



Luke

The Humanity of Jesus

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“Do you understand what you are reading?” Philip asked. “How can I,” he said, “unless someone explains it to me?”

Acts 8:30b-31a

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Luke 1 | A New Hope

Hello my friends, and welcome to the gospel of Luke. My name is Kris Langham, and I will be your guide as we walk through the story of Jesus, as recorded by the good doctor Luke. Luke was in fact a medical doctor, and a good friend of the apostle Paul, having joined Paul on several missionary adventures in the book of Acts.

Luke explains that “many [had] undertaken to draw up an account” of Jesus’ life at that time (1:1). And being not only a believer but also a man well-versed in research and reason, Luke “carefully investigated everything from the beginning” and “decided to write an orderly account” (1:3) for his friend Theophilus, whose name means friend of God. Luke did so, in verse 4:

“So that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught” (Luke 1:4).

That purpose is key. Lots of stories were going around about Jesus. Some true, some not. The four gospels of the Bible were recorded and kept with the express purpose of accuracy—so we would know truth. Matthew and John were eyewitnesses. Mark likely recorded Peter’s eyewitness account. Luke gives us an intriguing balance because he investigated. He gathered stories, conducted interviews, and asked many eyewitnesses. His gospel includes many repeated stories, but also a great many parables and teachings of Jesus that the others don’t share because people remembered them and recorded them. He delivers far more detail on the Christmas story, which says to me that he took time to speak to people like Mary, and even got personal stories from John the Baptist’s parents. And what a treasure for us—to learn how it all came about.

And though Jesus is very much the same person here, Luke's perspective on Him emphasizes the humanness of Christ. Still Son of God, but Luke is particularly intrigued that Messiah was also the Son of Man—that He was one of us.

Now Luke opens his account a short time before Jesus, with the very human story of an elderly husband and wife with no children. They were two people desperately in need of hope. Verse 5:

“In the time of Herod king of Judea there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly division of Abijah; his wife Elizabeth was also a descendant of Aaron. Both of them were righteous in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's commands and decrees blamelessly. But they were childless because Elizabeth was not able to conceive, and they were both very old” (Luke 1:5-6).

Sometimes life is rough on the nice guys. Two godly believers enduring one long trial. Infertility. It's a hard trial for any couple. In that day, people treated you like you were cursed. Yet Zechariah and Elizabeth served God faithfully, and their heart's one desire just never happened.

Zechariah is a Jewish priest, and we catch up with him serving in the temple of the Lord at the altar of incense. The incense in the temple represents prayer—and we see prayer happening everywhere in this story—both inside and outside the temple. Zechariah himself has been praying for one thing for a long time. There inside the temple, Zechariah is surprised by an angel named Gabriel. Let's read at verse 12:

“When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear. But the angel said to him: ‘Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard’” (Luke 1:12-13a).

Now there's an encouraging message: Your prayer has been heard. Which prayer? The prayer to have a child, of course. But Zechariah has been saying that prayer for years—praying, and hoping. God listened faithfully all those years, and His answer arrives at last in verse 13:

“Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to call him John”
(Luke 1:13b).

This baby named John will become the man we know as John the Baptist. This is not the disciple John who wrote a gospel; this John is a prophet—one of the most important prophets in all the Bible. His job description is given in verses 16 and 17—and it's a whole lot more than just baptizing:

“He will bring back many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the parents to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord” (Luke 1:16-17).

Now that's a powerful ministry! Imagine that was your calling today—bringing many back to God, turning fathers' hearts to their kids, turning rebellious hearts to hear true wisdom—and above all, making ready a people prepared for Jesus.

So after years of praying for a baby, Zechariah gets his answer, and it's almost too good to be true. So good that Zechariah has trouble believing it! And because he won't believe, he goes dumb. Not dumb as in stupid, dumb as in can't speak—because God takes his voice away. There's a lesson here—unbelief makes you dumb. When you don't trust God's Word, it will keep you quiet and hold you back from sharing the good news.

So Zechariah can't tell anyone what he's heard, but the angel Gabriel still has more to say. Six months later, Gabriel shows up again, this time to visit a young Jewish woman named Mary who is engaged to a young Jewish man named Joseph. Gabriel's message to Mary begins in verse 30:

“Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call Him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David, and He will reign over Jacob’s descendants forever; His kingdom will never end” (Luke 1:30-33).

That is quite a prophecy. You may have heard it before with the Christmas story, but look at the words carefully. The promise is made of a King. Jesus was born to be King, on the throne of King David, and His Kingdom will last forever.

But consider it from Mary's perspective: at this point the throne of David hasn't been occupied for centuries. The Jews have a king, a tyrant named Herod who rules the Jews ruthlessly. And he serves under Caesar Augustus in Rome—a cruel and wicked man who calls himself a god.

So this prophecy to Mary is a promise of hope, and it is a long time coming. Don't miss this—the Kingdom of God and the King who will rule it are at the heart of all Bible prophecy; it is what all of history is leading up to. That Kingdom will change the world, and it will last forever. Here in Luke, the archangel Gabriel just named the King, and His name is Jesus. This is big.

Now Mary's response to this massive prophecy is beautiful, honest, and very human. Verse 34:

“‘How will this be,’ Mary asked the angel, ‘since I am a virgin?’” (Luke 1:34).

You gotta love this. Mary skips past all the everlasting kingdom stuff and says, “Wait a second! I’m a good Jewish girl. How am I gonna have a baby when I’m just engaged?”

So Gabriel explains that the Holy Spirit will make it happen, so that the child will be called the “Son of God.” As he says in verse 37:

“For no word from God will ever fail” (Luke 1:37).

I like that. The angel reminds Mary that God’s Word comes with power. Nothing is impossible for God, and His Word will not fail. **The same is true for us. Our hope rests in the power behind every promise from God’s Word.**

And Mary believes. Where Zechariah had trouble believing and so couldn’t speak, Mary can’t wait to tell someone! Ironically, Mary runs off to tell Zechariah’s wife, who is also Mary’s cousin—Elizabeth. Elizabeth is quite pregnant by this time, and excited to see Mary. In verse 45, she exclaims,

“Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill His promises to her!” (Luke 1:45)

Elizabeth knows that there is a special blessing for Mary’s faith, for simply trusting God at His Word.

So Mary and Elizabeth are both in on the excitement now. This is that big moment when you have the most amazing news, and you finally get to share it with someone—someone who gets it. Mary is overflowing with joy, and her joy turns into a song. **See the promise of God always comes with hope, but that hope is only enjoyed when you receive it with faith.** Mary enjoys it, so she sings it. The song is known as the *Magnificat* (which I

have to admit sounded to me like a feline superhero). But *Magnificatis* simply Latin for “glorify”—because Mary’s soul is glorifying the Lord. And what a beautiful thing that is.

After the song, we move on to the birth of John the Baptist, and at long last Zechariah gets his voice back, and he breaks into song! The joy of believing has finally struck the old priest, and we nearly have a musical here in chapter 1. Both of these songs are glorious and brimming with hope. So I encourage you to read Luke 1 for yourself today. You can even sing the songs if you like. They are spontaneous songs written by hearts overflowing with joy, because hope is on the horizon at last.

And as we get ready to journey through Luke’s gospel, hold onto God’s promises, hold onto hope—and maybe take a cue from John the Baptist, and prepare a clear path for Jesus in your heart.

Luke 2 | Peace on Earth

Welcome back, everyone. Luke chapter 2 on our journey through the Word, the story of the day that peace came to earth. That peace arrived as a little baby boy, and for anyone who has ever longed for peace in the world, or peace in your heart, this story is for you. It is, of course, the Christmas story—the birth of Jesus, and it begins at verse 1:

“In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world” (Luke 2:1).

And so, every person in the vast Roman empire traveled back to their hometowns to be registered and counted. Verse 4 introduces Joseph—living in Nazareth, but now traveling south to Bethlehem, the town of David,

“...because he belonged to the house and line of David” (Luke 1:4).

Don't miss that. Chapter 1 introduced us to King Herod, and chapter 2 to Caesar Augustus. But whatever happened to the line of King David? Verse 5:

“He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child” (Luke 1:5).

Betrothed and pregnant will get you a lot of sideways glances and muttered judgments, but underneath this very human story, there is a great undercurrent of God's mighty hand working everything together. Many details of this story were written on scrolls centuries before it all happened. Bethlehem. The line of David. And a virgin with child—enduring an arduous journey. Verse 6:

“While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped Him in cloths and placed Him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them” (Luke 2:6-7).

And just as simple as that, Almighty God entered the world that He created, a little baby boy who was laid down to sleep in a feeding trough.

Verse 8 introduces a group of shepherds out under the starry skies above Israel’s countryside keeping watch over their flocks by night. Bethlehem has pasture land for sheep to this day, and I can tell you the hilly terrain provides some great viewpoints for stargazing. Now shepherds in that day were among the lowly of society. Yet God has a way of lifting up the lowly, and honoring the humble. So in verse 9:

“An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; He is the Messiah, the Lord’” (Luke 2:9-11).

That is awesome. Never forget that the story of Jesus is good news of great joy, and may it always be great joy to your heart and mine.

“In the town of David a Savior has been born” (2:11). Jesus was born to save. I am often perplexed by books and articles that attempt to explain how Jesus became Savior as His disciples exaggerated His story over time. But that’s not the historical record. Here Luke records the story—prophesied for centuries beforehand, and now proclaimed by an angel on high—of a baby who is Messiah and Lord. And Jesus came—not to condemn—but to save. Verse 13:

“Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, ‘Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom His favor rests’” (Luke 2:13-14).

Peace on earth. It’s a popular phrase around Christmastime. And for good reason: it’s right here in the Christmas story. But sometimes those three amazing words get separated from the story of Jesus’ birth. I remember riding in Small World at Disneyland around Christmas one year, and it was all lit up and beautiful. At the end of the ride, “Peace on Earth” was posted beautifully on a banner, and again in languages from all around the world. A lovely sentiment, but of course there was nothing about the birth of a Savior. Now I’m not offended that they don’t include Jesus in their Christmas décor. It is our job to proclaim the good news of great joy, not Disney’s. But it is interesting. The whole world loves this phrase: peace on earth. We long for it. But how to find it? And why do the angels proclaim it here? How does the birth of Messiah bring peace?

The world can wish us peace, and all that well-wishing may be very well-intended, but where to find it? Here a host of angels proclaim it. Well, I don’t know what they thought, but I can tell you what they said. “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see!” (Luke 2:15). They do just that, and then they’re ready to go tell it on the mountain to anyone they can find that Jesus Christ is born.

Verse 21 jumps forward one week. The story mellows a bit, but pay attention to the details:

“On the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise the child, He was named Jesus, the name the angel had given Him before He was conceived” (Luke 2:21).

So He was circumcised on day 8, then Mary and Joseph waited out the time of purification, and presented Him to the Lord, and finally made a sacrifice offering for Him in verse 24.

It's all rather mundane really—the usual Jewish traditions for a baby. But notice a phrase repeated three times: They did all of it:

“...in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord” (Luke 2:24).

That's essential because Jesus came to fulfill the Law. And even as a baby, before He had any choice in the matter, He completed all that was required of Him by God's law. Not one thing is missed, so that He could be a complete Savior for us.

And notice that the sacrifice offered at verse 24 was the sacrifice for a poor family—a pair of doves or two young pigeons. Does it ever make you wonder—that our Lord chose to be born into a poor family?

And while this poor young family is at the temple, they encounter an old man named Simeon, who gives a prophecy about Jesus, and he reminds them that peace on earth doesn't come without a price. Verse 34:

“Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, His mother: ‘This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too’” (Luke 2:34-35).

So Simeon warns the young couple of the effect that Jesus will have on the world. It won't be easy. Jesus will be spoken against, and that conflict will reveal the true hearts of many. That will not be pretty. And a sword will pierce Mary's soul. Wow. This experience will be deeply personal for the young mom—just as reading the gospel should be for me and you.

They return home, and Jesus grows up in Nazareth. In verse 40 He grows in strength and in wisdom. Again the detail here tells me that Luke took extra time to hear Mary's story—which gives us a story from Jesus' childhood that the other gospels miss. He's twelve years old, and His family goes to Jerusalem for the Passover. Then at verse 43:

“After the festival was over, while His parents were returning home, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but they were unaware of it” (Luke 2:43).

Now families traveled in large groups for the Passover, and it wasn't hard to misplace one child for a time. So they kept traveling for a whole day. They searched, didn't find, and went back to Jerusalem. Verse 46:

“After three days they found Him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. Everyone who heard Him was amazed at His understanding and His answers” (Luke 2:46-47).

I love this story. What was that like? His parents are less amused. But in verse 49:

“‘Why were you searching for Me?’ He asked. ‘Didn't you know I had to be in My Father's house?’” (Luke 2:49).

Take that one to heart. Because you and I can misplace Jesus too. **Even as we go about all our religious rituals, even ones that are all about Jesus, sometimes coming back home we just leave Him behind. He's not in our talk or in the way we treat each other. So go back. Find Him at His Father's house.** It amazes me how many places we can go looking for God in our lives when of course Jesus is always hanging out in His Father's house. Go back to church. In spite of all their many issues, Jesus can still be found among His people.

Read Luke 2 today. Hear the good news and share the great joy that Jesus Christ is born! And as you read, perhaps invite the peace that came to earth on that Holy night to come into your heart as well.

Luke 3 | Prepare the Way

Welcome back to Luke's gospel. Chapter 3 today on Through the Word, with the ministry of the first Bible hero of the New Testament: John the Baptist. John had one essential ministry: preparation. Have you ever tried to share the love of God with someone, and you just knew that something was in the way? As if they had an invisible wall up. Or maybe that's you. Do you ever feel like the message goes in the ears but something stops it before the heart? You just might need a John the Baptist message.

Luke begins by quoting an ancient prophecy about John. Verse 4:

“As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet: ‘A voice of one calling in the wilderness,

“Prepare the way for the Lord,

make straight paths for Him.

Every valley shall be filled in,

every mountain and hill made low.

The crooked roads shall become straight,

the rough ways smooth. And all people will see God's salvation”””

(Luke 3:4-6).

So there it is, John's calling—from centuries before—was to prepare the way for the Lord. Now John wasn't out plowing trails for Jesus to walk on, and he didn't go flattening mountains and filling valleys to make straight paths. The path he cleared was the road to the hearts of the people, and that path doesn't clear easily. All kinds of junk can crowd the way.

What does it take to open a stubborn heart? Well, John the Baptist focused his ministry on one thing: repentance. Back in verse 3:

“He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins” (Luke 3:3).

Now baptism was somewhat new to the Jews. The only people that had been baptized before were those that wanted to become Jews. And this baptism is a little different from the one that you and I go through as Christians. They didn't have faith in Jesus yet. This was simply a baptism of repentance. To repent is to turn away from sin, deciding that it is wrong. In Latin the word means something like “changing your mind.” In other words, changing the way you think about the things that you do and the way you live, agreeing with God when He calls it wrong, and deciding that it's time to turn and live for Him. And repentance is the main ingredient necessary to prepare a heart for Jesus.

Now John's message is not the full gospel. Really it's the heart of the Law, which is Old Covenant. It is the Law that prepares the way for Jesus' message of grace. The Law tells us when we are doing wrong, and that we need to get right. But the law can't make you right! It can help you see your guilt, and see your need for a Savior.

Now to get people there, John had to be pretty blunt with some—especially as crowds arrived. In verse 7, John sees some religious hypocrites in the bunch, and he calls them out—a brood of vipers. John isn't preaching an empty repentance of just words, as if you can say “Sorry” to God and go right back to sinning. At verse 8 he says:

“Produce fruit in keeping with repentance” (Luke 3:8).

Fruit in the Bible is an outward show of what's happened on the inside. You can say that you're a good orange tree all day long, but the only way to

prove it is making good oranges. So producing fruit in keeping with repentance means actually changing your actions.

And notice that repentance looks different for each person. To those who have more than they need, John told them to share. To the tax collectors, he told them to stop over-collecting. To the soldiers, he told them to stop abusing their authority by extorting money. Be content. The question for us is: what should repentance look like in your life? And are you producing fruit?

John speaks so powerfully, the people start to wonder if maybe he is the Messiah. John stops the rumors immediately in verse 16:

“John answered them all, ‘I baptize you with water. But one who is more powerful than I will come, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire’”
(Luke 3:16).

John is always pointing the way to Jesus—because his message is only the beginning of the story. Don’t miss that. Repentance is the first step. Once you change your mind about the way you live, now Jesus has a clear path to enter, and He comes with forgiveness and so much more: with the Holy Spirit and with fire—a fire to live a whole new life for Him.

And back in our story, Jesus shows up. And if you look carefully you’ll see the whole Trinity—all three parts of one God, yet each part clearly distinct. At verse 21:

“When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. And as He was praying, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended on Him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: ‘You are My Son, whom I love; with You I am well pleased’”
(Luke 3:21-22).

I love that last part. The Father says to Jesus, “You are My Son whom I love.” The Father loves the Son. **Never forget that God—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit in One, before a single part of creation came into being—God was, is, and ever shall be love.**

So why was the baptism of Jesus so important? It was a baptism of repentance, but Jesus had nothing to repent of. He was sinless. Yet He went through the process so that He would fulfill every step required of man. For Jesus to die in our place, He had to, as He put it, “fulfill all righteousness” (Matthew 3:15).

Now the rest of the chapter is what we call a genealogy—the family tree that leads up to Jesus. Starting at verse 23:

“Now Jesus Himself was about thirty years old when He began His ministry. He was the son, so it was thought, of Joseph,

the son of Heli, the son of Matthat,

the son of Levi, the son of Melki,

the son of Jannai, the son of Joseph,

the son of Mattathias, the son of Amos,

the son of Nahum, the son of Esli...” (Luke 3:23-25).

And it goes on a ways from there. But if you look carefully, you have to ask whether there is a mistake in the Bible. See Matthew records Jesus’ genealogy as well, but if you compare the two, they are quite different. In Matthew’s account, Joseph is the son of Jacob (Matthew 1:16). Here in Luke 3:23, Joseph is the son of Heli, and the differences continue from there all the way back to King David. How does Joseph have two different fathers? Why is the whole line different? Is there a mistake in the Bible?

Look closer. Here in Luke, the word “son” is not in the original Greek text. It actually says “Joseph of Heli,” which in that language could be used to mean son or son-in-law. In other words, it says that Joseph is the son-in-law of Heli, meaning that Heli is Mary’s dad. See Luke was recording the bloodline of Jesus, which only goes through Mary. In the time that Luke and Matthew wrote, the difference would have been obvious. All Jews were very familiar with family lines, and finding whose father is whose would be as simple as asking anyone from Nazareth or Bethlehem.

Here’s how it works in the four gospels: Matthew presents Jesus as the King of the Jews. So he records a genealogy that starts with Abraham, the first Jew, goes through David the king, and continues through the line of the kings, all the way to Joseph. Jesus inherited the kingly line of David through Joseph. Mark on the other hand presents Jesus as the servant of all. A servant needs no genealogy, so Mark doesn’t give one. Luke presents Jesus as the Son of Man—focusing on His humanity. And so Luke’s genealogy goes through the bloodline that starts with Mary and goes all the way back to Adam, the very first man. Now Mary and Joseph both descended from David, so Mary has the right bloodline but isn’t in the line of kings. That came through fathers. Thus Jesus had both the bloodline and the line of succession. Finally, John’s gospel presents Jesus as the Son of God. No genealogy required there, so John goes back to the very beginning, where Jesus existed before time began.

Read Luke 3 today. And read through the genealogy with it. You might find some hidden gems amongst all the names—like Jesus’ great-great-great-grandfather Matth, which is better than being named Algebra or Trigonometry. Though if that’s your name, more power to you. More importantly, take John’s message to heart. Examine the path to your

heart, and let John's words clear that path for Jesus. If you need to repent, repent. And I'll meet you back here in chapter 4.

Luke 4 | Conquering Temptation

Hello friends, and welcome back to the book of Luke. Chapter 4 opens:

“Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, where for forty days He was tempted by the devil” (Luke 4:1-2).

So the story before us is about Jesus and temptation. Temptation is a lure to do wrong—a trap that makes evil look good. It’s the delicious bait that conceals a sharp hook, or the tasty morsel of cheese on a deadly mouse trap. Temptation is that last moment of pleasure before the trap breaks your neck.

Now the temptation itself is not the sin. It’s all about how you respond to it. So let’s see how Jesus responds here in Luke 4.

Jesus fasts for forty days in the desert, and the devil attacks Him with three temptations—just three. And if you look carefully, you’ll see that these three represent the devil’s entire playbook when it comes to temptation.

1 John 2 sums them up this way: the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life (1 John 2:16). Those are the same three temptations that took down Eve in the garden of Eden. The first temptation comes for Jesus in verse 3:

“The devil said to Him, ‘If You are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread’” (Luke 4:3).

This one is the lust of the flesh. When the devil tells you that you need something to be satisfied and you won’t be happy until you get it, he’s preying on your flesh. When you crave a food, a feeling, or a fix. Whether it’s drugs or porn or even something that seems harmless, whatever

addiction tempts you to put your physical needs before your spiritual devotion, that's the lust of the flesh. When you start to believe you can't be happy without it, watch out. So how should you respond? Check out verse 4:

“Jesus answered, ‘It is written: “Man shall not live on bread alone””
(Luke 4:4).

Notice that Jesus responds by quoting Scripture. He's quoting Deuteronomy, and the rest of that verse says that man shall live:

“...on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD”
(Deuteronomy 8:3).

And that's exactly what Jesus uses to survive temptation: God's Word. He does battle with the sword of the Spirit. If you want a ready defense against temptation, memorize Scripture. A Bible left on your shelf will do you about as much good as a sword that's never been unsheathed. Learn how to use it well before the battle hits.

And consider the verse: “Man shall not live on bread alone,” but on God's Word. Temptation hits. My flesh wants that thing. But I need God's Word. That's where I'll find life. God created the world, and the same breath that breathed life into Adam still breathes life into the Scriptures that we read. Sometimes I like to think of the Bible like those little healing fairies in classic Zelda that restore life.

Well, the next temptation comes at verse 5:

“The devil led Him up to a high place and showed Him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And he said to Him, ‘I will give You all their authority and splendor; it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. If You worship me, it will all be Yours’” (Luke 4:5-7).

This one is the lust of the eyes. The devil offers Jesus His heart's desire. Lets Him see it right in front of Him. Remember, the kingdoms of the world are what Jesus came for. God's great plan is to establish Jesus as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. And the devil offers it to Him. The easy way. No pain. No death on a cross. Just worship the devil, and it's all Yours. Verse 8:

“Jesus answered, ‘It is written: “Worship the Lord your God and serve Him only””” (Luke 4:8).

When you're tempted with the lust of the eyes—when you see what you want for the taking—remember, you serve God before any other, and you will do things His way, not the easy way. Verse 9, and temptation number three:

“The devil led Him to Jerusalem and had Him stand on the highest point of the temple. ‘If you are the Son of God,’ he said, ‘throw Yourself down from here. For it is written:

“He will command His angels concerning you to guard you carefully; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone””” (Luke 4:9-11).

Temptation three is the pride of life. When you find yourself sittin' high and mighty, and you think you could do anything. God will catch you. You're too big to fail. He has to catch you. And for this one, the devil even quotes the Bible. See right here: He'll forgive you. Just jump.

Danger. **Your pride is the devil's weapon, not yours. Pride makes you stupid. And dangerous.**

And notice how the devil says again, if you are the Son of God. Temptation is often a challenge to your identity—to prove who you are. Don't bite that bait. So in verse 12:

“Jesus answered, ‘It is said: “Do not put the Lord your God to the test””” (Luke 4:12).

When the devil stokes my pride and tells me to jump into something foolish, I remember: my life doesn't belong to me. I am only a steward. And I don't need to prove who I am. I am His. God gave me this life, and it is not for me to put God to the test. I trust Him, I don't test Him. The strongest defense against pride is humility.

And just like that, the devil leaves... until an opportune time.

So where does that leave us? We face temptation. What do we do? I think it's pretty simple really. Do what Jesus did. Speak God's Word. Literally. Memorize it, and say it when temptation hits. With my old youth group, I used to have them take three index cards. On one side write: lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. Then on the back of each card, write the verse that Jesus quoted in response. Keep 'em in your pocket, and when temptation hits, pull out the cards. Figure out which temptation it is, and speak the verse. Speak it to yourself, speak it to the devil tempting you. “Resist the devil, and he will flee from you” (James 4:7).

Well, Jesus recovers and heads back to his hometown in Nazareth. While He's there on the Sabbath day, He enters the synagogue. He unrolls the scroll of Isaiah and reads one of my favorite scriptures in the whole Bible. At verse 18:

**“The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because He has anointed me**

to proclaim good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind,

to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor"
(Luke 4:18-19).

That amazing passage is a description of Jesus' ministry. It's His work. His calling. He preaches good news to the poor. He proclaims freedom for prisoners. Recovery of sight to the blind, release to the oppressed, proclaiming the year of the Lord's favor.

What a passage. And for one long dramatic pause, every eye in the synagogue is fastened on Jesus. Do you mean it? Is it real? Verse 21:

"Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:21).

Now the people of Jesus' hometown speak well of Him, and they love the graciousness of His words. But they're having trouble believing that a kid they knew growing up could be all that. Any Christian who's ever tried to share Christ with their family knows what this is like. So Jesus moves on in verse 31.

"Then He went down to Capernaum, a town in Galilee, and on the Sabbath He taught the people. They were amazed at His teaching, because His words had authority" (Luke 4:31-32).

Authority is a key word in Luke's gospel. Jesus taught—not just with eloquence or insight—but with authority. Jesus' message was not simply a wise man teaching a philosophy or idea. He was and is the eternal one speaking truth and proving His authority to proclaim it by the power of His words over demons, over illness, over nature itself.

When He demonstrated the power and authority of His Word, people got excited about the healing and miracles and they begged Him to stay. But watch His words in verse 43:

“But He said, ‘I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent’” (Luke 4:43).

The people wanted miracles, but Jesus was sent to preach, to preach the good news of God’s kingdom. That’s the heart of His ministry: preaching and inviting people to join the kingdom of God. To invite you to be a citizen in God’s kingdom—where God is king.

Read Luke 4 today, and as you read God’s Word, remember that it has authority. Over temptation, over doubters, over demons, over everything that comes against you, and over your life. And I’ll meet you back here in chapter 5.

Luke 5 | For the Love of Sinners

Hello Through the Word. We are back in Luke's gospel today at chapter 5. Jesus has been preaching and healing and proclaiming the gospel of the Kingdom. Now, for the first time, we see Jesus call His disciples. For us, we will find the very simple heart of what it means to be a Christian. Let's dive in at verse 1:

“One day as Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret (also known as the Sea of Galilee), the people were crowding around Him and listening to the Word of God. He saw at the water's edge two boats, left there by the fishermen, who were washing their nets. He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from shore. Then He sat down and taught the people from the boat” (Luke 5:1-3).

I can't help but marvel at the dynamics of divine timing. Did it just happen to be Simon who parked his boat at the right place at the right time? I wonder if Simon has any sense of destiny at this point. Or maybe he's too busy listening to Jesus teach. He's got a front row seat! Simon will be Peter by the way, but he doesn't know that yet. Sometimes God's plan for you starts with one little coincidence. Or is it? Verse 4:

“When He had finished speaking, He said to Simon, ‘Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch.’

Simon answered, ‘Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because You say so, I will let down the nets’” (Luke 5:4-5).

Remember that Simon is a fisherman by trade. This is what he does. He didn't catch anything all night, but he's clearly intrigued by this traveling teacher, and so he decides to take Jesus at His word, and give it a shot.

That may seem small, but it will be the first step on a great journey. In verse 6:

“When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break” (Luke 5:6).

The catch is so big it nearly sinks two boats. It’s a big day for men who fish for a living! Everyone is ecstatic. But then, for Simon, the penny drops. And not just a penny. Have you ever had a moment in time when everything slows down and reality drops? Simon is looking at two boats full of fish, but this isn’t about the fish. Verse 8:

“When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus’ knees and said, ‘Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!’” (Luke 5:8).

Wow. Simon gets a tiny glimpse of who Jesus is and it overwhelms him. But it’s not just everything that Jesus is; it’s what Simon is not. He’s not good, and he knows it. Pay attention here. For anyone who ever felt not good enough, or too dirty and broken for God to use, this story hits home.

Simon’s fishing partners James and John are also astonished, and in verse 10:

“Then Jesus said to Simon, ‘Don’t be afraid; from now on you will fish for people.’ So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed Him” (Luke 5:10b-11).

Now consider that for these fishermen, this was a very successful work day. Two boatloads of fish! But again, it’s not about the fish. And they leave it all to follow Jesus.

And this gets to the heart of what it means to be a Christian, even today. It’s about seeking the Giver instead of the gifts. Jesus called disciples with two simple words: follow Me. But for these men, following Jesus meant leaving

everything else. That leaving behind looks different for every disciple, but it's there for each of us. Imagine if they tried to do both: follow Jesus and drag around two boatloads of old fish. They'd be slow and stinky. And for Simon Peter, Jesus knows exactly how sinful he is, and He still calls him. Turns out, **following Jesus isn't about your past; it's about your future, and about taking the first step toward that future right now.**

Moving on to verse 17, we find one of my favorite miracle stories. Jesus is preaching in an overcrowded house, and some men hear about it. Men with a good friend who can't walk. A paralytic. Verse 18:

“Some men came carrying a paralyzed man on a mat and tried to take him into the house to lay him before Jesus. When they could not find a way to do this because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and lowered him on his mat through the tiles into the middle of the crowd, right in front of Jesus. When Jesus saw their faith, He said, ‘Friend, your sins are forgiven’” (Luke 5:18-20).

Notice that Jesus saw their faith. How did He see it? It wasn't an aura or glow; it was their deeds. And the words He says are striking, “Friend, your sins are forgiven.” That's quite a statement. Forgiving sins is no small thing. We might forget that as we hear it so often in church, but the Pharisees don't miss it. Verse 21:

“The Pharisees and the teachers of the law began thinking to themselves, ‘Who is this fellow who speaks blasphemy? Who can forgive sins but God alone?’” (Luke 5:21).

They call it blasphemy because only God can forgive sins, and Jesus is suddenly forgiving them! He's claiming God's authority for Himself. And they're right to question. Who does this rabbi think He is? Verse 22:

“Jesus knew what they were thinking and asked, ‘Why are you thinking these things in your hearts? Which is easier: to say, “Your sins are forgiven,” or to say, “Get up and walk”?’” (Luke 5:22-23).

Ooh, now that's a great question. Which one is easier? Of course, it's easier to say, “Your sins are forgiven” because no one can see if it actually worked. But truly forgiving sins is much harder to do. Now, it's harder to say, “Get up and walk,” because then everything's on the line. If the guy doesn't get up and walk, they know you're a fake.

All of that is spinning through their minds, as Jesus goes on:

“‘But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.’ So He said to the paralyzed man, ‘I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home’” (Luke 5:24).

Pause there! Jesus wants them to know. And He wants us to know—to be convinced—that He has authority to forgive sins. Here. On earth. And to prove that authority He puts it all on the line. “Get up.” And the lame man got up, took his mat, and went home praising God.

Moving on, Jesus calls an awful sinner to be a disciple. Now don't miss how striking this is. The man's name is Levi, and he's a tax collector. He's the worst sort of traitor to the Jews—taking money from his own people and giving it to the enemy, the Romans. Even worse, stealing for himself in the process. At verse 27:

“After this, Jesus went out and saw a tax collector by the name of Levi sitting at his tax booth. ‘Follow Me,’ Jesus said to him, and Levi got up, left everything and followed Him” (Luke 5:27-28).

There's those two words again: follow Me. The very essence of what it is to be Christian. And those other two words: left everything. This man Levi will

later become Matthew, and will write the Gospel of Matthew. Levi here is filthy rich in the truest sense—his money is dirty. But he leaves everything right there at his tax booth to follow Jesus. And he's so excited about following Jesus that he throws a party. And who does he invite?

His friends, of course. And who is friends with a filthy traitor but more dirty sinners of course. Now, you have to picture this scene. And picture how the religious Jews see it all. Jesus—the good rabbi—and His disciples—who thus far are not the most respectable lot—all go to a big party—with a whole houseful of sinners.

This does not sit right with the Pharisees. They confront Jesus:

“Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?” (Luke 5:30b).

Sometimes it's hard to fathom God's love for sinners. Two thousand years later, we still have trouble grappling with this reality that God loves the bad guys too, that Jesus would go to a party with those people. After all they've done.

The tax collectors here are not just well-meaning sinners. They're greedy corporate thieves. The Romans were oppressors, and the tax collectors are opportunists making it all worse. What they do is sick. So in verse 31:

“Jesus answered them, ‘It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance’” (Luke 5:31-32).

Catch that word: repentance. That's the key. Jesus did not come just to party with sinners or prove that God isn't a cosmic killjoy. He came to save them and heal them. Read Luke chapter 5 today. Remember, God's love

for sinners, His authority to proclaim your sins forgiven, and hear those two little words from Jesus that change everything: follow Me.

Luke 6 | Radical Love

Hello friends, and welcome again to Luke's gospel. Chapter 6 today, with one of the greatest sermons ever delivered from the most effective teacher of all time. Jesus was a preacher—as good as they get. But before that, we have three short stories and an important decision for Jesus that required some serious prayer. We'll pick up that story in verse 12:

“One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God. When morning came, He called His disciples to Him and chose twelve of them, whom He also designated apostles” (Luke 6:12-13).

I must admit, I'm a little fascinated by the dynamics of Jesus praying to God. He often pulled aside to pray, and here He spent a full night praying before choosing the apostles. Their names are listed in verse 14, and there are 12. If you're wondering, the difference between a disciple and an apostle is simple. A disciple is a follower, someone who becomes like their leader. Many were disciples of Jesus, but only twelve are chosen to be apostles here. The word apostle means sent one. Follow to learn, then sent out to represent.

These men have been following Jesus and learning to live and love like Christ. Now they are chosen to lead, and they would be sent out into the world to represent Jesus and bring the good news.

Next up is the great sermon. Now the teaching here is very similar to Matthew 5 —leading some scholars to believe that Luke and Matthew recorded the same sermon but changed up various bits of it. But look carefully. Verse 17 says that Jesus “stood on a level place” (Luke 6:17). This is clearly not a mount. It's the Sermon on the Plane. Like every

traveling preacher, Jesus surely repeated the same message at different locations—but modified to fit the audience.

The sermon begins with a series of beatitudes: a proclamation of blessing. To be blessed is to receive a gift—a happiness from God. We begin at verse 20:

“Looking at His disciples, He said:

**‘Blessed are you who are poor,
for yours is the kingdom of God.**

**Blessed are you who hunger now,
for you will be satisfied.**

**Blessed are you who weep now,
for you will laugh.**

**Blessed are you when people hate you,
when they exclude you and insult you
and reject your name as evil,
because of the Son of Man.**

Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven” (Luke 6:20-23a).

Now all four blessings here have something in common. There’s a little suffering now and a big payoff later. That’s the journey of faith. After that, there are four woes. Woe is a warning from God—the opposite of blessing. Verse 24:

“But woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort.

Woe to you who are well fed now, for you will go hungry.

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

Woe to you when everyone speaks well of you, for that is how their ancestors treated the false prophets” (Luke 6:24-26).

Each of the woes is an antithesis for the blessings. A little comfort and ease now, and a lot of hard times down the road.

Don't be fooled by temporary prosperity or the praise of man. Seek God's approval and seek the blessings that last.

Moving on to verse 27, Jesus delivers a profound challenge to love:

“Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn to them the other also. If someone takes your coat, do not withhold your shirt from them” (Luke 6:27-29).

Now that is radical in any time and any culture. It's always right to love your neighbor, but don't pat yourself on the back for being nice to your friends. Every Christian is called to love those who curse you, those who mistreat you. Someone takes your coat—here, you look like you could use this shirt. This passage challenges me every time I read it—challenges the way I see my possessions, and the way I see people. Particularly people who are against me. Doesn't mean I have to be against them. Verse 32:

“If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that” (Luke 6:32-33).

In my much younger days, I got mixed up in a new kind of party called raves. Loud music, lots of drugs, but I was there for something else. There was a friendliness. Everyone belonged. Everyone was nice. I called them the nineties' hippies. It wasn't long though, before I discovered just how selfish this drug-induced "love" really was. "I love you because love makes me feel good." **When the drugs wore off, the love went cold. And when the drugs continued, the lines blurred between being loved and being used.**

Then one day—right in the midst of all that—I encountered Jesus. He was not what I expected. His was a higher love. A love where the only reward comes from God Himself. At verse 35, He says:

"But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because He is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful" (Luke 6:35-36).

I never stop being amazed at the kindness of God. Even when I least deserve it.

Next up, Jesus gives us another lesson in treating others the way we want to be treated. Verse 37:

"Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Give, and it will be given to you" (Luke 6:37-38).

What a statement. Do not judge. Now I don't think Jesus means for us to simply ignore sin. If your friend is destroying their life with sin, ignoring it is not love. But neither is condescending judgment love. Don't look down on them; help them. Verse 41 explains:

“Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, ‘Brother, let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when you yourself fail to see the plank in your own eye? You hypocrite...” (Luke 6:41-42).

This is for all of us Christians who love to tell everyone else what they’re doing wrong—and overlook our own faults. Hey, hypocrite. **Jesus says that the other guy’s problem is a speck, and you have a big old two by four in your eye. It’s not that you shouldn’t help; it’s that trying to help with that plank stuck to your face—you’re gonna hurt someone. Arrogant people hurt people. Humbled people help people.** So take the plank out of your eye so you can see, and let the experience humble you. Then offer to help a friend.

Next up is a little lesson on fruit. Fruit is a part of the tree that you can see and taste, and it identifies the tree. Orange trees make oranges. In the Bible, fruit is the outward evidence in your life of what’s really going on on the inside. In verse 43:

“No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. Each tree is recognized by its own fruit. People do not pick figs from thornbushes, or grapes from briars. A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart...” (Luke 6:43-45).

Jesus just finished teaching us how to live and love well, but if your heart is wrong, you’ll never get it right. You just can’t fake the fruit. And you can’t change your fruit until you let God change your heart.

And Jesus closes the sermon with a striking challenge, beginning at verse 46:

“Why do you call Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say?” (Luke 6:46).

In other words, if you're not obeying Jesus, don't call Him your Lord. At verse 47:

“As for everyone who comes to Me and hears My words and puts them into practice, I will show you what they are like. They are like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock. When a flood came, the torrent struck that house but could not shake it, because it was well built. But the one who hears My words and does not put them into practice is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. The moment the torrent struck that house, it collapsed and its destruction was complete” (Luke 6:47-49).

When we put Jesus' words into practice, we're not just building a house; we're laying foundation. When the storm hits—and it will hit—the rock will hold you fast. Read Luke 6 today, and build your house on the rock.

Luke 7 | Such Great Faith

Hello my friends, and welcome back to Luke chapter 7 today on Through the Word, as we get a glimpse of the love of Christ for every kind of people.

One of the most interesting and challenging aspects of being a Christian and living to serve others is the amazing variety of people you encounter. If you put yourself out there to help, you're gonna meet some people, and every life will have a story to tell. Ministry is a new adventure every day.

How do you respond? Like Jesus of course. Luke 7 has everything from grieving widow to disheartened believer to dirty sinner to self-righteous Pharisee. How does Jesus care for such different people in different situations? One at a time, and the first one comes in a town called Capernaum in verse 2:

“There a centurion’s servant, whom his master valued highly, was sick and about to die. The centurion heard of Jesus and sent some elders of the Jews to Him, asking Him to come and heal his servant” (Luke 7:2-3).

Now a centurion is a high ranking official in the Roman military. This officer is commended by the Jews as a good man who cares for his servant and loves the Jews. Yet Jesus will commend him for something different. Then in verse six:

“So Jesus went with them. He was not far from the house when the centurion sent friends to say to Him: ‘Lord, don’t trouble yourself, for I do not deserve to have You come under my roof. That is why I did not even consider myself worthy to come to You. But say the word, and my servant will be healed’” (Luke 7:6-7).

There's a key concept here that the centurion understands, and we don't want to miss: authority. It's one of the key words in the Gospels, and this centurion gets it. Authority is a kind of power that is more than just strength or might. It is a power that is backed up by something or someone higher, someone with the legitimate right to say so. Authority is what gives the judge and the police officer the power to administer justice. Authority gives the pastor the power to look at a bride and groom and call the two one. Sometimes authority is abused or corrupted, but the concept is key to the function of society, and to the Kingdom of Heaven.

This centurion knows all about authority. He says in verse 8:

“For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, “Go,” and he goes; and that one, “Come,” and he comes. I say to my servant, “Do this,” and he does it.’

When Jesus heard this, He was amazed at him, and turning to the crowd following Him, He said, ‘I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel.’ Then the men who had been sent returned to the house and found the servant well” (Luke 7:8-10).

So Jesus hears the centurion and is amazed. Think about that: Jesus amazed. **The centurion understands how the system works. It's not about who has the muscle.** It's not just about Jesus having superpowers to heal. **It's all about who is in charge. The centurion knows that Jesus has authority, and if He says the word, it happens.**

Jesus hears the centurion's insight and calls it great faith. **You cannot impress God with your riches or skill, but He loves to see your faith.**

And next up, Jesus moves on to a town called Nain, and just as He approaches the city gate, a funeral procession is heading out, carrying a

man who died too young, and left his widow mother to grieve alone. In verse 13:

“When the Lord saw her, His heart went out to her and He said, ‘Don’t cry.’ Then He went up and touched the bier they were carrying him on, and the bearers stood still. He said, ‘Young man, I say to you, get up!’ The dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus gave him back to his mother”(Luke 7:13-15).

The response of the people is stirring:

“God has come to help His people” (Luke 7:16b).

Now I know a statement like that can on one hand amaze you, but on the other you can’t help but wonder sometimes: why doesn’t He help me? When things get bad and God doesn’t seem to show up, it makes you question.

John the Baptist was probably asking the same thing. He served God faithfully for years, but here in chapter 7 we find him stuck in jail. At verse 18:

“John’s disciples told him about all these things. Calling two of them, he sent them to the Lord to ask, ‘Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?’” (Luke 7:18-19).

Wow. Imagine John’s mixed emotions and struggling faith. He proclaimed that Jesus is the One—the Lamb of God. Why is he questioning that very truth now? It’s the classic battle between faith and sight. John hears of these great miracles, but he looks around him and sees the walls of a jail cell. Unjustly imprisoned.

I get it. But John’s problem is his focus. Doubt stirs when we get nearsighted—when we focus on our own circumstances. Watch how Jesus

responds. He never explains to John why he is in jail. Instead, He shifts John's focus. In verse 22:

“So He replied to the messengers, ‘Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor. Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of Me’” (Luke 7:22-23).

Now there's an interesting phrase. How do you stumble on account of Jesus? Maybe it's by focusing on what He isn't doing.

So Jesus fixes John's eyes back on what He is doing. The rest requires patience. After responding to John, Jesus turns back to the crowd to talk about John and his ministry. Remember: John's ministry was preparing hearts to hear Jesus. And it was repentance that cleared the way. But something interesting at verse 29.

“All the people, even the tax collectors, when they heard Jesus' words, acknowledged that God's way was right, because they had been baptized by John. But the Pharisees and the experts in the law rejected God's purpose for themselves, because they had not been baptized by John” (Luke 7:29-30).

What a statement. What a contrast! The tax collectors were lousy sinners, but they accepted God's way for themselves because repentance prepared the way. The Pharisees were supposed to be godly and religious people, but they rejected God's purpose for themselves. That's phenomenal. But why? It comes down to one simple word: repentance. The Pharisees refused it. Refused to admit that they had anything to repent of.

So Jesus' message was meaningless to them. Forgiveness? Don't need it. In verse 31, Jesus shows His compassion and His frustration.

“To what, then, can I compare the people of this generation? What are they like? They are like children sitting in the marketplace and calling out to each other: ‘We played the pipe for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not cry’” (Luke 7:31-32).

That’s a moving picture. God tries every song He can to break through to these guys—a joyful song, a funeral dirge. Nothing moves them. John the Baptist came with a serious message—he was never found at a party of sinners. But they wouldn’t listen. Said he had a demon. Jesus came with joy and love and celebration, and they just called Him a glutton and a drunkard. “A friend of sinners,” they said. A serious insult in their eyes. These guys remind me of those teenagers who are too cool to do anything, so they sit back and judge everyone who does. Smug and self-righteous. In verse 35, Jesus challenges them:

“But wisdom is proved right by all her children” (Luke 7:35).

In other words, **the evidence of the message is in the lives that are changed by it.** The chapter ends with a story of one of those changed lives. A sinful woman weeps in repentance at Jesus’ feet. Yet a Pharisee named Simon just can’t understand how Jesus can forgive such a foul sinner. The story Jesus tells is as insightful as it is penetrating, and it cuts to the heart for every one of us who just struggle to see how Jesus can love sinners like them, or sinners like us. Read Luke 7, and let Jesus’ love challenge your heart.

Luke 8 | Careful How You Hear

Hello, Through the Word. Luke chapter 8 on our journey today, a chapter about the hidden power of the mighty Word of God. It begins in verse 1 with Jesus doing exactly what He came to do:

“After this, Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God” (Luke 8:1).

So Jesus is out proclaiming the gospel. This is not just a stop along the way. This is what Jesus came to do. It carries throughout His story even more than the miracles.

Jesus is proclaiming the kingdom of God. And then Jesus tells a parable about planting seeds to explain just how this preaching works. Let's listen in, and try to picture the story in your mind. Verse 4:

“While a large crowd was gathering and people were coming to Jesus from town after town, He told this parable: ‘A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path; it was trampled on, and the birds ate it up. Some fell on rocky ground, and when it came up, the plants withered because they had no moisture. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up with it and choked the plants. Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up and yielded a crop, a hundred times more than was sown.’ When He said this, He called out, ‘Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear’” (Luke 8:4-8).

Now a parable is a story with a lesson in it. Jesus told stories about things and people that we can relate to to help us understand the spiritual. Everything is symbolic, so Jesus explains to His disciples in verse 11:

“This is the meaning of the parable: The seed is the Word of God” (Luke 8:11).

Pause there. The seed is God's Word. Think about that. A seed is an amazing little thing. Not much to look at, but it has the unseen power to grow life. Now in the parable, this seed is the Word. It's not your philosophical argument about God, and it's not your stunning ability to explain God. The seed is the Word of God. Consider how unimpressive a single seed is: small, dry, not colorful, or rich in texture. Yet the power of life is in there. Just add good dirt and water, and you get the most amazing results. That's the power of God's Word.

The dirt in this parable represents the hearts of those who hear the Word. God's Word is always powerful, but Jesus describes three ways in which that life-giving seed will fail to bear fruit. First in verse 12.

“Those along the path are the ones who hear, and then the devil comes and takes away the Word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved” (Luke 8:12).

For some, the heart has been trampled on so much that the surface is hardened to the point that a seed can't get in at all. Satan picks it off easily. Then verse 13:

“Those on the rocky ground are the ones who receive the Word with joy when they hear it, but they have no root. They believe for a while, but in the time of testing they fall away” (Luke 8:13).

These hearts have a little soft dirt, so they respond well to God's Word. A shoot pops up, but then the sun gets hot. Life gets rough. Jesus calls it testing. Trials. Think about that. The testing is sunshine. Sun is good for healthy plants if they have good roots. And testing is good for the believer with good dirt. The hot sun forces the roots to go deeper, but for those hearts without much depth, the time of testing dries up what little growth they had. And then in verse 14:

“The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life’s worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature” (Luke 8:14).

With some believers, you see a little growth, but it never seems to get anywhere. They just don’t mature spiritually. The problem isn’t bad dirt below—their heart may be fine. The problem is nasty thorns above. Weeds grow all around, and the heart is too busy growing the weeds to grow God’s Word. What are those thorns? Jesus says they are “life’s worries, riches and pleasures.” Interesting. They’re not necessarily outright sins, but they prevent the believer from growing. **The key word here is mature. Every Christian is called to grow and grow up. Spending too much time and thought on life’s worries, riches, and pleasures will stunt your growth.** And then at verse 15:

“But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the Word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop” (Luke 8:15).

Growing into a mature and strong Christian is pretty simple. No magic formulas or Miracle-Gro. It starts with good seed—that’s the Word of God. Then good dirt—that’s a noble and good heart. Planting the seed is hearing the Word and holding onto it. If your heart is hard, soften it. When trials hit, soften deeper, and dig your roots to deeper waters. Persevere. And up top, clear out the worries to make room to grow.

Now without going into the details of verses 16 to 21, I want to point out two key phrases that you might want to mark in your Bible. First in verse 18, Jesus says:

“Therefore consider carefully how you listen” (Luke 8:18a).

In other words, listen with care and attention so that you don't lose the seed planted. And then skipping down to verse 21, Jesus says this:

“My mother and brothers are those who hear God's Word and put it into practice” (Luke 8:21).

Got that? Not just hearing God's Word, but living it. Practice what He preaches. It's a sign that you are His family. Trust Jesus at His Word, and do it.

Next up, the disciples are given an opportunity to do just that. In verse 22:

“One day Jesus said to His disciples, ‘Let us go over to the other side of the lake’” (Luke 8:22).

So there it is. Jesus gave them a word. He told them to go to the other side of the lake. Don't miss the details. Be careful how you listen. Hear God's Word and put it into practice. And they do. At least, they start to. Back in verse 22:

“So they got into a boat and set out” (Luke 8:22).

So far so good. But the testing comes in verse 23:

“As they sailed, He fell asleep. A squall came down on the lake, so that the boat was being swamped, and they were in great danger” (Luke 8:23).

Do you ever feel like Jesus is asleep in your life? Right when the big storm hits, Jesus is out cold. Keep in mind, some of these men are fishermen. These are no high seas wusses. They spent their lives on the water. Yet in verse 24, they wake Jesus convinced that they're going to drown. Have you ever faced a storm so big you felt utterly helpless? And you wonder if God even cares. Verse 24:

“He got up and rebuked the wind and the raging waters; the storm subsided, and all was calm. ‘Where is your faith?’ He asked His disciples” (Luke 8:24b-25).

Now that is awesome. But don't miss the lesson here. It's not just the miracle. Jesus takes on a massive storm with a word. Remember, this whole chapter is about the power of God's Word.

But He doesn't turn to them and say, “Did you see how awesome that was?” No. He asks, “Where is your faith?” That's what this whole storm is about. Not about miracles, but faith. If you ask me, I don't think that calming the storm was Jesus' highest plan for the disciples. Too often we just want to get out of the storm. But remember, Jesus gave them a word: “We're going to the other side.” Did they listen carefully?

Some years ago, God used this very story to speak to my heart. I was going through quite the storm of my own, and I wanted out. And somewhere in this story, I felt as though the Lord was saying, “Son, I won't always get you out, but I will get you through.”

It was a very long time before I saw any light at the end of that tunnel. But that one word stuck with me. Through. He'll get me through. Funny, it was around that same time that I was kicking around ideas for an app and audio guides for the Bible. And that word through came back again.

Well, there are two more stories here, so read Luke 8. Let the seed of God's Word plant and take root in good dirt. Consider carefully how you listen. Put His Word into practice. And I'll meet you back here next time.

Luke 9 | Finding Who You Are

Hello, my friends. Pastor Kris with you as we open Luke 9 today on Through the Word, an essential chapter about finding who you are by knowing who Jesus is. Let's dive in at verse 1:

“When Jesus had called the Twelve together, He gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases, and He sent them out to proclaim the Kingdom of God and to heal the sick” (Luke 9:1-2).

So Jesus sends out the Twelve on mission. Jesus still sends us on mission today. Every mission is different, but several keys stand out about their mission. Two pairings. First, He equipped them with power and authority—power to do the work and authority to make it legitimate. And notice on this mission those will be their only equipping—no bag, no bread, no money this time. The second pairing forms the mission's purpose: proclaim God's Kingdom and heal the sick. Message paired with ministry. They will both preach and serve. Just like Jesus, the healing bears testimony to the message, which is always the Kingdom of God.

There's an important lesson on miracles here: the miracles support the mission, and the mission was about the message. Never do we see Jesus—nor the disciples—perform miracles just to show off.

Well, when they come back to meet Jesus, they meet Him in Bethsaida, and He draws a large crowd and He preaches to them the Kingdom of God. Do not miss it. The Kingdom is Jesus' primary message. Then in verse 12, things get interesting.

“Late in the afternoon the Twelve came to Him and said, ‘Send the crowd away so they can go to the surrounding villages and countryside and find food and lodging, because we are in a remote place here’” (Luke 9:12).

The disciples have a real problem: several thousand people and not much to eat. And the only solution they see is to send the crowd away.

When you get involved in the ministry of helping people, one challenge is bound to hit you: too many needs for you to handle. But watch Jesus’ response. Verse 13:

“He replied, ‘You give them something to eat’” (Luke 9:13a).

So the disciples told Jesus to send them away, but He says you feed them. Pay attention. Jesus doesn’t just fix the problem. He includes the disciples. They get to be a part of it! But hold on. There’s a problem with this. Back in verse 13:

“They answered, ‘We have only five loaves of bread and two fish—unless we go and buy food for all this crowd.’ (About five thousand men were there)” (Luke 9:13b-14).

Note that they counted men because most men represented a family, so you could estimate there were at least three people per man. That means fifteen thousand! Okay, nice idea including us, Jesus. But this one is impossible. Impossible is Your job, not ours. Now watch Jesus carefully here. I want you to picture this one, and see it with fresh eyes. Verse 14:

“But He said to His disciples, ‘Have them sit down in groups of about fifty each.’ The disciples did so, and everyone sat down. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, He gave thanks

and broke them. Then He gave them to the disciples to distribute to the people.” (Luke 9:14b-16).

Pause scene. Play it back in slo-mo. Jesus took five loaves and two fish, broke them, and gave them to the disciples. Now zoom in on one disciple. He’s holding about half a bread loaf and just a portion of one fish. No miracle yet. And look at his eyes. He looks at the food. Impossible. Looks at his part of the crowd. Impossible! Looks back at Jesus. Well, if you say so. And he steps to the first person and does what Jesus said. We feed them.

Now by all reason and experience, that story should end just a few people in for every disciple. But in verse 17:

“They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over” (Luke 9:17).

Well, what do you know? Jesus told them to do the impossible, and they did it. Don’t miss that. This miracle did not happen in Jesus’ hands, though it did start with Jesus’ Word. And for anyone in ministry who has ever been overwhelmed by the need—like God simply hasn’t supplied you sufficiently—maybe start by just sharing what Jesus gave you. You may be surprised to see just how far it goes.

Now the next section is one of the most important in all the Bible. And it’s all about who Jesus is. Verse 18:

“Once when Jesus was praying in private and His disciples were with Him, He asked them, ‘Who do the crowds say I am?’” (Luke 9:18).

Jesus starts with an easy question. It’s easy to talk about what others say about Jesus, and the disciples offer up a few answers. And you can discuss

what your friends or parents or pastor say all day long. But faith has to be personal. So Jesus cuts to the critical question in verse 20:

“But what about you?’ He asked. ‘Who do you say I am?’” (Luke 9:20).

That simple question may be the most essential question of your faith. Who is Jesus? According to you.

“Peter answered, ‘God’s Messiah’” (Luke 9:20b).

And Peter got it right. He knows who Jesus is. Jesus instructs them not to tell anyone yet. In verse 22:

“And He said, ‘The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and He must be killed and on the third day be raised to life’” (Luke 9:22).

Wow. That’s the whole thing. And notice that who Jesus is determines what Jesus must do. He is the Messiah, and so He must suffer, die, and raise to life.

And then at verse 23, Jesus goes on to explain who the disciples are and what they must do. You see, **you’ll never understand who you are until you know the One who made you. As soon as the disciples acknowledge who Jesus is, He reveals to them who they are.**

You can spend your life trying to find your purpose, but you’ll never truly understand what you are meant to do until you know the One who meant you to do it. So Jesus reveals what it means to be a disciple in verse 23:

“Then He said to them all: ‘Whoever wants to be My disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow Me. For

whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for Me will save it. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit their very self?” (Luke 8:23-25).

Memorize that passage. You'll spend a lifetime uncovering its meaning. First, Jesus told them that He would suffer. Now following Him means a cross for us as well. To follow Jesus, you follow Jesus. Every day.

And what about that statement: "Whoever wants to save their life will lose it"? He's not talking about rescuing yourself from a burning building. He means trying to give meaning to your own life, living for whatever you want to, and trying to get what you want from life. Jesus says, try to save it, and you'll lose it.

It's... meaningless. If that hits home, read Ecclesiastes with us. But whoever loses their life—for Jesus—will find it. Give up on all that the world calls life, trade it in for life in Jesus, and you'll find yourself alive. More than you ever imagined. Not an easy life. Not an all-your-hopes-and-dreams life. Don't twist Jesus' words. He simply says, lose your life for Him and save it. Next up, verse 28:

“About eight days after Jesus said this, He took Peter, John and James with Him and went up onto a mountain to pray. As He was praying, the appearance of His face changed, and His clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning” (Luke 9:28-29).

So first the disciples acknowledged who Jesus is, and now they get a quick glimpse of who He really is. I think there's a lesson here. The more you acknowledge God in your life, the more He will reveal His true nature.

Believing is seeing. And while they're standing there, Moses and Elijah show up. Peter says something goofy, and then in verse 35:

“A voice came from the cloud, saying, ‘This is My Son, whom I have chosen; listen to Him’” (Luke 9:35).

I encourage you to read that story, and just take it in. The chapter goes on with several more great lessons on what it means to be a disciple, and it closes with a series of personal challenges from Jesus to carefully count the cost of following Him.

Read Luke 9 today and let Jesus ask you the question: who do you say He is? Answer honestly. And He may just reveal to you something about who you are as well. And I'll meet you back here in chapter 10.

Luke 10 | Who Is My Neighbor?

Welcome back, everyone. Luke chapter 10 today on Through the Word, a chapter about mission, ministry, loving your neighbor, and loving God.

Love is a road that's easier to preach about than walk down. When the sweet sentiments and good intentions of love meet the reality of my stressful life and so many needy people, sometimes "love your neighbor" doesn't feel so practical. But there's no way around it; no excuse in the world that will get us out of it. God has called us to love with more than just good intentions. We are called to love with our very lives.

The chapter begins with the disciples sent out on the road with a mission. Verse 1:

"After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of Him to every town and place where He was about to go. He told them, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into His harvest field'" (Luke 10:1-2).

So the disciples are given a mission to proclaim the gospel, but first, Jesus wants them to see the enormity of the task. There are so many to reach, so many ready to receive God's Word. We just need people willing to go out and do the work. And it is work. But anyone who has ever gathered fruit at harvest time knows the great joy that hard work can bring. So Jesus gives them some instructions and a reality check about the true nature of ministry. In verse 3:

"Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves. Do not take a purse or bag or sandals; and do not greet anyone on the road" (Luke 10:3-4).

Ministry is no easy ride. There are wolves out to devour you, and you, my friend, are just a lamb. That's a dramatic picture. For a mission like that, there is one thing you will absolutely need to pack. And it's not something you can carry in a bag. So Jesus says don't even bring a bag! What you need is faith. Heading out with no provisions will drive that lesson deep. They will learn to walk in faith at every step.

The directions that follow are essential. Of course, every mission is different and instructions change to fit the need, but there are core values here that should guide every servant of God. At the heart of it all, they are called to be messengers, and their message from God is repeated in verses 9 and 11:

“Tell them, ‘The Kingdom of God has come near to you’” (Luke 10:9).

Well, the disciples head out, and skipping ahead to verse 17:

“The seventy-two returned with joy and said, ‘Lord, even the demons submit to us in Your name’”(Luke 10:17).

Nothing like a little mission for God to let you see His power and get all fired up! But be careful. In our flesh, we're always impressed with a show of power. But watch Jesus' response. Verse 18:

“He replied, ‘I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven’” (Luke 10:18).

Well, that changed the mood in a hurry. Jesus recognizes a real danger here—one that we should take to heart. God may use you for great things, but never forget that He gets the glory. All of it. Jesus saw it firsthand. Satan. God made him beautiful and powerful. And he fell like lightning. It can happen to any Christian leader. Verse 19:

“I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you.

However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven” (Luke 10:19-20).

In other words, don't get excited about your power. It's not yours. Rejoice in God's grace. Picture your name up there in God's book way before you could ever earn it, and be amazed that God would use a nobody like you or me.

Next up, a question that leads Jesus to one of the most famous stories of all time. At verse 25:

“On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. ‘Teacher,’ he asked, ‘what must I do to inherit eternal life?’” (Luke 10:25).

So the man wants to know how to live forever. How to get to heaven. But the question is not entirely honest. He's trying to test Jesus. Jesus responds in verse 26:

“‘What is written in the Law?’ He replied. ‘How do you read it?’ He answered, “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind’”; and, “‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’” ‘You have answered correctly,’ Jesus replied. ‘Do this and you will live.’ But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, ‘And who is my neighbor?’” (Luke 10:26-29).

Look carefully. He wanted to justify himself. That means he wanted to prove his own righteousness. Not by living out the commands, but by limiting them. Love your neighbor is much easier if you set a limit on who qualifies. They have to live right next door. And it can't just be some yahoo on the road.

Hey, I get how this works. In my younger days, I was an expert at justifying myself. I could take whatever I was doing and sort of verbally twist it to make it sound like I was a great guy. I even convinced myself I was good.

Now watch Jesus' response. He doesn't tell this man the gospel. Doesn't call him to repent. Because a man justifying himself doesn't think he needs to repent. So Jesus tells a story. In verse 30:

“In reply Jesus said: ‘A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead’” (Luke 10:30).

The world is a rough place. People are wicked. You can't always prevent it, but how do you respond? Verse 31:

“A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side” (Luke 10:31-32).

Notice that Jesus purposefully chooses a priest and a Levite. Religious people. The folks you expect to do right. But righteousness isn't about your title or the respect you command; it's about living out your faith—even when it's inconvenient. After all, they're probably busy with religious duties. Sometimes we're too busy for our most essential human responsibility: love your neighbor. At verse 33:

“But a Samaritan...” (Luke 10:33).

Wait. Pause there. You have to know that the moment Jesus said Samaritan, every eye opened a little wider. The scorn in the heart of the Jews listening toward Samaritans. Half-breeds. Outcasts. The last person a

Jew would think of to answer, “Who is my neighbor?”! Could God’s command even apply to a Samaritan? But Jesus said it.

“But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him” (Luke 10:33-34).

The Samaritan took pity. He took time, he took patience, he took his own money, he brought the man to help, and he took care of him.

Now I do not believe this is not an endorsement for handing out money. Sadly, that often does more harm than good. This is a calling to real care for hurting people. Care that restores and renews. The Samaritan didn’t save the world, but he was a neighbor to one person that day. Real neighbors don’t hand out money, but they do stop and talk, and they do take time to care and help out when you need it. When was the last time you stopped to care? When did I?

Jesus finishes the parable with a question. Which passerby was a neighbor? Verse 37:

“The expert in the law replied, ‘The one who had mercy on him.’ Jesus told him, ‘Go and do likewise’” (Luke 10:37).

The last story in Luke 10 about two sisters in ministry named Mary and Martha provides the perfect balance for those of us who read the first two stories about ministering to others and get so caught up in doing the work that we forget our first priority. Balance is key. So before you go out trying to save the whole world, take time to listen to God first.

Read Luke 10 today. Let it open your eyes to the harvest and call you out to work the field. And may it challenge you to love your neighbor no matter who God puts in your path today. And I'll meet you back here in Luke 11.

Luke 11 | Teach Us to Pray

Hello, my friends. Luke 11 today on Through the Word, where Jesus teaches some essential lessons on one of life's most important habits: prayer. And the passage before us is one of the most quoted passages in the history of quotes. We'll also get some serious warnings against religious hypocrisy. So let's begin at verse 1:

“One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When He finished, one of His disciples said to Him, ‘Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples’” (Luke 11:1).

So the disciples make a request: teach us to pray. Talking to God is one of your essential life habits. Like eating and washing are to physical health, so prayer is to spiritual health. Now Jesus' response to the request is known as the Lord's Prayer. If you grew up in church, you probably memorized it. Many Christians pray with these exact words. Others use it as a model for prayer.

It's worth noting that this is one of many examples of prayer and many types of prayer in the Bible. Jesus also warns us not to babble on in prayer as if using lots of words will get us heard. So while reciting this prayer can be good, the key is the meaning, not the repetition. It also provides us a great example: simple, honest, and straightforward. The version here is going to sound shorter than you're used to because several key phrases are in some manuscripts of Luke and not others. That's okay. The full version is in Matthew 6. But let's read here at verse 2:

“He said to them, ‘When you pray, say:

“Father, hallowed be Your name,

Your Kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. Forgive us our sins,

for we also forgive everyone who sins against us. And lead us not into temptation””” (Luke 10:2-4).

So what do we learn from this prayer? First of all, Jesus tells us to call God our Father. Never forget what a privilege it is to talk to Almighty God as your dad. Next lesson: reverence. Hallow and respect God’s great name to set your attitude right from the outset.

“Your Kingdom come.” This is our hope. All that is broken and desperate and worn in our world that drives us to prayer finds its ultimate resolution and healing in His Kingdom. We serve Him as king and we pray for His Kingdom to be established here on earth—especially in us.

“Give us each day our daily bread.” We pray not for our wants, but our needs. And with gratitude we trust in His faithfulness to provide.

“Forgive us our sins.” Asking forgiveness should be as common to our prayer as asking for needs. Same goes for forgiving others. Are you holding a grudge? Tell God about it and tell Him you forgive. And always recognize that connection between forgiving and being forgiven.

“Lead us not into temptation.” This one intrigues me. In prayer we ask God to lead us, but why state the obvious? Of course He wouldn’t lead us to do bad. Perhaps it’s a reminder for us. In our folly we can convince ourselves that prayer is about bending God’s will to let us have what we want and do what we want. But much of Jesus’ prayer is about God’s will and our verbal commitment to abide by it.

Jesus follows the prayer with a story—an example for us to be persistent in prayer. God is not a genie granting wishes. Prayer should be real and you

should take time to talk things out and be patient for His reply, but be persistent as well. And then in verse 9:

“So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened” (Luke 11:9-10).

Now the verb tense here in Greek is something we can't quite capture in English: keep asking, keep seeking, and keep knocking. Prayer is more than a request; it's a pursuit. Pursue your Father in prayer, and you will find. He's the sort of dad who plays hide and seek at just the right level for His kids to find Him. Verse 11:

“Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!” (Luke 11:11-13).

Remember who you're talking to. God is not a genie, nor is He a grumpy and heartless old man. He's a father who loves His kids. A good father knows how to bless without spoiling. And a grateful child knows that a Father's greatest gift is not His stuff but His presence. That's why the good gift here is the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is God with us. **Because sometimes letting me go through the trial is God's way of delivering me from evil. But when He doesn't get me out, I'm so glad He goes through it with me.**

And then in verse 14, Jesus drives out a demon, and in spite of the miracles, the skeptics challenge Jesus again. Some accuse him of being powered by Beelzebub. That's another name for Satan. Then in verse 16:

“Others tested him by asking for a sign from heaven” (Luke 11:16).

You can read Jesus' response to the Satan accusation at verse 17, but let's see if He's willing to show a sign in verse 29.

“As the crowds increased, Jesus said, ‘This is a wicked generation. It asks for a sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah’” (Luke 11:29).

Why does Jesus say that a wicked generation asks for a sign? Mind you they've seen plenty of signs and miracles already. Do they need more proof? I think they just don't want to listen, and the request is really just an excuse. Light came into the world, but men hid from the light because they loved their darkness (John 3:19). Yet there is no excuse that will stand before God on Judgment Day (Romans 1:20).

Yet Jesus does offer one sign. He calls it the sign of Jonah. You may remember that Jonah was the guy who went in the belly of the great fish for three days and three nights before he was spit out on the land. And then he testified to the Ninevites. It's a striking story, and for a reason.

It's foreshadowing. God planned it that way. It's a picture of Jesus: He will die, go into the belly of the earth, and on the third day be raised to life. The one key evidence that Jesus offers to substantiate all His claims is His resurrection. Every time that you or I demand a sign from Jesus, this is where He takes us. The resurrection. Then in verse 31:

“The Queen of the South will rise at the judgment with the people of this generation and condemn them, for she came from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon's wisdom; and now something greater than Solomon is here” (Luke 11:31).

It's another Old Testament story. The African Queen of Sheba heard of Solomon's great wisdom and traveled far to hear it. She asked, she sought, she knocked. And her example renders all of our excuses invalid. Verse 32:

“The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and now something greater than Jonah is here” (Luke 11:32).

The Ninevites were wicked, but they repented at God’s Word. They turned their hearts to God. They didn’t seek, but when wisdom showed up, they listened. What about us?

Then in verse 33, Jesus talks about light and dark and which one you choose to allow into your soul. A lamp is for light, and it’s meant to be seen. Jesus is a light, and His works were done openly. So why then don’t they see it? Verse 34:

“Your eye is the lamp of your body. When your eyes are healthy, your whole body also is full of light. But when they are unhealthy, your body also is full of darkness” (Luke 11:34).

I think the point here is that **when we can’t see the lamp of God’s light, we can blame the lamp all we want, but the problem is our vision. The word for unhealthy eyes here implies stinginess—a refusal to see. So see generously.**

God’s light reveals color and beauty all around. It gives us vision and understanding. Light helps us see each other and be seen as we are honest with each other. Light reveals truth. As C.S. Lewis said, “I believe in Christianity like I believe the sun has risen—not because I see it, but because by it I see everything.” Open your eyes wide and let the light of God enter into your whole being. Hide nothing in darkness.

The chapter ends with six woes or warnings to the religious hypocrites. Don’t miss that the truly blind people here are the religious ones! Those

who claim to follow God, but still hide in the dark. Read Luke 11 today, and let God's light shine.

Luke 12 | Hypocrisy, Greed, and Worry

Welcome back, everyone. Pastor Kris with you in Luke 12 today with stern warnings from Jesus about three major pitfalls. You know those old cartoons where some poor unsuspecting fool slips on a banana peel? I don't know if real banana peels work that way, but these three will take you down: hypocrisy, greed, and worry. The first warning comes at verse 1:

“Meanwhile, when a crowd of many thousands had gathered, so that they were trampling on one another. Jesus began to speak first to His disciples, saying: ‘Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy’” (Luke 12:1).

“Be on your guard against yeast.” Yeast is that magical fungus that you put in bread dough. Just a pinch will fluff up a whole loaf. Good stuff. The Bible uses yeast symbolically of things that spread fast. Like sin. Bad stuff. And in this case, hypocrisy. There's a big crowd now, and Jesus knows that crowds change the way people act. The disciples have onlookers—maybe even some fans. Onlookers affect you. But allow just a pinch of pretentiousness, and that fungus will puff up your ego til it pops.

Hypocrisy means saying one thing and doing another—a pious demeanor with a rotten heart. The Pharisees had it in droves. What's the antidote? A little dose of reality. Verse 2:

“There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known. What you have said in the dark will be heard in the daylight, and what you have whispered in the ear in the inner rooms will be proclaimed from the roofs” (Luke 12:2-3).

That should shake you. Nothing stays hidden. It shakes me. There is no darkness that can hide the real me from my Creator. Every lie, every

gossip, every time I fake the faith to impress the crowd—He is never fooled for a moment, and He will reveal.

So why do we try? Why fake it? The answer is fear of man. That over-concern for what people think. Verse 4:

“...do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. But...fear Him who, after your body has been killed, has authority to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear Him” (Luke 12:4-5).

A healthy fear of God is the true antidote for every hypocrisy. You don't need to look good for anyone but the Lord, and He doesn't buy your act. Walk in the light. And remember, He already loves you. Just be real. Well, Jesus is still teaching, so let's jump to verse 10:

“And everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven” (Luke 12:10).

Okay, big question here. What is the one sin that Jesus says will not be forgiven? It's right here: blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. So what does that mean? Well, there's some debate. Some say it was something that was only possible for those who witnessed Jesus in person. Most teachers agree that if you're worried you may have done it, you probably didn't—because you wouldn't care any more if you did. But what is it?

Blasphemy means speaking evil against or defiant irreverence. And the key distinction here is speaking a word against Jesus—forgiven—and blaspheming the Holy Spirit—not forgiven. Jesus came as a man. The Holy Spirit convicts hearts of sin, righteousness, and judgment. So perhaps Jesus means we will be forgiven for doubting what we see and hear, but rejecting what God makes known to your heart is another story. And I don't

think this is a one-time mistake. I believe Jesus is talking about a perpetual, obstinate refusal to believe the Holy Spirit. To be fully convicted yet refuse.

Well, next up in verse 13, a man asks Jesus to settle an argument with his brother. They're fighting over inheritance. Interesting, Jesus tells them it's not His job to settle every argument. And today still, we Christians can try to stop arguments by calling Jesus on our side and refusing to budge. But Jesus calls us to deal with our own disputes. Don't hide behind your faith. Work it out. But watch His warning:

“Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions” (Luke 12:15).

Greed will drop a wrench in the gears of any compromise. You'll never negotiate fairly when your motive is money. Life is more than things. If your life was a box of cereal, the ingredients list wouldn't include your car, your toys, or your accounts. Life is what lasts: faith, hope, and love. Life is the truths you live by. It's how you treat people, not what you get from them.

So Jesus tells a parable about a rich man with an abundant harvest. Business was good. What to do with all that grain? Verse 18:

“‘I'll tear down my barns and build bigger ones....’ And I'll say to myself, ‘You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry’” (Luke 12:18-19).

Ahh, the easy life. Now the Bible teaches us to enjoy life, but this isn't joy. It's greed. Verse 20:

“But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?’” (Luke 12:20).

That phrase intrigues me. “Your life will be demanded from you.” Not your possessions, not your good intentions. Your life. What you did. How you treated others. How you used what God entrusted with you to help. None of it is yours to keep. It’s on loan from God, and we will all give an account.

Warning one: hypocrisy. Two: greed. Warning three: worry. **Now I don’t think that Jesus is here condemning worry as a sin. He’s helping, and throwing guilt on top of your anxiety issues does not help.** So let these words encourage you. Verse 22:

“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothes” (Luke 12:22-23).

Notice that the key again is to understand what life is and isn’t. Stuff makes you worry—worry you won’t have enough, or worry you’ll lose it. But that stuff isn’t life. Worry is dangerous. It fixes your mind on things that don’t matter as much. It steals your joy. Just like greed and hypocrisy, it makes you care more about things and less about people. Verse 24:

“Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds!” (Luke 12:24).

God cares about you. Calm your heart. Look to God’s world. He is provider, and He values you. Now hypocrisy, greed, and worry each happen when our focus moves off of God and onto worldly things. So in verse 29:

“And do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink; do not worry about it. For the pagan world runs after all such things, and your Father knows that you need them” (Luke 12:29-30).

The heart of the issue is your heart and where you set it. If it's on worldly things, you're gonna worry. Verse 31 is worth memorizing:

“But seek His Kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well” (Luke 12:31).

This is the key to it all. Seek God's Kingdom. His Kingdom is every place that serves Him as king. So put all your striving into living right in His sight. Stop pursuing happiness and pursue righteousness. Pursue His glory. **Pursue happiness, and you'll get neither. Pursue God, and you'll find both.**

God is giving us His Kingdom. So why are we so concerned with stuff? But what do we do when our hearts are so fixed on our things? Verse 33:

“Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will never fail, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Luke 12:33-34).

Watch this. **Following your heart comes naturally. But the trick is to lead your heart. How do you lead it? First, understand it. Where your treasure goes, your heart follows.** Whatever you invest in—with time, money, thought, creativity.

Think about it. Odds are you're not a model train enthusiast. But if you spend the next week spending loads of hard-earned money starting a model train set, pouring over train blogs with research, creativity, investment, take a guess where your heart will be. It will spend every waking moment waiting for FedEx to show up with the new Lionel X-3000 train engine.

Okay, I made that up. But if you want your heart to be in heaven, lead it there. Invest your time, energy, creativity, money, and most importantly, your love into God's Kingdom. Treasure it, and your heart will not resist.

By the way, the same principle works in marriage. If your heart's just not in it anymore, lead it back. Invest time, creativity, even money.

Now, there's a lot more good stuff here in chapter 12, but we are outta time. Read Luke 12 for yourself. Be on guard and check your heart—for hypocrisy, greed, and worry. And take a healthy dose of God's antidote. Seek first His Kingdom. And I'll meet you back here next time.

Luke 13 | People Question, Jesus Answers

Hello friends, and welcome back to Luke. Chapter 13 today, where Jesus gives us some real answers to some difficult questions about life and death and heaven and hell.

Why does tragedy happen to some people and not others? Are most people headed for heaven... or that other place? Big questions, and Jesus provides real answers. So let's dig in at verse 1.

“Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices” (Luke 13:1).

So tragedy has struck. Some Jews from Galilee who were murdered by the Romans at the order of Pontius Pilate. Wicked, cruel, and it was all executed by the people in power—the very people responsible for justice. Worse yet, they were killed at the temple. They were there to worship. To sacrifice. How do you make sense of such injustice? Why would God allow it? Why them?

Reasonable questions. And I love watching how Jesus responds. Many times He was hit with hard questions. Some of those weren't really questions, but just excuses. He didn't always answer those. But others were quite genuine. And His answers intrigue me. **He never offers the kind of easy religious textbook answers that oversimplify complex and painful issues. Nor does He deliver those arrogant I-would-explain-but-you-wouldn't-understand sort of answers. He often responds with a question—the kind that helps us think it through. Or a parable that helps you see it in a better light. God's light.**

This time, we get both. Verse 2:

“Jesus answered, ‘Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way?’”
(Luke 13:2).

Jesus first addresses the traditional response to tragic events in that day. According to most folks, bad things happen to people because they deserve it. If tragedy strikes, onlookers assume that the victims must have sinned worse than everyone else. But in verse 3:

“I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish. Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them—do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish” (Luke 13:3-5).

That’s interesting. Jesus explains that tragedy hits people who are just like the rest of us. They don’t deserve it any more than you or I do. He even brings up another story—a tower that fell in Israel and killed 18 people. This tower story really hit home for me in the days after 9/11. So many were asking: why them? Why did some die and others survive? Jesus tells us what isn’t the reason. It isn’t because of their sin. Notice though that He doesn’t tell us what is the reason. It’s not for us to know.

In my experience, God doesn’t give you answers about someone else’s life. He deals with your life. So He doesn’t tell you why these others died unexpectedly. But Jesus does tell them what it means for them. Twice He says,

“But unless you repent, you too will all perish” (Luke 13:5).

In other words, even though you don't know why some other people died unexpectedly, you do know that you could die on any given day, and you know that you are a sinner.

Whether you are a better or worse sinner than the next guy doesn't matter. You could still die today. Repent of your sin, trust in Jesus, and you will not perish.

And then Jesus tells a parable. There's no explanation on this one, so the purpose here is to give us perspective. What is it like from God's perspective when people like us go on asking questions about others but never seem to repent or change our own lives? The parable is about a man with a fig tree in his vineyard. The fig tree doesn't bear fruit. Not a one. Now I relate to this one personally because—I kid you not—I literally have a fig tree in my back yard with no figs. Not one. It is so frustrating. I mean, it looks nice, but the point of the fig tree was the figs. For the man in the parable, he's had enough. He tells his gardener to cut it down. But the gardener talks him into one more year. Fertilize it. Then give it one more year to fruit. Patience.

And as an owner of a fig-less fig tree, I can honestly say this one helps me see God's perspective. Waiting for people to change is frustrating. And He is patient. But we need to know—there is a time limit. Unless we repent, we will perish. And my favorite insight on this one came from another teacher. He noted that when the gardener says to fertilize the tree, the King James reads, "Dung it." Which is fertilizer, right? Well, in Philippians 2, Paul speaks of all his stubborn pride in his own accomplishments that kept him from God for so long. But he says, "[Now] I consider them dung—compared to the greatness of knowing Jesus" (Philippians 3:8). So what does it take

to fertilize a fruitless heart that refuses to get right with God? Dung it. Take all your foolish pride and self-righteousness and dung it.

Well, next up, another story about Jesus healing someone on the Sabbath. This comes up quite often in the Gospels.

This time, a woman has been hunched over for 18 years. Jesus rescues this poor woman. But someone gets mad. It's the synagogue leader.

“There are six days for work. So come and be healed on those days, not on the Sabbath” (Luke 13:14).

See, the Sabbath was a day off, and God's rules were pretty simple: no work on Sabbath. Keep it holy. Somewhere along the way, some Jewish leaders decided that healing someone was work. No healing on Sabbath. It wasn't in God's law, but it was man's law.

Jesus points out that these man-made rules show more compassion to animals than to people. They could rescue an ox, but not a person. With Jesus, people are always important—more important than things and more important than man-made rules.

So what happened to this guy? How did a synagogue leader get to be so heartless? No one asks the question out loud, but Jesus tells two parables that I think speak into this.

These two are thinkers, so pay attention. First at verse 18:

“Then Jesus asked, ‘What is the Kingdom of God like? What shall I compare it to? It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his garden. It grew and became a tree, and the birds perched in its branches’” (Luke 13:18-19).

So what does it mean? Scholars differ, and I think that when Jesus doesn't give an interpretation, His purpose is largely to get us to think. Other passages provide more precise doctrine, but parables are meant to be mulled over. Jesus wants us to dissect and discuss.

Everything here is symbolic. God's Kingdom is like a mustard seed—a tiny seed growing a big tree. It's pretty amazing really. And it has proven true. Jesus started something so small and look at the impact over centuries. And it worked that way in my life. Beautiful thing really. God's Kingdom just grows. But look closer. A large tree with birds. But a real mustard seed makes a shrub or maybe a moderate size tree at best.

And in the Bible symbology, birds often represent a dark presence. Evil. And consider the context: religious leaders fighting against the love of God. So maybe there's a picture here of God's Kingdom growing unnaturally large and evil characters finding themselves a nice branch to perch on—in the church. Something to think about. Then Jesus gives another parable in verse 20:

“Again He asked, ‘What shall I compare the kingdom of God to? It is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into about sixty pounds of flour until it worked all through the dough’” (Luke 13:20-21).

So just a little yeast works through all the dough. Most read this as a simple picture of God's Kingdom working its way into every part of your life. As it should. Some point out, however, that yeast usually represents sin in the Bible. So perhaps Jesus is warning us—just a little pinch of sin or hypocrisy can invade your whole life. Or if a leader lacks compassion like this guy, it can hit the whole church.

Jesus moves on, and we follow Him teaching in many towns. The questions keep coming, and Jesus answers. We don't have time for all of

them, so I encourage you to read and think through the whole chapter. And if you have questions, ask God. And pay attention as you read—He just might answer you.

For this last one, I'll just read it and let you think it through. It begins at verse 23:

“Someone asked him, ‘Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?’

He said to them, ‘Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to. Once the owner of the house gets up and closes the door, you will stand outside knocking and pleading, “Sir, open the door for us.”

But he will answer, “I don’t know you or where you come from.”

Then you will say, “We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.”

But he will reply, “I don’t know you or where you come from. Away from me, all you evildoers!”” (Luke 13:23-27).

Luke 14 | Count the Cost

Hey, friends. Welcome back to Luke. Chapter 14 today with powerful lessons on practical humility and counting the cost of following Jesus.

But we begin with a lesson on going last. Jesus is eating at the house of a prominent Pharisee, when He observes how the guests find seats. Each one takes a place of honor for themselves. Interesting how human nature works—vying for status in the house of the esteemed. So in verse 8, Jesus tells them this parable:

“When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited. If so, the host who invited both of you will come and say to you, ‘Give this person your seat.’ Then, humiliated, you will have to take the least important place. But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, ‘Friend, move up to a better place.’ Then you will be honored in the presence of all the other guests. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted” (Luke 14:8-11).

So Jesus’ story is about a wedding. Basically, if you show up at a wedding and the seats aren’t marked with name tags, don’t sit yourself next to the bride and groom, or somebody will move you out to the lowest place, and you will look like a fool. And this one applies to life. It’s a simple and powerful rule: take the lowest place. Go last. That doesn’t mean lose on purpose. It means choosing to take the spot no one else wants so someone else can enjoy the best. It’s a great lesson on practical humility. Now we don’t have seats of honor quite like they did in Jesus’ time, but status and honor are still in play. So when given a choice, take the least and offer the best. As Philippians says, “Consider others more important than yourself” (Philippians 2:3). That’s revolutionary. When you run for the

car, call the backseat—in the middle! When you park the car, take the spot far from the store. Volunteer for the least favorite chore—even at home. Humble yourself and let God honor you.

Try it! You'll be amazed by how easy it is to grab the lowest seat. No arguments! No lost friends! And the joy in your heart will surprise you. If you want to follow Jesus, you've got to follow Him into the lowest spot. It's part of the cost. But on the upside, Jesus will sit right there with you.

Then in verse 12, another lesson in practical Christianity:

“Then Jesus said to His host, ‘When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or sisters, your relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous’” (Luke 13:12-14).

What a picture. Living for Jesus always means giving to people who can't give back. Again, it's a cost. Giving Christmas gifts to friends who give back is nice, but it's really just swapping. This sort of giving means not getting back. Not here anyway. And then in verse 15:

“When one of those at the table with Him heard this, he said to Jesus, ‘Blessed is the one who will eat at the feast in the Kingdom of God’” (Luke 14:15).

Looks like this man has heard Jesus talk about the great celebration we'll have in Heaven. It will be awesome indeed. Who would want to miss a feast at God's own table?! Who indeed. Verse 16:

“Jesus replied: ‘A certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests. At the time of the banquet he sent his servant to

tell those who had been invited, “Come, for everything is now ready.” But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said, “I have just bought a field, and I must go and see it. Please excuse me.” Another said, “I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I’m on my way to try them out. Please excuse me.” Still another said, “I just got married, so I can’t come”” (Luke 14:16-20).

Well, I guess everyone’s got a good reason. Too bad they’ll miss the banquet. Wait, what am I saying? Those reasons are weak-sauce. In fact, Jesus doesn’t call them reasons; He calls them excuses. And I think that Jesus is here flipping our view on all the “reasons” that so many of us give for not believing. Sometimes we see the gospel as sort of a philosophy. Hey, if the gospel works for your life, that’s great. But the gospel isn’t a philosophy; it’s an invitation. You are invited to God’s Kingdom and His banquet.

And look closer at the three reasons: “I just bought a field.” Some of us are too invested into this world to have time for God’s invitation. “I just bought five oxen.” Too busy with business—with material possessions. “I just got married.” Who could argue with prioritizing your family? And all three reasons are good things—godly even. But when “godly” things come before God Himself, something’s off. They’re excuses. And you can excuse yourself all you want, but you’re the one missing the banquet. Back in the parable:

“The servant came back and reported this to his master” (Luke 14:21a).

The master is angry. And yet, he won’t force anyone. And God won’t force any of us into His Kingdom. Now here’s the twist. The man orders the servant:

“Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame” (Luke 14:21b).

The servant does it, and there's still room.

“Go out to the roads and country lanes and compel them to come in, so that my house will be full” (Luke 14:23b).

And what a picture of God and His glorious gospel. Anyone and everyone is invited. Some of the folks you would think must be in just make excuses, and some of the last people on your list get the invite and come right in. Sometimes those with nothing to lose find it much easier to let go and let God.

Next up, verse 25 starts out with large crowds. You would think Jesus would like large crowds, but let's see what He does. Verse 25:

“...turning to them He said: ‘If anyone comes to Me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life—such a person cannot be My disciple’” (Luke 14:25b-26).

Wait... what? Jesus just said... hate your family?! Hate your own life?! Yep. And don't miss it. It sounds shocking because it is. So what's He saying here? This one really makes you think. And I think that's the point. Jesus wants us to wrestle with this one. He just told a parable about people invited to God's Kingdom but missing it. And their excuses weren't sin—they were family and land and just life. Sorry God, too busy. You understand.

Now, we know thoroughly that Jesus calls us to love. Love parents, love kids, love others, even love enemies! Unquestionably the consistent message of Scripture is love. So why does He say “hate” in this passage?

Well, He's got large crowds following Him around. But at some point, every one of them will find a conflict between following Jesus and all the other stuff. And they'll have to choose. Several times in the Bible, the terms love and hate are used to indicate preference and priority rather than emotion. In other words, following Jesus will at times require that all those others come second.

Obviously, don't hate your family with anger and malice. Jesus never teaches that. But do love Jesus first. In verse 27:

“And whoever does not carry their cross and follow Me cannot be My disciple” (Luke 14:27).

There's a sacrifice. A cost. And Jesus wants us to count it. He tells a parable about building a tower. Don't start if you can't afford to finish. Or going to war: don't risk what you're not willing to lose. In verse 33:

“In the same way, those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be My disciples” (Luke 14:33).

So the cost of following Jesus is everything. Your whole life. It's a covenant—like marriage. When you say, “I do,” you count the cost and let go. Same goes with Jesus.

There are few things more miserable and despicable than a married person acting single—as if their covenant doesn't include commitment or sacrifice. Except maybe a Christian acting as if their life and their possessions are still their own. You were bought at a price.

Read Luke 14 today, and take a good look at everything on that price tag. Are you willing to pay it? If you ask me, it's a deal you do not want to miss.

Luke 15 | Of Prodigals & Judgementals

Welcome back, my friends. Luke 15 today on Through the Word. Have you ever lost something that was truly precious to you—a special gift from an old friend or perhaps a faithful dog gone missing? If so, you know just how heavy the word “lost” can feel.

Now as Christians, we sometimes use the word “lost” to refer to unbelievers—not always well received—or better yet to describe ourselves before we knew Jesus. I once was lost. I didn’t have direction. I was in danger. But as valid as that is, Jesus offers another perspective on lost here in Luke 15—one that’s less about me wandering and more about God’s view. And pay close attention to whom Jesus tells it to. Verse 1:

“Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, ‘This man welcomes sinners and eats with them’” (Luke 15:1-2).

So the story ahead is told to religious leaders who say they love God, but who just can’t stand all the sinners around Jesus. I can almost hear them muttering. Disdain. Disgust. And it wasn’t just the sinners that bothered them. It was the way Jesus welcomed them. Even ate with them. So Jesus tells them a parable. Verse 4:

“Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn’t he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep’” (Luke 15:4-6).

So there’s a lost sheep. But Jesus’ story isn’t just about the sheep or how lost he feels. It’s about the shepherd. He lost a sheep that he values—that

he cares for. He searches for it. He leaves 99 sheep to find one lost because he's a good shepherd and he cares.

Think about that. The Pharisees look at all these sinners, and they're lost. They are way off God's path for their lives. But all the Pharisees see is wandering fools. The kind that we avoid. But do they see the heart of God? Do they see the Good Shepherd right in front of them who cares so much for His dear sheep—one who came a very long way just to find them? And oh when He finds that one sheep. Verse 7:

“I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent” (Luke 15:7).

Why is it that God keeps on loving these sinners? These lost souls. Getting through to the Pharisees isn't easy, so He tells another parable in verse 8:

“Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Doesn't she light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin’” (Luke 15:8-9).

So story number two is about a lost coin. This one is a drachma, and it's worth a full day's wages. Think about how much you make in a full day of work. Now imagine losing that much. That's money you need to live on. You search for that kind of money.

I once lost my wedding ring—for months. That one hurt. And when I found it, the joy. I was celebrating. Literally dancing. I went searching the house for people to celebrate with! It was awesome!

And that's the woman's story. She tells the neighbors. But don't miss it: that should have been the Pharisees. They're the neighbors. God is knocking

on the door smiling from ear to ear and saying, “Look what I found,” and they just don’t get it. No compassion. No care for the lost. When a “godly” person doesn’t care about something that God is passionate about, something’s wrong.

But keep in mind, God wants them back too. Jesus is telling these stories for that very reason—to move the hearts of the Pharisees back to God. So He tells one more in verse 11:

“Jesus continued: ‘There was a man who had two sons’” (Luke 15:11).

Pause there. Two sons. Now you’ve likely heard this story—we call it the Parable of the Prodigal Son. Prodigal means wasteful and recklessly extravagant. If you’re a dad, prodigal means pain in your butt. **But do not miss that this is a story of two sons. Sinners and religious hypocrites are both lost—just in different ways. And they are both precious to God. Both are pictured here as beloved sons. And at every point in the story, the Father loves both of His children.**

The question is will the hypocrites see themselves? **A little tip: If you read Jesus’ parables and always see others in the story but never see yourself, you’re probably missing something.** Verse 12:

“The younger one said to his father, ‘Father, give me my share of the estate.’ So he divided his property between them. Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need” (Luke 15:12-14).

You dumb, entitled, arrogant fool. You just couldn't see how good you had it. How much your dad loves you. He gave you everything. And yeah, there were rules, but Dad's rules were keeping you safe and alive.

Now to feel the impact here. In that culture the son's request for his share of the estate was like telling his dad, "You're basically dead to me, so just give me my inheritance." Take a moment to feel that one. Then remember that the dad in this story represents God.

Because people do this to God all the time. They want the blessings without the rules, so they take God's money and run. It's foolish, but they do it. We do it. But it doesn't last. Life apart from God—life rejecting God's rules and wisdom—gets ugly quick. The young man in the story goes broke in a hurry, and he's living with pigs.

But what can he do? He told his father, "You're not my dad anymore." But in verse 17:

"When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants."' So he got up and went to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him" (Luke 15:17-20).

It's a powerful scene. The dad never ever stops loving his son. He runs for him and hugs him. There is no feeling in the world like getting a child back. We have grown kids now. Our whole world lights up whenever one of them just comes to visit. But a lost child.

I read an article about a couple who got their daughter back after 23 years missing. For years, their sorrow was immeasurable. And God feels that toward every sinner who runs.

But imagine the overwhelming joy of getting their girl back again. Much was lost over the years, but she's back. And God feels that every time one of us comes home. Verse 21:

“The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ So they began to celebrate. Meanwhile...” (Luke 15:21-24).

Wait, what's "meanwhile"? Isn't the story over? Nope. Remember that Jesus is telling this to the Pharisees.

“Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. ‘Your brother has come,’ he replied, ‘and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.’ The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him” (Luke 15:25-28).

The older son. He's the good kid. Rule follower. And watch his response.

“All these years I’ve been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders” (Luke 15:29b).

Slaving. That's how he sees his relationship. As for his brother, he calls him, "this son of yours." You give him a party? Him?!

See the prodigal child rejected the father's authority and rule. The self-righteous rejects his mercy and love. Both are lost. Both are loved.

The prodigal says, "You're not the boss of me." The elder says, "Hey boss, why do you still call him 'son'?" They both miss the love of their father.

Verse 31:

“My son,’ the father said, ‘you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found’” (Luke 15:31-32).

The father makes two things clear: you are not a slave; you are my son. And he is your brother. He has returned. When will you?

Luke 16 | God and Money

Hello, friends. Welcome back to Luke. Chapter 16 today, and today Jesus talks about money.

That's right. The Lord's gettin' all up in your personal business. One-sixth of the content of Matthew, Mark, and Luke relates to money in some way. Why? Because we deal with money every day. It affects life. Affects you. Your character. Your relationships. So of course, God talks about it. He gives us guidelines, warnings, and promises.

But what about those preachers who say that godliness is a good way to get more money? Serve God, get rich. What do you think? TV preacher says so. They even quote the Bible. What does the Bible say?

Money is a complex matter. To help us think it through, Jesus starts with a parable about a man whose job is all about money. He's a money manager, also called a steward. Now the money manager isn't rich, but he works for a rich man. The manager is authorized to make decisions and spend the money but has a responsibility to do so wisely. Because in the end, it's not his money. Verse 1:

“Jesus told His disciples: ‘There was a rich man whose manager was accused of wasting his possessions. So he called him in and asked him, ‘What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your management, because you cannot be manager any longer.’ The manager said to himself, ‘What shall I do now? My master is taking away my job. I’m not strong enough to dig, and I’m ashamed to beg—I know what I’ll do so that, when I lose my job here, people will welcome me into their houses’”” (Luke 16:1-4).

Interesting. He's not a good manager, and he's about to be fired. But not yet. He has a little time and still has access to the finances. And he comes up with a plan. Verse 5:

“So he called in each one of his master’s debtors” (Luke 16:5).

Now these debtors are farmers, and they owe the rich man things like olive oil and wheat. Big debts. They are years behind on supplying, yet the rich man has continued paying them regardless. Nice guy. Now watch what the manager does.

You. How much do you owe? Nine hundred gallons of oil? Make it 450. You owe a thousand bushels of wheat? Now it's 800.

Pretty generous. Sure, it's someone else's money, but generous nonetheless. But how will the boss respond? Check out verse 8:

“The master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly” (Luke 16:8).

Wait. What? The master commended him? The master just lost money. Now remember, parables are supposed to make you think. The master commends shrewdness when the manager gets all generous and forgiving with the master's holdings. The key word here is “shrewd.” It means astute or sharp in practical matters. The manager figured something out and did something clever, and it's something that Jesus wants us to learn and apply. Look again at verse 8.

“The master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly. For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light. I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings” (Luke 16:8-9).

So Jesus wants us to learn a lesson in shrewdness. Never dishonest, but wise in practical matters, especially eternal matters. The key is in the connection between verse 4 and verse 9. Back in verse 4, the manager is going to lose his job. His access to money is temporary, so he uses it to make long-term friends who will “welcome him into their houses.” In verse 9, Jesus almost repeats the same phrase for us, “Use worldly wealth... so that you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.”

See, the money manager is you. In this life, you have possessions. You have money. Small or great, it's yours. Only it's not yours. Not to keep. The rich man represents the true Lord of the house. You handle some money while you're here, but when you're gone, the money stays. At some point, you realize the truth. You're going to die. The world is firing you, and all the money you've got stays right here. And it turns out you were only ever a money manager, never an owner. And like this manager, you've been caught wasting those possessions.

You have a little time left, so act fast and act shrewdly. Whatever money is in your power, use it for eternal purposes. Give. Be generous. Be merciful. **People like a giver, but they love a forgiver.** The Lord can afford it, and lots of people need it.

You can't take it with you, but you can send it ahead. So use worldly wealth for heavenly purposes and use temporary riches for eternal rewards. I like that the picture here isn't just “doing good” but “making friends.” Help real people in practical ways.

Unfortunately, too many teachers get this backward. They were around in Jesus' day too. Pharisees. Today they disguise themselves as Christian preachers. Instead of using worldly wealth for godly purposes, they use “godly” living to get worldly wealth. But that's not godly at all.

They live as if money is the goal. Money isn't the goal; it's a test. Verse 10:

“Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much. So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches?” (Luke 16:10-11).

Notice that Jesus makes a distinction between worldly wealth and true riches. This is where the false teachers miss it. They think worldly wealth is the true stuff. Worldly wealth is a test. If you can be trusted with money—if you can handle it faithfully—God can trust you with the true riches.

Leading God's precious people. Teaching His Word. Serving God is not about skill or success. It's about faithfulness. God wants servants who are faithful, so He tests you—gives you something little to see how you handle it. Notice that Jesus calls money a little thing. He also calls it “someone else's property.” So if you're faithful with money, God will trust you with more.

Then Jesus gets to the heart of the matter. It's not just using money. The real danger is serving money. Verse 13:

“No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money” (Luke 16:13).

Wow. Quite a statement. See, money is not the problem. Loving money, living for money, serving money—that's the real problem. You can't live for money and live for God. The Pharisees claimed to serve God. It was their whole thing. But verse 14 tells us:

“The Pharisees, who loved money, heard all this and were sneering at Jesus. He said to them, ‘You are the ones who justify yourselves in

the eyes of others, but God knows your hearts. What people value highly is detestable in God's sight” (Luke 16:14).

Now the chapter ends with a story about two men, one rich and the other poor. The poor man's name is Lazarus, though not the same Lazarus who was raised from the dead. And many scholars believe this is a true story rather than a parable.

That's rather sobering when you read it because it's a story about hell. Jesus tells it here because He wants to put riches and poverty into full perspective. If you don't see the reality of heaven—and hell—the world doesn't make sense. So much of this life is all about money. So much is unequal and unfair. And then you die. And just a few greedy hoarders get to enjoy all the wealth.

But look at eternity and the picture changes. I'll let you read the story for yourself, but I should explain one detail. When the two men die, they go to two different places, yet neither is quite Heaven. One is Hades, or hell, and the other is by Abraham's side or Abraham's bosom. Where is that? It's curious, and scholars have different views. Some believe that God created a separated area in hell where people of faith waited for Jesus' resurrection. They explain that before Jesus died and rose, no human could go to Heaven yet.

See, hell is the place where everyone goes to get exactly what they deserve for their life. Absolute fairness. No more, no less. Heaven is God's presence, reserved only for the righteous. Yet the Bible says repeatedly: there is none righteous except Jesus. On the cross, Jesus traded our sin for His righteousness. This story is before all that, so by Abraham's side appears to be a place for people of faith to wait.

The rest I'll leave to you. I do encourage you to read Luke 16. If you're looking for more Bible verses about preachers who preach worldly wealth, read the warnings in 1st Timothy 6:5, 2nd Corinthians 2:17, and Revelation 3:17. And I'll meet you back here next time.

Luke 17 | The Kingdom of God

Hello again, and welcome to Luke 17 today on Through the Word with some essential teachings from Jesus about one of the Bible's primary themes: the Kingdom of God. So what is God's Kingdom?

Jesus talks about it throughout the Gospels. Is it in Heaven—or on earth? Is it now—or in the future? But before we get to that, we've got some great lessons on faith, forgiveness, and the heart of a servant.

Jesus begins with a strong warning against causing others to stumble—especially the little ones. And then in verse 3:

“If your brother or sister sins against you, rebuke them; and if they repent, forgive them. Even if they sin against you seven times in a day and seven times come back to you saying ‘I repent,’ you must forgive them” (Luke 17:3-4).

Well, that's pretty clear. Forgive. And keep on forgiving. It's an essential for following Christ.

Now, He doesn't say get walked on. In fact, He says rebuke the person. Let them know! And if they repent—as in genuinely change their mind—forgive. The Greek word literally means to cast away. Take that grudge and huck it into the sea. And how many times? As many times as they repent.

Now, the next verse appears to be unrelated, but look closely. Verse 5:

“The apostles said to the Lord, ‘Increase our faith!’” (Luke 17:5).

Huh. They want more faith. And watch Jesus' response. Verse 6:

“If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and planted in the sea,’ and it will obey you” (Luke 17:6).

Well, there's a curious statement. Does Jesus want us to tell mulberry trees to jump in the sea? He never did it. The disciples never did it. And why would you? In fact, Jesus never performed miracles just to show off. They had purpose. So what's this about?

Well, look back at the context. He just taught them to forgive. Mulberry trees are known for their very deep roots—very hard to dig out. And Hebrews 12 warns us to make sure that “no root of bitterness springs up and causes trouble” (Hebrews 12:15). Bitterness is precisely what happens when you don't forgive. And in the Bible, the sea is the place that God says He casts our sins when He forgives. Metaphorically. **So perhaps Jesus is less interested in us uprooting trees and more interested in us uprooting and drowning old grudges. And that takes faith.** Trust God even a mustard seed's worth and tell those nasty old roots to get up and get out. Trust Him and let it go. Next up in verse 7—a hard lesson about the heart of a true servant. Every Christian is called to live our lives as servants. In God's upside-down Kingdom, servants take the top spot. Jesus Himself lived to serve, and we follow His lead. In God's economy, only a life lived for others has real meaning. But it's one thing to act like a servant; it's quite another to be treated like one. So Jesus tells a parable to help us check our own hearts.

In the story, a servant works in the boss's fields all day. When he gets back to the house, he's not done serving. No dinner until he cooks and serves the boss first. Hey, it's in the job description. And all of that without so much as a “thank you” from the boss. And at verse 10:

“So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty’” (Luke 17:10).

Now that is the attitude of a true servant. Don't expect applause. Don't wait for gratitude. Work hard, serve God, serve others. Be found faithful. Now don't misunderstand. God appreciates our service, and He pays very well in eternity. He will say, "Well done, good and faithful servant" (Matthew 25:23). And it's also right for you to thank others when they serve you. **But Jesus wants to keep us from the very real danger of self-centered serving. I should not serve to feel good, to look good, or to make you think I am good. I serve to help others because God is good.**

Now to keep us in balance, the next story reminds us just how important it is for us to show gratitude when God serves us. Jesus is traveling to Jerusalem, and in verse 12:

"As He was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met Him. They stood at a distance and called out in a loud voice, 'Jesus, Master, have pity on us!' When He saw them, He said, 'Go, show yourselves to the priests.' And as they went, they were cleansed" (Luke 17:12-14).

Notice they have to move before they're healed. They take steps of faith before the healing. And all 10 are healed. But in verse 15, only one comes back to thank Jesus. And then in verse 17:

"Jesus asked, 'Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Has no one returned to give praise to God except this foreigner?' Then He said to him, 'Rise and go; your faith has made you well'" (Luke 17:17).

So nine men didn't even come back to say thanks. That's not right. But how many times have we seen people caught in a bind and beg God for help, only to forget all about God when the rescue is over? Hey, we can do it too.

But for these nine lepers, does it really make a difference? They're still healed. No more leprosy. But look carefully at verse 19. "Your faith has made you whole." That word "whole" is the same Greek word used for "saved" in the Bible—as in eternal salvation. Ten men were healed of leprosy. Yet only the one who returned to Jesus with gratitude got to hear Him say, "Your faith has saved you."

And now we come to the Kingdom. In verse 20:

"Once, on being asked by the Pharisees when the Kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, 'The coming of the Kingdom of God is not something that can be observed, nor will people say, "Here it is," or "There it is," because the Kingdom of God is in your midst'" (Luke 17:20-21).

So the question posed to Jesus is about when. The Bible is loaded with prophecies about the coming of God's Kingdom, so of course people want to know when. Every believer is called to look forward to it. So when is it?

The heart of Jesus' message was always about the Kingdom of God. So what is it? Where is it? And when is it? Well, I think that at its essence the Kingdom of God is wherever and whenever God is king.

Pretty simple. But hold on. Is God's Kingdom a political thing or a personal thing? When God shows up to rule, will He show up in a royal castle to rule the nations, or will He show up in my heart to rule me? Well, the Bible talks about both, but the order is key. Look back at verse 21. Jesus tells the Pharisees to stop looking around them to find the Kingdom over here and over there and start looking in their midst. It's right here.

Listen, we can all look around and say, "God, the world is so messed up. Lord, come fix it. Come reign over this world." And that's valid. But God is

waiting for us to say, “Lord, I’m so messed up. Lord, come and fix me and reign in my heart.” When Jesus reigns as king in your heart, then the Kingdom of God has truly shown up in your life.

And after responding to the Pharisees about today, Jesus pulls the disciples aside to tell them about that future day when the Kingdom will be a worldwide issue. Jesus is coming back, and He explains that His return will not be a one location event. In verse 24:

“For the Son of Man in His day will be like the lightning, which flashes and lights up the sky from one end to the other. But first He must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation” (Luke 17:24-25).

The order is essential. Jesus would suffer first. But He will return. Jesus calls it, “The day of the Son of Man,” and the description that follows is striking. Now there are several interpretations of just how this will all go down. The rapture. The Second Coming. The tribulation. But I encourage you to read Jesus’ words, and before you try to fit it all into an eschatological timeline, look first for the heart of His message. Find the clear message before dissecting for details.

Jesus compares the days of the Son of Man to the day Noah entered the ark. People were going about their business, and “the flood came and destroyed them all” (Luke 17:27). And to the days of Lot. In verse 28:

“People were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building. But the day Lot left Sodom, fire and sulfur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all” (Luke 17:28b-29).

So does Jesus mean that judgment comes without warning? No. This is the warning. It comes unexpected if we ignore the warning.

So too for God's Kingdom. For those looking ahead to see it and are ready for it, the return is always expected. But for those who lost sight of God's Kingdom and start looking back to the things of this world, Jesus gives one striking warning:

“Remember Lot's wife!” (Luke 17:32).

And the heart of the message is in verse 33:

“Whoever tries to keep their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life will preserve it” (Luke 17:33).

Read Luke 17 today. See the Kingdom here in your midst. And make sure that the true King reigns in your heart—both now and forever.

Luke 18 | What Must I Do?

Hello, my friends. Welcome back to Luke at chapter 18 today. As we step back into our story, we join the disciples, gathered together, and Jesus is teaching. Verse 1:

“Then Jesus told His disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. He said: ‘In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared what people thought. And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, ‘Grant me justice against my adversary.’ For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, ‘Even though I don’t fear God or care what people think, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won’t eventually come and attack me!’”” (Luke 18:1-5).

Intriguing story. There is an ungodly judge and a persistent woman who won’t stop pestering him. Now Jesus is not saying that God is an unjust judge. He’s saying that God is so much better! Even an unjust man will help you out if you’re persistent enough. So how much more will the God who loves you? Now of course, if you’re asking God for things that are selfish, wicked, self-glorifying, or just plain ridiculous, stop pestering. But if your prayers are right, keep at it. Verse 1 says don’t give up. And at verse 7:

“And will not God bring about justice for His chosen ones, who cry out to Him day and night? Will He keep putting them off? I tell you, He will see that they get justice, and quickly” (Luke 18:7-8a).

And in an interesting turn, Jesus follows that with a question:

“...when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?” (Luke 18:8b).

The connection is worth pondering. In some way, God's response to our requests for justice are tied to these two things: the return of Christ and our faith. Then at verse 9, another parable about prayer, but notice the audience for this one:

“To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable” (Luke 18:9).

So Jesus has a word for the self-righteous—the ones convinced they're the good guys. Now righteous means being right with God, but a self-righteous man isn't as concerned with what God thinks. Or maybe he just assumes that God approves because he meets his own standard.

Now I've gotta come clean here. That was me. For quite some time before the gospel humbled me, I really thought that I was good, or at least better than most. I wasn't overtly arrogant, but I genuinely thought I was good, and I figured that God must approve because I was a nice guy. Now, God loved me that whole time, but He wasn't so fond of my self-righteousness.

Why not? The same reason we don't like self-righteousness. In verse 9, it makes you look down on everybody else. As if being good makes you better than others. More often it makes us hypocrites. So Jesus tells a parable in verse 10:

“Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’ But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’ I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves

will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted” (Luke 18:10-14).

So the first lesson in prayer was persistence. The second is humility. The Pharisee prays, but all he wants to talk about is himself. That phrase that says he prayed by himself can also be translated he prayed to himself. **If you just want to talk about yourself, talk to the mirror. God is never impressed with your boasting.**

But those who humble themselves will be exalted. That doesn't mean put yourself down. It means be honest. **Humility isn't down on itself, but neither does it pretend or puff up. It's just real. And in prayer, humility remembers well who you are and who you're talking to.** And God responds. He exalts the humble.

And speaking of humble, verse 15 brings us a story of babies and children brought to Jesus. The disciples grow tired of it, but Jesus just loves them.

“Let the little children come to Me, and do not hinder them, for the Kingdom of God belongs to such as these” (Luke 18:16).

The children are a picture of humility. The next guy in our story could use a little humbling. He's rich, he's young, and he's a ruler. Not the kind that measures things and makes straight lines—the kind of ruler who's in charge. Verse 18:

“A certain ruler asked Him, ‘Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?’” (Luke 18:18).

Good question. In other words, how do I go to heaven? But Jesus' response isn't what you might expect. No gospel here. No believe in Me and get your sins forgiven. Watch His words. Verse 19:

“Why do you call me good?” Jesus answered. ‘No one is good—except God alone. You know the commandments: “You shall not commit adultery, you shall not murder, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, honor your father and mother.”’

‘All these I have kept since I was a boy,’ he said” (Luke 18:19-21).

The back and forth here intrigues me. The man asks the good teacher about heaven, but Jesus says that no one is good—except God. Huh. See, the problem here is that this man already thinks he’s good. He wants to go to heaven, but he wants to earn it, and he probably doesn’t think he has any sins to forgive. And Jesus meets him where he is.

Watch carefully. Jesus reviews the Ten Commandments. But not all of the commandments. I only count five here. See, sometimes self-righteous people fool themselves into believing they’re good by looking only at the rules they keep. You might notice that the five mentioned have something in common: they’re all about how you treat your neighbor.

What’s missing are all the commandments about love for God. Oh, and that last one about envy. Remember, this guy is rich. The first commandment left out: “You will have no other gods before Me” (Exodus 20:3). He’s rich, and he’s a decent guy. Treats people pretty well. But what about that money? Remember back when Jesus said, “You cannot serve two masters”? (Luke 16:13). Specifically, you cannot serve both God and money. In spite of all this man’s rule-following, one thing’s still missing. Verse 22:

“When Jesus heard this, He said to him, ‘You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow Me’” (Luke 18:22).

Think back to the question that started this: “How do I inherit eternal life?” So what’s the answer? Is it giving all your money away? That’s not the gospel. That would be earning heaven. The answer is Jesus’ last two words—follow Me. That’s the only answer. But for this man, that was impossible. You cannot serve both God and money. You cannot follow both riches and Jesus.

The problem isn’t that this man possesses riches, but that riches possess him. Remember, “Whoever tries to keep his life will lose it” (Luke 17:33). Sometimes the more you have in this life, the harder it is to let go. In verse 24:

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

Those who heard this asked, ‘Who then can be saved?’

Jesus replied, ‘What is impossible with man is possible with God’” (Luke 18:24-27).

I appreciate this part. If entering the Kingdom requires letting go of your money, what hope is there? But Jesus reminds us that salvation is God’s work. Don’t give up hope. Verse 28:

“Peter said to Him, ‘We have left all we had to follow You!’ ‘Truly I tell you,’ Jesus said to them, ‘no one who has left home or wife or brothers or sisters or parents or children for the sake of the Kingdom of God will fail to receive many times as much in this age, and in the age to come eternal life’” (Luke 18:28-30).

Don’t worry Peter. God’s got you. He knows every sacrifice, and He will cover every loss. Read Luke 18. And consider what you’re holding onto

that is preventing you from following Jesus. Let go your grip on this world and grab a firm hold on God's Kingdom.

Luke 19 | Enter the King

Luke chapter 19 on our journey through the Word today, and the story of one of the greatest dates in world history. Though it may have passed unnoticed by much of the world, it would seem that there was a great big star on this date on God's wall calendar. Several major prophecies from all over the Old Testament point to this one day—the day the King made His royal entrance to the capital of His Kingdom. But first, a story about the power of forgiveness.

Some of my favorite stories to hear are the true testimonies of changed lives, lives radically altered by the love of Jesus. I've heard stories from ex-addicts, ex-thieves, ex-liars, ex-adulterers, ex-self-righteous religious, ex-extremists, ex-gang bangers, ex-Raiders fans, ex-you-name-it-Jesus-can-heal-it testimonies of His power. (Though I'm kidding about the Raiders fans. Mostly.)

But these are the stories I love. These are the stories that give me hope for every kind of sinner and remind me that God loves everyone. The story in Luke 19 is about a man that most people probably hate—especially religious people. And for good reason. He's a tax collector, a chief tax collector. He got rich by making everyone else poor. Let that sink in. His name is Zacchaeus. You might remember the story. He's a short man, and he climbs up in a tree ahead of the crowd and waits for Jesus to pass. And in verse 5:

“When Jesus reached the spot, He looked up and said to him, ‘Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.’ So he came down at once and welcomed Him gladly” (Luke 19:5-6).

Now, you have to feel this scene. The locals know Zacchaeus is the worst. Greedy traitor. And Jesus just walked home with him? What? Guest of a sinner?!

It is a hard thing to truly reckon yourself with the love of Jesus for sinners.

But don't read this wrong. Jesus doesn't visit Zacchaeus to approve of his greed. He intends to save him and change him. Verse 8:

“But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, ‘Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount’” (Luke 19:8).

Well, what do you know? Zaccheus is a new man. You can argue with doctrine. You can argue with miracles. But some of the strongest evidence that Jesus is Savior is the testimony of changed lives. Jesus declares his salvation, and in verse 10—one of the key verses to this whole book:

“For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost” (Luke 19:10).

Jesus came to seek—to look diligently. He came to save—to rescue from danger. And that saving is for lost people. Stinking, dirty, sinful, going every which wrong way but right lost people.

Zacchaeus was lost. Some people don't like the term “lost.” But as for me, I was totally lost. I was clueless about direction or destination. This I know: I once was lost, but now I'm found.

Next up, verse 11 brings us another parable. Pay attention again to why Jesus tells it and who He tells it to. That's key. According to verse 11, many people in Jerusalem believed that the Kingdom of God was about to appear. In other words, they thought Jesus was just about to be proclaimed King!

And wouldn't that just solve all their problems! Kick out Caesar, boot King Herod, fix all the political issues and bring peace to the land. After all, many Old Testament prophecies promise such a kingdom. But here, that's not the plan yet. That's for Jesus' Second Coming. Still future. Still gotta wait.

There's a good lesson for us here. Sometimes we just want Jesus to fix all our problems outside. You know, make my world right. Bring peace all around us. But it doesn't work that way... yet.

So to help us understand how this does work, He tells a parable in verse 12:

“A man of noble birth went to a distant country to have himself appointed king and then to return” (Luke 19:12).

So the noble man is to be appointed king. But notice: he goes far away to become king and then return. Why far away? Why not become king at home? And before he leaves, in verse 13:

“So he called ten of his servants and gave them ten minas. ‘Put this money to work,’ he said, ‘until I come back’” (Luke 19:13).

A mina is about three months' salary. But why leave? And why the big pay advance?

Think about it. How is a king to know which of his servants is truly loyal? Everyone is faithful when the king is watching. It's how you behave when the boss is away that truly speaks. The man leaves, and many declare they don't want him to be king.

Look around your world. Jesus left. And lots of people proudly pronounce they don't want Him to be King. But what about you? What did He give you,

and what are you doing with it while He's gone? Not because He's here and watching, but simply because He's king. Back in the parable, verse 15:

“He was made king, however, and returned home. Then he sent for the servants to whom he had given the money, in order to find out what they had gained with it” (Luke 19:15).

Well, some were faithful to work and to invest and brought back much more. And the master rewards them. Instead of money, he sets them over cities. Why? Because he can trust them. He knows he can trust them because they were faithful with the little things while he was away. Other servants did nothing, and what they had was taken away.

Now remember, **Jesus tells this parable to people who want Him to set up His Kingdom here and now. Fix my world now. The lesson for us: Don't wait until He fixes the world before you help your world. Be faithful now, and He will reward you then.**

Then at verse 28, it finally happens. The triumphal entry. We call it Palm Sunday. So important is this one day that God gave prophecies in Daniel 9:24, Zechariah 9:9, and Psalm 118. In other words, it's a day that God does not want His people to miss. The day of the grand entrance of the King in great triumph. Entering His city. Jerusalem.

And yet his entrance begins with a small errand for two disciples. Go to the village ahead and find a colt. A donkey's colt. No great horse. No chariot procession. A donkey. Not much to look at. Rather humble. Interesting. In some cultures a king entering on a donkey is a proclamation of peace. Jesus hops on, and in verse 36:

“As He went along, people spread their cloaks on the road. When He came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives,

the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen: “Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord!”

“Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!” (Luke 19:36-38).

Picture the scene. The Mount of Olives is a somewhat steep hillside, and directly across the Kidron Valley, in full view, is Jerusalem. Here on the Mount, the grand celebration. Shouts of joy and exclamations of praise. Can you hear it? Do you hear their words echoing from the hillsides? “Blessed is the King.” “Peace in heaven.”

Some Pharisees are concerned. Proclaiming a king is an invitation for trouble with Rome. “Rebuke your disciples!” But in verse 40:

“I tell you,’ He replied, ‘if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out’” (Luke 19:40).

There simply is no quieting this proclamation. The rocks would sing it. Jesus is King, and He brings peace. But look carefully at verse 41:

“As He approached Jerusalem and saw the city, He wept over it...” (Luke 19:41).

Can you see the tears streaming down Jesus’ face?

“If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes’” (Luke 19:42).

Wow. Jesus weeps. Why? Because the people of His city don’t see it. They don’t know what would bring them peace.

Remember again Jesus’ parable and the people who “thought that the kingdom of God was going to appear at once.” They want peace to be

brought down. Enforced by God outwardly. Fix my world. Ironically, that's kinda what the Romans promised. *Pax Romana*.

Jesus came humbly, riding on a donkey's colt. But they miss it, and, as they do, Jesus prophesies another day

"...when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you" (Luke 19:43).

History tells us that day did come. Some 40 years later, it was the Romans, as they enforced their version of peace at the edge of a sword. And just as Jesus prophesied, they did not leave one stone on another.

Read Luke 19 today. Join the cheers of the crowd. Proclaim the King. But take heart, the King is coming back again. Will we be found faithful when He arrives?

Luke 20 | Questioning Jesus

Welcome back to Luke's gospel. Chapter 20 today as Jesus is asked three tough questions by several people who don't believe and don't really seem to want answers. Which makes you wonder, "Is it okay to ask God questions?" And if you do question God, will He answer?

Here in Luke, many people ask Jesus questions, but His response often depends on whether the question is really a question or something else disguised as a question. **Some questions are really just excuses, or even accusations in question form.** How will He respond? We're about to find out.

Now the setting here is essential. We have entered Jesus' last week on Earth, the Passion week. It's early spring in Jerusalem, and Jews from far and wide have all gathered in and around the grand city to celebrate the Passover. It's a week-long celebration, and we began Sunday with Jesus' grand entrance. Throughout this week, the story and the meaning of Passover would be present in the minds of every Jew. At this point, more than a millennium has passed since Moses led the Israelites out of bitter slavery. The stories are in the air as families travel, and fathers tell them once again. The slavery in Egypt. The calling of Moses. The ten plagues and the final night when God sent an angel of death to take every firstborn son and pass over the house of each home where he saw blood on the doorposts. The blood of the lamb. They called it the lamb of God.

Here in Luke 20, it's likely Tuesday, and all around the temple, priests and Levites are busy at work inspecting the lambs that each family has brought for the Passover sacrifice. The lamb has to be spotless. God insisted. So they poke and prod and look close for any issue.

And right here in those same temple courts, Jesus—whom John called the Lamb of God—is about to be challenged and questioned on authority, integrity, and doctrine (John 1:29). Will He pass the inspection? Is He a spotless lamb? Verse 1:

“One day as Jesus was teaching the people in the temple courts and proclaiming the good news, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, together with the elders, came up to Him. ‘Tell us by what authority You are doing these things,’ they said. ‘Who gave You this authority?’” (Luke 20:1-2).

Authority is power that comes from the rightful source. Anyone can claim that this or that is true or tell you what to do, but who says you have to listen? And based on what? That’s what the priests are saying to Jesus: who says we should listen to you?

It’s a valid question—if it’s genuine. But watch Jesus’ response. Verse 3:

“He replied, ‘I will also ask you a question. Tell me: John’s baptism—was it from heaven, or of human origin?’”

So why doesn’t Jesus just answer their question and say He is the son of God? Pay attention here. He responds by taking them back to John’s baptism. Remember John? Way back at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry, John proclaimed and explained Jesus’ authority—even called him the Lamb of God. For the priests, the answer to their question has been evident since then. And now, they’re stumped.

If they answer that John’s message came from heaven, then Jesus’ authority is from above. Question answered. But if they say John made it up, they’re in trouble with the people. The people know John was a prophet. The priests are stuck on the fear of man.

“So they answered, ‘We don’t know where it was from.’ Jesus said, ‘Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things’” (Luke 20:7-8).

The lesson for us: **don’t expect God to answer questions when you refuse the answers already given.**

And sometimes when we won’t hear a direct answer, Jesus offers a parable to help us see our question—and ourselves—from a new perspective. Verse 9:

“A man planted a vineyard, rented it to some farmers and went away for a long time. At harvest time he sent a servant to the tenants so they would give him some of the fruit of the vineyard. But the tenants beat him and sent him away empty-handed” (Luke 20:9-10).

Once again, Jesus’ parable is about how people behave when the master is away. This time they are tenants renting a farm. The field and fruit rightfully belong to the owner. But the tenants won’t have it. They refuse the authority of the messenger. He sends another—they beat him. A third—they wound him.

So the owner sends his own son. The son has full authority. And in Jesus’ story, the tenants see the man’s son and circle up to mull it over. They probably looked a whole lot like the priests when they circled up to answer Jesus’ question. In the story, the tenants decide to kill the son. And so they do.

For those listening, it’s a shocking story. For the priests, it’s a mirror. God sent His Son. And in verse 17:

“Jesus looked directly at them and asked, ‘Then what is the meaning of that which is written: “The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone””’ (Luke 20:17).

The quote is Psalm 118 (Psalm 118:22). Same psalm that described Palm Sunday a thousand years before it happened. This part pictures the builders of the temple in the quarry selecting which massive stones to use for the magnificent temple walls. The entire temple would be built from the cornerstone. And David describes a stone that the builders rejected—cast aside—but now it’s the corner.

And here they are. Verse 19 says they know the parable is about them, but they still won’t listen. Time passes, and, in verse 20, they send spies “who pretend to be sincere.” And they ask Jesus another question in verse 22:

“Is it right for us to pay taxes to Caesar or not?” (Luke 20:22).

Reasonable enough question. For the Jews, paying taxes to Caesar was basically buying swords for the enemy. They hated it. But the question is a trick. It’s sorta like asking, “Are you ever gonna stop hiding spaghetti in your shoes?” You can answer yes or no, but either way you look bad.

If Jesus says to pay taxes, they’ll say He’s supporting an evil government. If He answers, “Don’t pay,” they’ll go tell the Romans and get Him arrested. Verse 23:

“He saw through their duplicity and said to them, ‘Show me a denarius. Whose image and inscription are on it?’ ‘Caesar’s,’ they replied. He said to them, ‘Then give back to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s’” (Luke 20:23-25).

Now stop and think on that one. Caesar placed his image on the coin to claim it. So give it back if he wants it. Taxes are a harsh reality of life, but

there it is. But what about, “Give to God what is God’s”? Where did God place His image? What is Jesus calling us to give to God?

The spies are speechless. For us, perhaps some good insights on how we pay our own taxes, and more importantly, on the nature of what God expects us to pay Him.

And question number three for Jesus comes from the Sadducees. Where the Pharisees were conservative, the Sadducees were quite liberal in their theology and practice. As the old saying goes, they are very sad—you see—because they don’t believe in life after death. They question Jesus about what happens in heaven for a woman married seven times.

“...at the resurrection whose wife will she be...?” (Luke 20:33).

Now they’re asking about a resurrection they don’t believe in. It’s not a question; it’s a challenge. There just can’t be life after death because it brings up too many issues. As if God can’t handle issues.

But I promise you, your issues are not too complicated for God—whether in this life or the next. Jesus responds by explaining that

“...those who are... in the age to come... will neither marry nor be given in marriage” (Luke 20:35).

A good lesson for us: **questions about eternity cannot be understood by forcing the constraints of this world. It is this temporary world that must be viewed through the lens of eternity and not vice versa.**

And Jesus reminds the Sadducees that God

“...is not the God of the dead, but of the living, for to Him all are alive” (Luke 20:38).

So that's it. Three questions, three answers. Hat trick. Or if you're a bowler, turkey. Jesus comes away spotless. Like a Passover lamb. The askers are all stumped, so in verse 41, Jesus asks the question:

“Why is it said that the Messiah is the son of David?” (Luke 20:41).

Now all the Jews present know the many prophecies that the Messiah would descend from David, but then Jesus quotes David in Psalm 110, where David clearly calls the Messiah “my Lord” (Psalm 110:1). And thus the conundrum: how can Messiah be both David's descendant and David's Lord? Perhaps there is more to this Messiah than they're looking for. Perhaps there's more to Jesus than you and I realize.

And Jesus closes out the chapter of questions with a warning for the disciples about the hypocrisy of those teachers of the law who asked the questions. They like to look good, they like to be honored—but don't trust it.

Read Luke 20. Bring your questions to the Lord—if they really are questions. In Isaiah, the Lord invites us,

“Come now, let us reason together,’ says the LORD: ‘though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow’” (Isaiah 1:18 ESV).

Luke 21 | Jesus on End Times

Hello, friends, and welcome back to Luke. Chapter 21 brings us to one of the crucial passages in Bible prophecy. It's the end of the world as we know it. The Bible is loaded with end times prophecies, but have you ever wondered what Jesus says about it? Well, wonder no more. Known as the Olivet Discourse, Luke 21 provides a full chapter packed with prophetic details.

Now, as with most Bible prophecy, there are a number of different interpretations on exactly what this chapter means and how it will all play out. Scholars and denominations disagree over literal or figurative interpretations, past or future fulfillment, and timelines and all sorts of details here. And that's okay. Disagreements are healthy—if we handle them well. **The evidence of God's work in our lives is in how well we love each other, not in how right our eschatology is or how much we agree on it.**

Eschatology, by the way, is the science of last things, or end times theology. And it's a good thing my salvation doesn't depend on it because I am not an expert. I might sound confident, but anyone can sound like they have all the answers when no one challenges them. The truth is I'm an explorer just like you, and I read through one commentary, and it all sounds confident and clear. Then I read another. And I wonder.

But that's okay too. First Corinthians reminds us that now we see things like a dim reflection in an obscured mirror, but then we will see clearly—face to face (1 Corinthians 13:12). And that same passage reminds us that while prophecies will cease and knowledge pass away, love perseveres forever (1 Corinthians 13:8).

But that's not a reason to skip this. Jesus told the disciples to keep watch, and here He tells them what to watch for.

The prophecy begins with a comment made by the disciples as they walk past the temple with Jesus. Verse 5:

“Some of His disciples were remarking about how the temple was adorned with beautiful stones and with gifts dedicated to God” (Luke 21:5).

Now a key to understanding prophecy is context, and the setting and questions here are just that. The disciples are a little awestruck by the temple and its beautiful stones. And you would be too. Notice how He starts in verse 6:

“But Jesus said, ‘As for what you see here, the time will come when not one stone will be left on another; every one of them will be thrown down’” (Luke 21:6).

Don't get too fixed on what you see. That's a key to faith. Look to God's Word and believe that God's plan for what will be is a greater and more permanent reality than what's in front of you now. These stones will be thrown down. Then in verse 7, the disciples ask two questions, and these are key to the whole chapter. Pay attention:

“‘Teacher,’ they asked, ‘when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are about to take place?’” (Luke 21:7).

Jesus responds with a whole chapter's worth of signs. The prophecy here breaks into a few pieces, and many believe that each one represents a different time period. It may help you to mark the transition points at verse 8, verse 12, verse 20, and verse 25.

The first prophecy is back in verse 6: the destruction of the temple. That came true quite literally less than four decades later in 70 AD when the Romans laid siege to Jerusalem. Roman soldiers greedy for the gold set a fire to melt the gold between stones, and every last stone came down. That pivotal event marked the end of Israel's time in their homeland. After 70 AD, the Jews were scattered throughout the world for almost 1,900 years.

Now predicting an event in 70 AD may not impress you, but for the disciples, that fulfillment would rock their world. It came true literally in their lifetime. And in the argument over whether end times prophecy is literal or figurative, the literalists have some strong support here. This happened. Now they also concede that some language is clearly figurative. The dragons and beasts in Revelation are clearly symbolic, but they say symbolic of real people and real events. I should note that some scholars believe that most of this chapter was fulfilled at that time in 70 AD and much of Revelation too.

Moving to verse 8, watch how Jesus begins His discourse:

“He replied: ‘Watch out that you are not deceived. For many will come in My name, claiming, “I am he,” and, “The time is near.” Do not follow them’” (Luke 21:8).

Before Jesus gets to any specific signs, He warns them: don't be deceived. Prophecy can be confusing, and many deceptions take advantage of one verse and mix truth with lies. Don't be deceived. Don't follow anyone who claims to be the one, and don't trust anyone's "inside track" on God's plan. Don't follow them; follow Jesus. Stick with the Bible and good teaching directly from it.

Jesus tells of false Messiahs, wars, revolutions, earthquakes, famines. But read carefully. Those are signs, but in verse 9, Jesus says:

“These things must happen first, but the end will not come right away” (Luke 21:9).

Those things are not the end yet. Do not give in to end times fearmongering. Jesus says those things are not the end, and He says:

“... do not be frightened” (Luke 21:9).

Then in verse 12, He backs up:

“But before all this, they will seize you and persecute you” (Luke 21:12).

So Jesus says “before all this” because the disciples will have some things to deal with in the here and now before the end comes. Persecution. And indeed, Christians and Jews—the disciples were both—have been severely persecuted in various parts of the world for 2,000 years. Sadly, they have also sometimes been the persecutors.

Yet here, Jesus warns the disciples, you will be persecuted, and “you will bear testimony to Me” (21:13). And in verse 17,

“Everyone will hate you because of Me. But not a hair of your head will perish. Stand firm, and you will win life” (Luke 21:17-19).

Now, how does that work? Not a hair will perish. Christians have been beaten and killed around the world. Yet the word “perish” refers to the second death. Judgment. No matter what they do to you in this world, not the tiniest part of you will perish. Stand firm and win life.

Then another transition. The disciples asked for signs of when. Verse 20:

“When you see Jerusalem being surrounded by armies, you will know that its desolation is near” (Luke 21:20).

Now some believe that warning is still future. Others believe Jesus is warning again about 70 AD. And indeed history tells us that many Christians heeded warnings and got out quickly. Yet it was dreadful for Israel, and just as verse 24 predicts, many fell by the sword, and many more were “taken as prisoners to all the nations.” And so the Jews have been all over the world for nearly 20 centuries. And look at the end of verse 24:

“Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled” (Luke 21:24).

So Jesus prophesied a Jerusalem under Gentile control. Gentile means non-Jewish. And sure enough, Jerusalem was under Roman, Byzantine, Muslim, Christian, Muslim again, Ottoman, and finally British control for 19 centuries. Then in 1948, miracle of miracles, the Jews re-formed Israel. And in 1967, Jerusalem was theirs. But hold on, the Temple Mount is still under Muslim control.

Thus, many scholars believe that what Jesus calls the “times of the Gentiles” refers to this time, the past 2,000 years as God has been working to bring the gospel to the whole world. It’s also called the Church Age. Some believe it will end with the Rapture, then the Tribulation, which will again be a time for God to focus on saving the Jews.

Verse 24 ends with the times of the Gentiles fulfilled. Transition. Verse 25 moves forward:

“There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. People will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken” (Luke 21:25).

These signs will be impossible to miss. Most scholars see this as Tribulation time. And in verse 27, the sign:

“At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory” (Luke 21:27).

That is the Second Coming. The return of Jesus. Jesus says they will see Him, and it's the final piece of all this prophecy. What it all leads up to.

And in verse 28, He tells us what to do with it:

“When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near” (Luke 21:28).

Argue the details later. The essential is the return of Christ, and the application is stand and lift your heads. Your redemption is near.

And that's the whole prophecy. But Jesus adds a parable about fig trees. Plain and simple: when you see leaves sprouting, you know summer is coming. Funny enough, I have a fig tree in my backyard right now. A month ago, it looked dead. As I record this, the first buds are popping. Summer is close. God designed the seasons with signs. And I love it. And just like that, verse 31:

“... when you see these things happening, you know that the Kingdom of God is near” (Luke 21:31).

We should look for God's Kingdom like children looking for summertime. It will come. He began with a warning against deception; He ends with a warning against losing sight. When you forget about His return, Jesus warns your heart can get weighed down with drunkenness and anxieties, and that day will surprise you. Jesus says:

“Be always on the watch” (Luke 21:36).

Luke 22 | When Darkness Reigns

Welcome back to Luke. Chapter 22, and it all comes down to this. We've followed Jesus through 33 years of life on Earth, and now we come to His last day. Our story begins just outside of Jerusalem with the Passover feast quickly approaching, and the chief priests looking for a way to get rid of Jesus.

Interesting phrase. I'm sure many since have had similar feelings. If we could just get rid of this pesky Jesus. Opportunity knocks in verse 3 when Satan enters Judas, and he offers to betray Jesus.

The stage is set for a final showdown. And yet rather than run or fight, Jesus chooses to slow down and spend His final evening on earth with His closest friends. He sends Peter and John to make preparations for the Passover.

As you read Luke 22, do the same. Slow down. Step into the story and look around. Take it in. There's so much here. And as you look, there are three stories to follow—three men who give us three critical perspectives on this dark night: Peter, Jesus, and Judas.

We climb the stairs to an upper room, remove our sandals, and recline on the floor at a low table with the disciples. Passover is a familiar setting. The feast, the wine, the tradition, the stories. The spotless lamb sacrificed. The people saved. And as we begin, Jesus speaks. Verse 15:

“And He said to them, ‘I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the Kingdom of God’” (Luke 22:15-16).

What does He mean? Passover finds fulfillment. It turns out that all of this story is fulfilling a thousand-year-old story, a plan of God from the foundations of the world. Jesus is the Lamb. And notice the phrase: “in the Kingdom of God.” All of God’s plans and prophecies lead us back to the Kingdom. Four times Jesus will refer to it. Then in verse 19:

“And He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is My body given for you; do this in remembrance of Me.’ In the same way, after the supper He took the cup, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is poured out for you’” (Luke 22:19-20).

Communion. The only regular practice that Jesus personally instituted. “Do this in remembrance of Me.” What does it mean to truly remember someone? I recall the powerful scene from *Saving Private Ryan*. Lives were sacrificed to save his, and the final words he heard from his commander: “Earn this.” And he never forgot. His life was bought at a price. And so was mine.

Then right away, Jesus tells His disciples that one of them will betray Him. First, they question who it is. Then ironically, they argue over which of them is the greatest. Jesus settles the argument. You’re arguing over the wrong sort of greatness. In His Kingdom, the greatest serves, just as Jesus serves us. And then in verse 28, something striking:

“You are those who have stood by Me in My trials. And I confer on you a Kingdom, just as My Father conferred one on Me” (Luke 22:28-29).

What a thing to say. He commends them for faithfulness. They stood by Him. Things got rough, and they stayed. Do you have friends like that?

And for their loyalty, Jesus promises a reward like no other:

“I confer on you a Kingdom” (Luke 22:29)

As you follow Jesus, as you stick it out through every trial, know that He sees it. He knows. And in His Kingdom, He remembers. In verse 30:

“So that you may eat and drink at My table in My Kingdom and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Luke 22:30).

And just then, Jesus turns to Peter with a warning.

“Satan has asked to sift all of you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail” (Luke 22:31-32).

Step into Peter’s shoes. Peter was the kind of guy with a heart full of sparks and lighter fluid. When Jesus talks devotion and loyalty, that’s Peter’s heart language. He gave up everything for Jesus. “What’s this? Satan’s after us? Don’t worry about me, boss.” Verse 33:

“But he replied, ‘Lord, I am ready to go with You to prison and to death’” (Luke 22:33).

The fellowship is breaking, but Peter is convinced that he is Samwise—true to the very end. We all like to imagine ourselves the faithful one. But words are too easy. Verse 34:

“Jesus answered, ‘I tell you, Peter, before the rooster crows today, you will deny three times that you know Me’” (Luke 22:34).

Jesus prepares Peter for his failure and his restoration. And He prepares all the disciples for challenges ahead. Next mission, bring supplies. Sword too. And He reminds them of a passage in Isaiah 53 about Messiah:

“... He was numbered with the transgressors” (Luke 22:37, Isaiah 53:12).

It's a helpful reminder. The world is about to flip upside down. It's nice to know that God saw all of this coming.

The hour is late. Jesus heads out to the Mount of Olives. The disciples follow. He stops and asks them to pray. And here in this critical time, we find Jesus in one of the most human moments of His life.

“He withdrew about a stone’s throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, ‘Father, if You are willing, take this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done’” (Luke 22:41-42).

That prayer floors me. Jesus, God in the flesh, in anguish over the coming darkness, speaks a humble prayer of submission. “Not My will.” Those are hard words for anyone, but for Jesus—I am ever impressed by the humility and humanity of my Savior.

Jesus prays more, now in great anguish, and His sweat falls to the ground like drops of blood.

The disciples, on the other hand, are struggling with their own humanity. They're asleep. For all of their promises of undying devotion, they're still flesh and bone.

And quite suddenly, a crowd approaches through the deep of the night, and in the lead is Judas. Verse 47:

“He approached Jesus to kiss Him, but Jesus asked him, ‘Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?’” (Luke 22:47b-48).

Betrayal is a hard word to swallow. Deceived by a friend. Judas was one of them. One who stood by Him. And even now, a kiss. If your culture doesn't kiss, you may relate this to the warm hug of true friendship. But there was nothing true here.

A battalion follows Judas, and Peter—true to his devotion—pulls out a sword and attacks, slicing an ear. Jesus calms them immediately and heals the man's ear.

“Am I leading a rebellion, that you have come with swords and clubs? Every day I was with you in the temple courts, and you did not lay a hand on Me. But this is your hour—when darkness reigns” (Luke 22:52b-53).

Take note. Darkness reigns. That's a Kingdom word, and this is their hour.

They seize Jesus and take Him to the house of the high priest. Peter follows at a distance. You can almost feel the fight inside of Peter. So convinced of his own undying devotion. To his credit, he pulled a sword on a battalion. But this isn't going the way he pictured. What do you do when your moment passes and the blaze of glory inside of you falters?

Still dark out, Peter sits by the fire outside the house. A servant girl recognizes him:

“This man was with Him.’ But he denied it. ‘Woman, I don’t know Him...’” (Luke 22:56b-57).

Time passes. Another challenge. You're one of them.

“Man, I am not!”

Another hour goes by, and a third. Verse 59:

“Certainly this fellow was with Him...” (Luke 22:59).

“Peter replied, ‘Man, I don’t know what you’re talking about!’ Just as he was speaking, the rooster crowed. The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter” (Luke 22:60-61a).

“And he went outside and wept bitterly” (Luke 22:62).

It is a harsh reality to realize that you—on your own—cannot live out all of your convictions. The humbling brings tears. I often wonder what was in Jesus' eyes in that last look. God is not done with Peter, and such a humbling is necessary for a man who will yet be used so greatly by God.

Now, Jesus is truly on His own, His faithful disciples gone and He facing the callous cruelty of the Roman guards and the stinging venom of the Jewish leaders. Jesus is blindfolded, beaten, and mocked relentlessly.

Day breaks at last, and Jesus is led before the council of elders. They've been planning this. It is the trial of Jesus. It will come in stages and begins before the chief priests of Israel and teachers of the law. In verse 67:

“If You are the Messiah,’ they said, ‘tell us.’ Jesus answered, ‘If I tell you, you will not believe Me, and if I asked you, you would not answer’” (Luke 22:67-68).

Pay attention. As the trials move forward, many accusations will fly, but just one question matters. Who is Jesus, really? Who is this man on trial for his life? Yet from the beginning, Jesus knows that the ones asking will not listen. They won't even take an open stance.

And for all of us who put Jesus on trial in the court of our minds, it's worth asking: who is Jesus? And if He told you directly, would you listen? If you were asked directly who He is, would you answer? Verse 69:

“But from now on, the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the mighty God.’ They all asked, ‘Are you then the Son of God?’ He replied, ‘You say that I am.’ Then they said, ‘Why do we need any more testimony? We have heard it from His own lips’” (Luke 22:69-71).

And there you have it. Jesus professes to be the Son of God. And for the Jews, the only thing they heard was opportunity. We'll convict Him for blasphemy and finally get rid of Jesus.

One trial down. One to go. Read Luke 22, and I'll meet you back here at the house of Pilate.

Luke 23 | Crucify Him!

Welcome back, friends. Luke 23 on Through the Word today, and now that we are here, I am a bit overwhelmed. How do I tell the story of the day my dearest friend died? Yet He died to save my life. So tell it I must.

The story begins soon after dawn. The priests and scribes, hoping to be rid of Jesus at last, have sped through a trial. Yet to put Him to death, they must take Him to the Roman authority. In Jerusalem, that authority is Pontius Pilate, the local governor. We begin in verse 1:

“Then the whole assembly rose and led Him off to Pilate. And they began to accuse Him, saying, ‘We have found this man subverting our nation. He opposes payment of taxes to Caesar and claims to be Messiah, a king’” (Luke 23:1-2)

Notice: truth mixed with lies, and tailor-made to scare Pilate. The last thing he wants is a rebellion against Caesar. Is this “king” a threat? Pilate ignores the little stuff and hones in on what matters—who Jesus is. Verse 3:

“Pilate asked Jesus, ‘Are you the king of the Jews?’

‘You have said so,’ Jesus replied” (Luke 23:3).

Interesting that Jesus refrains from speaking but affirms when others speak truth. And Jesus agrees He is indeed the King. That’s no small claim. The Jews had not had a real king for many generations. Yet God promised David a king in his line forever. Reading the Old Testament prophecies, God’s plan to save the world centers around the promise of a King. Centuries later, here stands, bloody and beaten, a son of David, accused of being king.

Could this be the one? Could this be the king eternal? The Kingdom forever? Sure doesn't look like a king in this condition. Pilate, for his part, finds nothing to prosecute. In verse 4:

“I find no basis for a charge against this man” (Luke 23:4).

Pay attention. Jesus is never found guilty of a crime. Spotless. But the priests press the matter. He stirs up the people. Interesting crime. But Pilate hears among their words that Jesus is from Galilee. Different jurisdiction. Perhaps he won't have to judge this Messiah after all. He sends Jesus to King Herod.

The scene before Herod is a circus. The priests hurl accusations, yet Herod just plies Jesus for a miracle. He just wants a show. Jesus remains silent. The room devolves into mockery, and an elegant robe is draped over the beaten and humiliated king.

Pause this scene and step outside it for a moment. It's all so familiar—all the ways we put Jesus on trial today. Some divert—let someone else decide. Others mock and demand signs. Others still demand that we do away with the claims of this ancient rabbi once and for all.

Back in our story, Pilate's avoidance doesn't work as Herod sends Jesus back. Won't work for us either. The claims of Jesus are before us; the decision is ours. Is He King, or isn't He? Will you follow Christ? Avoiding that question is like avoiding a marriage proposal—not deciding has the same result as deciding not to.

Pilate calls the priests and rulers together and insists there is no basis for charges. In verse 20:

“Wanting to release Jesus, Pilate appealed to them again. But they kept shouting, ‘Crucify Him! Crucify Him!’

For the third time he spoke to them: ‘Why? What crime has this man committed? I have found in Him no grounds for the death penalty. Therefore I will have Him punished and then release Him.’ But with loud shouts they insistently demanded that He be crucified, and their shouts prevailed” (Luke 23:20-23).

Pilate grants their demand, and Jesus is led away with a cross. Already beaten and severely wounded, Jesus buckles under the weight of the heavy cross, and an African man named Simon is forced to carry it. A crowd follows. Mourners wail. Jesus speaks to them. And in verse 32:

“Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with Him to be executed. When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified Him there, along with the criminals—one on His right, the other on His left. Jesus said, ‘Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing’” (Luke 23:32-34).

Jesus amazes me here. His mercy never gives out. Others are not so impressed. In verse 35,

“The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at Him. They said, ‘He saved others; let Him save Himself if He is God’s Messiah, the Chosen One’” (Luke 23:35).

Their challenge bears a tragic irony. They openly acknowledge that Jesus saved others. **They couldn’t deny the miracles. They just couldn’t understand why a real Savior wouldn’t save Himself. But for Jesus to truly be a Savior, He had to be a sacrifice.**

Onlookers offer Him wine vinegar, and in verse 37:

“If You are the king of the Jews, save Yourself” (Luke 23:36).

“If you are.” The central question remains: who is He? Is He king? Now when the Romans crucified a criminal, they often placed a sign over the convicted to indicate their crime for all passers by. In verse 38:

“There was a written notice above Him, which read: this is the king of the jews” (Luke 23:38).

That’s it. Jesus is convicted of just one thing: He is indeed the King of the Jews. What does that mean for us? For one, Jesus is the human descendant of King David, the heir to the throne. But there is much more to this King of the Jews. Consider Isaiah 44:6:

“This is what the LORD says— Israel’s King and Redeemer, the LORD Almighty: I am the first and I am the last; apart from Me there is no God” (Isaiah 44:6).

Did you catch that? The LORD Almighty is Israel’s King. There on the cross, the words “King of the Jews” are written in four languages. What that means is more than any human language can express. Verse 39:

“One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at Him: ‘Aren’t you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!’” (Luke 23:39).

Biting words. And Jesus has heard the same sentiments a thousand times over—from criminals like you and me who demand that God save us from our sins—on our own terms. But the second thief is different. Watch his words in verse 40:

“...‘Don’t you fear God,’ he said, ‘since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.’ Then he said, ‘Jesus, remember me when You come into Your kingdom’” (Luke 23:40-42).

The second thief speaks with faith and respect like a man speaking to his King. In verse 43:

“Jesus answered him, ‘Truly I tell you, today you will be with Me in paradise’” (Luke 23:43).

In verse 44, the scene changes dramatically:

“It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, for the sun stopped shining” (Luke 23:44-45a).

Well, what just happened? A minute ago, the sun was directly overhead. Now everything goes dark. As the guards scramble to light torches, you might wonder if this is just an eclipse. But this is Passover, and that only happens at full moon, which means the moon is way over on the other side of the earth. This is no eclipse. Luke says it plainly: “the sun stopped shining.” No sunshine, no moonlight, and those who rejected the Light of the world walked in darkness for three long hours. And in verse 45:

“And the curtain of the temple was torn in two” (Luke 23:45).

That curtain was inside the temple, a massive and intricate piece of cloth—possibly inches thick—separating the Holy Place—where the priests serve—from the Holiest Place—where the presence of God dwelt above the Ark of the Covenant. The curtain hung there always—in many ways representing the barrier between earth and heaven, between us and God. And suddenly there it hangs—rent in two. Verse 46:

“Jesus called out with a loud voice, ‘Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit.’ When He had said this, He breathed His last” (Luke 23:46).

“The centurion, seeing what had happened, praised God and said, ‘Surely this was a righteous man.’ When all the people who had

gathered to witness this sight saw what took place, they beat their breasts and went away” (Luke 23:47-48).

I wonder about those people. What doubts and demons did they battle in their minds as they beat their chests? What drove them to walk away?

Others did stay. Some who had followed Him—including the women—stood at a distance and watched. And one more. In verse 50:

“Now there was a man named Joseph...” (Luke 23:50).

This Joseph is from Arimathea. He’s a member of the Jewish council, yet he did not consent to the decision to convict Jesus. Luke says he was “a good and upright man.” And one description really intrigues me:

“... and he himself was waiting for the Kingdom of God” (Luke 23:51).

What a way to describe a man. What a difference it makes in his life. You can tell a lot about a person by what they wait for. In verse 52:

“Going to Pilate, he asked for Jesus’ body. Then he took it down, wrapped it in linen cloth and placed it in a tomb cut in the rock, one in which no one had yet been laid” (Luke 23:52).

And there you have the story. The day darkness fell on the earth. The day my dear friend died. The day my life was saved. Some of the Galilean women follow Joseph to see where the tomb is. They prepare spices and perfumes to honor the burial, but they must wait—and rest through the Sabbath.

Waiting can be hard. Waiting makes you wonder. What was it all for? Waiting for Messiah. Waiting for the King to rule. Waiting for the Kingdom.

Read Luke 23. Follow the trial. And consider the trial in your own mind.
Who is this Jesus? Why did He die? And is He worth waiting for?

Luke 24 | Risen

Welcome back, friends. Luke chapter 24 today, and on our journey through the Word, this is as big as it gets. It takes place on a Sunday, and for those of us who follow Jesus, this is the day—the day where hope finds its foundation.

Without this day, Ecclesiastes says life is meaningless, and Paul says our faith is worthless (Ecclesiastes 1:2, 1 Corinthians 15:17). Everything hangs on this one day. It is Resurrection Day.

Three days have passed since Jesus took on the great enemy. Death is the one enemy that conquers every man, no matter how smart or strong. But watch the battle carefully. Jesus died. Death won. To defeat death, you have to live.

And now the showdown is passed. Third day since, and the disciples are struggling. But this is also a first day. Sunday. And it begins early. Verse 1:

“On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, ‘Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; He has risen!’” (Luke 24:1-6a).

They were not expecting this. Put yourself there. Hearts heavy with grief. Then confusion—where’s His body? Then shock—two men, clothes like lightning. What can you do but bow? And the question:

“Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; He has risen!” (Luke 24:5-6).

And the next word is the key to this whole chapter—“remember.” Verse 6:

“Remember how He told you, while He was still with you in Galilee: ‘The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.’ Then they remembered His words” (Luke 24:6b-8)

So remembering is key because Jesus already told them about all of this. Repeatedly. The cross was not a surprise to God. For that matter, neither is any trial that comes into your life. So why were the disciples so surprised? Had they just listened and believed, the whole experience would have been so much better. Hope transforms every trial. Why didn't they listen?

My guess is that the disciples were like the rest of us. We don't like to think about hard truth. Open the Bible, and we would much rather read encouragement than warning.

But God promises us some hard things in this life. Jesus promised us trials and tribulation. Repeatedly. Still we act surprised. But here's the rub. **If you won't listen to the hard promise, you won't hear the hope that comes with it.** Like John 16:33,

“In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

As for the women, they run back to tell the disciples. In verse 11

“But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense” (Luke 24:11).

I wonder what that was like for the women—filled with hope and staring at a room full of mourners. I imagine the angels' question came back to them. Probably stayed with them for many years. It stays with me. Why do I seek the living among the dead? Why do I sometimes treat church like history

class? Or worship like a memorial service for God—like I’m an old lady laying flowers at Jesus’ gravestone?

Shouldn’t our faith walk be a living, breathing, leaping, risk-taking, heart-pounding, edge-of- your-seat relationship with the living God?!

“He is not here; He has risen!” (Luke 24:6a).

The disciples aren’t ready for that just yet. Yet Peter is intrigued enough to get up and move. He runs to the tomb. He finds the strips of linen, but no body.

John’s gospel informs us that he too went to the tomb with Peter. Which begs the question: why aren’t the four Gospel accounts of this story identical? I mean, they are mostly the same, and all the big stuff matches, but some details differ.

A friend helped me with this. He’s a lawyer. He said that when four witnesses tell exactly the same story, that’s not agreement; it’s collusion. But the four Gospels don’t do that. They tell of the same events from four perspectives. That’s crucial to understanding what we have in the four Gospels. The minor differences here are in line with what you should expect from a collection of witnesses. As you may recall, that’s how Luke assembled his account—from many witnesses.

Back in our story, Luke shares the account of two disciples whom the others missed. Verse 13:

“Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus Himself came up and walked along with them; but they were kept from recognizing Him.

He asked them, ‘What are you discussing together as you walk along?’ They stood still, their faces downcast” (Luke 24:13-17).

I love this story. Jesus Himself comes up and walks with them. But they don’t see it. Can I relate to that? Wondering what God is doing, yet all the while God walks with me—unrecognized.

The stranger asks what they’re discussing. One disciple, Cleopas, is a little taken aback because everyone is talking about these things. Verse 19:

“‘What things?’ He asked. ‘About Jesus of Nazareth,’ they replied. ‘He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. The chief priests and our rulers handed Him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified Him’” (Luke 24:29-20).

They go on to lay out all of the facts that they know about Jesus—like puzzle pieces that just don’t fit. His amazing life. His tragic death. Ever do that? **Ever try to piece together a story or figure out what God is doing by laying out all the pieces—some so full of hope, others so tragic—and wonder how they can even be the same story?**

And their next phrase gets to the heart of it: “we had hoped.” In verse 21:

“But we had hoped that He was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place” (Luke 24:21).

They had hoped. When all was going well and Jesus was so amazing, everything seemed to add up. His words were truth—the very words of God. His works were powerful—bringing healing and life. But this last part. He died. Worse yet, He was killed. So much for hope.

How do you piece together God doing such amazing things on one side and allowing something so awful on the other? But then a new piece showed up, one they hadn't expected. In verse 22:

“Some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb...” (Luke 24:22).

And there—no dead body. Just angels who said He was alive. I think there may be a subtle message here to men about listening to the women God puts in your life. Then in verse 25:

“He said to them, ‘How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken!’” (Luke 24:25).

How foolish. Foolish is making conclusions without understanding. When you look at the facts but only the surface. When you fail to perceive that your plan and God's plan are two different things. When hard things happen and you conclude that God failed. Verse 26:

“‘Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter His glory?’ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, He explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning Himself” (Luke 24:26-27).

This... is... awesome. What I wouldn't give to be a fly on their backpacks. As they walk along the road, Jesus walks them through the Old Testament and explains all the Scriptures about Himself—Scriptures they knew, but were “slow of heart to believe.” Makes you wonder. What passages and promises am I missing either because I don't want to hear the hard stuff or I'm just slow of heart?

They reach Emmaus, but Jesus keeps walking ahead. “Stay with us.” And He does. They sit for a meal, and Jesus breaks the bread and gives thanks. Suddenly, their eyes are opened. Jesus. Maybe it's the familiarity of

breaking bread or maybe something about gratitude changes your view. And just like that, He disappears.

Stunned but finally understanding, they immediately head back to Jerusalem to see the disciples. More news there. Jesus appeared to Simon! Then verse 36:

“While they were still talking about this, Jesus Himself stood among them and said to them, ‘Peace be with you.’ They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. He said to them, ‘Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? Look at My hands and My feet. It is I Myself! Touch Me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have’” (Luke 24:36-39).

Interesting that Jesus emphasizes that He does in fact have a body. He even joins them to eat some fish and reminds them that everything had to be fulfilled. And watch verse 45:

“Then He opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, ‘This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day...’” (Luke 24:45-46).

Two keys: He explains, and He opens their minds to understand. Both are necessary to faith. And what comes next? Verse 47:

“And repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. I am going to send you what My Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high” (Luke 24:47-49).

Those instructions are crucial, as we shall see in the book of Acts. What the Father has promised is the Holy Spirit. Without that power, the disciples' mission would be futile.

And so a day that started hopeless finished with a calling: bring hope to the entire world! We have that same calling, and we need that same power. **We can explain the message, but only the Spirit can open the mind.**

A great deal more took place in these first days and weeks after the resurrection. Luke will share some of it in his continuation of the story in Acts, and John and Paul share further still. But we close out Luke's gospel with one more phenomenal story. Verse 50:

“When He had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, He lifted up His hands and blessed them. While He was blessing them, He left them and was taken up into heaven. Then they worshiped Him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God” (Luke 24:50-53).