive is as common now as it was in the first century – greed.

Little is known about Judas Iscariot, though much has been speculated. Judas was a common name in early Judaism meaning ‘*praised*’ or ‘*the praised one*.’ The last name, Iscariot, is from *Ish Kerioth* or “man of Kerioth,” a small town about thirty miles south of Jerusalem, near modern-day Hebron. Judas was the son of Simon Iscariot (John 13:26). Again, Simon, man of Kerioth.

If the hometown assumption is accurate, and most scholars believe it is, then Judas was the only disciple not from Galilee. This also allows for the possibility that Judas was originally a disciple of John the Baptizer in the Judean wilderness, as Kerioth lies on the fringe of these wilderness lands.

Unlike other disciples, the former occupation of Judas is left unmentioned. It is assumed that Judas was educated with at least some practical experience in finance or accounting, as “*keeper of the money bag*” (John 12:6). Ultimately, the love of money led Judas to make a conscious decision of betrayal. This decision was perhaps foreshadowed when Judas speaks up to chastise Mary for using expensive perfume to anoint Jesus. The Apostle John notes that it was because Judas was a thief that he spoke up (John 12:1-6).

Whether Judas genuinely repented of his betrayal is not for us to know. His guilty conscience, however, is evident as he returned the thirty pieces of silver and went away and hanged himself (Matthew 27:3-5).

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. When were you most embarrassed by someone else – parents, children, friends? What did they do? What is it like to be in a situation where you would be highly ashamed if everyone else knew what you had done?

2. Jesus says that before morning Peter will have denied him three times (Luke 22:31-34). In what ways have you denied Jesus before others? In what circumstance would it be tempting to deny knowing Jesus? How can you prepare for those circumstances?

3. Before going out to the Mount of Olives, Jesus provides a final word of instruction and encouragement to the disciples (Luke 22:35-38). What was his message? How did the disciples misunderstand what Jesus said?

STUDY QUESTIONS

4. What was the purpose of going to the Mount of Olives (Luke 22:39-46)? What does this scene tell you about preparing to face something big? Describe the intensity of this moment?
5. As the crowd arrived to arrest Jesus, what would the disciples have become immediately aware of (Luke 22:47-53)? When you think about the things Jesus told his disciples in the hours, days, and weeks before this night, what first comes to mind?
6. What strikes you about the final remark Jesus makes to the chief priests and officers of the temple before they seize him?

STUDY QUESTIONS

7. Peter wept bitterly when he realized he had denied Jesus three times. How would you have consoled Peter at this moment (Luke 22:54-62)?

8. Having learned and loved this passage of Scripture, how are you called to live it out?

CLOSING PRAYER

Heavenly Father, we read your Word and imagine your pain. Even before you experience the grueling physical pain, you experience the heartbreaking pain of betrayal. Those who love you betrayed you in these final moments. Lord, humble us. We have betrayed you in moments of sin. We have betrayed you in moments of omission, not doing those things you have called us to do. We have betrayed you in our treatment of others. We have betrayed you in our words and attitudes. We have betrayed you in minimizing your lordship and our worship of you. We have been Judas. We have been Simon Peter. We pray for your forgiveness and your strength to resist those temptations of betrayal. Lord, we pray that we might more often pray. That we would follow your example on our knees before the Father. Amen.



PART FOUR UNIT 8

ON TRIAL

Luke 23:1-25

But the crowds were urgent, demanding with loud cries that Jesus should be crucified. And their voices prevailed. So Pilate decided that their demand should be granted. He released the man who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, for whom they asked, but he delivered Jesus over. – Luke 23:22-25

HISTORICAL INSIGHT

PONTIUS PILATE was the Roman governor of Judea (A.D. 26-36), serving under Emperor Tiberius. He was the fifth Roman to hold this position and is most notable for his role in trying and condemning Jesus to death by crucifixion.

The historical record of Pilate is found not only in the Gospels but in secular accounts as well. The Roman historian Tacitus credits Pilate for inflicting the extreme penalty on Christus.* Philo, a diaspora Jew in Alexandria, wrote of Pilate's zeal for annoying the Jews rather than honoring Tiberius.** And Josephus, the notable Jewish historian with an allegiance to Rome, wrote of Pilate's entrance into Jerusalem and his dishonoring the Jews with military standards.***

Further evidence of Pilate's term was unearthed in 1961 with excavations of a theater near Caesarea Maritima. A limestone block shows a dedication to Tiberius and recognition of Pontius Pilate, Prefect of Judea (the Roman title for governor). Since then, a coin and ring bearing the name and image of Pilate have surfaced.

Pilate was a cruel man who imposed Roman peace with an iron fist. His desire to retain power by demonstrating to Rome his control of the Jewish people led to a delicate balance of force and politics. It is of note that following the trial of Jesus, he and Herod are said to *"have become friends"* (Luke 23:12). There is also speculation that a political alliance was the cause of Caiaphas' removal as High Priest shortly after Pilate was dismissed in A.D. 36 for an especially violent response to Samaritan Jews.

* Tacitus, Annals, Book 15, Chapter 44, A.D. 116.

** Philo of Alexandria, The Embassy to Caligula, pp. 299-305, A.D. 41.

*** Josephus, The Jewish War, 2.169-174, A.D. 75 and The Antiquities of the Jews, 18.55-59, A.D. 93

STUDY QUESTIONS

- 1.** What is your experience with a courtroom? Have you been on a jury? Have you been asked to provide testimony in a trial? What is that like? When have you been accused of something that you did not do, what one word describes your feeling in that situation?

- 2.** Why did the entire Sanhedrin bring Jesus before a civil court (Luke 23:1)? Was this a civil matter? What did the religious leaders potentially risk by doing this? What did the religious leaders potentially gain by doing this?

- 3.** What accusations are brought against Jesus (Luke 23:1-3)? In what ways are these accusations true? In what ways are these accusations false?

STUDY QUESTIONS

4. Who is Pontius Pilate? What was the first verdict of the civil authorities?
5. Jesus is sent to a second civil court. Who was head of this second court and why was Jesus sent there? How did this court find Jesus (Luke 23:6-16)?
6. Why was Herod glad to see Jesus? What family member of Jesus had Herod taken issue with a few years prior?

STUDY QUESTIONS

7. Describe the final verdict (Luke 23:18-25)? If you were Pilate and were writing a book about this moment, what would the title be? If you were the religious leaders, what would the title be? What do you title the book?
8. Having learned and loved this passage of Scripture, how are you called to live it out?

CLOSING PRAYER

Heavenly Father, Lord, and Redeemer, today we ask you to give us fresh insight into your final days on earth. Days that were filled with betrayal, rejection, and injustice. Enable us to know your power when we face the same. Enable us to know your love and mercy and grace when we enact the words and actions of rejection and injustice on others. Lord, let us look to history, to Pilate, as someone we are tempted to be like when we don't stand firm in our conviction of who you are. When we give in to the voice of popularity and the desire to be liked over the desire to be faithful to you. Keep us from betraying your Word. Keep us from rejecting your truth. Keep us from promoting injustice. Amen.



PARTFOUR UNIT 9

CRUCIFIED AND BURIED

Luke 23:26-56

Then Jesus, calling out in a loud voice, said, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!” And having said this he breathed his last. Now when the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God, saying, “Certainly this man was innocent!” – Luke 23:46-47

HISTORICAL INSIGHT

CRUCIFIXION, as a means of capital punishment, had been invented and practiced by many others well before the Romans “perfected” it as the ultimate execution.

The earliest records indicate that King Darius of Persia crucified over three thousand of his political enemies in Babylon in the late 6th century B.C. For the next several centuries crucifixion was practiced regularly by the Greeks, Carthaginians, Macedonians, and Romans. Only after Roman Emperor Constantine the Great banned crucifixion in the mid-4th century A.D., did the practice lose favor and disappear from normal means of punishment.

Crucifixion verdicts from Roman courts were reserved for particular criminals and dissidents. While most common cases of theft, assault, and even murder, did not receive this punishment, those cases for which Roman peace was threatened, did merit crucifixion. Most often these were slaves, political agitators, rebels, and religious heretics. The Roman Empire desired these criminals to be made an example. The objective was to maximize torture, shame, and deterrence.

Further, most all crucifixion victims were Jews and other non-Roman citizens. It was highly distasteful to crucify a Roman citizen. The Roman statesman Cicero (106 B.C. – 43 B.C.) called it a crime to *“bind a Roman citizen; to scourge him was wickedness. So guilty an action cannot by any possibility be adequately expressed by any name bad enough to warrant it (crucifixion); a most cruel and disgusting punishment.”**

* Cicero, Pro Rabirio Perduellionis Reo 5.16.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What comes to mind when you see a cross? What does it symbolize for you? How do you reconcile what occurred on the cross with what are generally more joyful thoughts? What happened on the cross? Now, go deeper, what really happened on the cross?
2. What is your normal state of mind when treated unjustly? What can you learn from Jesus about compassion for others as he is led to his death (Luke 23:26-43)?
3. Where have you heard the words of the people before (Luke 23:35-39)? Who was behind these words the first time? Who is behind these words at this time? What does that mean for you?

STUDY QUESTIONS

4. Many who witnessed the crucifixion of Jesus would have seen it as a divine curse, as grounds to further reject Jesus. However, three men did not. Who were these three men? What do their words and actions teach you about responding to Jesus and who he is?

5. Just before Jesus breathed his last breath, two supernatural events took place. Describe the time of day and how it looked over the land? What was the significance of the second event that took place (Luke 23:44-47)?

6. How did the crowd react to the death of Jesus? Why?

STUDY QUESTIONS

7. John 19:39-42 describes what the women of Luke 23:55 observed. Along with Joseph of Arimathea, a dissenting Sanhedrin member, who else prepares the body of Jesus? What do you know about this individual? What were the women planning to do when they returned to the tomb after Sabbath?
8. Having learned and loved this passage of Scripture, how are you called to live it out?

CLOSING PRAYER

Jesus our Savior, we are incapable of fully expressing our gratitude for your willingness to be pierced for our iniquities, for our rebellion. We are incapable of fully understanding your love for us that you would be crushed for our sins, for our falling short of your glory. Jesus, you were beaten and crucified that we might be made new, restored, and delivered from an eternal separation of your goodness and light. As you hung on that cross, we are incapable of even partially comprehending the weight of our sin and the burden of our salvation. But we do know that you and you alone were capable of breaking the bonds of our fallen nature by the breaking of your body and the atonement of your blood. Let us never stop expressing our gratitude and worship. Amen.



PART FOUR UNIT 10

AN EMPTY TOMB

Luke 24

And as the women were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, "Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but he has risen. Remember how Jesus told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise."

— Luke 24:5-7

HISTORICAL INSIGHT

MARY MAGDALENE is one of the most fascinating women of the Bible. In fact, she is perhaps a woman of the Bible for whom most Christians and non-Christians are most fascinated. Little is known outside of Scripture about Mary, but enough is found to ensure her history is told accurately and her story understood.

Mary was a woman from whom Jesus cast out seven demons (Luke 8:2). Her name Magdalene likely indicates that she came from the city on the southwest coast of the Sea of Galilee named Magdala. After Jesus healed her, she remained faithful to him as a disciple.

Several myths surround Mary Magdalene. The first, labeling Mary as a “prostitute,” was originated by Pope Gregory I in 591 A.D., when he pronounced that Jesus had saved a *“sinful woman – beautiful, vain, and lustful, the sister of Martha and Lazarus.”* This is clearly contrary to the Gospel accounts yet has remained intertwined in Western Christianity for centuries.

A second myth, one of Middle Ages folklore, has been reignited in contemporary pop culture by Dan Brown’s *The Da Vinci Code*. It claims Mary Magdalene was the wife of Jesus. On many theological, logical, and literary levels, this is wrong.

Myths aside, the reality of Mary Magdalene in Scripture is a profile of a remarkable woman from Magdala, a small Galilean fishing town, who became a female disciple and was the first witness to the resurrection of Jesus, the very cornerstone moment of Christianity. While Mary, mother of Jesus, was the first to carry the Gospel, Mary Magdalene was the first to carry the Good News.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. The celebration of Easter as the resurrection of Jesus has been central to the Church since the early apostles. It has historically been the most sacred and celebrated Christian holiday. How do you describe Easter to a nonbeliever? How do you celebrate Easter? Is it the most sacred holiday for you?

2. Why did the women return to the tomb after the Sabbath? What tells you the women did not expect Jesus to be raised from the dead (Luke 24:1-5)? Can you compare that sense of surprise to anything you have experienced?

3. What convinced these women that Jesus had indeed risen from the grave? What life lesson is found in their example?

STUDY QUESTIONS

4. What stands out to you most about the encounter Jesus had with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-32)? What did Jesus use to teach them about himself along the road? At what moment were their eyes opened and they recognized it was Jesus?

5. What is the most unbelievable thing you have ever seen in person? How passionate are you when sharing that story? While faith itself is cause for great passion, can you imagine how passionate (even unto death) these disciples were after having seen and touched Jesus (Luke 24:36-45)?

6. How do these final words from Jesus inform your calling to discipleship? To disciple-making? To biblical literacy – the learning, loving, and living out of God’s Word (Luke 24:45-49)?

STUDY QUESTIONS

7. Luke 24:53 concludes Luke's first book. Do you know which book picks up where this one ends? Read the first few verses of that second book of Luke.
8. Having learned and loved this passage of Scripture, how are you called to live it out?

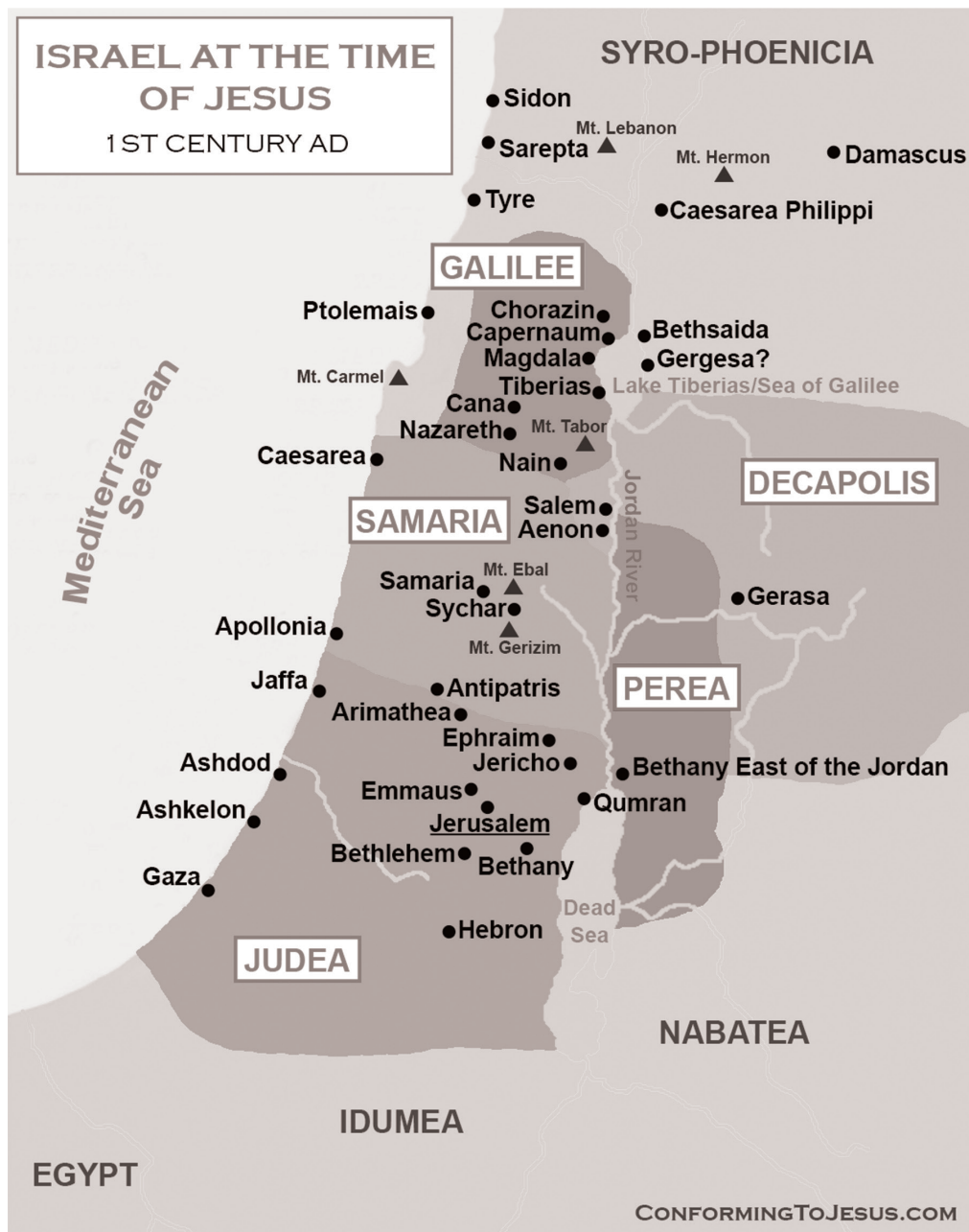
CLOSING PRAYER

Jesus Christ, Risen Lord, and Savior, we praise you forever. Because you live, we have an eternal tomorrow in your presence. Because you live, we have hope in our today. Because you live, we have the power of the Holy Spirit to guide us, encourage us, convict us, and strengthen us. All that we are, and ever will be, is only because you live. There is no greater reality in all the world than the empty tomb. Death could not hold you. Darkness could not contain you. The empty tomb stands as the pinnacle of your redemption story. From creation to fall to redemption to restoration, the empty tomb holds your one story together. Without it, there is no faith, no hope, no peace, and no joy. Because of the empty tomb, we believe in our heart you are Lord, and you were raised from the dead. Because of the empty tomb, we are saved. Amen.



ISRAEL AT THE TIME OF JESUS

1ST CENTURY AD



PRAYER JOURNAL

For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. Amen.

LUKE 2:11



PRAYER JOURNAL

“For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses my life for my sake will save it.” Amen.

LUKE 9:24



PRAYER JOURNAL

“The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.” Amen.

LUKE 10:2



PRAYER JOURNAL

“For the Son of Man came to seek and to save that which was lost.” Amen.

LUKE 19:10



PRAYER JOURNAL

And Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Amen.

LUKE 23:34



PRAYER JOURNAL

“Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.” Amen.

LUKE 21:33



SOURCES CONSULTED

Agan III, C.D. Jimmy *Knowing the Bible: Luke, A 12-Week Study*, Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015.

France, R.T. *Teach the Text Commentary Series: Luke*, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2013.

Holcomb, David *One Story: From Shadows to Substance*, Vol. 3, Clemmons, NC: River Oaks Community Church, 2020.

Keener, Craig S. *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006.

MacArthur, John F. *MacArthur Study Bible, 2nd Edition*, Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2021.

MacArthur, John F. *Luke: The Savior of the World*, Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2007.

Sakenfield, Katharine Doob. *The New Interpreters Dictionary of the Bible, Volumes 1-5*, Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006.

Sproul, R.C. *Luke: An Expositional Commentary*, Sanford, FL: Ligonier Ministries, 2020.

Stonecroft Ministries. *Following Jesus with Luke*, Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishing, 2013.

Swindoll, Charles R. *Living Insights New Testament Commentary: Luke*, Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2017.

Wright, N.T. *Luke for Everyone*, Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004.



—OF JESUS
THECHRIST
GOACCORDING TO
THELUKE **—**