



LEAP OF FAITH
The Luke Daily Study Guide

Adapted, with permission, by the North Brooklyn Vineyard

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The Luke Daily Study Guide

Intro

Introduction

Introducing the Leap of Faith Study Guide

We're continuing a tradition which began last year at the North Brooklyn Vineyard, to spend the six weeks before Easter doing something we call the Leap of Faith. You can learn more about the Leap of Faith in Mike Turrigiano's *User's Manual*, which you can usually find nearby wherever you picked up this guide. One element in the larger experience of the Leap of Faith is this six-week walk through one of the books of the Bible. One of the things I really love about these Bible study guides is that those of us who participate get the unique chance to study the Bible alone and together at the same time: the guides are designed to help you have a satisfying interaction with the Bible on your own each day; but because around 100 other people are reading and thinking about the exact same daily Bible passage as you, it also gives you the fun opportunity to share your individual experience with the people around you. So, please join in yourself, share this guide with your friends, and talk together about what you find.

Whether you've never opened a Bible before in your life or you've been reading the Bible ever since you did memory verses as a kid, I've written this guide with you in mind. People of both varieties have told me that the previous guide has been surprisingly helpful and interesting, occasionally thought-provoking, and not-too-infrequently relevant to their lives. I aim for at least the same this time around; you, of course, will have to be the judge as to whether I succeed.

Each day's guide is broken into three sections:

1. **The story for the day.** This year, we'll be studying the book of Luke, one of the Bible's four biographies of Jesus (called 'the gospels'). I've divided the book into 42 bite-size portions, meant to be short enough that you can comfortably read them in a single day, but long enough that each day is a satisfying stand-alone experience—the passages tend to be between about half a page and about a page long, as logic break points allow. For your convenience, I've included the Bible text of each day's story in *Today's New International Version* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005). I hope you'll find it to be a very readable translation, with current vocabulary and a modern sensibility. As you read the story, try to read it from the perspectives of the participants in it. Really get inside the story. What's it like to go through this experience with these people?
2. **Points of Interest.** This section briefly explores aspects of the day's story that might be especially interesting or potentially confusing. It offers some historical notes and references that might help to interpret the story, frames some of the issues or questions, and gives suggestions of ways to understand the story and its meaning.
3. **Taking it home.** In this section, I offer some suggestions for how the day's reading might apply practically to our lives and the lives of the people around us. Much of the time, I'll propose a way we might want to respond to the passage through prayer; other times, I might propose a little experiment, or a conversation. Each day, we'll look at the passage from the perspective of three groups of people:
 - a. **For you and your family**—we'll explore how we and the people closest to us might identify with the story. We'll discuss implications that it has for how we

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look at ourselves, how we approach our lives, and how our family relates with God;

- b. **For ‘your six’**—think of six people in your life who live locally, who aren’t currently followers of God (but who may be interested in God or exploring issues of faith), and for whom you’d like to see God do good things. What does this passage have to offer to those six friends? (For more about your six, see Dave Schmelzer’s *Leap of Faith User’s Manual*.)
- c. **For our city**—we’ll spend some time each day particularly focusing on what the day’s story might mean for the Williamsburg area, New York City, and their surroundings. We’ll take the opportunity to pray for New York, and to think about our relationships to our city.

Introducing the book of Luke

As I’ve mentioned, we’ll be studying the book of Luke. The book of Luke is one of the four biblical gospels. *Gospel* is a word from Old English which simply means ‘good news.’ The gospel writers told their stories in order to share the good news about Jesus’ coming, his life, his teaching, his death, and his resurrection.

The book of Luke is part of a two-volume set with another biblical book, the book of Acts, which goes on to tell the story of the early church after Jesus’ death. The author never gives his own name, but from very early in church history the book of Luke and Acts have been ascribed to (no big surprise here) Luke, a traveling companion of Paul, a famous early follower of Jesus who was largely responsible for spreading the good news of Jesus to Europe. Luke was part of a small company who worked with Paul, sharing the good news and starting churches throughout the Mediterranean world. Luke was a medical doctor by profession, and he was almost certainly the only non-Jewish author of the New Testament (and quite possibly of the entire Bible). The audience for Luke may have been cultured, highly-educated Greeks (Greek was the dominant culture of the eastern Roman empire): he writes in the same formal historical style that was fashionable in Greek society at the time. There is some evidence that Luke intended his writings for wide publication: the Gospel of Luke and Acts are almost exactly the same length, which happens to be the length that was common in scrolls used for publication (*IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* 187: InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL, 1993).

Luke’s gospel was probably written after Mark’s gospel, another of the four biblical gospels, and is apparently based upon it. Luke follows the same basic storyline as Mark, and about 40 percent of the material is drawn directly from Mark. But Luke also has much material that isn’t found in any of the other gospels. Luke’s unique contributions show up particularly in his stories about Jesus’ birth and the teachings of Jesus he shares with us. Perhaps because he is outside of Jewish society himself, he also shows a particular concern for Jesus’ interaction with people who would be outsiders in ancient Jewish society: non-Jews, women, and the poor.

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Monday, March 14th

Luke 1: 1-25

1 Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, 2 just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. 3 With this in mind, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I too decided to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, 4 so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught. 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. 6 Both of them were righteous in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's commands and decrees blamelessly. 7 But they were childless because Elizabeth was not able to conceive, and they were both well advanced in years. 8 Once when Zechariah's division was on duty and he was serving as priest before God, 9 he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to go into the temple of the Lord and burn incense. 10 And when the time for the burning of incense came, all the assembled worshipers were praying outside. 11 Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. 12 When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear.

13 But the angel said to him: "Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to call him John. 14 He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, 15 for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even before he is born. 16 Many of the people of Israel will he bring back to the Lord their God. 17 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."

18 Zechariah asked the angel, "How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years."

19 The angel said to him, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to tell you this good news. 20 And now you will be silent and not able to speak until the day this happens, because you did not believe my words, which will come true at their appointed time."

21 Meanwhile, the people were waiting for Zechariah and wondering why he stayed so long in the temple. 22 When he came out, he could not speak to them. They realized he had seen a vision in the temple, for he kept making signs to them but remained unable to speak.

23 When his time of service was completed, he returned home. 24 After this his wife Elizabeth became pregnant and for five months remained in seclusion. 25 "The Lord has done this for me," she said. "In these days he has shown his favor and taken away my disgrace among the people."

Points of Interest:

- 'Many have undertaken'—Luke is not the only or the first person to write the stories of Jesus. It seems that one of Luke's motivations for his own writing is to collect everything he has been taught into a single, orderly history.
- 'I myself have carefully investigated everything'—like any good historian today, Luke relies on primary sources and careful research. It is probable that Luke did his

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own fact-checking and interviewing of living eyewitnesses rather than only relying on what was already written (For instance, the very intimate tone of the stories involving Mary make me, at least, believe that Luke must have gotten some of the early stories directly from her, or from someone who knew her well). Luke expects that his audience would be very interested in the accuracy and reliability of his writing: they are not looking for sensational stories, but for a history they can trust.

- ‘most excellent Theophilus’—as I mentioned in the introduction, Luke probably intended his writing for publication. The aptly named Theophilus (‘god-lover’ in Greek) was probably his patron and sponsor. ‘Most excellent’ is a technical title indicating that Theophilus is part of the Roman nobility (*IVP Bible Background Commentary* 187)—something like, ‘Count Theophilus.’ It is also possible that Luke is using the title as an honorary compliment (*ibid*).
- ‘was also a descendant of Aaron’—in other words, Elizabeth is also from a priestly family. Jewish priests were all descended from Aaron, the brother of Moses. The priests were in charge of the worship ceremonies at the temple in Jerusalem.
- ‘observing all the Lord's commands and decrees blamelessly’—this does not necessarily mean that they were thought to be absolutely perfect; rather, it means that they consistently based their life on following God’s instruction.
- ‘But they were childless’—it’s surprising to Luke that such a righteous couple would be childless. Children were considered a special blessing from God; inevitably, the converse also came to be thought of as true: childlessness was a punishment from God. Luke is making clear here that Elizabeth and Zechariah are not being punished. Why, then, would these faithful people not be given children?

Actually, Elizabeth is the latest member of a small but significant Biblical club: devout women who are not able to have children until long after all natural hope of becoming pregnant is gone. The first among these women is Sarah, Abraham’s wife, who, like Elizabeth, does not have a child until she is beyond child-bearing years. Other members of the club are Rachel (Genesis 29 and 30), Hannah (I Samuel 1 and 2), and the unnamed mother of Samson (Judges 13). The stories of these previous miracle mothers will be referred to numerous times during Luke’s account of the pregnancies of Elizabeth and Mary.

- ‘to go into the temple of the Lord and burn incense’—the altar of incense was in the Holy Place, the area of the temple to which only priests could go. One of the jobs of the priests was to burn incense every morning and evening (Exodus 30: 7-8).
- ‘your prayer has been heard’—the incense symbolized the prayers of the people. As Zechariah is tending to the people’s prayers, he hears from the angel that his own prayer has been answered. My guess is that this is a prayer that Zechariah actually stopped praying a long time ago: his wife has probably been too old to have children for a while, and it would be an exceptional person who would continue to pray for a child after that. Nonetheless, God has not forgotten Zechariah’s prayer.
- ‘he will be great in the sight of the Lord’—the eventual children of the childless women I mentioned earlier all end up playing important roles in the history of God’s people: Sarah’s son Isaac is the forefather of all Jews, and the person through whom God intends to bring blessing to all of the families of the world; Rachel’s son Joseph—of Technicolor Dream Coat fame—ends up saving much of the ancient near east from famine; Hannah’s son Samuel becomes the model for all of the ancient

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Jewish prophets; and Samson—the lover of Delilah and the man whose great strength depended on his long hair—saves the Israelites from annihilation at the hands of their enemies. Elizabeth’s son John also has great promise on his life. He has perhaps a greater role than all of them: he is to be the herald who comes just before the long-expected return of the Lord, when he comes with the power to rescue his people from their troubles.

- ‘He is never to take wine or other fermented drink’—this is just like the instructions given before Samson’s birth (Judges 13:4)
- ‘in the spirit and power of Elijah’—Elijah is a great prophet from Israel’s history, known for calling the people of Israel back to the worship of God when they had turned away to other gods. At the end of his life, Elijah is taken up to heaven in a fiery chariot. Hundreds of years after Elijah’s time, and hundreds of years before John’s birth, the prophet Malachi predicted that Elijah would return again before the ‘great and dreadful day of the LORD’ (Malachi 4:5-6). John is not literally Elijah, but will have his ‘spirit and power’: he will be like Elijah in his calling and in the power he receives from God to pursue it (A similar thing happened to Elijah’s protégé, Elisha [2 Kings 2: 9, 10, and 15]).
- ‘and I have been sent to speak to you’—I think Gabriel is essentially saying, ‘What more could I do to prove it to you?’ Gabriel points out that he is, in fact, an angel sent by God to speak to Zechariah. Shouldn’t the appearance of an angel be proof enough of the miracle the angel is predicting? Isn’t that the whole point of sending an angel?
- ‘now you will be silent’—Gabriel dramatically applies the old proverb, ‘If you can’t say something nice, don’t say anything at all,’ by taking away Zechariah’s power of speech after he speaks his doubting words.
- ‘taken away my disgrace’—Elizabeth is quoting her predecessor Rachel (Genesis 30:23). Finally, the stigma has been erased; there will be no more lurking suspicions that she is being punished by God.

Taking it home:

- *For you and your family:* Luke’s hope for Theophilus was that reading Luke’s history would give Theophilus greater certainty in his belief in Jesus. As you begin your own reading of this history, ask God that it would be a faith-growing experience. Are there particular ways that you need assurance about Jesus? Consider mentioning those things specifically to God. Ask that you would get the assurance you need sometime in the next six weeks.
- *For your six:* Do any of your six have a deep desire that has long gone unfulfilled? Ask God to show his care for them by satisfying their longing.
- *For our city:* Zechariah is performing an old religious ritual when it suddenly and surprisingly takes on new life. Pray that everyone participating in religious ceremonies in our city would have a similar experience. Ask that these faith traditions too would come alive with fresh and vibrant new connections with God.

Tuesday, March 15th

Luke 1: 26-56

26 In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, 27 to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a

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descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. 28 The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you."

29 Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. 30 But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God.

31 You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. 32 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, 33 and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end."

34 "How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"

35 The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. 36 Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. 37 For no word from God will ever fail."

38 "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May it be to me according to your word." Then the angel left her.

39 At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, 40 where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. 41 When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. 42 In a loud voice she exclaimed: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! 43 But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? 44 As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. 45 Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!"

46 And Mary said:

 "My soul glorifies the Lord

47 and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

48 for he has been mindful

 of the humble state of his servant.

 From now on all generations will call me blessed,

49 for the Mighty One has done great things for me—

 holy is his name.

50 His mercy extends to those who fear him,

 from generation to generation.

51 He has performed mighty deeds with his arm;

 he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.

52 He has brought down rulers from their thrones

 but has lifted up the humble.

53 He has filled the hungry with good things

 but has sent the rich away empty.

54 He has helped his servant Israel,

 remembering to be merciful

55 to Abraham and his descendants forever,

 just as he promised our ancestors."

56 Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months and then returned home.

Points of Interest:

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- ‘a town in Galilee’—Judea and Galilee were the two Jewish regions in Roman Palestine. Judeans thought of Galilee the same way people on the East Coast think of anywhere in the middle of the country: Galilee was considered backward, provincial, and far away from anything important. The prophet Isaiah—writing hundreds of years earlier—predicted that despised Galilee would become a place of honor (Isaiah 9:1). Gabriel is about to put the fulfillment of that prophecy in motion.
- ‘a descendant of David’—David was the Jewish national hero, famous as a warrior, a king, and a worshipper of God. David’s reign was Israel’s golden age. David’s family had not been in power for a very long time: the Jews had been under foreign domination for 600 years, except for a brief period of independence when the high priests ruled. But I imagine David’s family still retained some respect, both out of reverence for the glorious past and out of the hope (supported by many prophecies) that David’s kingdom would one day be restored.
- ‘You will conceive and give birth to a son’—another of Isaiah’s prophecies says, ‘Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel [which means, ‘God with us’]’ (Isaiah 7:14). On a certain level, this prophecy was fulfilled during Isaiah’s own time: Isaiah is simply saying that something he has predicted will happen in the length of time it takes for a young woman to become pregnant, have a child, and wean the child. But there’s another layer to this prophecy; it looks forward to a time when, through the birth of a child, God who seems far away will draw very near—he will be with us. Gabriel is saying that that deeper layer of the prophecy would now be fulfilled. This humble, young Galilean woman would play a part in, not just a miraculous birth, but in God himself living among his people.
- ‘The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David’—yet another of Isaiah’s prophecies is referenced here. In fact, it’s the same prophecy that mentions Galilee’s rise in status. It might be worth quoting a couple of verses (you might recognize them from Handel’s ‘Messiah’):

For to us a child is born
 To us a son is given,
 And the government will be on his shoulders.
And he will be called
 Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
 Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
Of the increase of his government and peace
 There will be no end.
He will reign on David’s throne
 And over his kingdom,
Establishing and upholding it
 With justice and righteousness
 From that time on and forever (Isaiah 9: 6-7)

Mary’s child, because of Mary’s marriage to Joseph, will be an adoptive descendant of David, and he will be the one who finally does bring back the glory days of David. Even better, while David’s kingdom disintegrated shortly after his death—and even ended with something of a whimper toward the end of David’s own reign—Jesus’ reign will never end and his kingdom will never fall.

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You might have noticed that we've mentioned ancient Jewish history and prophecy quite a bit in today's and yesterday's passages. At the beginning of his story, Luke is strongly painting a picture for us of a people who have been waiting for a very long time for God to come and intervene in their circumstances. The central story of the Old Testament (the part of the Bible written before Jesus' arrival) is the story of the exodus: when the people of Israel were slaves in Egypt, God heard their prayers and through his mighty acts rescued them and eventually brought them safely to their own land. Toward the end of Old Testament history, the people of Israel are once again in captivity, but the biblical prophets predict that God will return once again to rescue them. By the time of Zechariah, Elizabeth, and Mary, the people have been waiting around 600 years for this second rescue attempt. Our story begins at the indescribably exciting moment when God finally begins to put his new rescue plan into action. Luke's story—and the rest of the New Testament (the part of the Bible written after Jesus' coming)—is a description of this new dramatic rescue attempt: who is being rescued? from what are they being rescued? and how are they going to be rescued? The Old Testament prophets give us some hints as to what to expect, but God has some surprises in store for us as well. One of the first things we learn—predicted by Isaiah, but still surprising—is that the instrument of God's plan will be the baby of this young, Galilean woman.

- 'the house of Jacob'—another name for the Jews. The forefather of the Jews was Jacob, also known as Israel. The Israelites came to be called Jews when most of the tribes of Israel were conquered and dispersed, leaving Judah (the ancestral lands of two of the original twelve tribes) as the only remaining Israelite homeland.
- 'How will this be?'—just like Zechariah, Mary responds to Gabriel with a question, but her question is quite different. Zechariah asks for further assurance that the angel's words will happen; Mary simply wants to know how they will come about. Amazingly, she doesn't express any doubt at all that her child will be the promised son of David, and will reign forever; she merely wonders how God will overcome the practical barrier of her virginity to bring it about.
- 'So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God'—Jesus is not only the adoptive heir of David, but also a miraculous son of God. Jesus is given life by the Spirit (or 'breath') of God, just like Adam, the first human being God created, was (Genesis 2:7).
- 'Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit'—the Holy Spirit is the essence of God, sent to interact with human beings, conferring on them supernatural powers or abilities. Our word 'inspired' comes from this idea that we've been breathed on or somehow empowered by another spirit. Here, the Holy Spirit inspires Elizabeth with supernatural knowledge about Mary's child and with words of blessing and praise.
- 'and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior'—Mary models her song of praise after Hannah's song after the birth of her son Samuel (1 Samuel 1:1-10). The theme of both songs is that God sees, remembers, and promotes those who look small and forgotten.

Taking it home:

- *For you and your family:* When the angel calls Mary 'highly favored,' she's initially confused. She doesn't think of herself as special, and she's surprised that God would take such notice of her. It seems to me that Mary's an example for all of us: maybe

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we're all highly favored by God. Of course, Mary inhabits a privileged place in history: she's the one and only mother of Jesus. But the whole point of Mary's story is that God is willing and able to do astounding things for and through humble, ordinary people. Today, with your family or household or friends, try on for size the idea that God notices you, likes you, and has big plans for you. Imitate Elizabeth by proclaiming God's favor over one another, maybe just by saying something like, 'You know what, God really likes you,' to someone else in your house at least once today.

- *For your six:* Mary's and Elizabeth's recent experiences are made all the more meaningful by the fact that they are able to share them with one another. Pray for the friendships of your six. Ask God to give them good company as they go through life. Pray particularly that God will provide them with friends with whom they can talk about their spiritual experiences. You might even want to pray that God will help you to be good spiritual friends for your six. Ask God to make you a source of support and encouragement in the lives of your six, just like Elizabeth is for Mary.
- *For our city:* In this passage, God inaugurates a new era of great things for the people of Israel. God is going to be at work among them in ways they haven't seen for hundreds of years. Pray the same thing for Williamsburg and New York City: ask God to be at work in our city in ways none of us have ever seen, even in ways that it's hard for us to believe he would still act.

Wednesday, March 16th

Luke 1: 57-80

57 When it was time for Elizabeth to have her baby, she gave birth to a son. 58 Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown her great mercy, and they shared her joy.

59 On the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to name him after his father Zechariah, 60 but his mother spoke up and said, "No! He is to be called John."

61 They said to her, "There is no one among your relatives who has that name."

62 Then they made signs to his father, to find out what he would like to name the child.

63 He asked for a writing tablet, and to everyone's astonishment he wrote, "His name is John." 64 Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue was loosed, and he began to speak, praising God. 65 The neighbors were all filled with awe, and throughout the hill country of Judea people were talking about all these things. 66 Everyone who heard this wondered about it, asking, "What then is this child going to be?" For the Lord's hand was with him.

67 His father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied:

68 "Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel,
because he has come to his people and redeemed them.

69 He has raised up a horn of salvation for us
in the house of his servant David

70 (as he said through his holy prophets of long ago),

71 salvation from our enemies
and from the hand of all who hate us—

72 to show mercy to our ancestors

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and to remember his holy covenant,
73 the oath he swore to our father Abraham:
74 to rescue us from the hand of our enemies,
and to enable us to serve him without fear
75 in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.
76 And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High;
for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him,
77 to give his people the knowledge of salvation
through the forgiveness of their sins,
78 because of the tender mercy of our God,
by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven
79 to shine on those living in darkness
and in the shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the path of peace."
80 And the child grew and became strong in spirit; and he lived in the wilderness until he
appeared publicly to Israel.

Points of Interest:

- ‘Then they made signs to his father’—apparently, Zechariah was not just mute, but deaf as well; or maybe the neighbors just got confused.
- ‘Immediately his mouth was opened’—the very next words out of Zechariah’s mouth after his doubting question nine months ago are words of praise when God proves that he has done what he promised. After nine months of silence, Zechariah has a lot of words stored up, and they come out in a song of praise and prophecy.
- ‘a horn of salvation’—horns are symbols of strength and power. An animal uses its horns to defend itself and fight its rivals. God is similarly providing them with someone or something to defend them.
- ‘the oath he swore to our father Abraham’—Zechariah is probably referring to God’s promise in Genesis 15 that he would free Abraham’s descendants from slavery and give them their own land.
- ‘to rescue us from the hand of our enemies’—it would be natural to assume that these enemies are the Romans. Just like he once freed them from the Egyptians, he would now free Israel from the Romans. This political interpretation was, in fact, very common in Zechariah’s time. However, it doesn’t seem that it is what Zechariah has in mind. The specific enemies he mentions are sins and death.
- ‘you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him’—as I mentioned in Monday’s passage, the prophet Malachi says Elijah will precede the return of the Lord. Isaiah also speaks of a messenger who would go ahead of the Lord to prepare his way (Isaiah 40: 3-5); we’ll talk more about the Isaiah passage on Friday.
- ‘to shine on those living in darkness’—another reference to Isaiah 9: ‘The people walking in darkness/have seen a great light’ (Isaiah 9:2).

Taking it home:

- *For you and your family:* there’s something fun and powerful about praising God aloud. Zechariah probably had an extra dose of energy in his praise, because he hadn’t been able to speak at all for so long; but maybe all of us could benefit from imitating him. I know that when I choose to speak aloud about God’s goodness (even when I’m just talking to myself), I almost always find my spirits lifted, and I have a

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feeling that more of God's goodness is being unleashed in my life. If there's even a hint of something good in your life that you feel you could thank God for, trying thanking him aloud. You could use your own words, or use Mary's song from yesterday or a psalm like Psalm 100 as a guide. Don't just read silently or think it, but speak out; I, at least, find it makes quite a big difference. If you're feeling extra bold, tell someone else how good you think God is; if you do, I suggest you go ahead and use your own words, rather than belting out Mary's song at an unsuspecting listener.

- *For your six:* Elizabeth and Zechariah's faith causes them to do something unusual in naming their child. This strange choice intrigues their friends, provoking wonder and curiosity. Elizabeth and Zechariah's willingness to do the unexpected seems to open everyone up to the possibility that God might do something extraordinary. Have you made a strange faith choice recently? Do any of your six know about it? If so, how did they respond?
- *For our city:* this supernatural birth is not just a private affair. The whole neighborhood is celebrating Elizabeth and Zechariah's good fortune, debating together about what the child should be named, and discussing together what all of these things might mean. It's one of our hopes for our church that we would be known widely as a place where supernatural things happen. Already, we've seen some pretty remarkable things: people being healed of sicknesses, unexpected provision of money or jobs, and all sorts of other things. Pray that our church would continue to see more of God's supernatural activity, and that it wouldn't just be our own private experience but the talk of the town.

Thursday, March 17th

Luke 2

1 In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. 2 (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) 3 And everyone went to their own town to register.

4 So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. 5 He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. 6 While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, 7 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.

8 And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. 9 An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 10 But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. 11 Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. 12 This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

13 Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

14 "Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."

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15 When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."

16 So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. 17 When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, 18 and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. 19 But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. 20 The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

21 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.

22 When the time came for the purification rites required by the Law of Moses, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord 23 (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord"), 24 and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: "a pair of doves or two young pigeons."

25 Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. 26 It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. 27 Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, 28 Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying:

29 "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised,
you may now dismiss your servant in peace.

30 For my eyes have seen your salvation,

31 which you have prepared in the sight of all nations:

32 a light for revelation to the Gentiles,
and the glory of your people Israel."

33 The child's father and mother marveled at what was said about him. 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, 35 so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too."

36 There was also a prophet, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, 37 and then had been a widow for eighty-four years. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. 38 Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.

39 When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth. 40 And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was on him.

41 Every year Jesus' parents went to Jerusalem for the Festival of the Passover. 42 When he was twelve years old, they went up to the Festival, according to the custom. 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. 44 Thinking he was in their company, they traveled on for a day. Then they began looking for him among their relatives and friends.

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45 When they did not find him, they went back to Jerusalem to look for him. 46 After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. 47 Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers. 48 When his parents saw him, they were astonished. His mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you."

49 "Why were you searching for me?" he asked. "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?" 50 But they did not understand what he was saying to them.

51 Then he went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. But his mother treasured all these things in her heart. 52 And as Jesus grew up, he increased in wisdom and in favor with God and people.

Points of Interest:

- ‘while Quirinius was governor of Syria’—while we might say something like, ‘Back in 1975,’ it was standard during Luke’s day to place events by referring to the ruler who was in power. Luke will do the same at the beginning of tomorrow’s passage.
- ‘to Bethlehem the town of David’—Bethlehem was David’s home town, and Joseph is of David’s family; but that wouldn’t be reason enough for Joseph to go to Bethlehem for the census. People were required to pay tax where they owned property, not in their family’s ancestral home; so Joseph must have owned property in Bethlehem (*IVP Bible Background Commentary* 193). Regardless of the exact reason for Joseph and Mary’s trip to Bethlehem, it does call to mind yet another old prophecy:

But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,
though you are small among the clans of Judah,
out of you will come for me
one who will be ruler over Israel,
whose origins are of old,
from ancient times (Micah 5:2).

This future-but-somehow-ancient ruler from Bethlehem cannot be David, because Micah is speaking long after David’s time. From Nazareth, but born in Bethlehem, Jesus is both the Prince of Peace expected from Galilee (Isaiah 9) and the ancient ruler to come from Bethlehem (Micah 5). All of Israel’s hopes for a glorious restoration are coming together in this child.

- ‘He went there to register with Mary’—returning home with an already pregnant fiancée could have been embarrassing for Joseph; he and Mary could have avoided scandal by keeping Mary quietly out of sight somewhere. Perhaps Mary makes the trip because she is also required to pay tax in Bethlehem (*IVP Bible Background Commentary* 193), or they don’t want to be apart when Mary is so close to giving birth. Or maybe they’ve simply decided not to act ashamed when they have nothing to be ashamed of.
- ‘there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby’—since shepherds lived a semi-nomadic life, on the open countryside much of the time with their flocks, they were outsiders, and considered a bit uncivilized (*IVP Bible Background Commentary* 194). They might be a surprising choice as the first to hear the great news that the Savior has arrived. Maybe the shepherds were told because this was good news that simply had to be shared with someone, right away, and they were awake while everyone else

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was asleep. Maybe they were told because this good news was for everyone, including—even especially—the humble (see Mary’s song from Tuesday’s passage). It’s also worth noting that the Bible holds shepherds in higher esteem than society in general: Moses, the great deliverer of the Israelites from Egypt, was a shepherd; so was king David; and the ruler who is to come from Bethlehem is called a strong and majestic shepherd (Micah 5:4). So, maybe the shepherds are told the good news about Jesus first because he himself will be, like David, a shepherd as well as a king.

- ‘he is the Messiah, the Lord’—*Messiah* means, ‘anointed,’ or, ‘commissioned by God for a purpose.’ It’s the term the Jews came to use for God’s special agent, sent to restore everything to the way it should be. They formed their idea of the Messiah by collecting all of the prophecies we’ve been referring to, as well as several others and a bunch of the Psalms, into something of a composite picture of a great, but somewhat enigmatic, ruler or savior to come at the end of days. In these prophecies, like in the angel’s pronouncement here, it’s sometimes a bit unclear as to whether it is God himself coming, or a human being whom he has chosen.
- ‘a great company of the heavenly host appeared’—the Roman emperors had choirs who would sing their praises (*IVP Bible Background Commentary* 194); Jesus has a choir of angels to sing his.
- ‘the baby, who was lying in the manger’—Jesus’ birth is a disorienting mixture of overwhelming majesty and humble simplicity. On the one hand there are angel choirs proclaiming universal peace; on the other hand, there’s a poor girl’s baby, lying in a feeding trough in a stable. I think we can expect that this plan of God’s will keep us on our toes.
- ‘Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord’—this ceremony is to remember that God spared the Israelites when he brought a plague on the firstborn of Egypt during the exodus (Exodus 11, 13).
- ‘a pair of doves or two young pigeons’—they offer the birds because they are too poor to offer a lamb (Leviticus 12:8).
- ‘you may now dismiss your servant in peace’—by supernatural insight, Simeon recognizes the 8-day old Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah. Now that he has gotten a glimpse of God’s rescue plan put into effect, he can die happy. He needs nothing else from life.
- ‘prepared in the sight of all nations’ —Zechariah’s song yesterday focused on how the new David would fulfill Israel’s hopes for rescue. In Simeon’s song, we learn that Jesus’ arrival isn’t good news for the Jews alone. The whole world should pay attention, because Jesus has come for the non-Jews (that is, Gentiles) as well as the Jews. This expansion of the savior’s mission beyond Israel is something of a minor theme in the writings of the Jewish prophets; our old friend Isaiah, for instance, writes, ‘I will also make you a light for the Gentiles/that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth’ (Isaiah 49:6). But in Jesus’ ministry, and particularly in the way the non-Jewish Luke focuses the story, it becomes a very, very major theme.
- ‘a light for revelation to the Gentiles’—the savior brings a new brightness to the life of people who hear about him.
- ‘And a sword will pierce your own soul too’—while Jesus’ coming is good news for everyone, his mission is not easy. It will be a difficult thing for a mother to watch.

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- ‘very old’—presumably over a hundred years old, since she was married ninety-one years ago. She has been on the lookout for God’s rescue for a long time.
- ‘Thinking he was in their company’—they were probably traveling with an entire caravan of people who had gone up to Jerusalem for the festival. It might be easy to assume that Jesus was amongst the other older boys in the group.
- ‘But they did not understand what he was saying to them’—his parents don’t quite seem to know what to do with all of the amazing things that happened around Jesus’ birth. Or, over the twelve years since his birth, they’ve forgotten that Jesus is God’s special agent of salvation, and begun to think of him as just their boy.
- ‘and was obedient to them’—the fact that he is the son of God does not lead Jesus to despise his earthly parents. He shows them honor, just like the Ten Commandments recommend (Exodus 20:12)

Taking it home:

- *For you and your family:* Simeon and Anna are graceful examples of something that’s very hard to do: wait well. There’s a long gap for them between God’s promise and its fulfillment, and they live in that gap without bitterness and without giving up. They seem to draw closer to God and to hold more firmly to his promise as they wait. Is there something you are waiting for? How has your experience of waiting gone? What would it look like to wait well? Is there anything you need from God in order to help you wait? Consider using this period of uncomfortable waiting to draw nearer to God, even if it’s simply by telling him how it feels to wait.
- *For your six:* The shepherds were simply going about their business when the supernatural broke into their routine, in the form of an angelic choir. This supernatural interruption brought an extra dose of joy and of meaning to their night. Pray that the lives of your six would be similarly seasoned with the supernatural. Ask God to speak to them in dreams, or to bring strange coincidences their way, or to answer a prayer when they’re not expecting it.
- *For our city:* Simeon speaks in this passage about the savior’s arrival being good news for the entire world, not just for the little group who knew about him already. In Simeon’s day, the little group was the Jews; perhaps today that little group is church people. In New York in particular, that little group is quite little: no more than ten percent of the population are regular churchgoers. While there’s plenty to pray about for the ten percent who are in churches, today pray for the ninety percent of our population who aren’t churchgoers. Pray that they would encounter Jesus in a way that brightens up their lives.

Friday, March 18th

Luke 3

1 In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar—when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and Traconitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene— 2 during the high-priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. 3 He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 4 As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet:

"A voice of one calling in the wilderness,

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'Prepare the way for the Lord,
make straight paths for him.
5 Every valley shall be filled in,
every mountain and hill made low.
The crooked roads shall become straight,
the rough ways smooth.
6 And all people will see God's salvation.' "

7 John said to the crowds coming out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? 8 Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. 9 The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire."

10 "What should we do then?" the crowd asked.
11 John answered, "Anyone who has two shirts should share with the one who has none, and anyone who has food should do the same."
12 Even tax collectors came to be baptized. "Teacher," they asked, "what should we do?"
13 "Don't collect any more than you are required to," he told them.
14 Then some soldiers asked him, "And what should we do?"
He replied, "Don't extort money and don't accuse people falsely—be content with your pay."
15 The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Messiah. 16 John answered them all, "I baptize you with water. But one who is more powerful than I will come, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. 17 His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire." 18 And with many other words John exhorted the people and proclaimed the good news to them.
19 But when John rebuked Herod the tetrarch because of his marriage to Herodias, his brother's wife, and all the other evil things he had done, 20 Herod added this to them all: He locked John up in prison.
21 When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened 22 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."
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, 24 the son of Matthat, the son of Levi, the son of Melki, the son of Jannai, the son of Joseph, 25 the son of Mattathias, the son of Amos, the son of Nahum, the son of Esli, the son of Naggai, 26 the son of Maath, the son of Mattathias, the son of Semein, the son of Josek, the son of Joda, 27 the son of Joanan, the son of Rhesa, the son of Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel, the son of Neri, 28 the son of Melki, the son of Addi, the son of Cosam, the son of Elmadam, the son of Er, 29 the son of Joshua, the son of Eliezer, the son of Jorim, the son of Matthat, the son of Levi, 30 the son of Simeon, the son of Judah, the son of Joseph, the son of Jonam, the son of Eliakim, 31 the son of Melea, the son of Menna, the son of Mattatha, the son of Nathan, the son of David, 32 the

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son of Jesse, the son of Obed, the son of Boaz, the son of Salmon, the son of Nahshon, 33 the son of Amminadab, the son of Ram, the son of Hezron, the son of Perez, the son of Judah, 34 the son of Jacob, the son of Isaac, the son of Abraham, the son of Terah, the son of Nahor, 35 the son of Serug, the son of Reu, the son of Peleg, the son of Eber, the son of Shelah, 36 the son of Cainan, the son of Arphaxad, the son of Shem, the son of Noah, the son of Lamech, 37 the son of Methuselah, the son of Enoch, the son of Jared, the son of Mahalalel, the son of Kenan, 38 the son of Enosh, the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God.

Points of Interest:

- ‘during the high-priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas’—there was supposed to be only one high priest who served for life, but Annas had been deposed by the Romans (*Illustrated Bible Dictionary* 68; InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL, 1998). Caiaphas, his son-in-law, is the new Roman appointee, but Annas is still high priest in Jewish eyes.
- ‘in the wilderness’—the wilderness is a place of spiritual preparation. Moses spent 40 years in the wilderness, as did the people of Israel on their way from Egypt to the Promised Land. The prophet Elijah also went out into the wilderness, to separate himself from corrupt politics and to hide from a king who was trying to kill him. John may be imitating his predecessor Elijah, or even self-consciously fulfilling his role as ‘the voice of one calling in the wilderness’ (Isaiah 40, see below).
- ‘a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins’—repentance is recalibration, or turning around. John is calling the people to re-orient themselves away from their sins. The particular sins John focuses on are sins of considering oneself better than others by taking pride in status, or by taking advantage of position. As Mary says in her song earlier, God lifts up the humble. People who lift themselves up are heading in the opposite direction from God’s blessing. All it takes, though, to be forgiven this error is to turn around.
- ‘the words of Isaiah the prophet’—this is Isaiah 40: 3-5. It’s John’s job description. He prepares the path for God’s salvation, by warning people to get rid of anything that would get in God’s way. This is why John is calling people to repent: not to condemn them, but to help make them ready for the good things God wants to give them.
- ‘Produce fruit in keeping with repentance’—the repentance John is recommending is not just words or intellectual beliefs; it should have a practical outcome in their lives.
- ‘coming out to be baptized by him’—baptism was a ritual cleansing performed by gentiles who wished to convert to Judaism, but John is baptizing people who are already Jews. Essentially, he’s saying that these Jews need to convert to Judaism. Amazingly, crowds of people submit to this crazy requirement. They must recognize him as ‘the voice calling in the wilderness.’ They realize that John has been sent to prepare the way ahead of the Lord, and they trust that he knows what he’s doing. By baptizing these Jewish listeners, John is demonstrating that the Lord is coming to rescue those who make an active choice to welcome him, not to rescue by default anyone who happens to have the right religious or family background.
- ‘Even tax collectors’—tax collectors are never all that popular, but tax collectors in Roman Palestine were especially disliked: they got rich off of collaborating with the

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Romans and robbing fellow Jews. They were roughly analogous to gangsters running a protection racket. But John has awakened a spiritual sensitivity even in these worldly, hardened, corrupt men.

- ‘the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie’—John is saying he’s not good enough to be the slave of the one who is coming. The crowds are so impressed by what they’ve seen of John that they are hopeful he might be the promised rescuer, but they haven’t seen anything yet.
- ‘He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit’—John has been immersing people in mere water, but the one who is coming will immerse them in the very presence of God, a substance far more rare and valuable. We’ve already seen the Holy Spirit at work quite a bit in Luke’s story, inspiring prophecy in several people and causing Mary’s pregnancy; but the Holy Spirit falling on people was quite rare in the history of God’s interaction with his people. Before now, only a handful of prophets had ever been filled with the Holy Spirit in this way. But what Zechariah, Elizabeth, Mary, and Simeon have experienced is just a small taste of what is to come. Soon, many people will be positively drenched in the Holy Spirit.
- ‘he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire’—fire is very useful, and also dangerous. This baptism in the Holy Spirit is not something to take for granted; if you’re not careful, you could get burned.
Chaff, by the way, is what remains after the kernel has been separated out of the wheat. The coming of the Lord is like a harvest. Like any farmer, the Lord will keep what’s useful from his crops, and get rid of the rest. John’s message sounds pretty severe, and there certainly is a lot of sober warning to it. But Luke also calls it good news: his listeners still have the opportunity to make sure that they are the wheat, and not the chaff.
- ‘when John rebuked Herod the tetrarch’—Herod the tetrarch is the ruler of Galilee. Tetrarchs were a sort of lesser client king (a quarter-king) under the Romans. John’s model Elijah also got into trouble for criticizing his king’s relationship with his wife. Herod does exactly what John has been warning people not to do: rather than repenting, he abuses his position to punish John. It doesn’t turn out well for Herod: his first wife’s father defeats him in war; the Romans depose him; and he’s sent away into ignominious exile.
- ‘the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form’—while John is baptizing Jesus with water, God baptizes him with the Holy Spirit. Jesus first receives from God what he will later pass on to others.
- ‘you are my son’—one way to think of Jesus’ baptism is that it is his formal commissioning into the role of Messiah. Remember that *Messiah* means, ‘anointed.’ Among the kings of David’s line, rather than a coronation ceremony they would have an anointing ceremony, in which a priest or a prophet would pour oil over the new king’s head. The oil symbolized God’s favor on the king and his authority being given to the king. At Jesus’ baptism, God himself anoints Jesus with the Holy Spirit rather than oil, and directly proclaims his favor. Jesus is the true Ruler from David’s Line. David and all of his other royal descendants were only symbols of the true king to come.
- ‘with you I am well pleased’—everyone else repents of their sins as they are baptized. At Jesus’ baptism, God proclaims that he has no need to repent.

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- ‘the son of Adam, the son of God’—genealogies were cited in histories in order to connect the subject with well-known heroes. In this genealogy, we do indeed see that Jesus is in the lineage of David, and of Abraham. However, the genealogy doesn’t stop with either of these great men. Instead, it extends all the way to Adam. It’s as if the point of this genealogy is not to connect Jesus to the heroes of the past, but to connect them—and all of us—to him: everyone is in Jesus’ family. His story is our family history.

Taking it home:

- *For you and your family:* In today’s passage, John calls his listeners to go through the steps of becoming Jews, even though they’re already Jews. It’s quite a humbling thing. In fact, God seems uncomfortably willing to ask us to do things that are very humbling all the time. Has God put something humble in mind for you? I’m not talking about simply feeling more humble, but about actually taking an action that seems embarrassingly basic. Maybe it’s admitting that you don’t understand something, or confessing that you’ve done something stupid, or re-learning a lesson that you really should know by now. Ask God for the boldness to take that humble action, and the faith to believe that when you do he will raise you up.
- *For your six:* Just like Herod, out of pride or even out of fear, we can be tempted to defend our bad choices and mistakes. Doing so only ever makes it worse. Pray for your six, that they would be quick to acknowledge when they’re in the wrong.
- *For our city:* If John is right, then good things happen in a place where people are generous, honest, and fair. Pray that these qualities would characterize our city.

Saturday, March 19th

Luke 4:1-30

1 Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, 2 where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry.

3 The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread."

4 Jesus answered, "It is written: 'People do not live on bread alone.'"

5 The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. 6 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. 7 If you worship me, it will all be yours."

8 Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.'"

9 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. 10 For it is written:

" 'He will command his angels concerning you
to guard you carefully;

11 they will lift you up in their hands,
so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'"

12 Jesus answered, "It is said: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

13 When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time.

14 Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. 15 He was teaching in their synagogues, and everyone praised him.

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16 He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, 17 and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

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,

19 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

20 Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. 21 He began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

22 All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips. "Isn't this Joseph's son?" they asked.

23 Jesus said to them, "Surely you will quote this proverb to me: 'Physician, heal yourself!' And you will tell me, 'Do here in your hometown what we have heard that you did in Capernaum.' "

24 "Truly I tell you," he continued, "prophets are not accepted in their hometowns. 25 I assure you that there were many widows in Israel in Elijah's time, when the sky was shut for three and a half years and there was a severe famine throughout the land. 26 Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon. 27 And there were many in Israel with leprosy in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed—only Naaman the Syrian."

28 All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this. 29 They got up, drove him out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw him off the cliff. 30 But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way.

Points of Interest:

- 'led by the Spirit'—Jesus himself is guided by the Holy Spirit. God doesn't send Jesus the Holy Spirit at the baptism just for the sake of a cool visual effect. God gives Jesus the Holy Spirit because Jesus will need power and wisdom from the Holy Spirit in order to fulfill his mission.
- 'for forty days he was tempted by the devil'—just like Adam and Eve in the garden, Jesus faces temptation from the devil. The devil is an evil spiritual being, the enemy of God; and his primary weapons throughout the Bible are lies, accusations, and temptation. In the garden with Adam and Eve, he succeeds in making an incredibly destructive choice look like the most logical, most attractive thing to do. Here he tries the same strategy, but this time he fails.

The temptation lasts a full forty days, but Luke only tells us about the grand finale. In this finale, the devil tempts Jesus with three things that sound pretty good, but are really only cheap imitations of what Jesus really wants. Jesus sees through the deceptions, and decides to wait for God to give him the real thing, rather than trying to grab the copy for himself now.

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- ‘People do not live on bread alone’—Jesus is quoting Moses, who goes on to say, ‘but on every word that comes from the mouth of God’ (Deuteronomy 8:3). Jesus is, in fact, choosing to live here by God’s word, rather than by bread.
- ‘it has been given to me’—this isn’t quite true. It’s more like he’s stolen it, from Adam and Eve who were supposed to have dominion over the whole earth, but lost it when they succumbed to the devil’s temptation
- ‘For it is written’—the devil is clever. Since Jesus has been turning to the Bible for his answers, the devil decides to try to use the Bible for his temptation.
- ‘Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit’—having withstood the attack of his strongest enemy, Jesus is now emboldened to go on the offensive, beginning his active ministry.
- ‘teaching in their synagogues’—the synagogues were—and still are—local congregations where the people would gather on a weekly basis to praise God, pray together, and be taught from the Bible.
- ‘the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him’—an attendant chose what scroll to read from, and the reader then chose what passage to read.
- ‘Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing’—John’s teaching was all about what was coming—in the near future, but still in the future. Jesus’ teaching is about today. There’s no longer any need to wait. What they’ve been waiting for is now here, right in front of them.
John’s job description was to go ahead of the Lord to prepare the way for his coming. Jesus’ job description is to bring good news, freedom, healing, and favor to anyone who needs them.
- ‘prophets are not accepted in their hometowns’—from Jesus’ reaction, you get the sense that they’re being patronizing. They’re amazed, but their amazement is amusement and disbelief that Joseph’s son could speak so well. It’s not amazement at the wonderful thing that is being offered to them, or amazement that prophecy is coming true right in front of their eyes. They are too familiar with Jesus to treat him seriously. Jesus seems to go so far as to say that a total stranger, a foreigner even, might have a better chance of clearly seeing who he is than these people who think they know him so well.
- ‘But he walked right through the crowd’—either the anger of the crowd disperses quickly, or Jesus has an aura about him that keeps them from actually doing him harm.

Taking it home:

- *For you and your family:* The devil will try to fool you sometime today into accepting less than God wants to give you. He’s clever, and what he offers can often seem pretty good. Ask God to give you the eyes to see through the devil’s deception.
- *For your six:* Jesus has good news, freedom, healing, and favor available today for whoever needs them. Pray that your six would get at least tastes of each of these things today.
- *For our city:* The people of Nazareth get themselves into a bit of trouble today when they start to compare themselves enviously with the other towns around them. Pray that our city would be free from envy.

Sunday, March 20th

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Week 1

Luke 4:31-5:11

31 Then he went down to Capernaum, a town in Galilee, and on the Sabbath he taught the people. 32 They were amazed at his teaching, because his words had authority.

33 In the synagogue there was a man possessed by a demon, an evil spirit. He cried out at the top of his voice, 34 "Go away! What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!"

35 "Be quiet!" Jesus said sternly. "Come out of him!" Then the demon threw the man down before them all and came out without injuring him.

36 All the people were amazed and said to each other, "What words these are! With authority and power he gives orders to evil spirits and they come out!" 37 And the news about him spread throughout the surrounding area.

38 Jesus left the synagogue and went to the home of Simon. Now Simon's mother-in-law was suffering from a high fever, and they asked Jesus to help her. 39 So he bent over her and rebuked the fever, and it left her. She got up at once and began to wait on them.

40 At sunset, the people brought to Jesus all who had various kinds of sickness, and laying his hands on each one, he healed them. 41 Moreover, demons came out of many people, shouting, "You are the Son of God!" But he rebuked them and would not allow them to speak, because they knew he was the Messiah.

42 At daybreak, Jesus went out to a solitary place. The people were looking for him and when they came to where he was, they tried to keep him from leaving them. 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." 44 And he kept on preaching in the synagogues of Judea.

5:1 One day as Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret, the people were crowding around him and listening to the word of God. 2 He saw at the water's edge two boats, left there by the fishermen, who were washing their nets. 3 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.

4 When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch."

5 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."

6 When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. 7 So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink.

8 When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" 9 For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken, 10 and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon's partners.

Then Jesus said to Simon, "Don't be afraid; from now on you will fish for people." 11 So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.

Points of Interest:

- 'because his words had authority'—the main difference between Jesus' words and the words of other teachers is that his words are powerful. They don't just add

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knowledge, they cause action: people are rescued from the clutches of evil spiritual beings or healed of diseases when he speaks.

- ‘I know who you are’—demons are evil spiritual beings associated with the devil and constantly on the lookout to do people harm. Perhaps this demon knows who Jesus is because he’s heard about Jesus’ showdown with the devil. Or maybe he can just tell somehow by looking at him. In any case, sadly, this demon recognizes him for who he is, when the people of Nazareth could not.
- ‘Come out of him!’—Jesus is proclaiming freedom to a prisoner, just as he said in his teaching in Nazareth.
- ‘At sunset’—at sunset, the Sabbath, which is the day of rest, would end and it would be permissible to do work, like carrying sick people.
- ‘laying his hands on each one, he healed them’—Jesus is showing what it means for him to be the savior. He is not saving these people in some vague, ethereal way. He is quite tangibly rescuing them from disease, and from the influence of evil spirits who are doing them harm.
- ‘would not allow them to speak’—maniacal-sounding, ranting demons would not exactly be Jesus’ chosen spokespeople. Plus, he seems to prefer to demonstrate who he is.
- ‘Jesus went out to a solitary place’—maybe he snuck out early just to beat traffic, but it sounds to me like he went to find a quiet place to pray. It’s quite possible that, just as he started his ministry being led by the Spirit into the wilderness, he started his day by being led by the Spirit to a quiet place, to receive instructions from God for the day.
- ‘they tried to keep him from leaving them’—of course, it’s natural that they would want this experience to continue, but Jesus’ mission is bigger than one town. He wants to spread his good news as wide as possible.
- ‘in the synagogues of Judea’—he moves on from Galilee to Judea.
- ‘taught the people from the boat’—to avoid being mobbed, and to use the water to help him project his voice.
- ‘let down the nets for a catch’—Simon has just washed these nets. And besides, as he says, he’s been fishing all night and hasn’t caught a thing. After a miserable night of work, he’s probably ready to go home. Nonetheless, he acts on Jesus’ word.
- ‘so full that they began to sink’—I’m sure no one had even heard of such a large catch of fish that nets were breaking and boats swamping. It’s a catch of fish specifically designed to boggle the mind of fishermen.
- ‘Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!’—Simon realizes that he’s in the presence of someone very special, and it’s a little hard for him to grasp. Maybe he’s afraid that, being so near someone so holy, he will be burned like chaff, to borrow a phrase from John.
- ‘from now on you will fish for people’—Simon is not going to be destroyed or punished. He’s going to be transformed. Because of his humble response, Simon is raised up.
- ‘left everything and followed him’—Jesus himself has just been fishing for people. He’s used a huge catch of fish to catch himself some fishermen. After nearly swamping their boats trying to haul the fish in, they just leave them on the shore to be

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with Jesus instead. They realize that the person who led them to such a catch is more valuable than the catch.

Taking it home:

- *For you and your family:* Jesus wants to show you that he cares about you. What do you need from Jesus today? Do you need something encouraging to happen at work? Do you need a sick relative to start feeling better? Do you just need him to assure you that he's not angry at you? Ask Jesus for that thing you need.
- *For your six:* We're not really used to thinking about demons, and most of our images of demonic possession come from horror movies. It's kind of hard to take something like that seriously, or to imagine that such a creature might actually be affecting your six. But look at it this way: do any of your six seem to be consistently trapped by negative thoughts or compulsions? Maybe these are even things that don't seem to fit with the rest of what you know of the person's character. Perhaps there's an evil spirit at the root of it. Try asking Jesus to free your friend from the power of that spirit, and see what happens.
- *For our city:* Pray for the sick people of our city to be made well. Pray that at our Sunday services and small groups will be places where the sick from all over New York come to be healed and that the result will be that "news about him (Jesus) spread throughout the surrounding area" so that even more people can experience the goodness that Jesus has for them.

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Week 2

Monday, March 21st

Luke 5:12-32

12 While Jesus was in one of the towns, a man came along who was covered with leprosy. When he saw Jesus, he fell with his face to the ground and begged him, "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean."

13 Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" And immediately the leprosy left him.

14 Then Jesus ordered him, "Don't tell anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them."

15 Yet the news about him spread all the more, so that crowds of people came to hear him and to be healed of their sicknesses. 16 But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.

17 One day Jesus was teaching, and Pharisees and teachers of the law were sitting there. They had come from every village of Galilee and from Judea and Jerusalem. And the power of the Lord was with Jesus to heal the sick. 18 Some men came carrying a paralyzed man on a mat and tried to take him into the house to lay him before Jesus. 19 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.

20 When Jesus saw their faith, he said, "Friend, your sins are forgiven."

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?"

22 Jesus knew what they were thinking and asked, "Why are you thinking these things in your hearts? 23 Which is easier: to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk'? 24 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." 25 Immediately he stood up in front of them, took what he had been lying on and went home praising God. 26 Everyone was amazed and gave praise to God. They were filled with awe and said, "We have seen remarkable things today."

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, 28 and Levi got up, left everything and followed him.

29 Then Levi held a great banquet for Jesus at his house, and a large crowd of tax collectors and others were eating with them. 30 But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law who belonged to their sect complained to his disciples, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?"

31 Jesus answered them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. 32 I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

Points of Interest:

- 'reached out his hand and touched the man'—Jewish ritual cleansing rules (what we now know as kosher laws) prohibited contact with lepers (Numbers 5:1-3), probably out of a desire to minimize the spread of contagious skin diseases. People with leprosy were considered 'unclean,' or ritually impure, and required to wear a special uniform, to live outside of town, and to warn people who approached them not to touch them (Leviticus 13:45-46). Anyone who touched someone with leprosy was also considered unclean until it could be demonstrated that they had not caught the

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disease. Being unclean had very serious religious and social consequences: social contact was limited and participation in the normal religious ceremonies was not allowed. So, Jesus' choice to touch the man is unusual, bold, compassionate, and could be considered reckless. From other healing stories, it seems that Jesus could heal the man without touching him. By healing through touch, Jesus addresses the man's need in two ways: he physically heals the man of the disease, and he welcomes the man back into society; this is likely the first human contact the man has had since he caught the disease. Touching the man also turns the normal rules on their heads: usually when an unclean person touches you, you become unclean; but when Jesus touches an unclean person, the unclean person becomes clean. With Jesus, instead of an ever-spreading uncleanness, an ever-spreading cleanness becomes possible.

- 'show yourself to the priest . . . as a testimony to them'—the priests were responsible for officially inspecting people and declaring them clean or unclean (Leviticus 13 and 14). Jesus suggesting that this healed leper go to the priest is more or less analogous to recommending today that someone who thinks they have been miraculously healed go see their doctor. Jesus might have a few reasons in mind for making this suggestion: to confirm the healing and make it official; to demonstrate to the priests that he is working with them, not against them; and to give these experienced professionals a chance to see and celebrate something unexpected.
- 'Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed'—Jesus spends his days surrounded by the pressing needs of the crowd, but he also values these quieter times by himself with God. Luke doesn't tell us why Jesus withdraws alone, but I would guess it is to rest and be refreshed, to be equipped by God for his work, and to be guided by God.
- 'Pharisees and teachers of the law'—these are the religious experts. They're probably here to check out the new kid in town: to see how Jesus measures up and to figure out whether he's on their side.
The Pharisees are one of the major religious/political parties of the day, especially known for their scrupulous attention to the Jewish law. Their main project is to apply the general rules of the law clearly, exactly, and specifically to contemporary life. The teachers of the law are experts on traditional interpretations of the Jewish scriptures.
Pharisee is a party, and teacher a job; so, you could be a Pharisaic teacher of the law, or you could be a Pharisee who is not a teacher of the law, or you could be a teacher of the law who is not a Pharisee—sort of like you can be a Democrat without being a member of Congress and you can be a member of Congress without being a Democrat.
- 'When Jesus saw their faith'—Jesus could see cutting in line and destruction of private property, but instead he sees faith. It's obvious to Jesus, because of the great effort they all go through, that these men truly believe that if they just get their friend into Jesus' presence, something good will happen. Jesus rewards them for that faith.
- 'Friend, your sins are forgiven'—this is probably unexpected to everyone. I imagine the paralytic and his four friends were hoping that Jesus would heal the man of his paralysis. It seems likely to me that they'd be disappointed with Jesus' response, either because they figure Jesus is just saying something pious to cover his inability to heal or because they'd rather have healing than forgiveness.

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The Pharisees and teachers of the law are completely shocked by Jesus. He is not at all what they would expect of a rabbi: he's not referring to previous great rabbis as the source of the teaching; he's not really even teaching at all, but healing people instead; and he goes beyond healing to claim the power to forgive sins.

- 'the Son of Man'—this becomes Jesus' preferred title for himself. To a certain extent, it's a very humble title, simply meaning, 'human being.' By using it, he's identifying himself with all of us. But it is also a subtle reference to one of the more famous Messianic prophecies, in which Daniel predicts the coming of a holy king who would be 'like a Son of Man' (Daniel 7:13-14)
- 'I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins'—Jesus points out that it's equally impossible to heal someone as to proclaim forgiveness without power from God to back it up. Since no one has accused him of blasphemy for healing people, why would they all of a sudden be in an uproar now? To demonstrate that he does indeed have genuine authority behind his words, he heals the man.
- 'Levi held a great banquet for Jesus at his house'—throwing a party like this would be a fairly normal way to show gratitude.
- 'a large crowd of tax collectors and others'—naturally, Levi invites his friends and associates to this party. As I mentioned in the discussion of John's preaching, the tax collectors are essentially the gangsters of the day. The people Levi knows are other gangster-types, and the people who would hang out with them. Imagine a seedy nightclub, or a big party at a drug lord's compound. That's more or less the scene here—probably cleaned up some in honor of their special guest, but the same cast of characters. Again, this is not quite what would be expected of a rabbi.
- 'It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick'—Jesus has been doing a lot of healing of people who are physically sick. He's been healing them out of a genuine desire to see them well, but also as a metaphor for an even more primary mission: to forgive sinners. Just like doctors heal sick people, Jesus forgives sinners. He's a sin doctor. This puts Peter's exclamation, 'Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!' in a new light. By calling Peter to follow him, Jesus is not saying, 'Oh, Peter. Don't get down on yourself; you're not that bad.' Rather, he's saying, 'Of course, you're sinful, Peter. That's why I'm calling you. If you come with me, I can help you with that.' He has the same attitude toward the tax collector and his friends. The Pharisees think of sinners as people to be avoided. Peter fears that he will be punished for his sins. But Jesus draws near to sinners, for the sake of healing them, not punishing them.

Taking it home:

- *For you and your family:* Jesus looks at our faults and mistakes as sickness he wants to heal, rather than as failings that must be punished. Ask Jesus to take care of your sins today. Jesus is a sin doctor. Ask him to point out any sin-sickness in you, to diagnose the cause of the sin, to heal you, and to give you the prescription you need to stay in good spiritual health.
- *For your six:* Jesus shows the leper that he is both willing and able to heal his sickness. In other words, Jesus is both good and powerful. Do your six have a harder time believing in his goodness or his power? Try asking him to demonstrate whichever one they need most, just like he did for the leper.

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- *For our city:* In this passage we see Jesus caring for people who are left on the outside of society. Ask Jesus to especially care for the people in our city who are similarly isolated. Ask him to give them what they need to feel welcomed and loved.

Tuesday, March 22nd

Luke 5:33-6:11

33 They said to him, "John's disciples often fast and pray, and so do the disciples of the Pharisees, but yours go on eating and drinking."

34 Jesus answered, "Can you make the friends of the bridegroom fast while he is with them? 35 But the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; in those days they will fast."

36 He told them this parable: "No one tears a piece out of a new garment to patch an old one. If they do, they will have torn the new garment, and the patch from the new will not match the old. 37 And people do not pour new wine into old wineskins. If they do, the new wine will burst the skins; the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. 38 No, new wine must be poured into new wineskins. 39 And none of you, after drinking old wine, wants the new, for you say, 'The old is better.' "

6:1 One Sabbath Jesus was going through the grainfields, and his disciples began to pick some heads of grain, rub them in their hands and eat the kernels. 2 Some of the Pharisees asked, "Why are you doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?"

3 Jesus answered them, "Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? 4 He entered the house of God, and taking the consecrated bread, he ate what is lawful only for priests to eat. And he also gave some to his companions." 5 Then Jesus said to them, "The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath."

6 On another Sabbath he went into the synagogue and was teaching, and a man was there whose right hand was shriveled. 7 The Pharisees and the teachers of the law were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched him closely to see if he would heal on the Sabbath. 8 But Jesus knew what they were thinking and said to the man with the shriveled hand, "Get up and stand in front of everyone." So he got up and stood there.

9 Then Jesus said to them, "I ask you, which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to destroy it?"

10 He looked around at them all, and then said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He did so, and his hand was completely restored. 11 But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law were furious and began to discuss with one another what they might do to Jesus.

Points of Interest:

- 'disciples'—*disciple* means, 'follower.' It's the term used for the students or trainees of a teacher.
- 'often fast and pray'—the law of Moses only called for fasting once a year, but the Pharisees, figuring more is better, would fast twice a week.
- 'Can you make the friends of the bridegroom fast while he is with them?'—It would be inappropriate, insulting even, to fast at a wedding; when a bride and groom invite you to celebrate with them, go through all the trouble of planning their reception, and spend \$50 a plate, you don't tell them, 'None for me, thanks; I'm saving my appetite for later.' Similarly, it is out of place for Jesus' disciples to fast. It makes sense that the Pharisees and John's disciples would fast. Fasting is an expression of a strong, unsatisfied desire. The Pharisees and John's followers fast because they are waiting

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for something to happen. That's not true for Jesus' followers; rather than waiting for something to come, they're celebrating someone who has. It would be silly for them to fast to express their longing for a savior, when they can just eat with the savior instead.

- 'people do not pour new wine into old wineskins'—new wine expands in volume as it ferments, but old skins have already been stretched to their limits. So, if new wine is put into old skins, the skin breaks and the wine spills. Jesus is saying that he is new and different, and to try to fit him into the old categories just doesn't work.

Jesus is primarily using the example of wine here because it serves as a good illustration of poor mixing between new and old, but I believe he also intends to draw on our associations with wine to describe the message he is bringing. Wine is a symbol of celebration, of fun, of abundance. In the Old Testament, it is often used as a sign of God's blessing on and abundant provision for his people (*Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* 951-952. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998). So, by calling himself new wine, Jesus is saying that he is a gift from God of abundance and celebration.

- 'The old is better'—Jesus doesn't see much hope that the Pharisees will ever accept him. It's not just that they're making the honest mistake of putting new wine into old skins; they're trying to force new wine to be old wine, because the very idea of new wine is distasteful to them.

At one time, the Pharisees were actually the bringers of new wine. When the people of God had completely forgotten about God's law, the Pharisees were an exciting new reform movement, drawing people back to the law as a source of blessing. Over time, though, they've become rigid, like an old wineskin, unable to accept anything new.

The problem with drinking only old wine is that, eventually, you run out. If you want to keep having wine, at some point you've got to drink new wine. The Pharisees' insistence on old wine leaves them in the place of eventually having no wine at all.

- 'what is unlawful on the Sabbath'—as I mentioned yesterday, the Pharisees are known for scrupulous, detailed observance of the law. They formed exact definitions of how to obey the laws laid down by Moses (*Illustrated Bible Dictionary* 1210). Their aim was absolute certainty as to what it meant to obey any particular law. The Sabbath was one of their particular areas of expertise. The Sabbath is the one day a week when God's people were to make sure that they rest from their work. For the Pharisees, the big question regarding the Sabbath was, 'What exactly constitutes work?' They developed quite a detailed scheme for answering that question. In this particular situation, they determine that Jesus' followers are breaking the Sabbath through a series of logic that goes something like this: work is prohibited on the Sabbath; harvesting a field is work; harvesting involves collecting the edible parts of plants; since Jesus' followers are picking heads of grain, they are harvesting, and therefore working.
- 'Have you never read what David did'—Jesus could reasonably argue with the Pharisees' definition of work here, perhaps by suggesting that a certain number of heads of grain would have to be picked before it constituted harvesting. The Pharisees may even have responded enthusiastically to such a response: having debates, among themselves and with people from other schools, is just how the Pharisees would go about honing their definitions. However, Jesus doesn't take that

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tack at all. Rather than accepting their methods but arguing with their conclusions, Jesus calls into question their entire approach to the law. He brings up an example when the great Jewish hero David clearly and blatantly broke the law, without being corrected or punished by God (The story is found in 1 Samuel 21: 1-6). This example shows that interpreting what is permissible is more complicated than the Pharisees' system allows for. David's story demonstrates one of two things (or, even more likely, both of them):

1. sometimes, strict obedience to a specific law can be trumped by the larger purpose of that law, or even by some other higher priority;
 2. God gives some people the authority to re-interpret the law.
- 'The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath'—it would be audacious enough for Jesus to claim the same privilege as David, the privilege to re-interpret the law in light of particular circumstances. But Jesus goes significantly beyond that, essentially saying that the Sabbath belongs to him, and he can do with it what he likes. Since the Sabbath was also known as 'the LORD's day,' Jesus is pretty much saying he is God—or close enough to God that he would be given vast authority over the things of God.

In fact, this is the second time recently that Jesus has used a 'Son of Man' statement to claim divine authority: in yesterday's passage, Jesus says, 'the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins,' which God alone can do, and here he is 'Lord of the Sabbath.' Jesus is very much making clear that he is new, and different, and his arrival is something special.

- 'to see if he would heal on the Sabbath'—they would consider healing, like harvesting, as work which was prohibited on the Sabbath. One could make the claim that the Pharisees are actually working harder than Jesus or the man with the withered hand. Speaking a few words and stretching out your hand aren't all that hard, and wouldn't normally be considered work. Meanwhile, the Pharisees and teachers are working pretty hard at spying on Jesus and building a case against him. However, according to their precise definitions, Jesus is breaking the Sabbath and they are not.
- 'But Jesus knew what they were thinking'—Jesus knows that they are hoping to get some dirt on him; but rather than avoid their trap, he consciously steps right into it. In this passage, Jesus seems to welcome any chance to distinguish himself from the Pharisees and the teachers.
- 'do good or to do evil'—to the Pharisees and the teachers, the Sabbath is more or less about not doing much at all. To Jesus, the more important question is whether you are doing something helpful or harmful. Jesus is doing something helpful on the Sabbath, by healing the man's hand. Meanwhile, the Pharisees and teachers are planning harm to Jesus. The lack of compassion and the amount of pure hatred the Pharisees show here is pretty astounding. They see someone with a withered hand, and they think, 'Oh, good. This is a perfect opportunity for us to catch Jesus doing something wrong.' They are glad the man is healed, but only because it gives them the excuse they need to work against Jesus.

Taking it home:

- *For you and your family:* Following God's rules can be a tricky thing. On the one hand, it's easy to apply them legalistically like the Pharisees do, and miss the whole point of them. On the other hand, we seem to need some rules; we don't naturally do

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what's best for us without some guidance. Jesus' disciples seem to discover the key to getting the most out of God's law: they stick close to Jesus, trusting him to help them best interpret the law for their situation. Why don't you ask Jesus if he has any guidance for you from God's law today?

- *For your six:* It takes a new wineskin to hold new wine. Ask God to give your six the containers they need for the blessings he has for them. Pray that they would be open to new things from God.
- *For our city:* Pray that the people of our entire city would be able to see Jesus for who he is, rather than try to force him into whatever categories we already have for him.

Wednesday, March 23rd

Luke 6:12-26

12 One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God. 13 When morning came, he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them, whom he also designated apostles: 14 Simon (whom he named Peter), his brother Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, 15 Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Simon who was called the Zealot, 16 Judas son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor.

17 He went down with them and stood on a level place. A large crowd of his disciples was there and a great number of people from all over Judea, from Jerusalem, and from the coastal region around Tyre and Sidon, 18 who had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases. Those troubled by evil spirits were cured, 19 and the people all tried to touch him, because power was coming from him and healing them all.

20 Looking at his disciples, he said:

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

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

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

22 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.

23 Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven.
For that is how their ancestors treated the prophets.

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

25 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.

26 Woe to you when everyone speaks well of you,
for that is how their ancestors treated the false prophets.

Points of Interest:

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- ‘whom he also designated apostles’—*apostle* means ‘sent out one’ or ‘commissioned one.’ Jesus has been commissioned by God, and he is now commissioning these twelve people to share in his work. Jesus might be motivated by the growing crowds: he recognizes that he will need to have some deputies if he is to care for the huge crowds who are coming to him. It could also be that his recent conflicts with the Pharisees and teachers cause him to realize that his time is short and he needs to have someone to carry on his work.
He may be choosing the number twelve in honor of the twelve tribes of Israel. It could also be that it’s the most people he can really work closely with, or maybe these twelve are the only ones ready to take this step.
- ‘He went down with them and stood on a level place’—this sermon is sometimes called the ‘Sermon on the Plain.’ It’s similar to a sermon found in Matthew’s gospel. Matthew’s sermon is called ‘the Sermon on the Mount,’ because, well, it happens on a mountain. Luke’s and Matthew’s sermons may be similar sermons given at different times in different places, or Luke and Matthew may be writing from different memories of exactly what is said and of exactly where it is said: ‘Were we still up on the mountain when Jesus gave that sermon, or was it just after we came down?’
- ‘a great number of people from all over’—Jesus’ popularity is growing. Tyre and Sidon are outside of the bounds of Israel; so it might be that even non-Jews have begun to hear about him. If not non-Jews, Jesus is certainly starting to attract people from farther afield.
- ‘Looking at his disciples’—Jesus is speaking specifically to his followers, but he is doing so in front of the crowds. It could be that he wants the crowds to witness this commissioning of his followers. As we’ll see in tomorrow’s passage, it could also be that he’s opening up the invitation.
- ‘Blessed are you’—these are the famous beatitudes, so-called after the Latin for ‘blessed.’ It might be worth considering for a moment what exactly ‘blessed’ means. Some synonyms for *blessed* are *avored*, *fortunate*, or even *happy*. Perhaps the closest common equivalent to *blessed* is *lucky*, if you add in a sense that the luck is God-directed. So, what Jesus is saying here is, ‘When you’re poor, or hungry, or sad, or hated, that’s when you are really lucky!’ When I look at it that way, it takes the beatitudes out of my ‘Top 10 Beautiful Sentiments Expressed by Jesus’ list and moves it straight to the top of my ‘Top 10 Unsettling and Bizarre Sayings of Jesus’ list instead. It gets even stranger when you add in the second half of the teaching, where Jesus says, ‘I feel sorry for you if you are rich, or satisfied, or laughing, or well-received.’ Jesus is making the claim here that our usual measures for when things are going well and when they’re going poorly are 180 degrees off. When we think we’re doomed, we might be in exactly the right place for something great to happen. When we think things are heading in the right direction, we might actually be missing out on something.
This teaching reminds me a little of John’s call for people to repent, or to recalibrate themselves. Jesus too is calling for a recalibration; he’s saying, if you’re shooting for the best life possible, most of you are aiming in the wrong direction. His point here is not, ‘If you people were really spiritual, you’d be acting a lot more miserable. Don’t you know life’s not supposed to be fun?’ He is pointing people toward blessing, not

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misery, and it's a blessing that's felt in the present tense—even if full satisfaction only comes later. Somehow, even though the circumstances are terrible, life should feel great!

The key to understanding how this could possibly be true comes in the contrast between, 'for you will be satisfied,' and, 'for you have already received your comfort.' I think Jesus is saying here that the key to the best life is leaving enough room for God to give good things to you; if your hands are full of the things you've grabbed for yourself, you can't accept the really great stuff God wants to give you. Perhaps that's why John told the soldiers not to extort money (Luke 3:14). He's not saying, 'People who extort money are really awful people' (although that may, in fact, be kind of true), but, 'If your pockets are full of money you've extorted, how are you going to hold the things God wants to give you?'

Of course, it takes a lot of faith in Jesus to trust this advice. It's helpful for me to remember that the person who said these things is the same person who healed the leper: he is both willing and able to do wonderful things for people who have faith in him.

Taking it home:

- *For you and your family:* Do you find that your efforts toward happiness are often disappointed? Perhaps you need some recalibration. Ask God to point you in the true direction of happiness, and ask him for the faith to keep walking that way.
- *For your six:* God wants to bring satisfaction where there is hunger and laughter where there is sorrow. Ask God to fill the empty places in the lives of your six with good things from him.
- *For our city:* In today's passage, Jesus' message starts to spread beyond the people who had heard it before. Pray the same thing for our city. Pray that people who have never met Jesus before would hear good news from him, and experience healing and freedom from him.

Thursday, March 24th

Luke 6:27-49

27 "But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, 28 bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. 29 If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn the other also. If someone takes your coat, do not withhold your shirt. 30 Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. 31 Do to others as you would have them do to you.

32 "If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. 33 And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that. 34 And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, expecting to be repaid in full. 35 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. 36 Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

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. 38 Give, and it will be given to you. A

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good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."

39 He also told them this parable: "Can the blind lead the blind? Will they not both fall into a pit? 40 Students are not above their teacher, but all who are fully trained will be like their teacher. 41 Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in someone else's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? 42 How can you say, 'Friend, let me take the speck out of your eye,' when you yourself fail to see the plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from the other person's eye.

43 "No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. 44 Each tree is recognized by its own fruit. People do not pick figs from thornbushes, or grapes from briars. 45 Good people bring good things out of the good stored up in their heart, and evil people bring evil things out of the evil stored up in their heart. For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks.

46 "Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say? 47 As for those who come to me and hear my words and put them into practice, I will show you what they are like. 48 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. 49 But those who hear my words and do not put them into practice are 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."

Points of Interest:

- 'to you who are listening I say'—the blessings and woes are addressed specifically to Jesus' followers, but what follows applies to everyone. Perhaps that means that the blessings and woes Jesus mention particularly have to do with people who are spreading Jesus' message: 'If you find yourself too wealthy, too full, too well-received for preaching my message, you're probably getting it wrong.' If it's true that the blessings and woes apply uniquely in some way to the disciples or even the apostles, Jesus very quickly expands to include others in what follows. The rest of the sermon follows the same themes as the blessings and woes. It's as if Jesus is saying first to the disciples, 'Here's what you've signed up for,' and then turns to everyone else and says, 'And you are all welcome to join up as well.'
- 'Do to others as you would have them do to you'—this is another of those teachings of Jesus that packs a bigger wallop than you think it does at first glance. It's not just about being a nice person: turning in lost wallets to the lost and found, not hitting your little sister, etc. What Jesus is actually saying here is, 'Treat your enemies just like you'd hope your friends would treat you.' This seems crazy! And even if it's not crazy, it certainly is unfair. That might very well be Jesus' point. Jesus is calling people beyond fairness to generosity and mercy.
- 'Even sinners do that'—by 'sinners' here, I think Jesus means people who don't believe in God and/or have no regard for him. In other words, Jesus expects that believing in God would make a practical difference in a person's life. Specifically, belief in God should lead toward treating other people better than you otherwise would.
- 'Then your reward will be great'—Jesus is really into reward maximization. He's not recommending being 'good for goodness' sake'—as Santa Claus would say. He's not

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criticizing his listeners for trying to get the best deal they possibly can. His problem with people who only have reciprocal relationships ('I'll treat you well if you treat me well.') is that the strategy will never get anywhere: if you only give what you get and get what you give, you only end up breaking even. Jesus is giving us investment advice here: if we want big profits from our relationships, we should give more than we get. It's an investment in God's economy, and he pays very big dividends.

- 'and you will be children of the Most High'—children naturally imitate their parents. If we imitate God, we are showing ourselves to be his children
- 'Do not judge, and you will not be judged'—our treatment of others signals the treatment we will get. It's as if we have a choice between two different systems: a system of judgment and condemnation, and a system of forgiveness and generosity. We opt into a system by our attitude toward one another. If we choose to judge others, we'll be surrounded by judgment—from others, from God, probably even from ourselves. If we choose to treat others with generosity, we will find ourselves in an environment completely filled with generosity toward us.
- 'A good measure, pressed down, shaken together'—have you ever opened a potato chip bag only to be disappointed by how few chips there actually are in the bag? Jesus is promising us that we won't have that experience with the things he is talking about. God is generous with his portions.
- 'out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks'—in Jesus' analogy, our heart is a tree and our words are the fruit. We can test the state of our hearts by paying attention to our words.
- 'and do not do what I say'—it does no good to just listen to these words, or even to speak well of them. They are advice meant to be put into practice. They only help if you actually use them.

Taking it home:

- *For you and your family:* Try creating a judgment-free zone in your house today. Avoid judging one another, and even yourself. Check in at the end of the day. How does it feel? Do you notice a difference?
- *For your six:* Pray that God would reward your six extravagantly for any acts of kindness they perform, especially when they are kind to people they don't particularly feel kindness toward.
- *For our city:* Pray for an economy of abundance to be unleashed in our city. Ask God to give us all the ability to treat others as we would want to be treated. Pray that our whole city would be changed, for the better, as a result.

Friday, March 25th

Luke 7:1-23

7:1 When Jesus had finished saying all this to the people who were listening, he entered Capernaum. 2 There a centurion's servant, whom his master valued highly, was sick and about to die. 3 The centurion heard of Jesus and sent some elders of the Jews to him, asking him to come and heal his servant. 4 When they came to Jesus, they pleaded earnestly with him, "This man deserves to have you do this, 5 because he loves our nation and has built our synagogue." 6 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. 7 That is why I

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did not even consider myself worthy to come to you. But say the word, and my servant will be healed. 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."

9 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." 10 Then the men who had been sent returned to the house and found the servant well.

11 Soon afterward, Jesus went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a large crowd went along with him. 12 As he approached the town gate, a dead person was being carried out—the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. And a large crowd from the town was with her. 13 When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her and he said, "Don't cry."

14 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!" 15 The dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus gave him back to his mother.

16 They were all filled with awe and praised God. "A great prophet has appeared among us," they said. "God has come to help his people." 17 This news about Jesus spread throughout Judea and the surrounding country.

18 John's disciples told him about all these things. Calling two of them, 19 he sent them to the Lord to ask, "Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?"

20 When the men came to Jesus, they said, "John the Baptist sent us to you to ask, 'Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?'"

21 At that very time Jesus cured many who had diseases, sicknesses and evil spirits, and gave sight to many who were blind. 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. 23 Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me."

Points of Interest:

- 'a centurion's servant'—a centurion is a Roman army officer, more or less equivalent to a modern captain.
- 'he loves our nation and has built our synagogue'—in other words, whether or not he's actually heard the sermons of John and Jesus, he's been living by them: he's not taking advantage of his position to gain at the expense of someone else; instead he's loving his enemies and doing good to those who hate him.
- 'I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you'—it is not out of pride, but out of humility, that he doesn't come in person to Jesus. For an outsider and a member of the ruling class, he's also quite culturally sensitive. He seems to know that Jews do not usually accept the hospitality of non-Jews, because of the increased possibility that they would become ritually unclean (non-Jews not, of course, being attentive to the kosher laws). So, even though Jesus is willing to come to his home, he sends someone to stop him outside.
- 'I have not found such great faith even in Israel'—the friends of the paralytic were willing to dig through a roof to get their friend into Jesus' presence, but the centurion

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has utter confidence that a simple word from him will suffice. He recognizes that Jesus is more than a healer: he is a ruler, who can command others to do his bidding. This centurion probably wasn't even looking for a Messiah, like the Jews were, but he recognizes one when he sees him.

- 'his heart went out to her'—Jesus' sermon about being happy in the midst of poverty and hunger could be interpreted as stoicism, but Jesus is not dispassionate toward suffering. All of the other miracles Jesus has done so far have been in response to a request; but this time, Jesus decides to do this one on his own, out of deep sympathy for the suffering of this widow.

In Zechariah's song in chapter one, he looks forward to forgiveness of sins and rescue from the shadow of death. Now, we've seen Jesus bring both. He showed his authority to forgive by healing the paralytic, and now he demonstrates his power over death by raising the widow's son.

- 'The dead man sat up and began to talk'—that has to have been pretty startling to everyone involved. Of course, it would have been quite a shock to see a dead man pop up like he was startled out of his sleep, but it must have been equally surprising to wake up in the middle of your own funeral.
- 'God has come to help his people'—the people recognize that something very special is happening. Everyone recognizes that Jesus is a great prophet such as hasn't been seen in a long time, but some go so far as to think that God himself has come to them.
- 'John's disciples told him about all these things'—John was thrown in Herod's prison before Jesus began preaching and healing; so he hasn't been able to see Jesus for himself.
- 'Are you the one who was to come?'—it's a little surprising that John doesn't know. You'd think that he would be able to recognize the one for whom he has a messenger. Maybe John wasn't as certain about when the savior would come and what his ministry would look like as I imagine he was. Or maybe John is confused and disappointed by the fact that he's still in prison—the Messiah is supposed to be a rescuer after all. In any case, John is not sure, but he also hasn't given up hope. He's heard enough that it's worth asking.
- 'The blind receive sight'—Jesus is referring to Isaiah 35, where Isaiah predicts that just such miracles will happen in the time when the Lord comes to replace sorrow with joy.
- 'Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me'—This reminds me of a few of the lines from Isaiah 35:
Strengthen the feeble hands,
steady the knees that give way;

say to those with fearful hearts,
'Be strong, do not fear;
your God will come . . .'

Jesus is encouraging John to continue in his faith, even though Jesus doesn't look exactly like he expected. He won't be disappointed.

Taking it home:

- *For you and your family:* In this passage, we see Jesus answer a prayer from a distance, and raise someone from the dead! God is capable of doing much more than

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you might imagine or think of asking. Try increasing the boldness of what you ask him for. Who knows what might happen?

- *For your six:* Ask Jesus to show your six what they need to see in order to know he's the one they've been waiting for.
- *For our city:* Ask God to sustain anyone in our city who is about to lose hope.

Saturday, March 26th

Luke 7:24-50

24 After John's messengers left, Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed swayed by the wind? 25 If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear expensive clothes and indulge in luxury are in palaces. 26 But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. 27 This is the one about whom it is written:

'I will send my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare your way before you.'

28 I tell you, among those born of women there is no one greater than John; yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he."

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. 30 But the Pharisees and the experts in the law rejected God's purpose for themselves, because they had not been baptized by John.)

31 Jesus went on to say, "To what, then, can I compare the people of this generation? What are they like? 32 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.'

33 For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine, and you say, 'He has a demon.' 34 The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and you say, 'Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.' 35 But wisdom is proved right by all her children."

36 When one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. 37 A woman in that town who lived a sinful life learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, so she came there with an alabaster jar of perfume. 38 As she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them.

39 When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is—that she is a sinner."

40 Jesus answered him, "Simon, I have something to tell you."

"Tell me, teacher," he said.

41 "Two people owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. 42 Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he forgave the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?"

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43 Simon replied, "I suppose the one who had the bigger debt forgiven."
"You have judged correctly," Jesus said.

44 Then he turned toward the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. 45 You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. 46 You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. 47 Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—as her great love has shown. But whoever has been forgiven little loves little."

48 Then Jesus said to her, "Your sins are forgiven."

49 The other guests began to say among themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?"

50 Jesus said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

Points of Interest:

- ‘What did you go out into the wilderness to see?’—to all appearances, John was just a rather strange man alone in the wilderness. Why, then, would huge crowds have gone out to hear him? Why would they have responded to his message? It’s because he spoke with power and authority given by God.
- ‘and more than a prophet’—John held a privileged place among the prophets, being the one given the opportunity to introduce the coming Lord.
- ‘the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he’—John is great because of his place in history: he is the final prophet before the Lord ushers in an exciting new era. He could see that era, and he pointed out that it was on the way; but he did not actually get the chance to live in the wonderful new era himself.
- ‘because they had not been baptized by John’—the tax collectors, among others, listened to John. Because of their repentance, symbolized in baptism, they created a straight path for Jesus to bring salvation to them, just as John had said. The Pharisees and teachers ignored John, unwilling to undergo the humiliation of renewing their membership in God’s people by being baptized. That’s why they’ve been so unready for Jesus.
- ‘Here is a glutton and a drunkard’—the Pharisees are impossible to please. They dismissed John as a madman, and they dismiss Jesus as a party animal.
- ‘wisdom is proved right by all her children’—John and Jesus are both wisdom’s children, even if they show the family resemblance in much different ways. They both behave in ways that are appropriate to their time, their place, and their mission. John’s more severe lifestyle was in accordance with his message of repentance and of desperate longing for something new to come. Jesus’ propensity for partying fits well with both the exhilaration that the day has finally come, and with his mission to go wherever he can find sinners.
- ‘he went to the Pharisee’s house’—despite the fact that the Pharisees have already shown themselves to be critical and unreceptive, Jesus graciously accepts this Pharisee’s invitation. Jesus is doing to them what he would have them do to him.
- ‘Jesus answered him’—I think this is a funny moment. The Pharisee is silently skeptical about whether Jesus is a prophet, and Jesus responds as if he was talking aloud. I would love to see the expression on this Pharisee’s face. The Pharisee

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assumes that if Jesus were a prophet, he would know of the woman's sinful life, and therefore not have anything to do with her. The woman's past doesn't seem to matter to Jesus at all, except to lead him to remark on how much gratitude she expresses.

- 'You did not give me any water for my feet'—apparently, although the Pharisee invites Jesus to dinner, he is somewhat lacking in courtesy. He doesn't do any of the things that would express warm welcome or honor. Maybe he feels that Jesus should be grateful just to be invited. The woman more than makes up for the Pharisee's lack of courtesy with her lavish care.
- 'as her great love has shown'—she is not forgiven because of what she does; she does what she does out of gratitude, because she has already experienced forgiveness. Jesus is saying to Simon, 'Your actions toward me demonstrate that this woman feels as if she has been forgiven a great debt, and you do not.'
- 'Who is this who even forgives sins?'—perhaps this is new to the Pharisee crowd, or maybe it is just slow to sink in, that Jesus is a sin-doctor. He has come specifically to forgive sins.
- 'Your faith has saved you'—this woman is so confident that Jesus will forgive her that she extravagantly thanks him before it ever happens. It is just such faith in Jesus' goodness and power that leads to her being forgiven.

Taking it home:

- *For you and your family:* You can be utterly confident that Jesus will forgive your sins. After all, it's what he came to do. Spend a moment today praising Jesus for his forgiveness. Consider imitating the woman from today's passage, by figuring out some special way to thank Jesus. Perhaps you could write a letter to him, or give a gift in his honor to express your gratitude.
- *For your six:* John served as a forerunner for Jesus. He helped smooth the path so that it would be easier for people to recognize Jesus when he came to them. Ask God to help you to be the same kind of help for your six. What are the things that get in the way of your six being able to receive the good things Jesus might have for them? How could you play a role in helping them remove those barriers?
- *For our city:* The people in this passage could discern that John was a genuine prophet, sent from God. Pray that the people of our city would be similarly attuned to God's voice and able to recognize people who truly come from him.

Sunday, March 27th

Luke 8:1-21

1 After this, Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve were with him, 2 and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out; 3 Joanna the wife of Chuza, the manager of Herod's household; Susanna; and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means.

4 While a large crowd was gathering and people were coming to Jesus from town after town, he told this parable: 5 "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. 6 Some fell on rock, and when it came up, the plants withered because they had no moisture. 7 Other

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seed fell among thorns, which grew up with it and choked the plants. 8 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."

9 His disciples asked him what this parable meant. 10 He said, "The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of God has been given to you, but to others I speak in parables, so that,

'though seeing, they may not see;
though hearing, they may not understand.'

11 "This is the meaning of the parable: The seed is the word of God. 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. 13 Those on the rock 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. 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. 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. 16 "No one lights a lamp and hides it in a clay jar or puts it under a bed. Instead, they put it on a stand, so that those who come in can see the light. 17 For there is nothing hidden that will not be disclosed, and nothing concealed that will not be known or brought out into the open. 18 Therefore consider carefully how you listen. Those who have will be given more; as for those who do not have, even what they think they have will be taken from them."

19 Now Jesus' mother and brothers came to see him, but they were not able to get near him because of the crowd. 20 Someone told him, "Your mother and brothers are standing outside, wanting to see you."

21 He replied, "My mother and brothers are those who hear God's word and put it into practice."

Points of Interest:

- 'and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases'—the followers of Jesus are not all men. We now hear of these women who play a crucial role in Jesus' work. They, like the woman from the previous passage, willingly give out of gratitude for Jesus' rescue; and by their sacrifice, they make it possible for Jesus to go on to rescue others.
- 'parable'—a parable is a story drawn from everyday life to illustrate some spiritual truth.
- 'seeing, they may not see'—another quote from Isaiah (Isaiah 6:9). Apparently, one of the reasons Jesus speaks in parables is actually to make his teaching harder to understand. This is an unusual teaching method.
- 'Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear'—this is the real point of the parable: pay careful attention to my words, because they are important.
- 'The seed is the word of God'—when he speaks, Jesus is sowing word-seeds. Just like the seeds of plants, these words he is sowing have the potential to grow and multiply in the lives of their hearers; but it's also possible that something could get in the way of their growth. Then it would be just as if the words were never sown at all: though they had ears, they would never really have heard.

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- ‘by persevering’—it takes some work for these seeds to grow. You have to try to hear these words, if you really want to have the words fulfill their true potential. Jesus’ disciples are a perfect example in this passage of persevering to produce a crop. Everyone in the whole crowd hears Jesus’ parable, but to them it probably just ends up being a semi-interesting agricultural story. The disciples actually put in the extra time and effort to ask Jesus what the parable means. Because they ask, the secret is unlocked, and the meaning of the words is able to grow in their lives.
- ‘there is nothing hidden that will not be disclosed’—Jesus doesn’t want his words to remain hidden. Just like you don’t turn on a light unless you want people to be able to see, you don’t speak words unless you want them to be understood. Jesus wants people to ask him what his words mean, but he does want them to ask.
- ‘Those who have will be given more’—in the end, a farmer is looking for crops. He will plant more seeds where he has seen seeds grow, and he knows it’s a waste to plant seeds where they don’t grow. Jesus is the same way. He wants to see his words grow, and multiply, and have an effect; so, he’ll always give more words to those who listen well. And he’ll stop giving more words where they don’t have any effect: it does neither him nor the hearer any good.
- ‘My mother and brothers are those who hear God’s word and put it into practice’—this principle of listening to and applying God’s words is so important that people who do it are like family to him.

Taking it home:

- *For you and your family:* Is there anything from this week’s reading that has been confusing to you? Let Jesus know. If this passage is any indication, Jesus will be happy to explain it to you.
- *For your six:* Ask God to help your six to be good soil for Jesus’ words. Pray that any words of Jesus that land in their lives would grow and produce some positive effect in their lives.
- *For our city:* Jesus traveled from village to village, making sure that all of them heard the good news that his kingdom had arrived. Pray that each and every neighborhood in North Brooklyn and New York would be touched by Jesus’ kingdom, and that all of the surrounding towns and cities would also. Pray for your own neighborhood, and at least five others.

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Week 3

Monday, March 28th

Luke 8:22-39

22 One day Jesus said to his disciples, "Let us go over to the other side of the lake." So they got into a boat and set out. 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.

24 The disciples went and woke him, saying, "Master, Master, we're going to drown!"

He got up and rebuked the wind and the raging waters; the storm subsided, and all was calm. 25 "Where is your faith?" he asked his disciples.

In fear and amazement they asked one another, "Who is this? He commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him."

26 They sailed to the region of the Gerasenes, which is across the lake from Galilee. 27

When Jesus stepped ashore, he was met by a demon-possessed man from the town. For a long time this man had not worn clothes or lived in a house, but had lived in the tombs.

28 When he saw Jesus, he cried out and fell at his feet, shouting at the top of his voice,

"What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, don't torture me!"

29 For Jesus had commanded the evil spirit to come out of the man. Many times it had seized him, and though he was chained hand and foot and kept under guard, he had broken his chains and had been driven by the demon into solitary places.

30 Jesus asked him, "What is your name?"

"Legion," he replied, because many demons had gone into him. 31 And they begged Jesus repeatedly not to order them to go into the Abyss.

32 A large herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside. The demons begged Jesus to let them go into the pigs, and he gave them permission. 33 When the demons came out of the man, they went into the pigs, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and was drowned.

34 When those tending the pigs saw what had happened, they ran off and reported this in the town and countryside, 35 and the people went out to see what had happened. When they came to Jesus, they found the man from whom the demons had gone out, sitting at Jesus' feet, dressed and in his right mind; and they were afraid. 36 Those who had seen it told the people how the demon-possessed man had been cured. 37 Then all the people of the region of the Gerasenes asked Jesus to leave them, because they were overcome with fear. So he got into the boat and left.

38 The man from whom the demons had gone out begged to go with him, but Jesus sent him away, saying, 39 "Return home and tell how much God has done for you." So the man went away and told all over town how much Jesus had done for him.

Points of Interest:

- 'went and woke him'—the storm is so bad that the ship is being swamped and the disciples—several of whom made their living by fishing on this very lake—are certain they are going to die; but Jesus is still asleep. Either he's a very sound sleeper, or he's too ignorant of the danger to be as scared—or he knows something they don't.
- 'He got up and rebuked the wind and the raging waters'—this is reminiscent of God forming the sea and the sky out of the formless void (Genesis 1). It's also similar to Moses parting the Red Sea so that the Israelites could escape from the Egyptian army. Jesus brings order out of chaos by his words, and he's able to rescue his followers even in the direst of situations.

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- ‘Where is your faith?’—Luke himself tells us, ‘they were in great danger’; their perilous situation is an objective fact, not merely some frantic overreaction. So, Jesus waking up from his nap to say essentially, ‘Look, there’s no need to get all stressed out here,’ seems a bit out of touch. What’s going on here?

I think it’s not incidental that this story immediately follows the teaching about the seeds and the soils. The point of that story is that Jesus’ words are worth paying very close attention to. I think that this incident with the storm is a training exercise, to test just how good the ears of the disciples are. Jesus has sown some words here: ‘Let us go over to the other side of the lake.’ They hear those words, and act on them, setting out for the other side—so far, so good. But when the storm comes, they forget them; or, if they remember the words, they no longer believe them. The disciples are like the rocky soil: their excitement at Jesus’ words shrivels in the midst of trouble. It could be argued that it’s unreasonable to expect the disciples to treat Jesus’ words as a promise that they will indeed make it across the lake. Jesus word sounds more like, ‘I’d like us to go across,’ than, ‘We will most certainly make it to the other side.’ Also, though they’ve seen some pretty amazing things from Jesus, there’s no reason for them to think that he actually has the power to stop a storm. I think Jesus purposely puts them in this exaggerated situation, to stress just how important and powerful his words are: even the most seemingly insignificant of them could make a very big difference. It’s a lesson that will be important for the disciples to understand. Jesus knows that there are more hard times up ahead for him and his followers, and they will need to trust his words if they are to get through them.

- ‘In fear and amazement’—Jesus calms the storm, but not the disciples. They start out afraid of the storm, and they end up even more afraid of Jesus. Through this incident they gain a new level of respect for Jesus: the storm was powerful enough to kill them, and Jesus is powerful enough to kill the storm. That’s impressive, and a bit scary.
- ‘the region of the Gerasenes’—this is a non-Jewish area, which explains why we find a herd of pigs.
- ‘had lived in the tombs’—an evocative, if creepy, image. It simultaneously communicates loneliness—cemeteries were placed outside of the city limits—and a sort of living death.
- ‘What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God?’—Luke tells us this scene out of chronological order, perhaps to communicate some of the confusion of the moment. This exclamation actually comes after Jesus has already commanded the demon to leave the man alone.

It’s interesting that Jesus doesn’t silence the demon here, as he has in the past. Perhaps it’s because there’s no crowd watching; or perhaps it’s because he’s less concerned about being unmasked among non-Jews, who were not necessarily on the lookout for a Messiah.

- ‘Legion’—a Roman military division.
- they begged Jesus repeatedly not to order them to go into the Abyss—these demons are surprisingly frantic at Jesus’ arrival. Maybe they’ve heard stories of Jesus’ confrontations with evil spirits on the other side of the lake, but they didn’t expect him to come into this non-Jewish area. The Abyss is apparently some kind of prison for demons.

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- ‘he gave them permission’—I find it very surprising that Jesus would listen to the begging of a gang of demons. One idea I have is that he is following his own advice to give to everyone who asks (Luke 6:30). When he says give to everyone who asks, he means everyone! If this is Jesus being merciful just like his Father, his Father is beyond unbelievably merciful.
- ‘A large herd of pigs’—the formerly demon-possessed man had been living the life of an animal, chained up or running wild. But he is not an animal. His freedom is worth the life of an entire herd of animals.
- ‘the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and was drowned’—I often wonder whether or not this is what the demons had planned. Did they just want to go out with a bang? Or were they unable for some reason to control the pigs? When the pigs died, did the demons have to go to the Abyss anyway? This fascinating little vignette makes me think that life in the spiritual realm is much more complicated than I would otherwise assume.
- ‘dressed and in his right mind’—Jesus has calmed this man, just like he did the storm.
- ‘and they were afraid’—they respond just like the disciples did when the storm was calmed. They start out afraid of the demon-possessed man, and end up even more afraid of Jesus—so afraid of him that they ask him to leave. I’d completely understand if they were afraid of Jesus because all of the destruction he just caused, but actually it’s seeing the man in his right mind that they can’t handle. They’d grown used to the idea that the man’s situation was hopeless, and it’s unsettling to them to see that reality change. They seem to prefer that things stay as they are, even though it would mean consigning this man to continuing in his death-like life forever.
- ‘sent him away’—this man wants to leave everything and follow Jesus (just like Simon, Andrew, James, John, and Levi did), but Jesus refuses. I can think of a couple of reasons why Jesus doesn’t take the man with him:
 1. Perhaps he thinks the man is more motivated to escape than to follow Jesus. He wants to get in the boat and leave his entire past behind on the shore. Given what the man has been through, it’s understandable that he’d want a clean slate, but Jesus has something better in mind: he wants the man to get his life back, and to be able to celebrate his amazing restoration with his friends and family at home.
 2. Practically speaking, it would be very difficult as a gentile to travel with Jesus around Judea and Galilee: he would become a focus of negative attention; he wouldn’t understand the societal norms at all; he wouldn’t be received into homes; he’d become the center of tremendous controversy. Maybe neither the Jews nor this man himself were ready for such a radical step.

It seems unfair and, in fact, unjust for Jesus to deny this man’s request, especially if the refusal is ethnically motivated—and even more especially since he’s just honored the demons’ request. Why should the demons get what they ask for, and not the man whom they were oppressing? Perhaps the way to look at it, though, is that Jesus is not so much denying the request as giving the man even more than he asked for. Jesus sends him out with good news. Rather than being rejected, he’s being commissioned; this man is being made an apostle (remember it means, ‘sent one’). He’s the first non-Jewish apostle, and the first of the apostles to be actually sent, while the original twelve are still being trained. This man is put on the fast track.

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- ‘tell how much God has done for you’—all the man knows about God is that he rescued him when he seemed beyond help, but that’s enough. In fact, in this regard the man has an advantage over many of Jesus’ Jewish listeners, whose centuries’ worth of history with God and prophecies about the Messiah give them a lot more knowledge about God. We’ve seen some of the positive aspects of the Jewish expectation of the Messiah: Zechariah, Elizabeth, Mary, Simeon, and Anna gushed in praise at the satisfaction of their long-delayed desire; and the tax collectors, soldiers, and the rest of the crowds eagerly listened to John’s message and repented, in expectation of the rewards they’d receive at the Lord’s return. But there’s a downside to the Messianic expectation as well. Over time, people have developed very specific ideas of who the Messiah is and what he would do. We’ve seen the Pharisees and teachers—and perhaps even John—wrestling with the ways Jesus doesn’t fit into their categories; even more, they’ve actually tried to shove him into their categories or rejected him because he doesn’t fit. We’ll soon see that their own ideas about the Messiah will even become a barrier for the twelve apostles. This man has no such preconceptions. All he knows is that Jesus saved him from terrible captivity, which is precisely the message Jesus wants told about him; in fact, it’s what Jesus has been trying to say about himself all along.

Taking it home:

- *For you and your family:* Even a small word from God can make a big difference for our lives. Ask God to help you notice when he is speaking to you. Ask him for the faith to hold on to those words. If listening to God is a new thing for you, consider giving it a try. Say something to God or ask him a question; then listen for an answer. You probably won’t hear an audible voice, but you might get an impression that feels sort of like when you mentally form a sentence before saying it. If that happens and the words are good and seem like they’re not just your own thoughts, that might be God speaking to you. A good rule of thumb is if you’re not sure whether you’re hearing God but the words aren’t destructive to you or anyone else, proceed as if it is God speaking to you; if something further happens, you’re experiencing the story of the seeds and soils in your own life.
- *For your six:* Have any of your six had a good experience with God recently? If so, consider suggesting that they share their story. It’s a great way to move forward in their relationship with God, and it could be very helpful to the people they tell as well. It doesn’t matter if they don’t know much about God. If all they know is the good thing God has done for them, it’s enough—in fact, it might be better that way.
- *For our city:* Ask God to give us as a city hope for change in problem areas that seem like they will never change: homelessness, violence and families struggling to break the cycle of poverty and unemployment. Pray that we will not be so used to these problems that we’re more comfortable with them than without them.

Tuesday, March 29th

Luke 8:40-56

40 Now when Jesus returned, a crowd welcomed him, for they were all expecting him. 41 Then a man named Jairus, a synagogue leader, came and fell at Jesus' feet, pleading with him to come to his house 42 because his only daughter, a girl of about twelve, was dying.

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As Jesus was on his way, the crowds almost crushed him. 43 And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years, but no one could heal her. 44 She came up behind him and touched the edge of his cloak, and immediately her bleeding stopped.

45 "Who touched me?" Jesus asked.

When they all denied it, Peter said, "Master, the people are crowding and pressing against you."

46 But Jesus said, "Someone touched me; I know that power has gone out from me."

47 Then the woman, seeing that she could not go unnoticed, came trembling and fell at his feet. In the presence of all the people, she told why she had touched him and how she had been instantly healed. 48 Then he said to her, "Daughter, your faith has healed you.

Go in peace."

49 While Jesus was still speaking, someone came from the house of Jairus, the synagogue leader. "Your daughter is dead," he said. "Don't bother the teacher anymore."

50 Hearing this, Jesus said to Jairus, "Don't be afraid; just believe, and she will be healed."

51 When he arrived at the house of Jairus, he did not let anyone go in with him except Peter, John and James, and the child's father and mother. 52 Meanwhile, all the people were wailing and mourning for her. "Stop wailing," Jesus said. "She is not dead but asleep."

53 They laughed at him, knowing that she was dead. 54 But he took her by the hand and said, "My child, get up!" 55 Her spirit returned, and at once she stood up. Then Jesus told them to give her something to eat. 56 Her parents were astonished, but he ordered them not to tell anyone what had happened.

Points of Interest:

- 'they were all expecting him'—a crowd is even gathered to greet him as he steps off the boat. Jesus has reached rock star status. The people can't get enough of him.
- a synagogue leader—he's what we'd call 'a pillar of the community.' He's probably wealthy and well-respected. I imagine he travels in the same circles as the Pharisees and teachers. Given his place in society, it might take quite a bit of humility to ask for Jesus' help; it might even cause something of a society scandal. But Jairus doesn't seem to hesitate; his desperation for his daughter and his faith in Jesus' power compel him to ask for Jesus' help.
- 'subject to bleeding for twelve years'—this woman has been sick for exactly as long as Jairus' daughter has been alive. By stopping to talk with the woman, Jesus isn't doing proper triage of his healings. You're supposed to take care of emergencies first; then turn to the patients who have a chronic but stable condition. Jesus takes the chronic case first. In fact, by the time he talks with her, she isn't even sick anymore.
- 'Daughter'—I'm sure that Jairus would be wondering at this point why Jesus wasn't in more of a hurry. By calling this woman 'Daughter,' Jesus is saying, 'I feel for this woman exactly the way you feel for your daughter. I'm as desperate to see her healed as you are to see your daughter healed. I had to stop.'
- 'your faith has healed you'—of course, if physical health were all Jesus cared about, stopping wouldn't be strictly necessary. I think Jesus stops because it's important to him that the woman know that his blessing goes with her. If Jesus were to move on, this woman would melt into the crowd, never to be seen again. She would be healed,

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but she might guiltily think of herself as having stolen the healing. Jesus stops to let her know that he wants her to be healed, because he cares about her and because she has shown faith in his goodness and power.

- ‘Don't be afraid; just believe’—Jesus does not care for his ‘daughter’ at the expense of Jairus’ daughter. Jesus has enough power to help them both, even when it looks like Jairus’ daughter is beyond help.
- ‘They laughed at him’—the mourners don’t have the faith to receive Jesus’ words; they are like the path from the story of the soils: ‘as for those who do not have, even what they think they have will be taken from them’ (Luke 8: 18). So, they’re sent out of the room and don’t get the chance to share in this wonderful miracle. In fact, since Jesus asks that no one in the room talk about what happened, these mourners could come to take Jesus’ words literally: ‘I guess somehow Jesus was right; she was just sleeping.’

Taking it home:

- *For you and your family:* Jesus is able to save Jairus’ daughter even when it looks like she’s beyond help. Are you in a situation that seems hopeless? It’s still worth bringing it to Jesus. While we’re not guaranteed of the results, he may very well surprise you by what he can do.
- *For your six:* Just when it looks like the woman’s sickness is something that would never go away, Jesus heals her. Pray that God would save your six from problems and troubles they’ve begun to think of as permanent.
- *For our city:* It sometimes seems to me like our city has a particularly hard time accepting the idea that God would intervene in supernatural ways—perhaps because the universities are so prominent in our city. Pray that our city would change in this regard; pray that there would be a growing willingness to hope for and believe in God working supernaturally.

Wednesday, March 30th

Luke 9:1-17

When Jesus had called the Twelve together, he gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases, 2 and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal the sick. 3 He told them: "Take nothing for the journey—no staff, no bag, no bread, no money, no extra shirt. 4 Whatever house you enter, stay there until you leave that town. 5 If people do not welcome you, shake the dust off your feet when you leave their town, as a testimony against them." 6 So they set out and went from village to village, proclaiming the good news and healing people everywhere.

7 Now Herod the tetrarch heard about all that was going on. And he was perplexed because some were saying that John had been raised from the dead, 8 others that Elijah had appeared, and still others that one of the prophets of long ago had come back to life. 9 But Herod said, "I beheaded John. Who, then, is this I hear such things about?" And he tried to see him.

10 When the apostles returned, they reported to Jesus what they had done. Then he took them with him and they withdrew by themselves to a town called Bethsaida, 11 but the crowds learned about it and followed him. He welcomed them and spoke to them about the kingdom of God, and healed those who needed healing.

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12 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."

13 He replied, "You give them something to eat."

They answered, "We have only five loaves of bread and two fish—unless we go and buy food for all this crowd." 14 (About five thousand men were there.)

But he said to his disciples, "Have them sit down in groups of about fifty each." 15 The disciples did so, and everyone sat down. 16 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 set before the people. 17 They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over.

Points of Interest:

- 'he gave them power and authority'—Jesus makes the Twelve into his deputies. He passes along to them his own mission, and the power and authority he uses to accomplish it.
- 'Take nothing for the journey'—they have Jesus' power, authority, and message; and that's absolutely all they have. This reminds me of the verse Jesus quotes to the devil during the temptation: 'people do not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD' (Deuteronomy 8: 3). In the Deuteronomy passage, Moses is describing God's miraculous provision of food and clothing to the Israelites when they were in the desert. Jesus is asking his disciples to trust that they too will be supernaturally sustained.
- 'shake the dust off your feet'—as they say in the TV crime scene dramas, they're removing all trace evidence that they were ever even in the town: 'Magdala? No, I've never been there; I've never even heard of it. Go ahead, check my shoes.' By shaking the dust off their feet, they're making clear that they and this town have nothing to do with one another.

The Twelve are basically filling the role of John. They're going ahead of Jesus to announce his coming, giving people the chance to prepare to welcome him. If a town doesn't welcome the disciples, they also won't be ready to receive Jesus.

- 'I beheaded John'—John has been executed since we last saw him. For some reason, Luke decides not to tell us the story of his death, as his source Mark does (Mark 6:14-29). To my knowledge, it's pretty rare that Luke gives us fewer details than Mark. My current favorite theory is that Luke decides to leave out the details of John's death so that our last picture of him is when he is hearing the evidence that the Lord has come; like Simeon, he can then die in peace.
- 'he tried to see him'—is Herod intrigued, or does he just want to make sure that John is indeed dead? It's hard to know.
- 'they withdrew by themselves'—I think this is the first time Jesus has been alone with the Twelve since he chose them. I get the impression that they're going away for some R&R after their preaching tours. I'm sure Jesus wants to hear how the trips went, and they could probably all use some rest.
- 'He welcomed them'—the getaway doesn't last long. Somehow, the crowds find out where they are and follow them. These people are very good soil. They hear the apostles' message about Jesus' kingdom, and they immediately set out to find this

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kingdom. Just as he promised in the story about the soils, Jesus gives them more words: ‘Those who have will be given more’ (Luke 8:18).

- ‘Send the crowd away’—meanwhile, the Twelve treat the crowd like unwelcome guests. They take a very conspicuous glance at their watches and say, ‘Well, it’s getting to be about dinner time. I guess this means you’ll have to be moving along.’ As we’ve already seen in the stories of Levi and of the woman who anoints Jesus’ feet, hospitality is a very important feature of the culture of Jesus’ day. By these standards, in trying to send the crowds away with empty stomachs, the Twelve are woefully inadequate hosts.
- ‘You give them something to eat’—even though there are at least 5,000 people, Jesus insists that the Twelve show proper hospitality. While the disciples are getting the crowd’s coats and showing them to the door, Jesus says, ‘Why don’t you just have dinner with us? I’m sure there will be plenty.’
- ‘he gave them to the disciples to set before the people’—Jesus asks them to do the impossible, but he also supernaturally provides them with the ability to do it.
- ‘all ate and were satisfied’—earlier, Jesus said, ‘Blessed are you who hunger now, /for you will be satisfied’ (Luke 6:21). These crowds are hungry, both spiritually and physically. Jesus sees that they are satisfied on both counts.
- ‘the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls’—they give away everything they have, but they end up with more than they started with. There’s a full basket for each one of them. This isn’t just about the crowds being cared for. It’s also the best way for the disciples themselves to find what they need:

Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you (Luke 6:38).

If it’s true that the more you give the more you get, feeding 5000 people is an excellent way to a life full of good things.

Taking it home:

- *For you and your family:* The disciples are tired, and the needs of the crowd are overwhelming. They just want to send the crowd away so that they can rest, but God asks them to care for the crowd instead. Caring for others can be disruptive, inconvenient, and overwhelming; but Jesus promises that we can never out-give God. When we give to others, God gives even more to us. Pray that God would give you what you need to go beyond your limits in caring for others—whether what you need is more compassion, more faith, or just the actual things you need to care for them well. Remind God that as you step out to care for others, you’re hoping that he will care for you, and look for him to provide for you in surprising ways.
- *For your six:* Ask God to fill a practical need for your six in an unexpected way some time in the next week.
- *For our city:* Jesus comes where he is welcome. On behalf of our city, tell Jesus that he is welcome here, and invite him to come with more of his kingdom, more of his good news, and more of his healing.

Thursday, March 31st

Luke 9:18-36

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18 Once when Jesus was praying in private and his disciples were with him, he asked them, "Who do the crowds say I am?"

19 They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, that one of the prophets of long ago has come back to life."

20 "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?"

Peter answered, "God's Messiah."

21 Jesus strictly warned them not to tell this to anyone. 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."

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. 24 For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it. 25 What good is it for you to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit your very self? 26 If any of you are ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of you when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.

27 "Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God."

28 About eight days after Jesus said this, he took Peter, John and James with him and went up onto a mountain to pray. 29 As he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning. 30 Two men, Moses and Elijah, 31 appeared in glorious splendor, talking with Jesus. They spoke about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem. 32 Peter and his companions were very sleepy, but when they became fully awake, they saw his glory and the two men standing with him. 33 As the men were leaving Jesus, Peter said to him, "Master, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." (He did not know what he was saying.)

34 While he was speaking, a cloud appeared and covered them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. 35 A voice came from the cloud, saying, "This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him." 36 When the voice had spoken, they found that Jesus was alone. The disciples kept this to themselves and did not tell anyone at that time what they had seen.

Points of Interest:

- 'Jesus was praying in private and his disciples were with him'—Jesus used to go off alone to pray. Now, though he still takes some time away from the crowds, he brings his followers with him.
- 'Who do the crowds say I am?'—the disciples list off the same possibilities Herod had heard about in yesterday's passage. This seems to be the question that's on everyone's mind: who exactly is Jesus?
- one of the prophets of long ago has come back to life'—this is like saying that George Washington or Abraham Lincoln (or whoever you think of as the greatest long-dead president) has returned again and is running in the 2008 election; or—for Rick Pitino—it's like Larry Bird does walk through the door, and he's not old and gray, and he's in great shape, and he's good as ever, and he turns the Celtics 2007 season around. People recognize that Jesus is someone very special, such as they haven't seen since the time of legends.

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- ‘But what about you?’—the ‘But’ hints that Jesus thinks their answer might be different.
- ‘God’s Messiah’—Peter recognizes that Jesus is even better than one of the great prophets of the past: Jesus is the one the prophets were hoping for.
- ‘warned them not to tell this to anyone’—it turns out that Jesus’ prohibition on telling people he is the Messiah doesn’t apply only to demons. He extends it to his followers as well. Wouldn’t Jesus want people to know that he is the one whom God promised to send? In explaining the story of the soils, Jesus said, ‘there is nothing hidden that will not be disclosed’ (Luke 8:17). So, though he hides his identity, it’s not meant to be a secret forever; he actually wants it to be known, but he doesn’t want people to be told. Maybe Jesus wants people to discover he is the Savior because they’ve followed him, rather than following him because they’ve heard he is the Savior.
- ‘The Son of Man must suffer many things’—here’s another reason Jesus might want the disciples to remain quiet for the time being on the topic of the Messiah. He wants them to understand the Messiah better first. When Peter says, ‘You are the Messiah,’ he probably has in mind a glorious conqueror that will restore Israel to the golden age of David’s reign. There are plenty of prophecies in the Jewish scriptures that speak of the Messiah in these terms; we looked at some of them in our first few days of this study. But there are other prophecies, like Isaiah 53, that say things like, ‘He was despised and rejected by others,’ or, ‘he was led like a lamb to the slaughter.’ Jesus wants them to understand how these predictions of suffering and rejection fit into his mission before they start telling others that he is indeed the Messiah.
- ‘and on the third day be raised to life’—though his mission involves suffering and rejection, it ends in life: ‘After he has suffered/He will see the light of life and be satisfied’ (Isaiah 53:11). Mysteriously, the Messiah’s apparent defeat and death is his path to even greater glory, and the means by which he accomplishes his rescue of others.
‘On the third day,’ may be a reference to a prophecy of Hosea (Hosea 6:2). It could also be a prophecy Jesus himself is delivering for the sake of the disciples.
- ‘take up their cross daily’—this teaching is hard enough to understand now, after Jesus’ crucifixion, but Jesus is saying it before he is killed. In fact, it’s the first mention of a cross in the story. At this point, the cross is not at all a religious symbol, but just a means of execution. Jesus is saying here, ‘If you want to follow me, I think you ought to know that we’re going to end up on death row.’
- ‘What good is it for you to gain the whole world?’—in calling his disciples to head toward the electric chair, Jesus isn’t talking about grim defeat, nor even grand altruism or the noble death of a hero. Just like when he recommended loving our enemies, Jesus is giving them his advice on maximizing profit. He is advocating death on a cross because he thinks it’s the way to make the most out of life. Our life is the most valuable thing we have; without it, everything else we have is absolutely worthless. Unfortunately, we all have life in a limited quantity; eventually, each of us will see our life expire. Jesus, however, is offering us an unbelievable deal: he will trade us our limited lives for his glorious, death-defying life.
- ‘he took Peter, John and James with him’—again, Jesus takes some of his followers along with him when he goes off alone to pray. This time, it’s an even smaller number. These are the same three men who see Jairus’ daughter revived.

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- ‘Moses and Elijah appeared in glorious splendor’—Moses and Elijah are two of the greatest figures of ancient Jewish history. Each of them also saw a glorious vision of God when they went up on a mountain to pray alone. Oh, and did I mention that they had both died hundreds of years ago? Interestingly, both of them ended their lives in mysterious circumstances: Elijah didn’t actually die, but instead was taken up to heaven in a whirlwind (2 Kings 2:11); and Moses died alone in the desert without any witnesses, and was buried by God himself (Deuteronomy 34:5-6). I think that Peter, James, and John are introduced to Moses and Elijah as a demonstration that God does indeed have power over death. They have also already seen two people—the widow’s son and Jairus’ daughter—resuscitated, but that’s more of a delay of death; with Moses and Elijah, we see life beyond death.
- ‘Let us put up three shelters’—it appears that Peter is hoping or expecting that they will stay here for a while with Moses and Elijah, but it’s only a quick visit.
- ‘This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him’—the Father last spoke from heaven at Jesus’ baptism, when he said to Jesus, ‘You are my son’ (Luke 3:22). Now, he directs similar words to the disciples, saying, ‘This is my son.’ At this crucial moment, when Jesus is revealed as the Messiah, he starts to make his way toward the cross, and he invites his disciples to follow him to death, God the Father speaks from heaven to confirm Jesus’ identity and corroborate his words.
- ‘they found that Jesus was alone’—lest there be any confusion as to whom God is talking about, Moses and Elijah disappear. Jesus’ words are even more trustworthy than the words of Moses and Elijah, who represent the two major sections of the Jewish scriptures: the Law, written by Moses; and the Prophets, of which Elijah is one.

Taking it home:

- *For you and your family:* This passage makes it look like Jesus’ prayer times were pretty exciting: flashes of lightning, transformed appearance, conversations with long-dead heroes of faith, a voice out of the clouds. Could your prayer time use a little livening up? Ask God to give you visions, words from him, amazing experiences, or whatever else he’d like to give you so that the rest of life seems a little dull in comparison to your times of prayer, rather than the other way around.
- *For your six:* Pray that your six would grow in their curiosity about Jesus, and that he would reveal himself to them.
- *For our city:* Today, pray particularly for the successful people in our city. In this passage, Jesus reminds us that it’s possible to conquer the whole world, but still fail in the things that are most important. Pray that the people of our city would not lose themselves in the pursuit of worldly success.

Friday, April 1st

Luke 9:37-62

37 The next day, when they came down from the mountain, a large crowd met him. 38 A man in the crowd called out, "Teacher, I beg you to look at my son, for he is my only child. 39 A spirit seizes him and he suddenly screams; it throws him into convulsions so

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that he foams at the mouth. It scarcely ever leaves him and is destroying him. 40 I begged your disciples to drive it out, but they could not."

41 "You unbelieving and perverse generation," Jesus replied, "how long shall I stay with you and put up with you? Bring your son here."

42 Even while the boy was coming, the demon threw him to the ground in a convulsion. But Jesus rebuked the evil spirit, healed the boy and gave him back to his father. 43 And they were all amazed at the greatness of God.

While everyone was marveling at all that Jesus did, he said to his disciples, 44 "Listen carefully to what I am about to tell you: The Son of Man is going to be delivered over to human hands." 45 But they did not understand what this meant. It was hidden from them, so that they did not grasp it, and they were afraid to ask him about it.

46 An argument started among the disciples as to which of them would be the greatest.

47 Jesus, knowing their thoughts, took a little child and had him stand beside him. 48 Then he said to them, "Whoever welcomes this little child in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. For whoever is least among you all is the greatest."

49 "Master," said John, "we saw someone driving out demons in your name and we tried to stop him, because he is not one of us."

50 "Do not stop him," Jesus said, "for whoever is not against you is for you."

51 As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem. 52 And he sent messengers on ahead, who went into a Samaritan village to get things ready for him; 53 but the people there did not welcome him, because he was heading for Jerusalem. 54 When the disciples James and John saw this, they asked, "Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?" 55 But Jesus turned and rebuked them. 56 Then he and his disciples went to another village.

57 As they were walking along the road, a man said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go."

58 Jesus replied, "Foxes have holes and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head."

59 He said to another man, "Follow me."

But he replied, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father."

60 Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God."

61 Still another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say good-bye to my family."

62 Jesus replied, "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God."

Points of Interest:

- 'but they could not'—from Wednesday's passage, we know that they have the power and authority to do this. Nonetheless, they can't do it this time.
- 'unbelieving and perverse generation'—this scene reminds me of when Moses came down the mountain from meeting with God only to discover that, in his absence, the Israelites had decided to abandon God and worship a golden calf instead. God allowed that entire generation of people to die in the desert before bringing his people into the Promised Land. While the situation isn't quite so dire for Jesus, there is something of the sense that, in a very short time, things have gone awry. Even with

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all of the miracles Jesus has performed, everything quickly reverts as soon as he leaves to the way it was before. This is of especial concern for Jesus because he knows that he doesn't have much time left.

Perverse in this situation means 'crooked.' Jesus is finding it hard to get through to people, because the path to their hearts is winding and complicated.

- 'they did not understand what this meant'—the last time they didn't understand what Jesus was saying, they asked him, and he explained it to them (Luke 8:9). But this time, they are too afraid. So, though hearing, they don't understand.
- 'An argument started among the disciples as to which of them would be the greatest'—they're probably thinking about the Messianic kingdom. When they ride into glory in Messiah Jesus' wake, who will get the top jobs? Who will be prime minister? Who will be general? Who will get to rule his own small kingdom? Their recent experiences would provide some fuel for this argument: Peter, James, and John were getting special time with Jesus—'We could tell you what we saw, but then we'd have to kill you'—while the other nine were failing to cast out a demon. The three are probably certain that they're situated pretty well right now to get the plum positions.
- 'whoever is least among you all is the greatest'—Jesus already told them in his sermon on the plain (Luke 6:20-49) that things work differently in his kingdom. If they want to be great, they're going about it all wrong. They need some recalibration. The path toward greatness is not through arguing over the top spots, but through serving someone who has nothing to offer you—and trusting God to then serve you.
- we tried to stop him, because he is not one of us'—I wonder if John suspects, after what Jesus has just said, that maybe they didn't do exactly what Jesus would want. This man is casting out demons in Jesus' name. It's one of the primary signs that Jesus has brought God's kingdom to earth—and it's something that the disciples were recently unable to do—but they stop him, because he's not part of the club. The Twelve may disagree about which one of them is greatest, but they're in complete agreement that it's going to be one of them—not some outsider. If they can't cast the demon out, it shouldn't be cast out at all.
For Jesus, who is doing it isn't important; what's important is that people are being freed from demonic oppression.
- 'Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem'—Jesus is now entering a new phase of his mission. Up until now, he's really just been introducing himself. The miracles he has been performing have been small demonstrations of what he has come to bring: healing, freedom, abundance, and forgiveness. Now that he has shown what his kingdom is about, he is moving on to inaugurate that kingdom. It's no surprise that he would head for Jerusalem; as David's capital it would be the appropriate place to re-establish David's kingdom. If anyone really understood his plan, though, they would be very surprised that he expects to be killed, not crowned, when he arrives.
- 'a Samaritan village'—after the reign of Solomon (about 1,000 years ago), David's kingdom divided in two: Judah, with Jerusalem as the capital; and Israel, with Samaria as the capital. The two kingdoms spent much of the next 300 years fighting one another, like two siblings squabbling over their father's inheritance. Israel was eventually conquered by the Assyrians, who scattered the Israelites and re-settled the area with other conquered people. The Samaritans (so named after their capital)

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retained some of the culture and religion as the Jews, but mixed with lots of outside influences. The bitter sibling rivalry continued to the time of Jesus, and was mixed with fights about the purity of their religion: the Jews criticized the Samaritans for their syncretism, and the Samaritans responded defensively. The Jews lived in Judea and Galilee, and Samaria lay in between the two; so Jesus is cutting through Samaria to get from Galilee to Judea.

- ‘because he was heading for Jerusalem’—whether or not proper worship of God could happen only in Jerusalem was one of the biggest disagreements between Jews and Samaritans. The Samaritans aren’t so keen to support Jewish pilgrimages to Jerusalem.
- ‘do you want us to call fire down from heaven?’—shaking the dust off their feet is too subtle for them. They want fire. But Jesus didn’t come to bring fire; he came to bring freedom and healing. His followers are called to bless those who curse them (Luke 6: 28), not burn them. Ever since the crowd interrupted their vacation, the disciples have had difficulty imitating their Father by showing mercy and generosity.
- ‘first let me bury my father’—this person may be asking more than just, ‘Can I go to my father’s funeral?’ It could be that his father is still alive and well, but he wants to wait until his father’s death to follow. Similarly, the next man might be saying, ‘Let me get my affairs in order,’ rather than just, ‘Is it alright if I say goodbye?’ The point of these three interactions is that following Jesus can’t be fit in around other commitments; it’s the top priority, the choice which affects all your other choices. Up until now, Jesus has been drawing huge crowds and welcoming everyone who comes; now, he’s doing some winnowing. As he makes his way to confrontation with the leaders in Jerusalem, he wants to make sure people know the stakes when they decide to follow him.

Taking it home:

- *For you and your family:* Jesus commands us to heal the sick and to free people from spiritual oppression, but often our ability does not match our assignment. Pray that Jesus would increase your ability to bring freedom from sickness and evil spirits to the people around you.
- *For your six:* Many people have a great deal of respect for Jesus’ teaching, but they have a hard time understanding his death or believing in his resurrection. That’s no big surprise: Jesus’ followers were the exact same way, until they’d actually seen Jesus die and rise again. Is Jesus’ death or resurrection something getting in the way of any of your six believing in him? The big mistake the disciples make is not asking the questions they have. Pray that your six would have the faith, the interest, and the boldness to ask their questions about the meaning of Jesus’ death.
- *For our city:* Ask God to do something amazing in our city in our generation. On behalf of our city, turn around from unbelief and ask God for more faith. Pray that the paths of our hearts would be straightened so that Jesus can bring to us the good things he wants for our city.

Saturday, April 2nd

Luke 10:1-24

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. 2 He told them, "The harvest is

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plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field. 3 Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves. 4 Do not take a purse or bag or sandals; and do not greet anyone on the road.

5 "When you enter a house, first say, 'Peace to this house.' 6 If the head of the house loves peace, your peace will rest on that house; if not, it will return to you. 7 Stay there, eating and drinking whatever they give you, for workers deserve their wages. Do not move around from house to house.

8 "When you enter a town and are welcomed, eat what is set before you. 9 Heal the sick who are there and tell them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.' 10 But when you enter a town and are not welcomed, go into its streets and say, 11 'Even the dust of your town we wipe from our feet as a warning to you. Yet be sure of this: The kingdom of God has come near.' 12 I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town.

13 "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. 14 But it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon at the judgment than for you. 15 And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted up to the skies? No, you will go down to the depths.

16 "Whoever listens to you listens to me; whoever rejects you rejects me; but whoever rejects me rejects him who sent me."

17 The seventy-two returned with joy and said, "Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name."

18 He replied, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. 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. 20 However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."

21 At that time Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit, said, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure.

22 "All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows who the Son is except the Father, and no one knows who the Father is except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him."

23 Then he turned to his disciples and said privately, "Blessed are the eyes that see what you see. 24 For I tell you that many prophets and kings wanted to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it."

Points of Interest:

- 'appointed seventy-two others'—some of the earliest manuscripts say 'seventy others.' If so, this story might be about Jesus' mission expanding beyond the Jews to the entire world: the twelve apostles represent the twelve tribes of Israel and the seventy disciples the seventy nations of the world (from Genesis 10, which describes the seventy descendants of Noah who spread out and fill the earth). This broadening of the mission may be merely symbolic at this point, since the disciples are being sent to the towns where Jesus himself is about to go, which would mean the towns of Judea. Then again, maybe 'every town and place where he was about to go,' is meant in a spiritual sense, not a literal one.

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- ‘The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few’—there are plenty of people who want to hear Jesus’ good news. What’s lacking is enough people to share it.
- I am sending you out like lambs among wolves’—this isn’t an unfortunate necessity, but a purposeful strategy on Jesus’ part. He actually strips them of provisions so that they will seem even weaker and more defenseless.
- ‘do not greet anyone on the road’—in other words, don’t dawdle. Jesus wants them to be focused on their mission.
- ‘if not, it will return to you’—you don’t lose any peace by trying to give it away; it either multiplies, or simply returns to you. There’s no harm done if you try to bless someone who doesn’t want to be blessed.
- ‘eating and drinking whatever they give you’—Jesus twice commands them to eat what they are given. At the feeding of the 5,000, Jesus made clear that he expected his followers to be good hosts. Here, he adds that it’s also important for them to be good guests. Eating whatever is set before them could be difficult for the disciples for a couple of reasons: they don’t want to be a burden to their guests; or they won’t like what their guests offer. But Jesus tells them to accept whatever hospitality is offered. I can think of a few reasons this might be important.
 1. To honor their hosts—by graciously accepting whatever is offered;
 2. To meet their own needs—without bread or money, it’s the only way they’re going to eat. Besides, they are offering something very valuable to these people; it’s reasonable to expect that they might receive something in exchange;
 3. To build a friendship—eating with someone is a great way to get to know them.

Jesus’ repeated command to eat whatever they are given becomes particularly meaningful if they are actually being sent to non-Jews, who wouldn’t necessarily be serving kosher food. If it’s not relevant now, it will be in Luke’s sequel, the book of Acts.

- ‘Do not move around’—they might be tempted to move from house to house to get to know everyone a little, to spread out the burden of hospitality, or simply to move to a house they like better. But Jesus wants them to prefer depth of relationship to breadth of relationship on this particular mission. If they spend all of their time with one family, that family can learn more about Jesus, which they can share with the rest of the town once the disciples move on.
- ‘Yet be sure of this: The kingdom of God has come near’—the message is true whether it’s been received or not.
- ‘Woe to you, Bethsaida!’—Bethsaida, Chorazin, and Capernaum are all Jewish towns in Galilee, places where Jesus has spent much of his time. Tyre and Sidon are famous nearby Gentile cities. In the end, it may be a little surprising which towns welcome Jesus’ coming and which do not.
- ‘Whoever listens to you listens to me’—they are not just messengers; they are Jesus’ agents, with his own authority.
- ‘even the demons submit to us’—there have been some problems with casting out demons recently; so it’s good to see that the seventy-two have success.
- ‘Satan’—*Satan* is a name for the devil. It means, ‘enemy.’

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- ‘I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven’—though they look like lambs amongst wolves, they are actually powerful enough to do real damage to the devil.
- ‘but rejoice that your names are written in heaven’—it’s exciting to have played a part in such great supernatural events, and it’s a good thing to see Satan defeated. But Jesus reminds them here that they haven’t been chosen because of the wonderful things that they can do. They are with him because they are sick with sin, and he is a sin doctor. As Jesus said in Thursday’s passage, ‘What good is it for you to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit your very self?’ They need to beware of getting so wrapped up in the powerful deeds they can do that they neglect being healed by Jesus themselves.

Taking it home:

- *For you and your family:* Jesus tells us that there are huge spiritual rewards in being a good host and in being a good guest. Which role comes more naturally to you? For the next few days, try to pay attention to issues of hospitality. Consciously make an effort to stretch either your hosting muscles or your guest muscles. As you do so, are you experiencing any rewards? What are they?
- *For your six:* Ask Jesus to give your six more peace. Pray that they would be able to accept the peace that he gives them.
- *For our city:* Pray that the devil’s power in our city would be overthrown. Ask God to de-fang the evil spirits who would do our city harm.

Sunday, April 3rd

Luke 10:25-42

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?"

26 "What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?"

27 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.'"

28 "You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live."

29 But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

30 In reply Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead.

31 A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. 32 So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. 33 But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. 34 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. 35 The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.'

36 "Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?"

37 The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him."

Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."

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38 As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. 39 She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. 40 But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!"

41 "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, 42 but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."

Points of Interest:

- ‘what must I do to inherit eternal life?’—this question follows nicely on Jesus’ comment to the seventy-two about paying attention to your own soul. This man, unlike the other teachers of the law we’ve seen, is not arguing with Jesus over the minutia of interpretation. He’s asking an open-ended, fundamental question.
- ‘What is written in the Law?’—even though Jesus outranks Moses (as we learned from the vision on the mountain), he doesn’t repudiate him. Moses’ laws are God’s guidelines to direct his people toward life. The very Law in which this man is an expert holds the answer to his question. So, Jesus wants to know what the man has found. The man picks out two commandments that seem to summarize what the Law is all about: love God (Deuteronomy 6:5), and love people (Leviticus 19:18). That these two commandments would be the most significant ones is not entirely obvious; the one from Leviticus particularly is sort of tucked away amongst many seemingly random, detailed instructions. So, the man shows some insight. He wouldn’t be the only law expert of the day to give this answer, though.
- ‘Do this and you will live’—this is probably a bit unexpected. I think the law expert was inviting Jesus into a debate. The teachers of the law had debates on topics like this one all the time. On this particular topic, different experts might argue back and forth about the relative importance of the ethical law and the sacrificial law: is it more important to love your neighbor, or to offer the proper sacrifices? When the expert chooses the ethical angle, he might expect Jesus to then give the best argument for sacrifices, rather like the rules in a high school debate tournament. The law expert thinks of Jesus as a debate partner, but Jesus thinks of himself as a doctor; he’s giving the lawyer a prescription for eternal life.
- ‘But he wanted to justify himself’—the simplicity of, ‘do this and you will live,’ embarrasses the man. He needs to show Jesus that the question is a lot more complicated than Jesus indicates.
- ‘who is my neighbor?’—now the man starts to sound like the other teachers of the law. What exactly is a neighbor? How many doors down does the definition of neighbor extend?
- ‘he passed by on the other side’—this is not as callous as it sounds. To touch a dead man would make them ritually unclean, which would make them temporarily unable to do their jobs. Of course, the chance of saving someone’s life is worth such a temporary disruption. As Jesus said regarding the Sabbath, ‘Is it better to do good or to do harm?’ (Luke 6:9).

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- ‘But a Samaritan’—Jesus compares the most spiritual Jews—the priests and Levites—to a heretical Samaritan. The priest and Levite might know the Law better than the Samaritan. But that’s not the point. Doing it is what leads to life.
- ‘he took pity on him’—the Samaritan sympathizes with the man, rather than thinking about the hassle helping him will cause.
- ‘and took care of him’—this Samaritan is an illustration of doing good to those who hate you. He’s a Samaritan who goes out of his way to help a Jew.
- ‘Which of these three do you think was a neighbor?’—the lawyer’s question is, basically, ‘Who am I required to love?’ Jesus turns it around: If loving your neighbor is the way to life, then go out and find some neighbors to love, even if it means making a stranger or an enemy into a neighbor.
- ‘Martha was distracted’—it’s possible to take hospitality too far. Martha gets so embroiled in her duties as a hostess that she spends no time with Jesus and she gets angry at her sister—that’s pretty far away from loving God with your whole heart and loving your neighbor as yourself. Jesus accepts people’s hospitality because it’s a great way to spend time together. It doesn’t work if Martha is so intent on throwing the perfect party that she’s busy and worried.

Taking it home:

- *For you and your family:* Make sure that you go out of your way to love someone else today (or tomorrow if you don’t read this until late in the day). At the end of the day, share your stories with your family, your roommates, or a friend. Jesus says that loving the people around us is a way to experience eternal life. Do you feel like your life is more abundant, more real, or just plain better in some way because you loved a neighbor? Whether or not that’s true, talk to Jesus about your experience.
- *For your six:* Pray for your six too, that God would give them better, more rewarding lives as they go out of their way to love other people. Jesus says that if we do these things, we will, in fact, live.
- *For our city:* Ask God to save our city from busyness and worry. Pray that the people of our city would have richer, fuller relationships with one another and with God. Pray that God would give us the power to remove distractions that get in the way of good relationships.

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Monday, April 4th

Luke 11:1-28

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."

2 He said to them, "When you pray, say:

" 'Father,

hallowed be your name,

your kingdom come.

3 Give us each day our daily bread.

4 Forgive us our sins,

for we also forgive everyone who sins against us.

And lead us not into temptation.' "

5 Then Jesus said to them, "Suppose you have a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; 6 a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have nothing to set before him.' 7 And suppose the one inside answers, 'Don't bother me. The door is already locked, and my children and I are in bed. I can't get up and give you anything.' 8 I tell you, even though he will not get up and give you the bread because of friendship, yet because of your shameless audacity he will surely get up and give you as much as you need.

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. 10 For everyone who asks receives; those who seek find; and to those who knock, the door will be opened.

11 "Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? 12 Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? 13 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!"

14 Jesus was driving out a demon that was mute. When the demon left, the man who had been mute spoke, and the crowd was amazed. 15 But some of them said, "By Beelzebul, the prince of demons, he is driving out demons." 16 Others tested him by asking for a sign from heaven.

17 Jesus knew their thoughts and said to them: "Any kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and a house divided against itself will fall. 18 If Satan is divided against himself, how can his kingdom stand? I say this because you claim that I drive out demons by Beelzebul. 19 Now if I drive out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your followers drive them out? So then, they will be your judges. 20 But if I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.

21 "When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own house, his possessions are safe. 22 But when someone stronger attacks and overpowers him, he takes away the armor in which the man trusted and divides up his plunder.

23 "Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.

24 "When an evil spirit comes out of anyone, it goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it. Then it says, 'I will return to the house I left.' 25 When it arrives, it finds the house swept clean and put in order. 26 Then it goes and takes seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there. And the final condition of that person is worse than the first."

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27 As Jesus was saying these things, a woman in the crowd called out, "Blessed is the mother who gave you birth and nursed you."

28 He replied, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it."

Points of Interest:

- ‘Lord, teach us to pray’—his followers have seen Jesus go off alone to pray many times, and they’ve been invited to accompany him a couple of times now. It’s cultivated in them a desire to pray like he prays.
- ‘Father’—the prayer starts out very simple and direct, and it’s based on an intimate relationship with God. There are no flowery phrases and no flattery of God involved. This prayer comes out of a confidence that the ones praying are privileged children of the one to whom they are praying.
- ‘hallowed be your name’—in other words, ‘May your name be holy.’ *Holy* means, ‘set apart.’ I don’t think this means that God is not holy and we hope he becomes so. It essentially means, ‘May you be recognized for how special you really are.’ It’s an expression of hope that God gets the credit due him, but even more an expression of desire that others hear about the wonderful benefits available to them from this great Father.
- ‘Give us each day our daily bread’—a reference to the Israelites when Moses led them through the desert. There was not enough food for all of them; but each day God would send them manna (which, roughly translated, means, ‘What the heck?’), a sort of miracle flour out of which they made bread. Jesus is suggesting that we ask God to provide for us everything we need each day, just like he did for the Israelites in the desert. Three things strike me about this request:
 1. God is willing to take care of our needs, even our simple daily ones—I can be tempted to think that God would not want to be bothered by such trivial things as my daily needs, but Jesus recommends that we bring them to God’s attention every day;
 2. It’s a prayer we have to pray every day—Jesus doesn’t say, ‘Give us everything we need for the rest of our life,’ but, ‘Today, give us what we need today,’ Faith in God’s provision is a day-by-day venture;
 3. It implies that we need something from God every day—according to Jesus, we, like the Israelites in the desert, won’t have enough to make it through the day unless God provides. I have to admit that it doesn’t always feel that way to me. While there are definitely some days I feel like I won’t survive without God’s help, much of the time I think I’ll do alright on my own. I’m not depending on God to come through every day. Is Jesus over-stating my need? Am I blind to the ways God is in fact mercifully providing for me? Or, am I going hungry without even knowing it? While I think it’s entirely probable that God is providing for me all the time in ways I don’t notice, I’m most intrigued by that last question: do I spend much of my life unknowingly hungry? It’s certainly not true physically; I definitely get plenty to eat every day. But perhaps Jesus isn’t only talking about our physical needs in this prayer. Every time Jesus mentions bread in the book of Luke, I can’t help but think of the first time it came up, when Jesus said to the devil, ‘People do not

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live on bread alone,' quoting Moses, who goes on to say, 'but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.' While I know this is not true of everyone, I at least have plenty of actual bread each day; but perhaps what I lack is the spiritual sustenance of daily, life-giving words from God.

- 'for we also forgive everyone'—as Jesus said earlier, 'For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you' (Luke 6:38). By forgiving others, we invest in an entire economy of forgiveness.
- 'lead us not into temptation'—we can depend on God not only to forgive us our sins, but to give us the strength to avoid them in the future.
- 'and I have nothing to set before him'—the man in this story is not asking for something for himself. He's asking his friend to give him what he needs to show proper hospitality to another friend.
- 'because of your shameless audacity'—a combination of wanting to shut his friend up and of recognizing the validity of the request eventually got the man up. If someone who's predisposed not to help you can be persuaded through boldness and insistence, how much more is it true of God, who is eager for you to ask for what you need? I think Jesus is hinting, though, that willing as God is to hear our requests, it might take us looking a bit foolish or acting a bit audacious.
- 'everyone who asks receives'—Jesus is particularly talking here of God's eagerness to give us whatever we need to show generosity or hospitality toward someone else.
- 'how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him'—the Holy Spirit also is a good gift that God is always more than willing to give to people who ask.
- 'a demon that was mute'—I think this means that the demon causes muteness in humans, but perhaps the demon himself is also mute. Who knows?
- 'By Beelzebul, the prince of demons, he is driving out demon'—it's unclear exactly who Beelzebul is. It could be another name for the devil, or another high-ranking demon. It seems that it's even possible that they make him up right here on the spot as a plausible explanation for Jesus' success (*Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* 164). There's also some disagreement about what the name means, but it might mean, 'master of the house,' an interpretation Jesus may be picking up on in his story about the house being plundered (*Illustrated Bible Dictionary* 154). These 'others' who are saying that Jesus is using demonic power to cast out demons are probably the Pharisees and the teachers, since in his answer Jesus refers to the 'others' as having disciples. Whoever they are, they've decided that Jesus does not come from God; but he has obvious spiritual power that has to be explained somehow. They figure: if not from God, it must be from the devil. Other people, perversely, suggest that Jesus perform some miracle to prove that the miracles he has already performed are heavenly, an endless loop Jesus chooses not to engage.
- 'how can his kingdom stand'—Jesus is doing real damage to the devil's kingdom. It makes no sense that he would be doing it with the devil's own power.
- 'when someone stronger attacks'—if the question is, 'How is Jesus able to drive out demons?' here is Jesus' answer: he is stronger than the devil, and has tied him up. Therefore, he can take whatever he wants; and what he wants are the lives of those he who've been under spiritual oppression.

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- ‘Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it’—it’s true that Mary is blessed. Both the angel Gabriel and Elizabeth, inspired by the Holy Spirit, exclaimed how blessed she is at the beginning of our story (Luke 1:28, 42). But here Jesus stresses that her blessing is not exclusive; it’s available to anyone who, like Mary, takes the word of God seriously. This is the second time Jesus has made a point of saying that his family doesn’t possess any special privileges.

Taking it home:

- *For you and your family:* Try praying Jesus’ prayer aloud today—if possible, with your family or roommates. For some of you, it might be a completely new experience. For others of you, it brings up bad memories of rote prayers you didn’t really understand or believe. For yet others of you, it’s a familiar, meaningful practice already. Regardless of your previous history with the Lord’s prayer, ask the Holy Spirit to give you a fresh and lively connection with God as you pray. Take some time to riff off of Jesus’ phrases, making the language your own and your requests more specific.
- *For your six:* Are you aware of something that one of your six needs? Ask Jesus to give you what you need to meet that need. Jesus loves to help us love our friends.
- *For our city:* Pray that Jesus’ kingdom would grow more and more in our city. Pray for more supernatural healing and provision, more freedom from spiritual oppression, more abundance, more joy, and more connection with God to spread.

Tuesday, April 5th

Luke 11: 29-53

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. 30 For as Jonah was a sign to the Ninevites, so also will the Son of Man be to this generation. 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 one greater than Solomon is here. 32 The people of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and now one greater than Jonah is here.

33 "None of you lights a lamp and puts it in a place where it will be hidden, or under a bowl. Instead you put it on its stand, so that those who come in may see the light. 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. 35 See to it, then, that the light within you is not darkness. 36 Therefore, if your whole body is full of light, and no part of it dark, it will be just as full of light as when a lamp shines its light on you."

37 When Jesus had finished speaking, a Pharisee invited him to eat with him; so he went in and reclined at the table. 38 But the Pharisee was surprised when he noticed that Jesus did not first wash before the meal.

39 Then the Lord said to him, "Now then, you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness. 40 You foolish people! Did not the one who made the outside make the inside also? 41 But now as for what is inside you—be generous to the poor, and everything will be clean for you.

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42 "Woe to you Pharisees, because you give God a tenth of your mint, rue and all other kinds of garden herbs, but you neglect justice and the love of God. You should have practiced the latter without leaving the former undone.

43 "Woe to you Pharisees, because you love the most important seats in the synagogues and respectful greetings in the marketplaces.

44 "Woe to you, because you are like unmarked graves, which people walk over without knowing it."

45 One of the experts in the law answered him, "Teacher, when you say these things, you insult us also."

46 Jesus replied, "And you experts in the law, woe to you, because you load people down with burdens they can hardly carry, and you yourselves will not lift one finger to help them.

47 "Woe to you, because you build tombs for the prophets, and it was your ancestors who killed them. 48 So you testify that you approve of what your ancestors did; they killed the prophets, and you build their tombs. 49 Because of this, God in his wisdom said, 'I will send them prophets and apostles, some of whom they will kill and others they will persecute.' 50 Therefore this generation will be held responsible for the blood of all the prophets that has been shed since the beginning of the world, 51 from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who was killed between the altar and the sanctuary. Yes, I tell you, this generation will be held responsible for it all.

52 "Woe to you experts in the law, because you have taken away the key to knowledge. You yourselves have not entered, and you have hindered those who were entering."

53 When Jesus went outside, the Pharisees and the teachers of the law began to oppose him fiercely and to besiege him with questions, 54 waiting to catch him in something he might say.

Points of Interest:

- 'This is a wicked generation'—this is the second time recently that Jesus has talked about the faithlessness of this generation. Last time, it was in response to the disciples' inability to free the demon-possessed boy (Luke 9:41). This time, it's in response to people accusing him of defeating demons with demonic power. Jesus is dismayed by just how difficult it is to help this generation escape from the devil's traps.
- 'none will be given it except the sign of Jonah'—Jonah was an Israelite prophet whom God sent to preach to Nineveh, a powerful enemy city. Jesus is contrasting the Jews of his own day with Jonah's Ninevites. Jesus' listeners are asking for a sign to prove that he is from God; but the people of Nineveh—though they didn't know God, didn't have any reason to respect an Israelite, and were so wicked that God had decided to destroy them—believed Jonah's words without any miracles and immediately declared a fast to show their humility and repentance. If the Ninevites believed Jonah without any signs, why should Jesus—who's actually done very many miraculous signs already—have to continue to do miraculous signs to prove himself to his listeners? They've seen and heard enough already.
- 'The Queen of the South'—this is the fabled Queen of Sheba. Sheba may have been Ethiopia, or it may have been a kingdom in the far south of the Arabian peninsula; either way, it was the farthest known civilization to the south of Israel. The Queen of

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the South heard that God had blessed Solomon with supernatural wisdom, and she traveled all the way from her own faraway land to hear what Solomon had to say. If this stranger would travel so far to hear Solomon's words, why won't Jesus' fellow Jews—people raised on the Law and Prophets that testify to him—listen to him?

- 'Your eye is the lamp of your body'—this is a confusing image to me, but I think that Jesus is referring to the fact that when they look at him, they see a demon. If they are looking at someone casting out demons by the power of God, but see a demon-possessed madman, there's something very wrong with their eyes (spiritually speaking, that is). With such poor spiritual vision, it will be very difficult for them to ever see well again; because their bad eyes affect everything they see. They are attracted to darkness and repelled by light, making them essentially blind.
- 'Jesus did not first wash before the meal'—this is referring to ceremonial washing for religious purposes. Such washing wasn't required by God in any of the laws of Moses; the Pharisees had developed the idea, under the theory 'Better safe than sorry.' They wanted some extra precautionary measures to insure that neither they nor their food was ritually unclean before eating.
- 'you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup'—the Pharisees spend so much time cleaning their hands that they completely neglect the state of their hearts. It's like polishing the outside of a pot so that you can see your reflection in it, but leaving the inside completely filthy. If the Pharisees are so concerned to show honor to God, why wouldn't they clean both inside and out? Or, do they think that God only cares about how things look on the surface?

Even now, Jesus seems to think, cleaning out their hearts wouldn't be so difficult—maybe even less difficult than all of the washing they do—just a little bit of generosity to the poor would take care of that greed quite nicely.

- 'you give God a tenth of your mint'—Moses commanded that the first ten percent of the harvest be offered to God as a way of saying thanks. This offering is called 'the tithe.' Along with the Sabbath, the tithe was a favorite of the Pharisees, because it lent itself easily to precise measurement; you could be absolutely certain whether or not you were tithing, at least as far as the Pharisees understood it. Jesus is saying here that the Pharisees go so far as to tithe from the herb plants in their little kitchen gardens.
- 'You should have practiced the latter without leaving the former undone'—Jesus doesn't criticize them for their scrupulousness in giving God a tenth; it's a good thing that they want to give proper thanks to God. However, it doesn't mix well with the fact that they don't show much concern for the larger things God cares about—or even for showing genuine love toward God himself. It seems like what they love is following the rules.
- 'you are like unmarked graves'—the Pharisees are like zombies. They look alive, but they are really dead. This is an eerie enough image for anyone, but it would have been especially horrifying to the Pharisees. As I mentioned during our discussion of the story of the neighborly Samaritan, according to the Law of Moses, touching a corpse makes a person temporarily ritually unclean. As they were prone to do, the Pharisees took the rule a couple of steps further; to make extra sure that they didn't become unclean they would not allow their shadow to pass over a gravestone. (*Bible Background Commentary* 221). Thus, in calling them unmarked graves, Jesus is

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saying that they're not just unclean; they're dead, and they're spreading uncleanness to everyone they touch.

- 'you insult us also'—the legal expert is pointing out that, while the Pharisees love following the rules, the legal experts love making those rules up. So, in criticizing the Pharisees, Jesus is indirectly criticizing the teachers and experts as well. It seems like the legal expert thinks that pointing this out might quiet Jesus down, but instead it starts him on a whole new round: 'Don't get me started on you . . . '
- 'it was your ancestors who killed them'—like most of us, the legal experts think of themselves as being good guys. If they had been around during the time of the prophets, they would have listened to them, rather than ignoring them and punishing them like the poor, benighted people of the time did. I do the same thing all the time: I like to think that I wouldn't have supported segregation or stolen land from the natives if I lived a hundred years ago, but the odds are that I actually would have. Jesus is saying that the law experts aren't as different from their ancestors as they like to think they are; in fact, they are about to prove just how similar they are, by killing him.
- 'from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah'—Abel's death at the hand of his jealous brother (Genesis ch. 4) was the first murder in the Jewish Bible, and Zechariah's martyrdom at the hands of an angry mob (2 Chronicles 24:20-22) was the last—the standard order for the books of the Bible was a little different in Jesus' day from today. So, Jesus is saying they have a share in every murder of God's people, from the first to the last. It's just a happy coincidence that in English it works out as going from A to Z.
- 'You yourselves have not entered'—apparently, the experts enjoy teaching the Law of Moses more than doing it. Also, the complexity of their teaching made it more difficult for others to follow; so, the net result of all of their attention to the law is that no one was actually performing it.
- 'When Jesus went outside'—I wonder if Jesus left immediately, or if he stayed until dinner was over. I'm imagining a very awkward silence for the rest of the meal.

Taking it home:

- *For you and your family:* Ask God to give you good eyes. Pray that you would be able to easily spot and welcome good things God is doing for you. Ask God to help you to see clearly what is good and what is harmful.
- *For your six:* Ask God to give your six good experiences with the Bible. Pray that they would somehow encounter life-giving guidance from the Bible, rather than joyless and oppressive rules.
- *For our city:* Pray for an increase of faith in our city. Ask God to give us the same readiness to hear him and respond to him as Jonah found in Nineveh.

Wednesday, April 6th

Luke 12: 1-21

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. 2 There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known. 3 What you have said in the

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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.

4 "I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. 5 But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after your body has been killed, has authority to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him. 6 Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God. 7 Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.

8 "I tell you, whoever publicly acknowledges me, the Son of Man will also acknowledge before the angels of God. 9 But whoever publicly disowns me will be disowned before the angels of God. 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.

11 "When you are brought before synagogues, rulers and authorities, do not worry about how you will defend yourselves or what you will say, 12 for the Holy Spirit will teach you at that time what you should say."

13 Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me."

14 Jesus replied, "Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?" 15 Then he said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions."

16 And he told them this parable: "The ground of a certain rich man yielded an abundant harvest. 17 He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.'

18 "Then he said, 'This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store my surplus grain. 19 And I'll say to myself, "You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry."'

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?'

21 "This is how it will be with those who store up things for themselves but are not rich toward God."

Points of Interest:

- 'began to speak first to his disciples'—again, like at the Sermon on the Plain (Luke 6:17-49), Jesus is addressing his disciples, but he's speaking in front of the entire crowd. Apparently, he wants the whole crowd to know that he expects his disciples to behave differently from what he's seen from the Pharisees.
- 'the yeast of the Pharisees'—a very small amount of yeast affects an entire batch of dough. Sadly, the thing the Pharisees add which affects the entire environment, is hypocrisy. Hypocrisy is living by a set of rules different from the one you teach. It's more than just failure to live up to your principles; it's possible to fail sincerely. Hypocrisy takes it a step further: it's purposefully setting up a standard for others you don't expect to keep yourself, or treating your own failure more lightly than the failures of others, or pretending you are living up to standards you are not. Jesus warns his followers to be vigilant about hypocrisy. If they let even a little in, it will affect their entire lives.
- 'What you have said in the dark will be heard in the daylight'—Jesus has spoken before about the fact that things he is keeping secret will eventually be known, but

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apparently it's not just Jesus' secrets that will be uncovered. It's in the nature of secrets to come out, and that includes the dirty little secrets of the Pharisees or of the disciples if they succumb to the temptation of hypocrisy. I don't think Jesus is talking about punishment here. I think he's just stating a plain fact: hypocrisy has a tendency to be found out; and when it is, people love to talk about it.

- 'who kill the body and after that can do no more'—this reminds me of what Jesus said yesterday about cleaning the outside but leaving the inside dirty. Just like it's possible to clean the body without affecting the soul, it's also possible to kill the body without affecting the soul. And just like the inside of a cup is more important than the outside, the soul is more important than the body.
- 'you are worth more than many sparrows'—Jesus is saying that while God has the authority to throw people in hell, that doesn't mean that he's hoping he gets the chance. God values life, even the life of a sparrow and all the more the lives of human beings. Fortunately, the one who has the power to do us real damage wants to do us good instead.
- 'anyone who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven'—I think that Jesus is referring back to Monday's passage when the Pharisees accused Jesus of defeating demons with demonic power. Blasphemy is saying that something holy is evil, which is exactly what the Pharisees did: they called the Holy Spirit (by whose power Jesus was casting out demons) the prince of demons. I don't think Jesus is being spiteful by saying that blasphemy against the Holy Spirit leads to unforgiveness; I think that once again he's stating the simple truth of the matter. If someone thinks the Holy Spirit is the devil, they won't welcome the Holy Spirit into their lives. But as John told us in his sermon (Luke 3:15-17) the Savior has come precisely to bring the Holy Spirit to people; it's by being baptized in the Holy Spirit that we are freed from our sins. So, by refusing the Holy Spirit, they are refusing the power to be rescued.
- 'When you are brought before synagogues, rulers and authorities'—it is not just Jesus who will have trouble with the authorities. His followers will follow him into trouble.
- 'the Holy Spirit will teach you at that time what you should say'—another form of daily bread. Jesus doesn't give them the words now; instead, the Holy Spirit will give them the words when they need them.
- 'tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me'—according to the law set up by Moses, the older brother would receive twice as large an inheritance as the rest (Deuteronomy 21: 17). It's unclear whether this man is saying that his brother hasn't giving him his share at all, or he's hoping that Jesus would say that the inheritance should be divided equally. In any case, Jesus is not interested in getting involved.
- 'Be on your guard against all kinds of greed'—it could be tempting for this man to think, 'Once I receive my inheritance, I'll be all set.' But that's a distraction from what matters most: there's a lot more to life than possessions.
- 'I have no place to store my crops'—Jesus exaggerates to the point of ridiculousness. This man is so rich that his big problem is he has nowhere to put all his wealth.
- 'And I'll say to myself'—this man is a bit self-involved. He's actually talking to himself about what he's going to say to himself later.
- 'eat, drink and be merry'—this phrase has become somewhat well-known, as a sort of cheer for partying, but in context it's tragic: it's the last thing the man says before

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dying. He doesn't actually get the chance to be merry. It's like dying on the eve of retirement; he's been working his whole life toward this moment, but he doesn't get a chance to enjoy it.

'Eat, drink, and be merry,' is probably a reference to the biblical book of Ecclesiastes, in which Solomon comes—at least temporarily—to the cynical conclusion that the most a human being can expect out of life is to eat, drink, and be proud of their work (2:24 and 3:13); the less fortunate still have to work, but they don't get a chance to enjoy it. So, this man is saying, 'I won!' just before he keels over.

- 'Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?'—this whole story is an illustration of what Jesus said earlier: 'What good is it for you to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit your very self?' (Luke 9:25).

Taking it home:

- *For you and your family:* Ask God to save you from hypocrisy. Pray for the faith to be honest, sincere, genuine, and fair as you apply the truth to your own life.
- *For your six:* Pray that your six would begin to know how valuable they are to God.
- *For our city:* Pray that God would break the power of greed in our city. Pray that people would not be fooled into thinking that acquiring things is the way to the good life.

Thursday, April 7th

Luke 12:22-48

22 Then Jesus said to his disciples: "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear. 23 Life is more than food, and the body more than clothes. 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! 25 Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to your life? 26 Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest?"

27 "Consider how the wild flowers grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. 28 If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today, and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, how much more will he clothe you—you of little faith! 29 And do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink; do not worry about it. 30 For the pagan world runs after all such things, and your Father knows that you need them. 31 But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well.

32 "Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. 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. 34 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

35 "Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning, 36 like servants waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, so that when he comes and knocks they can immediately open the door for him. 37 It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. Truly I tell you, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them. 38 It will be good for those servants whose master finds them ready, even if he comes in the middle of the night or toward daybreak. 39 But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into.

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40 You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him."

41 Peter asked, "Lord, are you telling this parable to us, or to everyone?"

42 The Lord answered, "Who then is the faithful and wise manager, whom the master puts in charge of his servants to give them their food allowance at the proper time? 43 It will be good for that servant whom the master finds doing so when he returns. 44 Truly I tell you, he will put him in charge of all his possessions. 45 But suppose the servant says to himself, 'My master is taking a long time in coming,' and he then begins to beat the other servants, both men and women, and to eat and drink and get drunk. 46 The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the unbelievers.

47 "The servant who knows the master's will and does not get ready or does not do what the master wants will be beaten with many blows. 48 But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows. From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked. "

Points of Interest:

- 'Therefore I tell you'—this teaching follows directly on yesterday's. Seeing as the amazingly successful businessman from Jesus' story yesterday couldn't guarantee happiness for himself, what should we do? Work as hard as we possibly can, because that's the only way we'll have any chance? Give up, because we have no hope? The lesson Jesus draws from the story is that we shouldn't allow ourselves to get preoccupied with the question of whether or not we will have enough. The best thing we can do is not worry. In this passage, Jesus assembles a very impressive list of good reasons not to worry:
 - Life is more than food'—if all we do is live to work and work to live, we're not really getting anything out of life. Even for those of us who are not actually wondering where our next meal will come from, it's easy to slip into survival mode, when the biggest goal for our week is just getting through it. Jesus is saying, 'What's the point of a life lived that way?' Our sights need to be set higher, or life's not worth living.
 - 'they have no storeroom or barn'—in contrast to the rich fool from the story Jesus told yesterday, the ravens don't save up for the future, but they seem to get along just fine. Worrying isn't necessary.
 - 'Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to your life?'—worrying does no good. We might feel as if, by worrying, we are taking our problems seriously; but actually, we're doing no practical good.
 - 'not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these'—this is humbling. Solomon, the most fabulously wealthy man they could imagine, was not quite able to match the splendor of a flower. He'd lose in a beauty contest with grass. Even huge success with maximum effort doesn't get us very far.
 - 'your Father knows that you need them'—we have a rich and powerful father who wants to give us good gifts. There's no need for us to worry. Do trust

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fund kids worry about whether they'll have enough clothes or enough food to eat? Our father will take care of us.

- 'seek his kingdom'—we have more important things to pay attention to than mere survival. It's God's strong rooting interest, not just to take care of our basic needs, but to give us his abundant and joyful kingdom. We can be so confident about this that, not only do we not need to worry, but we can afford to give to others freely.
- 'where your treasure is, there your heart will be also'—our heart follows our treasure, rather than our treasure following our heart. Someone recently suggested to me a pretty compelling way to interpret this verse: you can tell where your heart is by looking at what you spend your money on. That has the ring of truth to me—and it's very challenging.
- 'like servants waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet'—while the master is out partying, the servants stay at home to make sure that the lights are on and the fire is warm for the master when he returns.
- 'he will dress himself to serve'—this is a strange turn of events. The master wants the servants to stay up and alert not so that they can serve him when he returns, but so that he can serve them. He puts on his butler uniform and throws them a little party. If they don't stay awake, they'll miss out.
- 'at what hour the thief was coming'—a sudden change of metaphor. This image of the thief in the night reminds me of Jesus' analogy from Monday of overcoming the strong man to plunder his house. Jesus changes scene: in one scene, he is the master of the house and we are the servants; in the other, the devil is the owner of the house, and Jesus is the thief. The very same event—Jesus' coming—is looked at very differently, depending on your perspective. For those who are faithfully waiting (like Simeon and Anna from earlier in our story), Jesus' coming is the wonderful return of a generous master bearing gifts. For the greedy and the oppressive, of whom the devil himself is the leader and primary example, it's a catastrophe. Jesus has yet to explain exactly what he's referring to when he talks of his coming: hasn't he already come? Or is there some future arrival? Is he referring to both simultaneously? In the context of this particular teaching, it seems like one thing we can learn is that God's provision for people who seek his kingdom will come at an unexpected time in unexpected ways. Those who wait well and are on the lookout for it will be amply rewarded. Those who get tired of waiting and try to meet their needs by taking advantage of other people . . . well, it will be a bit awkward for them when God's help arrives.
- 'From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded'—this is the answer to Peter's question. Peter asks, 'Are you talking to us, or to everyone?' and Jesus answers, 'Yes.' This is a truth that applies to everyone, but to differing degrees, depending on how well you know the master and what he expects.

Taking it home:

- *For you and your family:* Let's say for a minute that what we spend money on indicates where our heart will be. If that were the case, what would your recent purchases tell you about your heart? Does it feel true that you've invested some of your heart in the things you've recently bought? If so (and it may not be), how do

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you feel about that? Where would you like your heart to be? How could you use money to help point your heart in that direction?

- *For your six:* Pray that Jesus would free your six from the power of worry.
- *For our city:* Pray that Jesus' coming would be good news to our city. Pray that when he offers gifts to our city, we would be ready and on the lookout to accept those gifts. Pray that we would not miss one opportunity to experience God's excellent service.

Friday, April 8th

Luke 12:49-13:17

49 "I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! 50 But I have a baptism to undergo, and what constraint I am under until it is completed! 51 Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division. 52 From now on there will be five in one family divided against each other, three against two and two against three. 53 They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law."

54 He said to the crowd: "When you see a cloud rising in the west, immediately you say, 'It's going to rain,' and it does. 55 And when the south wind blows, you say, 'It's going to be hot,' and it is. 56 Hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of the earth and the sky. How is it that you don't know how to interpret this present time?"

57 "Why don't you judge for yourselves what is right? 58 As you are going with your adversary to the magistrate, try hard to be reconciled on the way, or your adversary may drag you off to the judge, and the judge turn you over to the officer, and the officer throw you into prison. 59 I tell you, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny."

1 Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. 2 Jesus answered, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? 3 I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish. 4 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? 5 I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish."

6 Then he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree growing in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it but did not find any. 7 So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, 'For three years now I've been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven't found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?'"

8 " 'Sir,' the man replied, 'leave it alone for one more year, and I'll dig around it and fertilize it. 9 If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.' "

10 On a Sabbath Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues, 11 and a woman was there who had been crippled by a spirit for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not straighten up at all. 12 When Jesus saw her, he called her forward and said to her, "Woman, you are set free from your infirmity." 13 Then he put his hands on her, and immediately she straightened up and praised God.

14 Indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, the synagogue leader said to the people, "There are six days for work. So come and be healed on those days, not on the Sabbath."

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15 The Lord answered him, "You hypocrites! Doesn't each of you on the Sabbath untie your ox or donkey from the stall and lead it out to give it water? 16 Then should not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has kept bound for eighteen long years, be set free on the Sabbath day from what bound her?"

17 When he said this, all his opponents were humiliated, but the people were delighted with all the wonderful things he was doing.

Points of Interest:

- 'I have come to bring fire on the earth'— this talk of fire and baptism reminds me of John's preaching about Jesus: 'He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire' (Luke 3: 16). Jesus has come to bring the fire of the Holy Spirit to the earth. Introducing fire to a civilization makes all sorts of things possible that were unheard of before: warmth in the cold, light at night, cooked food, and the ability to shape metal, for instance. Jesus is bringing about a similar revolution, by making actual connection with a powerful, living God widely available for the first time in human history. Of course, fire can be dangerous and destructive as well. Invading armies would use fire to burn down conquered cities, for example. In the Bible, God is often associated with fire in both its liberating and its destructive aspects. For instance, when God led the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt, he took the form of a pillar of fire which went ahead of them through the wilderness to the Promised Land; but God also sent fire from heaven to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah for their wickedness. Like fire, the Holy Spirit is powerful, but not entirely safe. It's dangerous to ignore the Holy Spirit or take him for granted; but, treated with respect, he can bring great benefits to your life.
- 'I have a baptism to undergo'—before Jesus can baptize us with the Holy Spirit, he must experience a baptism. I believe this is an oblique reference to his death: he is going to be immersed in suffering and death.
- 'what constraint I am under'—Jesus has spoken much about bringing freedom to others. We learn here that he is not entirely free himself to do what he would like—set the Holy Spirit loose upon the earth. Somehow, his suffering and death, rather than constraining him, will free him from his current limitations.
- 'Do you think I came to bring peace on earth?'—this is a bit confusing, since angelic choirs did in fact sing at his birth that through him God was bringing 'peace to those on whom his favor rests' (Luke 2:14). And, to take it a step further, when Jesus himself sent his followers out to proclaim his good news, he instructed them to say to their listeners, 'Peace to this house' (Luke 10:5). So, it does indeed seem that Jesus came to bring peace. Nonetheless, as we've seen, Jesus' offer of peace seems to provoke strong reactions: positive ones from those who are being freed and blessed with peace and negative ones from people who refuse peace or resent the way Jesus brings it. As we've also seen, Jesus is not too concerned with smoothing over these differences. He has something of a take-it-or-leave-it attitude about himself and the good news he brings: 'I'm bringing peace, whether you like it or not.' Many people don't.
- 'you don't know how to interpret this present time'—the miracles he has done are just as clear a sign of the coming of God's kingdom as clouds are of rain. If they know to

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grab an umbrella when they see clouds, how have they missed that they should turn toward God when they see supernatural indicators that he has come close?

- ‘try hard to be reconciled on the way’—If you know you will be found guilty in court, you try to plea bargain before your court date. Jesus is recommending that they do the same thing regarding their sins: ask for forgiveness now, before it is too late.
- ‘when the tower in Siloam fell on them’—these people may have died dramatically and suddenly, but their sensational deaths don’t fundamentally matter. What matters is not how they died, but whether or not they were ready for death. While not everyone’s death makes the news, the sober truth is that we do all, in fact, die; and for us too, the important thing is to be ready for that moment.
- ‘leave it alone for one more year’—it’s not as if the owner of the vineyard doesn’t care about getting fruit from his trees. He’s not lenient; he’s patient. He’s willing to give the tree every chance to bear fruit before cutting it down. Likewise, God is looking for fruit from us, namely loving God and loving our neighbors. God loves both us and our neighbors. His love for us leads him to be patient with us when we mistreat others. His love for our neighbors means that eventually, if we take advantage of his patience and continue to mistreat others, he will firmly put a stop to it.
- ‘So come and be healed on those days’—the synagogue leader goes beyond accusing Jesus of working on the Sabbath, and accuses the woman he healed of breaking the Sabbath. It’s hard to see what work she is doing; it doesn’t even seem like she goes as far as asking for healing. All she does is straighten up and praise God. Perhaps the man is afraid to criticize Jesus—who’s been a little sharp with his critics recently—so he bullies the woman instead.
- ‘Doesn’t each of you on the Sabbath untie your ox or donkey’—here’s a great example of hypocrisy: they’re willing to make an exception for the sake of the well-being of their livestock, but not for the health of this woman.
- ‘whom Satan has kept bound’—perhaps the synagogue leader is harsh with the woman because he thinks her sickness is some sort of punishment for her sins; she deserves what she’s gotten, and she can wait one more day to be healed. Jesus, however, looks at her not as a perpetrator but as a victim, held prisoner by the devil.
- ‘his opponents were humiliated, but the people were delighted’—as opposed to the experts of the law, who make the law an impossible burden, Jesus actually makes the path to a good life from God more attainable.

Taking it home:

- *For you and your family:* Spend a moment today thanking God for his patience with you. Thank him for the fact that he is rooting for you to succeed. And ask him if there is some particular sign of growth he is looking for from you. Ask for his help in that area.
- *For your six:* Pray that the Holy Spirit, would introduce your six to a life more wonderful than they ever thought possible. Pray that they would experience a genuine connection with a real, active, powerful, and loving God.
- *For our city:* Pray for the people of our city who die today. Ask God to give them peace, and pray that in some way—whether their death is expected or a surprise—they will have the chance to prepare themselves to move on with grace and trust.

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Saturday, April 9th

Luke 13:18-34

18 Then Jesus asked, "What is the kingdom of God like? What shall I compare it to? 19 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."

20 Again he asked, "What shall I compare the kingdom of God to? 21 It is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into about sixty pounds of flour until it worked all through the dough."

22 Then Jesus went through the towns and villages, teaching as he made his way to Jerusalem. 23 Someone asked him, "Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?" He said to them, 24 "Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to. 25 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.'

26 "Then you will say, 'We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.'

27 "But he will reply, 'I don't know you or where you come from. Away from me, all you evildoers!'

28 "There will be weeping there, and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but you yourselves thrown out. 29 People will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God. 30 Indeed there are those who are last who will be first, and first who will be last."

31 At that time some Pharisees came to Jesus and said to him, "Leave this place and go somewhere else. Herod wants to kill you."

32 He replied, "Go tell that fox, 'I will keep on driving out demons and healing people today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will reach my goal.' 33 In any case, I must press on today and tomorrow and the next day—for surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem!

34 "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing. 35 Look, your house is left to you desolate. I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'"

Points of Interest:

- 'It is like a mustard seed'—the mustard seed is the smallest seed commonly known to Jesus and his contemporaries, but it grows into quite a large plant.

This illustration reminds me of a common description of the kingdom of God: it is both already and not yet. On the one hand, Jesus said in his sermon in Nazareth, 'Today, this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing' (Luke 4:21), more or less proclaiming that with his coming the kingdom of God had also finally arrived—the kingdom of God is already here. On the other hand, Jesus instructed us in his teaching on prayer (Monday's passage) to pray that the kingdom would come, as if it has not yet arrived.

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This little parable offers the key to understanding that paradox. We already have the kingdom of God, but only in seed form. Even the seed is pretty good; the seeds of the kingdom Jesus has been spreading bring tremendous amounts of healing, freedom, forgiveness, and abundance to the lives where they are planted. But what we've seen so far is insignificant in comparison to what the kingdom of God will be like when it grows to full-size.

- 'Make every effort to enter through the narrow door'—I get the picture here of Indiana Jones reaching back for his hat as he slides underneath the descending the door. The door of salvation is narrow, but in time, not in space. It's not so much that the door to God's kingdom is so tight that only a few really skinny people can squeeze through; it's that eventually the door will be closed and locked, and no one will then be able to get through. Anyone who takes the opportunity while it's there will be able to enter into the kingdom.
- 'People will come from east and west and north and south'—the fact that even people who partied with Jesus won't be able to make their way in when the door is closed makes the kingdom of God feel very exclusive. But that's not really the case: it will be filled to capacity with people from all over the place, but perhaps not the people Jesus' listeners would expect. People coming from all directions reminds me of the Queen of the South and the Ninevites from Tuesday's passage.
- 'Herod wants to kill you'—it's a little strange that some Pharisees would pass along this warning. It could be that there's a group of Pharisees that's more sympathetic to Jesus. I find myself a little suspicious, though. Last time we heard about Herod, he was trying to get a chance to hear Jesus, not to kill him. Meanwhile, the Pharisees themselves have shown a great deal of animosity toward Jesus. I wonder if they're looking at these rumors of death threats (whether they're accurate or not) as a perfect way to get rid of this nuisance; maybe they hope he'll run off into hiding in the desert.
- 'Go tell that fox'—as far as we know, calling someone a fox in Jesus' culture didn't carry the connotation of cleverness (nor of being good-looking, for that matter). It more or less meant 'untrustworthy,' as in 'there's a fox in the henhouse' (*Bible Background Commentary* 228).
- 'on the third day I will reach my goal'—another oblique reference to his death and resurrection, but he's also just saying: 'I'm going, I'm going.' He's already on his way out of Herod's reach.
- 'surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem'—while the Pharisees are warning him to avoid death by running away from Herod, Jesus is knowingly heading straight for death in Jerusalem: 'If I only make it to Jerusalem, they'll certainly kill me there; they reject all the people God sends to them.'
- 'you were not willing'—Jesus has a maternal instinct toward the people of Jerusalem. He desperately wants to care for them, even despite the fact that Jerusalem has rejected so many of God's messengers. It's not animosity on Jesus' part but rejection on Jerusalem's part that keeps him from being able to show them the love he wants to.
- 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord'—Jesus is quoting Psalm 118, which is a song of thanksgiving for God's rescue of his people. Jesus seems to be saying that, despite the fact that they are currently unwilling to receive his care and

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that they will in fact kill him, there will indeed come a time when they will welcome him and accept his help.

Taking it home:

- *For you and your family:* Has God placed any opportunities in front of you recently? That opportunity won't be there forever; at some point the door will close. What do you need from God to walk through that door?
- *For your six:* Pray for whatever seeds of God's kingdom there are in the lives of your six. Pray that those seeds would keep growing until they've brought an unimaginable amount of joy, peace, and abundance into their lives.
- *For our city:* Pray that people would come to God in great numbers from unexpected directions.

Sunday, April 10th

Luke 14

1 One Sabbath, when Jesus went to eat in the house of a prominent Pharisee, he was being carefully watched. 2 There in front of him was a man suffering from abnormal swelling of his body. 3 Jesus asked the Pharisees and experts in the law, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?" 4 But they remained silent. So taking hold of the man, he healed him and sent him on his way.

5 Then he asked them, "If one of you has a child or an ox that falls into a well on the Sabbath day, will you not immediately pull it out?" 6 And they had nothing to say.

7 When he noticed how the guests picked the places of honor at the table, he told them this parable: 8 "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. 9 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. 10 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. 11 For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."

12 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. 13 But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, 14 and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."

15 When one of those at the table with him heard this, he said to Jesus, "Blessed are those who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God."

16 Jesus replied: "A certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests.

17 At the time of the banquet he sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, 'Come, for everything is now ready.'

18 "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.'

19 "Another said, 'I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I'm on my way to try them out. Please excuse me.'

20 "Still another said, 'I just got married, so I can't come.'

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21 "The servant came back and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and ordered his servant, 'Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.'

22 " 'Sir,' the servant said, 'what you ordered has been done, but there is still room.'

23 "Then the master told his servant, 'Go out to the roads and country lanes and compel them to come in, so that my house will be full. 24 I tell you, not one of those who were invited will get a taste of my banquet.' "

25 Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them he said: 26 "If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even life itself—such a person cannot be my disciple. 27 And whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.

28 "Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Won't you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you have enough money to complete it? 29 For if you lay the foundation and are not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule you, 30 saying, 'This person began to build and wasn't able to finish.'

31 "Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Won't he first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? 32 If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. 33 In the same way, those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples.

34 "Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? 35 It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile; it is thrown out.

"Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear."

Points of Interest:

- 'went to eat in the house of a prominent Pharisee'—just as he commanded the seventy-two to do when he sent them out, Jesus accepts the hospitality that is offered to him, even though it's being offered by someone who has been working against him.
- 'Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?'—Jesus knows what they think: they've told him more than once that they don't think it's lawful to heal on the Sabbath. But by asking them the question, he takes the initiative. He puts the Pharisees in the awkward position of having to say aloud, in front of the man, before he is healed, that they don't think he should be healed. That would be a public relations disaster, but they also can't bear to say that it is, in fact, lawful; so they're silent.
- 'will you not immediately pull it out'—Jesus is saying, 'I just figured you'd think it was a great idea to help this person on the Sabbath, since you helped your ox out of trouble last Sabbath.' If they, strict as they are about the Sabbath, wouldn't leave their child—or even their ox—in a well for an extra day, then why should God leave his children in the clutches of Satan, or disease, or sin one day longer than necessary? Jesus continues to reinforce the fact that the Sabbath is not a day to do nothing, but rather a day for God's kingdom, which involves healing and rescuing people.
- 'noticed how the guests picked the places of honor at the table'—apparently, there's something of an undignified scramble for the best seats. Similar to so many other instances already in our study, Jesus doesn't criticize their desire for honor, but their methods of obtaining it. First of all, it's not really honor if you seize it, rather than

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having it given to you. Secondly, by trying to seize honor for yourself, you leave open the strong possibility of receiving humiliation instead, if your own sense of your honor is higher than your host's.

- 'invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed'—the very best way to get honor is to honor other people, particularly those who can't return the favor. Then, God himself will honor you: 'Give, and it will be given to you' (Luke 6:38).
- 'Blessed are those who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God'—I imagine that there's something of a stunned silence at the party after Jesus' little diatribe. I think this man is trying to smooth things over and change the subject by saying, 'Why bother fighting about a little thing like this party, when someday we'll be partying together in heaven anyway?' Jesus simply turns up the temperature even more, essentially responding, 'Who's to say we'll all be in heaven?'
- 'they all alike began to make excuses'—it isn't that these people haven't been invited to the party. In fact, they've even accepted the invitation. But, when the time for the party actually comes, they decide there are other things they'd rather be doing.
- 'does not hate father and mother'—this is very strong language, to make his point very clear: even family expectations aren't an acceptable reason to say, 'Maybe later,' to Jesus' invitation. None of the people who refuse to attend the banquet are doing something downright evil instead; the only problem with these other pursuits is that they take priority over the party. Family is a good thing, but family can also make demands that come into conflict with Jesus' invitation. In those cases, you can't please both.

I don't think Jesus is calling for cruelty to or neglect of family here. Following Jesus should actually be a good thing for your family; for example, one of the first things Jesus did after Peter started following him was heal Peter's mother-in-law.

Nonetheless, Jesus is firm on the fact that he expects following him to be the context for loving your family, rather than pleasing your family being the context in which you follow him.

- 'those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples'—following Jesus is a life-altering decision. It makes life better, but it has a definite affect on your entire life. Following Jesus can't just be a side project or something you get to when you have the time.
- 'if it loses its saltiness'—salt has a distinctive flavor, and that's what makes it useful. Likewise, following Jesus should make an actual difference in your life. Otherwise, what's the point?

Taking it home:

- *For you and your family:* Would you like to be more respected or honored? Don't be afraid to be honest; Jesus doesn't seem to think there's anything wrong with wanting honor. According to him, the best way to get it is to find someone more unnoticed than you and honor them. Who could you show some honor to today?
- *For your six:* In this passage, we get the picture that God is throwing a huge party. He's inviting everyone he can. All he wants is for that party to be full. Pray that your six would hear of God's invitation, say yes, and step into the party he has for them.
- *For our city:* Pray that we would be good salt, bringing some of the distinctive—and pleasant—flavor of the kingdom of God into our city. Ask God to give us as a church

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wisdom about our interaction and relationship with the Day Laborers, and the right way to go about being God's salt in our city.

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Week 5

Monday, April 11th

Luke 15

1 Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. 2 But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."

3 Then Jesus told them this parable: 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? 5 And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders 6 and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.' 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.

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? 9 And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.' 10 In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

11 Jesus continued: "There was a man who had two sons. 12 The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them.

13 "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. 14 After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. 15 So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. 16 He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

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! 18 I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. 19 I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.' 20 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.

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.'

22 "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. 23 Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. 24 For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate.

25 "Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. 26 So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. 27 'Your brother has come,' he replied, 'and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.'

28 "The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. 29 But he answered his father, 'Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I

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could celebrate with my friends. 30 But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!"

31 " 'My son,' the father said, 'you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. 32 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.' "

Points of Interest:

- 'This man welcomes sinners and eats with them'—are you, like me, starting to feel like the Pharisees and teachers are a broken record? Their tune hasn't really changed since their earliest interactions with Jesus. Over and over again, they comment on the fact that he is eating with sinners and doing what's unlawful on the Sabbath as if it's a complete surprise, even though it's exactly what he's been doing all along.
- 'one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them'—Doesn't everybody look for lost things? Maybe you wouldn't look for a dropped penny: it's not that valuable. You might not look for someone else's wallet: it's not yours. But you'd definitely look for your own wallet: it's yours, and it's valuable. Likewise, Jesus eats with these people because they belong to him and they're valuable.
- 'Doesn't he leave the ninety-nine'—it might occur to you that, according to the logic above, the ninety-nine sheep are ninety-times more valuable than the lost one. Why would a shepherd abandon the whole valuable herd for the sake of the lost one? I think the idea here is that there's safety in the herd. The ninety-nine serve as some protection for one another, but the one is defenseless. The shepherd isn't abandoning the ninety-nine; he is temporarily leaving the ninety-nine to bring the one back into the safety of the herd. 'he joyfully puts it on his shoulders'—the shepherd isn't angry or annoyed at the lost sheep. He doesn't scold it. He's simply glad that the sheep is safe and has been found.
- 'she calls her friends and neighbors together'—imagine the relief and excitement at recovering a large amount of lost money. The woman simply has to share her good news with her friends.
- 'Rejoice with me'—her friends celebrate with her. That's the immediate and natural response when a friend finds something they'd lost. By implication, since the Pharisees and teachers are muttering instead of celebrating, they are not friends of Jesus. It's not Jesus who is acting strangely here—you always celebrate when you find something you've lost. It's the Pharisees who are being rude and unfriendly.
- 'Father, give me my share of the estate'—inheritances usually don't come until after your parents are dead, but this son wants to hurry up the process. He's essentially saying, 'Look, Dad, can we go ahead and act as if you were already dead?' Amazingly, his father agrees to his request.
- 'He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating'—this is definitely hitting bottom: a good Jewish boy wouldn't have even eaten pig, but he wishes he could eat with pigs.
- 'my father's hired servants have food to spare'—he thought it would be better to have his father's money than to be his father's child; it turns out that having his father's money isn't even as good as being his father's servant.
- 'But the father said . . . this son of mine was dead and is alive again'—the son's speech was supposed to end with, 'make me like one of your hired servants,' but before he can finish, his father interrupts to call him his son.

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- ‘because he has him back safe and sound’—the father is not at all concerned about whether the younger son deserves to be welcomed back. He throws a party, not because his child has done something worthy of a party, but because he is happy: because someone he has worried about is safe and because someone he has missed has returned.
- ‘refused to go in’—in these three stories (the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost child), Jesus establishes a clear pattern: 1) something valuable is lost; 2) the lost thing is found; 3) the finder celebrates; 4) the finder invites friends and neighbors into the celebration. Here the pattern is broken. We determined earlier that, because they aren’t celebrating with Jesus, the Pharisees and teachers aren’t Jesus’ friends. Now, we see who they are: they are the angry older child.
- ‘his father went out and pleaded with him’—the father goes out in search of this missing son, just like he ran out to welcome the other one when he came home.
- ‘I’ve been slaving for you’—both children think of their relationship with their father as slavery. The younger son runs away from his father’s repressive regime, and then decides he’d be better off in slavery to his father than to anyone else. But the father doesn’t think of him as a slave at all; he thinks of him as his child. He first gives him an inheritance (even a bit earlier than usual); then welcomes him home as a son, rather than hiring him as a servant.

The older son stays with the father, but only out of a different strategy, not a different attitude. He takes the tack of the dutiful slave, patiently bearing with all of his father’s requirements—but resenting it the whole time. I get the sense that he too wishes his father were dead; he just isn’t bold enough to say it, like his brother was.

- ‘this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes’—the older child seems simultaneously disgusted by and envious of his brother. He doesn’t recognize what the younger child—through painful trial and error—has just figured out: his older brother had it better all along.
- ‘you never gave me even a young goat’—I get the strong sense that if the older son had ever asked for one, his father would have been happy to give him that young goat, or much more. After all, he gave the younger son a third of his fortune because he asked. The father seems genuinely confused by the older son’s bitterness: ‘you are always with me, and everything I have is yours.’ As far as the father knew, he was giving his older child the best: relationship with him, and the chance to work together to build up the older child’s inheritance. He thought it’s what his child wanted too, but all along the child was secretly bitter and resentful.

It’s the same thing with the Pharisees and God’s law. By muttering about Jesus’ relationship with the tax collectors and sinners, they’re essentially saying, ‘Look, we’ve been following God’s law all along. When are we going to get anything out of it?’ I think God’s answer would be, ‘The Law itself is the great thing I was giving you.’ The Law was meant to lead them toward a richer relationship with God and a more abundant life. The tax collectors and sinners haven’t been getting away with something; they’ve been missing out on something. The Pharisees and teachers, in theory at least, always had the better life within their grasp; but because they had the mentality of slaves rather than of children, they missed out too.

- ‘But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead’—the younger son has been found, but the older son is still lost in a self-imposed slavery.

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The younger son is in the party, but the older son is sulking outside. The big question, left hanging at the end of the story, is: will the older son join the party? Will he join the family, or remain a slave? It's up to the Pharisees—and to any of us who identify with the older brother—to decide how the story will end.

Taking it home:

- *For you and your family:* Who are your 'tax collectors'? That is, is there a group that, in your heart of hearts, you think is hopeless—or, at least, that they should have to do a lot of proving how sorry they are before God would welcome them? I think this passage is saying that those very people belong to God and are valuable to him. All God wants is for them to be safe at home with him. What would it take for you to be happy to see God celebrating them? Ask God to rescue you from muttering, from envy, and from suspicion. Pray that he would give you what you need to step into the party.
- *For your six:* Pray that your six would increase in their knowledge that they are valuable to God and he misses them.
- *For our city:* Pray for the churches of our city. Pray that the people of our churches would know the joy of being God's children. Ask God to protect us from a spirit of slavery.

Tuesday, April 12th

Luke 16:1-18

1 Jesus told his disciples: "There was a rich man whose manager was accused of wasting his possessions. 2 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.'

3 "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— 4 I know what I'll do so that, when I lose my job here, people will welcome me into their houses.'

5 "So he called in each one of his master's debtors. He asked the first, 'How much do you owe my master?'

6 " 'Nine hundred gallons of olive oil,' he replied.

"The manager told him, 'Take your bill, sit down quickly, and make it four hundred and fifty.'

7 "Then he asked the second, 'And how much do you owe?'

" 'A thousand bushels of wheat,' he replied.

"He told him, 'Take your bill and make it eight hundred.'

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. 9 I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.

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. 11 So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? 12 And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else's property, who will give you property of your own?

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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."

14 The Pharisees, who loved money, heard all this and were sneering at Jesus. 15 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.

16 "The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John. Since that time, the good news of the kingdom of God is being preached, and people are forcing their way into it.

17 It is easier for heaven and earth to disappear than for the least stroke of a pen to drop out of the Law.

18 "Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery, and the man who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

Points of Interest:

- 'Give an account of your management'—basically, the owner is giving the manager two weeks to get the books in order.
- 'people will welcome me into their houses'—apparently, his future job prospects are rather meager. He figures his best chance is to get in good with people. Maybe if he's well-liked or people feel like they owe him a favor, they'll let him stay with them.
- 'sit down quickly, and make it four hundred and fifty'—the 'quickly' part makes it clear that this is his idea, not his master's. Maybe people will even think he got fired for helping them out; a little guilt might increase the chances that they'll take him in.
- 'The master commended the dishonest manager'—any indignation he might feel at being cheated is outweighed by how impressed he is with what the manager pulls off. The master fired the manager because he was wasteful, but—once forced to it—he shows just how resourceful he's capable of being. The manager finally figures out how to turn a temporary resource (his access to his master's books) into a lasting benefit. If the manager had shown this shrewdness previously, the owner probably wouldn't have fired him.
- 'use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves'—this advice might seem a bit calculating. I think that's Jesus' point. We can learn something from this worldly, dishonest manager about how to make the best use of our resources. People are more important than money; so use your money for people's sake. Everyone likes to have money spent on them—just as much as they like their bills to be smaller, rather than larger. Our money won't last forever anyway, and people will. Perhaps if we spend our money on people, they'll remember us fondly, and welcome us into eternity. It's a simple calculation, and everybody wins.
- 'who will give you property of your own?'—Jesus presents things opposite to how I tend to think of them. I think I have my own property now, but everything in the kingdom of God will belong to God. Jesus says that right now everything we have is actually God's, but we have a chance of having something of our own in the kingdom of God. If we show ourselves trustworthy with his property now, he'll give us our own property in his kingdom. It's like we're teenagers who want our own car, but our parents are seeing how well we take care of their car first. Jesus has much bigger things in store for us in his kingdom, if we are ready.
- 'No one can serve two masters'—eventually the two masters will make competing demands, and you'll have to choose which one to obey. The two masters here are

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God and Money. God and Money both offer the same thing—life—but they have contradictory instructions for how to get it. God’s instructions are to spend money on people; we’ve seen that not just in this passage, but throughout Luke’s story (6:30 and 11:41, for example). Money’s instructions might be the exact opposite: use people to gain money—that at least is what John warned people against in his sermon (3:10-14). As Jesus said earlier, ‘Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions’ (Luke 12: 15).

- ‘sneering at Jesus’—the Pharisees seem to think that Jesus is just making pious excuses for why he is poor. He turns it around on them; they follow Money’s instructions, and then try to explain how they are really serving God.
- ‘people are forcing their way into it’—I have a little trouble following Jesus’ train of thought here, but I think his point is that the Pharisees can sneer all they want because there are plenty of other people who are desperate to get into the Kingdom. To use the language of last week’s story of the big party (14: 16-24), Jesus is confident that his house will be full.
- ‘than for the least stroke of a pen to drop out of the Law’—announcing the kingdom of God has replaced preaching the Law and Prophets, but that doesn’t mean that the Law has been made obsolete. Really, it’s just a change of tense. Until John, the message was, ‘Our rescuer will come.’ Since Jesus, the message has become, ‘Our rescuer has come.’ Jesus has come to complete the Law, not overturn it; loving God and loving our neighbors is still the way to find life (10: 27-28). Jesus simply brings new power to make it possible.
- ‘Anyone who divorces his wife’—this feels to me like another rather sudden shift of topic. Perhaps this is an example of how Jesus plans to uphold the Law and the Prophets. In the Law, Moses says very little about divorce. He neither specifically promotes it nor prohibits it, but instead assumes its existence and tries to manage it to avoid the worst abuses, such as spurious claims of adultery as grounds for divorce (Deuteronomy 22:13-19 and Deuteronomy 24: 1-3). In the Prophets, God is a bit more forthright: “‘I hate divorce,’ says the LORD God of Israel, ‘and I hate it when people clothe themselves with injustice’” (Malachi 2:16). What God hates about divorce in Malachi is that it provides an easy way to get rid of your wife (in most ancient culture only the man had power of divorce) when you get tired of her. In other books of the Bible (Matthew, Mark, and I Corinthians), Paul and Jesus himself add a few more details and a bit more nuance regarding divorce, allowing for some situations in which divorce may be an appropriate course of action. Both Jesus and Paul make it quite clear, though, that divorce is never God’s desire for a marriage and that it should only be entered into with extreme caution in rare circumstances. I think Jesus speaks so strongly against divorce because most of the time divorce is antithetical to the picture of relationships he has been trying to form. Jesus has been promoting relationships characterized by forgiveness, mercy, generosity, and servanthood; but divorce is often characterized by bitterness, judging of others, rejection, and selfishness, from at least one party, if not both. Jesus steers us away from divorce because it is a tempting choice, but there’s almost always a better option.

Taking it home:

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- *For you and your family:* This passage makes the startling claim that our relationship to money is one of the most powerful determinants in bringing us closer to or farther from the kingdom of God. Money can be a great tool in making friends that will be there to welcome us into heaven; but money also has a very real chance of drawing us away from God to serve it instead. Pray that God would break any negative spiritual power money has in your life, and ask God to give you shrewdness with money. Pray that God would help you to get the best eternal bang for your buck.
- *For your six:* Pray that your six also would have a godly shrewdness with their money. Pray that God would reward them for the generosity they show, and that their generosity would increase.
- *For our city:* Pray for the marriages of our city. Pray that God would bless marriages with abundance, generosity, forgiveness, blessing, and love. Pray against the power the temptation to blame has to undercut marriages. Pray for a particular outpouring of grace on marriages that are in crisis.

Wednesday, April 13th

Luke 16:19-17:19

19 "There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. 20 At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores 21 and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores.

22 "The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. 23 In Hades, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. 24 So he called to him, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.'

25 "But Abraham replied, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. 26 And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been set in place, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.'

27 "He answered, 'Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my family, 28 for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.'

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

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

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

17:1 Jesus said to his disciples: "Things that cause people to stumble are bound to come, but woe to anyone through whom they come. 2 It would be better for you to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around your neck than for you to cause one of these little ones to stumble. 3 So watch yourselves.

"If a brother or sister sins against you, rebuke them; and if they repent, forgive them. 4 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."

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5 The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith!"

6 He replied, "If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it will obey you.

7 "Suppose one of you has a servant plowing or looking after the sheep. Will he say to the servant when he comes in from the field, 'Come along now and sit down to eat'? 8 Won't he rather say, 'Prepare my supper, get yourself ready and wait on me while I eat and drink; after that you may eat and drink'? 9 Will he thank the servant because he did what he was told to do? 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.' "

11 Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. 12 As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance 13 and called out in a loud voice, "Jesus, Master, have pity on us!"

14 When he saw them, he said, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were cleansed.

15 One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice.

16 He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him—and he was a Samaritan.

17 Jesus asked, "Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? 18 Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" 19 Then he said to him, "Rise and go; your faith has made you well."

Points of Interest:

- 'There was a rich man'—Jesus is still speaking in response to the Pharisees' scoffing about not being able to serve God and Money. In yesterday's passage, Jesus told a story in order to recommend generosity to his disciples. In today's, he tells another story to illustrate to the Pharisees what could happen if you don't choose generosity.
- 'dressed in purple and fine linen'—this man is wearing expensive designer clothes.
- 'a beggar named Lazarus'—in reality, the rich playboy's name would be known and the homeless man would be nameless; but in Jesus' story, we know the beggar's name, but not the rich man's.
- 'carried him to Abraham's side'—this is sort of like our pop culture picture of St. Peter welcoming us at the pearly gates.
- 'send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue'—the formerly rich man has moxie. He yells up from hell to heaven to catch Abraham's attention, and he is bold enough to ask Abraham to send someone—in fact, the very person he's ignored his entire life—down to hell to bring him a drink. I don't think he's gotten completely used to his new station in life.
- 'in your lifetime you received your good things'—this rich man gains the whole world, but loses his soul (9:25). Like the dishonest manager, he's been wasteful with his possessions; he doesn't use them to make friends who would welcome him into eternal dwellings (yesterday's passage). He invites only his friends and relatives to his party, not those in need; so, he's already gotten his reward (14:12-14)
- 'a great chasm has been set in place'—Abraham doesn't say that he won't send Lazarus, but that he can't, because a chasm has been put in the way. He doesn't say exactly who put the chasm there. I think a good argument could be made that it is the rich man himself who dug the chasm—when he built the gate that kept Lazarus out. He erected his own barrier between himself and God's kingdom.

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- ‘They have Moses and the Prophets’—Jesus’ words about the importance of loving others are not new. The writings of Moses and the prophets are full of encouragements to love strangers, promises of God’s reward for those who do, and warnings of trouble for those who do not. The rich man’s relatives cannot reasonably say that they’ve never been warned.
Jesus clearly has the Pharisees in his sights with this comment. Being such experts in the Law, such students of Moses, they should know very well what God expects. They are exceedingly attentive to such things as exact tithing and exact definitions of work, but they overlook the much more important issue of mercy and generosity toward others.
- ‘they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead’—Jesus intrudes a real-life prediction into his story. Being hardened as they are to God’s heart, they will not even be convinced by his resurrection.
- ‘Things that cause people to stumble are bound to come’ —earlier (3:4), Luke described John’s preaching as the work of making a straight path so that the Lord could come to people. Now, we have another image of a clear path. Not only is God making his way to people, but people are also making their way toward God. They’re bound to trip a few times along the way, but that doesn’t make it okay to stick a leg out. Jesus expects his followers to make it easier for people to get to him, not to get in the way. This is in direct contrast to the law experts, who do put barriers in the way of people entering the kingdom of God (11:52).
- ‘thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around your neck’—handcuff a twenty-five pound weight to your hand, take a boat a couple of miles out to sea, then dive into the water and try to swim back to shore: that’s a safer choice than taking advantage of someone who is small or weak. Picking on someone smaller than you might look like something you can get away with, but God will weigh in on the side of the vulnerable one. I take the ‘little ones’ to be people who are just starting out in their journey toward God. Tripping someone is hardly ever as funny as the one sticking his leg out thinks it is, but it would be downright cruel to trip a child who is just learning to walk.
- ‘rebuke them; and if they repent, forgive them’—the disciples don’t need to pretend nothing happened, but they do need to let go of their desire to punish the person who did it.
- ‘Increase our faith’—the disciples recognize that what Jesus is asking, while simple in concept, is very hard to do. I think the faith they need is the faith to believe that they won’t be taken advantage of, that God will also protect them if they let down their guard and forgive.
- ‘we have only done our duty’—this presents an interesting contrast with Jesus’ earlier story about the master who does indeed serve dinner to his servants (12:37). I think that what Jesus is addressing here is an attitude of entitlement. God is indeed like a master who serves his servants. That doesn’t mean, though, that God somehow owes us his service. God serves us out of his generosity, not because we’ve done so much for him that it’s about time he does something for us. I think this image is referring back to the older child from the story of the two sons (Monday’s passage).
- ‘They stood at a distance’—the lepers are respectfully keeping their distance, so that no one else will become sick or ritually unclean.

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- ‘Where are the other nine?’—only the Samaritan returns to thank Jesus. Over the course of Luke’s story, Jesus has mentioned several examples of outsiders who respond to God more enthusiastically than God’s own people: Naaman the Syrian, who was healed of leprosy by Elisha (4:27); the Queen of the South who came to hear Solomon’s wisdom (11:31); even the Roman centurion who showed such great faith in Jesus’ healing power (7:9). Meanwhile, Jesus is able to accomplish less in his hometown than anywhere else (4:24), and many people refuse to listen to John because they rely instead on their relation to Abraham (3:8). Jesus goes so far as to leave his own family waiting outside (8:21) to stress the point that what matters is not some special pre-existing relationship with him, but faith and responsiveness to God’s work.

In Jesus’ day, it was the Jews who might be tempted to rely on the label ‘child of Abraham,’ as an automatic pass into God’s good graces. Today, it’s Christians or churchgoers—maybe even religious people of any kind—who could similarly assume they have some sort of automatic ‘in’ with God. Luke’s story makes it abundantly clear that it doesn’t matter where you come from or what label you wear. No matter who you are, you can find yourself welcomed into God’s party—or left out. It might not be overstating it to say that which way it goes rests almost completely on how grateful you are to receive the invitation.

Taking it home:

- *For you and your family:* Imitate the prayer of the disciples. Ask God to give you more faith. Pray particularly that, by faith, God would increase your ability to forgive others. Pray that God would give you the boldness to speak up when you’ve been wronged, the grace to forgive, and the trust in God that you will not be taken advantage of.
- *For your six:* Are any of your six sick? Pray that God would heal them. If they do get well, pray that they would recognize God’s work in their lives and turn toward him with gratitude.
- *For our city:* Pray for the relationship between the rich and poor of our city. Pray that barriers would be broken down and relationships built. Pray for mutual blessing between the rich and the poor. Ask God to allow our church to play a part in tearing down the barriers between rich and poor. Pray that God would give our church wisdom about how best to serve the Day Laborers that we’re starting a relationship with.

Thursday, April 14th

Luke 17:20-18:14

20 Once, having been 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, 21 nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is in your midst."

22 Then he said to his disciples, "The time is coming when you will long to see one of the days of the Son of Man, but you will not see it. 23 People will tell you, 'There he is!' or 'Here he is!' Do not go running off after them. 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. 25 But first he must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation.

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26 "Just as it was in the days of Noah, so also will it be in the days of the Son of Man. 27 People were eating, drinking, marrying and being given in marriage up to the day Noah entered the ark. Then the flood came and destroyed them all.

28 "It was the same in the days of Lot. People were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building. 29 But the day Lot left Sodom, fire and sulfur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all.

30 "It will be just like this on the day the Son of Man is revealed. 31 On that day no one who is on the housetop, with possessions inside, should go down to get them. Likewise, no one in the field should go back for anything. 32 Remember Lot's wife! 33 Whoever tries to keep their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life will preserve it. 34 I tell you, on that night two people will be in one bed; one will be taken and the other left. 35-36 Two women will be grinding grain together; one will be taken and the other left."

37 "Where, Lord?" they asked.

He replied, "Where there is a dead body, there the vultures will gather."

18:1 Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. 2 He said: "In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared what people thought. 3 And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, 'Grant me justice against my adversary.'

4 "For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, 'Even though I don't fear God or care what people think, 5 yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually come and attack me!' "

6 And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. 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? 8 I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?"

9 To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable: 10 "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11 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. 12 I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.'

13 "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.'

14 "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."

Points of Interest:

- 'flashes and lights up the sky from one end to the other'—this is another interesting already/not yet moment regarding the kingdom of God. The Pharisees ask, 'When will the kingdom of God come?' and Jesus answers, 'It's already here, but you don't even see it, because it's not a flashy thing.' Then he turns to his disciples and says, 'When my kingdom comes, you'll know it; it'll be as obvious as the biggest fireworks display ever!' Perhaps it's not even worth looking for the complete Technicolor version of Jesus' kingdom unless you first appreciate its subtler form.
- 'you will long to see one of the days of the Son of Man'—the full inauguration of the kingdom will take longer than the disciples expect—almost longer than they can bear.

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- ‘People were eating and drinking, buying and selling’—in other words, ordinary life was going on as usual. The arrival in full of Jesus’ kingdom will be a surprise; the day will start out like any other, and then the kingdom will break in suddenly and without warning.
- ‘Remember Lot’s wife!’—before destroying Sodom and Gomorrah, God warned Abraham’s nephew Lot and his family to escape. As they were running away, Lot’s wife turned back in regret, and she turned into a pillar of salt (Genesis 19:13). For a kingdom typified by good news for the poor, freedom for prisoners, healing for the sick, and life for the dead, the culmination of Jesus’ kingdom is oddly violent. It sounds a lot like a worldwide cataclysm: it will be like a lightning flash that fills the sky; it will be sudden and massively destructive like Noah’s flood or the fire that fell from heaven on Sodom and Gomorrah. It brings new perspective to Jesus saying, ‘I have come to bring fire on the earth’ (12:49). Apparently, the kingdom will not arrive without a struggle. There will be one last fight between Jesus and the strong man Satan (11:21-23) for final control.

This final unveiling of Jesus and his kingdom makes me think of a nuclear bomb: sudden and immediate destruction. Yet, Jesus also seems to indicate that someone can escape if they act quickly and without hesitation. Doom is not certain.

- ‘whoever loses their life will preserve it’—whatever mode of escape Jesus has in mind, it will look more like going into danger than getting out of it. It’s notable that Jesus makes special mention of leaving behind possessions. This moment is the ultimate test of whether God or Money is the master: Wealth says, ‘Come back for me; you’ll need me later’; but God says, ‘Run now and don’t look back.’
- ‘Where there is a dead body, there the vultures will gather’—to me, this is the most inscrutable sentence in the entire book of Luke. Today’s whole passage is a bit difficult to understand, but the rest of it is simple compared to this. I hesitate to even guess what it means, but here goes nothing:

A dead body, lying on the ground, is difficult to see; but vultures, circling in the air, are easy to spot. So, if you want to find a dead body, look for vultures. The vultures will lead you to the body. Likewise, the coming of the Son of Man will be hard to spot directly; but there will be signs that point you in the right direction.

The big problem with my interpretation is that, as far as I can tell, Jesus doesn’t tell us here what signs to be looking for.

- ‘yet because this widow keeps bothering me’—the judge eventually decides that it’s easier to grant the woman’s request than not. If the widow can outlast the corrupt and callous judge, it is certainly worth it for us to keep praying to God, who is a good father who wants to answer our prayers.
- ‘Will he keep putting them off?’—if God is so eager to answer our prayers, why is persistence necessary? Why would he put us off at all? I wonder if the answer has anything to do with the story about the fruitless fig tree (13:7). In this story of the widow and the unjust judge, Jesus is specifically talking about never giving up in praying for him to come again to set everything right. The story of the fruitless fig tree, on the other hand, is about God’s willingness to give us every possible chance to make the most of our lives. Perhaps God’s eagerness to answer our prayers for his

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kingdom to come is balanced by his desire to allow us to achieve maximum possible fruitfulness before it does.

- ‘I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get’—it’s really more of a boast than a prayer.
- ‘those who humble themselves will be exalted’—both people get exactly what they ask for. The Pharisee doesn’t think he needs anything; so he asks for nothing, and gets it. The tax collector asks for mercy, and he gets it.

Taking it home:

- *For you and your family:* Pray that God would rescue you from the temptation to think of yourself as better than others. Particularly if you are a part of a close family, pray that God would give you the grace to enjoy what’s special about your family without looking down on others.
- *For your six:* Ask God to loosen any attachment your six might have to their possessions. This passage tells us that the ability to leave behind our possessions without hesitation might very well prove crucial to saving our lives and bringing us into God’s kingdom.
- *For our city:* Jesus seems to think it is really an open question whether or not he will find people patiently and faithfully expecting him when he brings his kingdom. Pray that God will come to Williamsburg and New York, and that when he comes he will find faith here.

Friday, April 15th

Luke 18:15-43

15 People were also bringing babies to Jesus for him to place his hands on them. When the disciples saw this, they rebuked them. 16 But Jesus called the children to him and said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. 17 Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it."

18 A certain ruler asked him, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

19 "Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good—except God alone. 20 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.'"

21 "All these I have kept since I was a boy," he said.

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."

23 When he heard this, he became very sad, because he was very wealthy. 24 Jesus looked at him and said, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God! 25 Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for the rich to enter the kingdom of God."

26 Those who heard this asked, "Who then can be saved?"

27 Jesus replied, "What is impossible with human beings is possible with God."

28 Peter said to him, "We have left all we had to follow you!"

29 "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 30 will fail to receive many times as much in this age, and in the age to come eternal life."

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31 Jesus took the Twelve aside and told them, "We are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written by the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled. 32 He will be delivered over to the Gentiles. They will mock him, insult him and spit on him; 33 they will flog him and kill him. On the third day he will rise again."

34 The disciples did not understand any of this. Its meaning was hidden from them, and they did not know what he was talking about.

35 As Jesus approached Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging. 36 When he heard the crowd going by, he asked what was happening. 37 They told him, "Jesus of Nazareth is passing by."

38 He called out, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

39 Those who led the way rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!"

40 Jesus stopped and ordered the man to be brought to him. When he came near, Jesus asked him, 41 "What do you want me to do for you?"

"Lord, I want to see," he replied.

42 Jesus said to him, "Receive your sight; your faith has healed you." 43 Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus, praising God. When all the people saw it, they also praised God.

Points of Interest:

- 'anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it'—rather than stopping the children, they should learn something from them. These children know something that adults tend to forget about how to receive a gift. I can't help but think of the story of the two lost sons, who try to receive their inheritance like slaves rather than like children. How exactly do little children receive gifts? A couple of things I've noticed that might be relevant here are that children are shameless and they're trusting. Children don't spend too much time worrying about whether they are worthy of a gift or whether they've earned it; if they like it, they take it, gleefully. They also don't tend to be suspicious of the giver; they don't look for tricks or catches, but take the gift at face value.
- 'Let the little children come to me'—earlier, Jesus told the disciples that the way to be the greatest was to welcome a little child (9:46-48). He doesn't want to pass up this opportunity for greatness. The disciples still have something to learn about greatness.
- 'what must I do to inherit eternal life?'—this is the exact same question as the expert in the law asked earlier (10: 25). Now, though, in light of receiving the kingdom like a child, the question strikes me as a little odd. It occurs to me that you usually don't do anything for an inheritance; if you're the child of the person who owns it, it's simply given to you.
- 'Why do you call me good?'—I think Jesus objects to being called good because he suspects that the man is saying it flippantly, not because he thinks it doesn't apply.
- 'You know the commandments'—just like he did with the legal expert, Jesus refers the man to the Law. In fact, Jesus quotes the Ten Commandments—or, rather, five of the Ten Commandments. The Ten Commandments are the famous summary of the Law given by God to Moses on two stone tablets. Five of the commandments had to do with relating to God and five of them with relating to one another. It's often

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imagined that each set of five had its own tablet: a God tablet and a neighbor tablet. [Incidentally, the two commandments the law expert recited to Jesus (10:27)—love God and love your neighbor—serve as pretty good encapsulations of the two tablets]. The five commandments Jesus quotes here are from the second tablet, the neighbor tablet.

- ‘All these I have kept since I was a boy’—this man is far ahead of the Pharisees and teachers of the law. Most of the Pharisees and teachers focused on the minutia of the Law, rather than its heart. Our expert from chapter 10 focused on the essence of the Law, but he resisted doing it. This ruler both recognized what was important and did it. He’s actually well on his way to eternal life. As Jesus told the legal expert: ‘Do this, and you will live’ (10:28).
- ‘You still lack one thing’—he’s not all the way there, though. Perhaps what he’s missing is the first tablet. He’s missing a loving relationship with God. To inherit eternal life, you have to be a child of the one who owns eternal life.
- ‘Sell everything you have’—‘You cannot serve both God and Money’ (16:13). Jesus is calling him to separate himself totally from money and put his trust completely in God instead.
- ‘he became very sad’—‘Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also’ (12:34). We don’t know what the man ultimately chooses, but it’s clear that at this point wealth has at least some of his heart. His money makes it harder for him to truly choose God.
- ‘Who then can be saved?’—it might be that they assume that rich people are more loved by God, or it might be that they are impressed by how faithful this ruler is and are dismayed that even he can’t quite make it. Thankfully, we’re not reliant upon our own efforts, but on the favor of a very powerful God.
- ‘many times as much in this age, and in the age to come eternal life’—‘Give, and it will be given to you’ (6:38). When we give to others, God gives to us; and he gives much better gifts than we do. The Twelve and the Seventy-Two have already gotten glimpses of how this supernatural life of abundance works. They were each sent out with absolutely nothing, but everywhere they went they had a place to stay and food to eat (9:1-9, 10:1-24).
- ‘The disciples did not understand any of this’—Jesus keeps sowing this seed, but so far it hasn’t ever taken root. Though hearing, they don’t understand (8:10).
- ‘rebuked him and told him to be quiet’—they rebuke this blind man, just like the disciples rebuked the children. This reminds me of Jesus’ warning about causing little ones to stumble on their way to him (17:2). The blind man does not let himself be stopped, though. He’s persistent in asking, and his request is heard.
- ‘received his sight and followed Jesus, praising God’—this blind man knows how to accept a gift.

Taking it home:

- *For you and your family:* Pray that God would increase your ability to love him and to love your neighbors. Are you better at one of them than the other? Maybe you could ask your family members, housemates, or friends which one they see best in you. Thank God for your strength in that area, and then ask him for help in

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strengthening your weak hand. Look for opportunities today to practice the one you're weaker at.

- *For your six:* Pray that your six would increase in their childlikeness. Pray particularly that they would be good gift-receivers.
- *For our city:* Today, bring the children of our city to God in prayer. Ask God to bless our children and give them good gifts.

Saturday, April 16th (Service Project Day!!)

Luke 19:1-27

1 Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. 2 A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. 3 He wanted to see who Jesus was, but because he was short he could not see over the crowd. 4 So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way.

5 When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today." 6 So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly.

7 All the people saw this and began to mutter, "He has gone to be the guest of a sinner."

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."

9 Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. 10 For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost."

11 While they were listening to this, he went on to tell them a parable, because he was near Jerusalem and the people thought that the kingdom of God was going to appear at once. 12 He said: "A man of noble birth went to a distant country to have himself appointed king and then to return. 13 So he called ten of his servants and gave them ten minas. 'Put this money to work,' he said, 'until I come back.'

14 "But his subjects hated him and sent a delegation after him to say, 'We don't want this man to be our king.'

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.

16 "The first one came and said, 'Sir, your mina has earned ten more.'

17 " 'Well done, my good servant!' his master replied. 'Because you have been trustworthy in a very small matter, take charge of ten cities.'

18 "The second came and said, 'Sir, your mina has earned five more.'

19 "His master answered, 'You take charge of five cities.'

20 "Then another servant came and said, 'Sir, here is your mina; I have kept it laid away in a piece of cloth. 21 I was afraid of you, because you are a hard man. You take out what you did not put in and reap what you did not sow.'

22 "His master replied, 'I will judge you by your own words, you wicked servant! You knew, did you, that I am a hard man, taking out what I did not put in, and reaping what I did not sow? 23 Why then didn't you put my money on deposit, so that when I came back, I could have collected it with interest?'

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

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25 " 'Sir,' they said, 'he already has ten!'

26 "He replied, 'I tell you that to everyone who has, more will be given, but as for those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. 27 But those enemies of mine who did not want me to be king over them—bring them here and kill them in front of me.'"

Points of Interest:

- 'he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy'—if tax collectors are like gangsters, Zacchaeus is a mob boss.
- 'Zacchaeus, come down'—this is apparently the first time they've ever met, but Jesus knows Zacchaeus' name. He is noticed, known, and welcomed.
- 'I must stay at your house today'—the 'must' reminds me of the father of the lost son saying, 'we had to celebrate . . . '(15:32). Another lost son has been found. When something lost is found, you can't help but throw a party.
- 'All the people saw this and began to mutter'—this time it's not just the Pharisees and teachers, but all the people, who mutter. Perhaps Zacchaeus is so notorious that it's a bigger scandal than before, or maybe Judeans are more sensitive to this kind of impropriety than Galileans.
- 'Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor'—Zacchaeus recognizes his need to repent. He recalibrates himself from serving Money to serving God. It's interesting to me that Zacchaeus understands immediately that following Jesus calls for a radically different approach to money. Somehow, money seems to have a lot less of a grip on this chief tax collector than it does on the Pharisees or even on the rich ruler from yesterday's passage.
- 'if I have cheated anybody'—it's unlikely that he would have gotten as rich as he has without cheating. So, it's frankly surprising to me that he would even have enough money left to pay people back fourfold, seeing as he's already promised to give away half of his wealth. I may be wrong, but I don't think Zacchaeus will have much money left by the time he's done. Zacchaeus is simultaneously plea bargaining with his adversaries before he gets to the judge (12:58) and making friends who will welcome him into eternal dwellings (16:9). He knows how to be shrewd with worldly wealth.
- 'people thought that the kingdom of God was going to appear at once'—Jesus has been making his way very deliberately toward Jerusalem for quite some time now; and Jerusalem, being David's capital, would be the natural capital for the Messiah as well. So, people have gained the reasonable impression that Jerusalem is the finish line: as soon as he gets there, Jesus will unveil the kingdom of God. While it is, to a great degree, the climax of Jesus' earthly career, it's really only the beginning for his followers. It will be a while before the kingdom of God is fully established, and the disciples have a lot of work to do in the meantime.
- 'went to a distant country to have himself appointed king'—this story is 'ripped from the headlines.' The kings of Roman satellite kingdoms would have to have their kingships confirmed by Rome. Just like in this story, Herod Archelaus—the brother of the Herod who arrested John—had to travel to Rome to have his authority confirmed, and he had a delegation sent to contest his rule. Jesus too is going away—to heaven—to have his kingship confirmed by God.

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- ‘gave them ten minas’—this would be about three months’ wages for an average laborer—let’s call it in the neighborhood of eight or ten thousand dollars. It would probably seem like quite a substantial amount to the servants, but would only represent a very small proportion of the nobleman’s wealth.
- ‘your mina has earned ten more’—this first servant makes a thousand percent return on his investment. These are amazing, unreal profits. He certainly does put the money to work.
- ‘take charge of ten cities’—the ten minas were just a test. The nobleman was about to become a king, and he wanted to know who he could trust to help him rule his kingdom: ‘Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much’ (16:10).

This story presents us with the amazing idea that this entire life is just a test. Jesus is going away to be made a king. Everything we have is something Jesus has given us to put to work until he returns. In the next life, Jesus will give us authority in his kingdom proportional to the profits we are able to make for him in this one. Life as we know it is just the practice round. Eternal life in the kingdom of God is the real thing. But that doesn’t mean that this life doesn’t matter: how we do in practice has a big effect on what position we play in the big game—or whether we get to play at all.

- ‘I have kept it laid away in a piece of cloth’—he was told to put the money to work, but instead he wraps it up and keeps it in a safe place. This third servant is not at all a shrewd manager. He tries to play it safe, seemingly because he’s afraid of what the nobleman would do to him if he lost the money. By setting his sights on not losing the money, he completely wastes it. I get the feeling that the nobleman would have been far more pleased with a servant who invested the money and lost it than with someone who didn’t even try. In fact, I don’t think it’s incidental that in the way Jesus tells the story, no one who actually tries to put the money to work loses money; to try is to win.
- ‘You knew, did you, that I am a hard man’—actually, he doesn’t seem like a hard man at all. He gives the servants his own money to invest, and then he lets them keep the profits—besides giving them charge over cities. That’s the exact opposite of taking out what you did not put in. The king is pointing out, though, that the third servant’s actions aren’t even consistent with his own mistaken ideas of the king: if the king expects to reap where he didn’t sow, why wouldn’t the servant at least have invested the mina in the bank, where it would be utterly safe and yet make interest? Either the third servant is exceedingly fearful, or he’s lazy, or he is ashamed to be associated with the nobleman because some of the citizens don’t want him to be king.
- ‘he already has ten’—letting the third servant keep the mina would do no good to anyone. It would only serve to cause the third servant more worry, without bringing anyone any profit. Meanwhile, the first servant has shown that he is willing and able to put the mina to good use. Why wouldn’t the king put the mina into his hands?
- ‘bring them here and kill them in front of me’—they’ve made it clear that they don’t want him to be king, but his kingship is inevitable. This is the only way to give them what they want.

Taking it home:

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- *For you and your family:* Pray that God would give you the boldness and savvy of the first two servants. Ask God to help you do good business with what he's given you, and pray for good eternal profits from your investments.
- *For your six:* Pray that the Holy Spirit would be at work in the consciences of your six. Pray that God would be guiding them toward areas of their life that need recalibration, and that he would give them the willingness and the ability to make the necessary course corrections. Pray that God would give them joy as they make those choices.
- *For our city:* Pray for God's mercy on our city. Pray that North Brooklyn and New York would be places that welcome Jesus' kingship, rather than resisting it.

Sunday, April 17th

Luke 19:28-47

28 After Jesus had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. 29 As he approached Bethphage and Bethany at the hill called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples, saying to them, 30 "Go to the village ahead of you, and as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. 31 If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' say, 'The Lord needs it.' "

32 Those who were sent ahead went and found it just as he had told them. 33 As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, "Why are you untying the colt?"

34 They replied, "The Lord needs it."

35 They brought it to Jesus, threw their cloaks on the colt and put Jesus on it. 36 As he went along, people spread their cloaks on the road.

37 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:

38 "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!"

"Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!"

39 Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples!"

40 "I tell you," he replied, "if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out."

41 As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it 42 and said, "If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes. 43 The days will come on you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. 44 They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you."

45 When Jesus entered the temple courts, he began to drive out those who were selling.

46 "It is written," he said to them, " 'My house will be a house of prayer'; but you have made it 'a den of robbers.' "

47 Every day he was teaching at the temple. But the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the leaders among the people were trying to kill him. 48 Yet they could not find any way to do it, because all the people hung on his words.

Points of Interest:

- 'Bethphage and Bethany'—these are the suburbs of Jerusalem. Jesus has finally made it to his destination.

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- ‘you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden’—just like the story of Jesus’ birth, the story of his death is dense with allusion to Old Testament prophecy. We find this colt in the prophecy of Zechariah:

Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion!

Shout, Daughter Jerusalem!

See, your king comes to you,

righteous and having salvation

lowly and riding on a donkey

on a colt, the foal of a donkey (Zechariah 9:9)

During war, a king would ride a horse. The fact that Jesus comes on a donkey symbolizes either that he is coming in peace or that he has already won the war.

- ‘people spread their cloaks on the road’—practically, this would reduce the amount of dust thrown up as they travel over the dirt road. Symbolically, it communicates that even the hooves of Jesus’ donkey are too precious to touch the road. Only the very most wealthy and important people would have carpets. The people make a carpet for Jesus out of their coats, and they even let his donkey walk on it.
- ‘Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!’—this is from Psalm 118 (verse 26). They are welcoming Jesus as God’s representative. In fact, caught up in the exuberance of the moment, they may be calling Jesus God himself:
You are my God, and I will praise you;
you are my God, and I will exalt you.
Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;
his love endures forever (Psalm 118:28-29).
- ‘Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!’—this is not just a great day for Jerusalem. It has heavenly significance.
- ‘rebuke your disciples!’—the disciples are either welcoming Jesus as a conquering hero (which would be unpopular with the Romans) or worshipping him (which would be blasphemous in the eyes of the Pharisees). It’s inappropriate and should be stopped—unless Jesus is a conquering hero, God, or both. Jesus responds that to stop the disciples would do no good. This is a situation that so much calls for praise that if the disciples were to be quiet, inanimate objects would start to speak.
- ‘he wept over it’—Jesus is about to be killed in Jerusalem, but he looks on Jerusalem with pity and compassion, rather than anger. His mind isn’t on his own death, but on the destruction of Jerusalem, which he foresees. Jerusalem will be destroyed in a war between the Jews and the Romans in 70 AD—about 40 years after Jesus’ death, and maybe 10 years after Luke’s writing. We’ll talk more about the impending destruction of Jerusalem next week.
- ‘My house will be a house of prayer’—Jesus refers here to Isaiah 56:7: ‘for my house will be called/a house of prayer for all nations.’ What Jesus expects to see when he gets to the temple is prayer, but instead he finds shopping. The temple was always intended to be a place where people from all around the world would come to find God and have their prayers answered (2 Chronicles 6:32-34), but it’s fallen far short of its promise. The temple was a series of ever smaller and more restrictive courts; the largest court was the Court of the Nations, where all people were welcome; inside of that was the Court of Women, where all Jews were welcome; inside of that was the Court of Israel, for Jewish men; and inside of that were the Holy Place and the

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Holiest Place, where only priests could go. These merchants probably set up shop in the Court of Nations, meaning that the only place non-Jews were allowed to go had basically become a store instead of a place of worship.

Not only were non-Jews being robbed of a place to pray, but Jews were being robbed of money. What was being sold in the temple courts were animals for temple sacrifices. This started as a service to people who had traveled from far away, to make it easier for them to make their sacrifices. But the temple merchants were given monopolies, and thus charged exorbitant prices, sort of like for hot dogs at the ballpark. Thus, what was meant to be a house of prayer had become ‘a den of robbers’ (another quote from a prophet, Jeremiah 7:11).

- ‘the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the leaders among the people’—we’ve seen the teachers of the law before, but the chief priests are fairly new to our story. The chief priests are in charge of the temple, as the teachers of the law are in charge of the synagogues. Thus, between them, they control the two major institutions of Jewish society and religion. We’ve seen already the numerous run-ins between Jesus and the teachers over how to interpret the Law. Now, he has stepped on the toes—and cut into the profits—of the chief priests by driving the merchants out of the temple. So, the chief priests and the teachers join together to try to get rid of Jesus. For the time being, though, they’re daunted by Jesus’ overwhelming popularity.

Taking it home:

- *For you and your family:* Today, for Palm Sunday (John mentions that the crowds wave palm branches as they sing), push the limits of the exuberance of your worship. Particularly if you tend to be a bit more staid, step out and do something which might feel appropriate to you, but which you typically shy away from due to the fear of what onlookers might think.
- *For your six:* Pray that your six would find a hospitable place to meet with God. Consider inviting them to church for Easter Sunday, and pray that they would accept the invitation. Pray that, if they do come, our church would be a place where they feel like they belong and where they are able to connect with God.
- *For our city:* Today begins Holy Week, the week between Palm Sunday and Easter. Ask God that during this week, there would be a buzz about Jesus in our city. Pray that the usual greater attention Jesus gets would create opportunities for more people to hear his words and be drawn to him.

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Week 6

Monday, April 18th

Luke 20:1-26

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. 2 "Tell us by what authority you are doing these things," they said. "Who gave you this authority?"

3 He replied, "I will also ask you a question. Tell me, 4 John's baptism—was it from heaven, or of human origin?"

5 They discussed it among themselves and said, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will ask, 'Why didn't you believe him?' 6 But if we say, 'Of human origin,' all the people will stone us, because they are persuaded that John was a prophet."

7 So they answered, "We don't know where it was from."

8 Jesus said, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things."

9 He went on to tell the people this parable: "A man planted a vineyard, rented it to some farmers and went away for a long time. 10 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. 11 He sent another servant, but that one also they beat and treated shamefully and sent away empty-handed. 12 He sent still a third, and they wounded him and threw him out.

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

14 "But when the tenants saw him, they talked the matter over. 'This is the heir,' they said. 'Let's kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.' 15 So they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.

"What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them? 16 He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others."

When the people heard this, they said, "God forbid!"

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'?"

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

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

20 Keeping a close watch on him, they sent spies, who pretended to be sincere. They hoped to catch Jesus in something he said so that they might hand him over to the power and authority of the governor. 21 So the spies questioned him: "Teacher, we know that you speak and teach what is right, and that you do not show partiality but teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. 22 Is it right for us to pay taxes to Caesar or not?"

23 He saw through their duplicity and said to them, 24 "Show me a denarius. Whose image and inscription are on it?"

"Caesar's," they replied.

25 He said to them, "Then give back to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's."

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26 They were unable to trap him in what he had said there in public. And astonished by his answer, they became silent.

Points of Interest:

- ‘together with the elders’—the elders were members of the Jewish aristocracy who were neither priests nor teachers of the law (*Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* 201).
- ‘by what authority you are doing these things?’—‘these things’ to which they refer are the throwing out of the merchants in yesterday’s passage. The Temple was the jurisdiction of the chief priests, and they certainly didn’t give Jesus permission to get rid of the temple merchants—the temple merchants were their idea. So, to them it’s clear that Jesus is acting without any authority.
- ‘I will also ask you a question’—before answering where he gets his authority, he demonstrates that he does indeed have authority; he tells them that they have to answer his question before he’ll answer theirs, and they do.
- ‘John’s baptism—was it from heaven, or of human origin?’—I think Jesus is essentially saying, ‘You can figure out the answer to your own question.’ His authority comes from the same place as John’s: if John was sent by God, so is Jesus; if John was simply acting on his own, so is Jesus.
- ‘We don’t know where it was from’—this is both a bald-faced lie and entirely accurate. It’s a lie, because it’s not as if they don’t have an opinion: if they were to be honest, they would say that John’s authority was human. So, by saying they don’t know, they’re lying to avoid saying something that they know will be unpopular. But, by giving this answer, they’re ironically saying something that’s doubly true:
 1. First of all, they really don’t know where John came from, because they don’t even bother trying to figure it out. They don’t even think about the truth of the matter, instead thinking only about the political implications of their possible answers;
 2. Secondly, if they were to give their answer, they’d be wrong. They really don’t know where John was from, because they think he came from humans but he really came from heaven.
- ‘Neither will I tell you’—Jesus sees through their avoidance; it’s not that they can’t answer but that they won’t. Since they refuse to answer him, he refuses to answer them as well. Their unwillingness to recognize John leads to an inability to see Jesus for who he is.
- ‘He went on to tell the people this parable’—while he won’t plainly answer their question, he does tell a story that gives his answer. Earlier (8:10), Jesus said that he was willing to explain himself to those who truly listen to him, ‘but to others I speak in parables.’
- ‘A man planted a vineyard’—Jesus is using a story from Isaiah (Isaiah 5:1-7) as the basis for his own story. Isaiah’s story ends like this:

The vineyard of the LORD Almighty
is the house of Israel,
and the people of Judah
are the vines he delighted in.
And he looked for justice, but saw bloodshed;

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for righteousness, but heard cries of distress (Isaiah 5:7).

This vineyard to whom Jesus is referring is Israel, or Judah, and God is the builder and owner of that vineyard. Jesus adds a new set of characters—the tenants—to Isaiah's story. The chief priests, teachers, and elders are the tenants.

- 'he sent a servant'—another new set of characters: John and the other prophets.
- 'so they would give him some of the fruit of the vineyard'—they're sent to collect the rent, but the tenants have forgotten that they are renters and have begun to think of the vineyard as their own. They send the owner's representatives away (or in some cases kill them) as if they are beggars or thieves.
- 'I will send my son, whom I love'—this is an echo of God the Father's words about Jesus at Jesus' baptism (3:22). It's the answer to the priests' question regarding Jesus' authority. Jesus is God's Son, sent by him, with his authority. It's the priests, teachers, and elders who are usurping their authority: they are pretending that what belongs to God—the temple, and even more importantly the people who worship at the temple—belongs to them.
- 'The stone the builders rejected'—this is Psalm 118:22. It's the same psalm from which the people were singing, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD,' in yesterday's passage. It's a song of thanks for God's rescue. However, it seems that this rescuer is not immediately recognized. The cornerstone of a building is the first stone laid in the foundation, the stone upon which all of the other stones is built. In the metaphor Jesus quotes, one set of builders rejects a stone as altogether unsuitable, but another builder uses that same stone as the cornerstone. God will build something completely new—a Savior, a rescuer—out of what the chief priests, teachers, and elders throw out.

Ever since chapter 9, Jesus has insisted that he must go to Jerusalem to be rejected and killed, but he hasn't given very much explanation as to why. Here is at least part of the answer. Jesus is going to prove definitively that God sees things differently from the people of this world. In the next few days, all of the worldly leaders—secular and religious, Jewish and non-Jewish—will agree to get rid of Jesus. But what they throw out as garbage is what God most values: God will pick Jesus out of the garbage, clean him up, and display him as his greatest treasure.

- 'Is it right for us to pay taxes to Caesar or not?'—the chief priests and teachers think that they've come up with a trap for Jesus similar to the one he set for them about John. If Jesus says they should pay taxes, he would not only be pro-tax—and every politician knows how deadly that is to a political career—but pro-Roman (the Romans were unpopular *foreign* rulers). But if he speaks against taxes, he'd be considered a dangerous revolutionary by the Romans.
- 'Then give back to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's'—Jesus looks at a coin and says, 'Well, it seems to have Caesar's name and picture on it; so, I guess it must belong to him. We should give it back.' Even though it's pro-tax, it's logic that's hard to argue with. Jesus answers their question forthrightly, but in a way that completely avoids making any political statements, either for or against Rome. I think he's able to do so because money doesn't have a hold on him ('life does not consist in an abundance of possessions' (12:15)). It doesn't really matter to him how much money Caesar gets, and it doesn't need to matter to anyone else, either: 'Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life . . . For the pagan world runs after

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all such things, and your Father knows that you need them' (12:22,30). They could give Caesar every single coin that has his name on it without worrying, because God is faithful to provide for them.

What is very important to Jesus is that God gets what belongs to him. Going back to Jesus' story, the owner deserves his fruit. Jesus knows that the coins belong to Caesar because his picture is on them. Thus, whatever bears God's picture belongs to him. By this argument, it's people who belong to God: in the story of creation, God says, 'Let us make human beings in our image, in our likeness . . . '(Genesis 1:26). Just like the tenants in the story are holding back what belongs to the vineyard owner, the chief priests are holding back what belongs to God: by crowding the other nations out of the temple and cheating Jews who need animals for sacrifice, the chief priests are robbing the people of the chance to worship and robbing God of their worship. Even worse, they're robbing God of these people's worship in order to gain money for themselves.

Taking it home:

- *For you and your family:* The tenants in the vineyard start off just wanting to hold back a little fruit from the owner, but they end up killing his son. I think greed often starts small, but grows quickly out of control. Pray that God would protect you from greed. Ask God to point out any small entrance points for greed in your life, and ask him to give you the strength to refuse to give in to it. Ask God to forgive you for any ways you've already given in.
- *For your six:* Pray that God would remove any barriers to your six seeing or believing truth—whether it be truth about themselves, about God, or about something else. Also pray that the truth, when they do see it and embrace it, would be of great benefit in their lives. Particularly ask God to give them the boldness to accept truths that might be difficult for them to admit.
- *For our city:* The chief priests and the teachers had influential positions, which they could use to do a lot of good for people. Many of them probably started out in their public careers with the best intentions. However, over time, their priorities had shifted away from the good of the people and toward maintaining their own power. It seems to be all too common a temptation for people in powerful public service positions. Pray for our politicians, that they would be strengthened against this temptation and that they would be blessed with public-spiritedness in their decision-making.

Tuesday, April 19th

Luke 20:27-21:4

27 Some of the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to Jesus with a question. 28 "Teacher," they said, "Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies and leaves a wife but no children, the man must marry the widow and raise up offspring for his brother. 29 Now there were seven brothers. The first one married a woman and died childless. 30 The second 31 and then the third married her, and in the same way the seven died, leaving no children. 32 Finally, the woman died too. 33 Now then, at the resurrection whose wife will she be, since the seven were married to her?"

34 Jesus replied, "The people of this age marry and are given in marriage. 35 But those who are considered worthy of taking part in the age to come and in the resurrection from

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the dead will neither marry nor be given in marriage, 36 and they can no longer die; for they are like the angels. They are God's children, since they are children of the resurrection. 37 But in the account of the burning bush, even Moses showed that the dead rise, for he calls the Lord 'the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.' 38 He is not the God of the dead, but of the living, for to him all are alive."

39 Some of the teachers of the law responded, "Well said, teacher!" 40 And no one dared to ask him any more questions.

41 Then Jesus said to them, "Why is it said that the Messiah is the son of David? 42 David himself declares in the Book of Psalms:

"The Lord said to my Lord:

"Sit at my right hand

43 until I make your enemies

a footstool for your feet."

44 David calls him 'Lord.' How then can he be his son?"

45 While all the people were listening, Jesus said to his disciples, 46 "Beware of the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in flowing robes and love to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces and have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at banquets. 47 They devour widows' houses and for a show make lengthy prayers. These men will be punished most severely."

21:1 As Jesus looked up, he saw the rich putting their gifts into the temple treasury. 2 He also saw a poor widow put in two very small copper coins. 3 "Truly I tell you," he said, "this poor widow has put in more than all the others. 4 All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on."

Points of Interest:

- 'Some of the Sadducees'—the Pharisees have become familiar to us. The Sadducees were the other major religious/political party among the Jews in Roman Palestine. The Sadducees were more conservative than the Pharisees in some ways, but less traditional in others. For instance, they recognized the authority only of the Law—the five books of Moses, which were the oldest parts of the Jewish scriptures—not of the Prophets; but they were also significantly influenced by Greek culture and philosophy. Whereas the Pharisees were of the prosperous middle class and dominated among the teachers in the synagogue, the Sadducees were upper class and dominated among the priests at the Temple. The Pharisees were more numerous, but the Sadducees held the more powerful positions.
- 'who say there is no resurrection'—the Pharisees believed in life after death, but the Sadducees did not. It's the perfect intersection of their scriptural conservatism (the books of Moses are a bit sketchy on what happens after death) and their urbanity (contemporary Greek philosophy focused on the material world).
- 'man must marry the widow and raise up offspring'—this law (found in Deuteronomy 25:5-10) was meant to insure that widows could be adequately taken care of—largely through having children who would look after them in their old age—without land, which was the major wealth of each family, passing out of the hands of the family.
- 'since the seven were married to her'—three different husbands would have made the point. But the Sadducees exaggerate to make the situation as ridiculous as possible.

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This problem may have been one of the Sadducees' best 'stumpers' in their frequent arguments with the Pharisees.

- 'those who are considered worthy'—Jesus begins by saying that not everyone gets to enjoy life after death. It's a great privilege. It should neither be assumed as a right nor dismissed as unimportant.
- 'will neither marry nor be given in marriage'—the Sadducees seemingly airtight proof against life after death relies on the fundamentally flawed assumption that the next life is just like this one. According to Jesus, the next life operates by different rules. To me, Jesus' viewpoint makes a lot more sense: what would be the point of an eternal life that's exactly like this one?
- 'they are like the angels'—a little dig at the Sadducees, who—despite plentiful evidence in the books of Moses—also did not believe in angels (*New Bible Commentary* 1012. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994).
- 'But in the account of the burning bush'—this is one of the most famous stories from the books of Moses. It's when God called Moses to rescue the Israelites from their captivity in Egypt (Exodus 3). Jesus is proving life after death from the scriptures accepted by the Sadducees. Moreover, by using such a well-known passage, he's saying that proof of the resurrection has been right under their noses the whole time. It's almost humiliatingly obvious.
- 'He is not the God of the dead, but of the living'—God mentions Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as character references for himself: 'Just ask Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They'll vouch for me.' He wouldn't be a very good God if his best references were decaying corpses. To say that God is the god of the dead would be to say that he is powerless.

Greek mythology might provide us with another viewpoint on Jesus' argument here. In Greek mythology, three brother gods—Zeus, Poseidon, and Hades—drew lots to decide who would rule heaven, who would rule the seas, and who would rule the dead; the loser, Hades, ended up with the dead and was not very happy about it.

Since God calls himself the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the Sadducees either must admit that God is a bitter loser like Hades, or that Abraham and the others are alive.

- 'Well said, teacher!'—the teachers of the law, who would mostly be Pharisees, can't help but be impressed by and grateful for his refutation of the Sadducees, even though they're supposed to be allied with the Sadducees against Jesus (19:47).
- 'Why is it said that the Messiah is the son of David?'—during the birth stories early in his story, Luke makes much of Jesus' association with David's lineage. Even Gabriel, the angelic messenger to Mary, calls Jesus David's son: 'The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David' (1:32). Just a few passages ago (18:38), the blind man who calls Jesus 'Son of David' is given as a positive example of faith. So, why does Jesus all of a sudden take issue with the Messiah being called David's son? I think it has to do with the perception of the source of the Messiah's greatness. It's not that the Messiah benefits from David's reflected greatness: 'this Messiah is almost as good as his dad David.' Rather, it's the other way around: David was great because he resembled and to a certain extent foreshadowed the King who was to come.

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- ‘David himself declares in the Book of Psalms’—besides being a king and a warrior, David was a great worshipper and writer of songs. This is Psalm 110:1.
- ‘Beware of the teachers of the law’—the people need to be on their guard against the teachers for a couple of reasons: they’re bad examples, and they’ll rob you if they can.
- ‘the places of honor at banquets’—here’s how they’re bad examples. They think they’re great, but they’re actually setting themselves up for a fall: ‘For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted’ (14:11)
- ‘They devour widows’ houses’—here’s how they rob you. Widows were relatively powerless in Jesus’ society. We don’t know exactly how the teachers were taking advantage of the widows’ powerlessness, but the point is that the teachers are on the lookout for how to use people’s weakness to their gain—specifically to their financial gain. Ultimately, of course, Jesus promises that the teachers won’t get away with it: ‘It would be better for you to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around your neck than for you to cause one of these little ones to stumble’ (17:2)
- ‘this poor widow has put in more than all the others’—speaking of widows, Jesus exalts this humble widow for her act of faith. These coins the widow puts in would be of worth very little, but they mean a lot more than their monetary value. It’s significant that the widow has two coins, because she could have just given one of them and it still would have been half of her income—far more, percentage-wise, than everyone else’s ten percent. But she gives everything. She is able to do what the rich ruler (18:22) could not: she gives everything she has, and she trusts God to provide for her. She gives to God what is God’s (yesterday’s passage) by putting her life into God’s hands. It’s the only real act of worship we’ve seen since Jesus arrived in the Temple. She is also shrewd with her money: she’s turned her small amount of money into much treasure in heaven (Luke 12:33). And, she has no need to worry even in this life, because she has a good father who will take care of her needs (12:30).

Taking it home:

- *For you and your family:* Do you feel like you have very little to offer to God? Maybe you wonder if it’s even worth giving what you have to give. This passage shows us that God sees and honors the smallest offerings.
- *For your six:* Their preconceived notion of what it meant for the Messiah to be David’s son was getting in the way of Jesus’ listeners ability to see Jesus clearly and accept what he had to offer them. Ask God to remove any unhelpful filters through which your six see Jesus. One common filter is seeing Jesus as only a good moral teacher; but there are many other possibilities as well.
- *For our city:* I think that we as a city can sometimes, like the Sadducees, be a little too sophisticated to give credence to such things as miracles, or angels, or eternal life. In this passage, Jesus tells us that we miss out on the best parts of life if we dismiss the supernatural. Pray that God would give our entire city a greater ability to accept the supernatural.

Wednesday, April 20th

Luke 21:5-38

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5 Some of his disciples were remarking about how the temple was adorned with beautiful stones and with gifts dedicated to God. But Jesus said, 6 "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."

7 "Teacher," they asked, "when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are about to take place?"

8 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. 9 When you hear of wars and uprisings, do not be frightened. These things must happen first, but the end will not come right away."

10 Then he said to them: "Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom.

11 There will be great earthquakes, famines and pestilences in various places, and fearful events and great signs from heaven.

12 "But before all this, they will lay hands on you and persecute you. They will deliver you to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors, and all on account of my name. 13 And so you will bear testimony to me. 14 But make up

your mind not to worry beforehand how you will defend yourselves. 15 For I will give you words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict.

16 You will be betrayed even by parents, brothers, sisters, relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to death. 17 Everyone will hate you because of me. 18 But not a hair of your head will perish. 19 Stand firm, and you will win life.

20 "When you see Jerusalem being surrounded by armies, you will know that its desolation is near. 21 Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those in the city get out, and let those in the country not enter the city. 22 For this is the time of punishment in fulfillment of all that has been written. 23 How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! There will be great distress in the land and wrath against this people. 24 They will fall by the sword and will be taken as prisoners to all the nations. Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.

25 "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. 26 People will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken. 27 At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. 28 When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."

29 He told them this parable: "Look at the fig tree and all the trees. 30 When they sprout leaves, you can see for yourselves and know that summer is near. 31 Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that the kingdom of God is near.

32 "Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. 33 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

34 "Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you suddenly like a trap. 35 For it will come on all those who live on the face of the whole earth. 36 Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man."

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37 Each day Jesus was teaching at the temple, and each evening he went out to spend the night on the hill called the Mount of Olives, 38 and all the people came early in the morning to hear him at the temple.

1 Now the Festival of Unleavened Bread, called the Passover, was approaching, 2 and the chief priests and the teachers of the law were looking for some way to get rid of Jesus, for they were afraid of the people. 3 Then Satan entered Judas, called Iscariot, one of the Twelve. 4 And Judas went to the chief priests and the officers of the temple guard and discussed with them how he might betray Jesus. 5 They were delighted and agreed to give him money. 6 He consented, and watched for an opportunity to hand Jesus over to them when no crowd was present.

7 Then came the day of Unleavened Bread on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed. 8 Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, "Go and make preparations for us to eat the Passover."

9 "Where do you want us to prepare for it?" they asked.

10 He replied, "As you enter the city, a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him to the house that he enters, 11 and say to the owner of the house, 'The Teacher asks: Where is the guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?' 12 He will show you a large room upstairs, all furnished. Make preparations there."

13 They left and found things just as Jesus had told them. So they prepared the Passover.

Points of Interest:

- 'how the temple was adorned with beautiful stones'—Herod the Great (the father of the Herod from our story) tried to buy popularity with the Jews by spending tremendous amounts of money on a very lavish renovation of the Temple. Rich Jews from around the world contributed to the project as well. So, it's not a big surprise that the disciples would do a little gawking—the Temple is a world-renowned architectural wonder, like St. Peter's Basilica or the Taj Mahal. They seem to miss Jesus' point from yesterday's passage, though: the important thing is not the amount of money given, but the amount of faith shown.
- 'not one stone will be left on another'—even the Temple, the house of God, is just worldly wealth to Jesus: it will fail; it will wear out; it can be stolen or destroyed. In fact, the destruction of the Temple is not just a theoretical possibility. Jesus specifically foresees it in the not too distant future.
This prediction also reminds me of Psalm 118: 'The stone the builders rejected/has become the cornerstone' (quoted in Monday's passage). There's only one way to have a new cornerstone: by building a new building. You can't just add a new cornerstone to an old building. God will dismantle his old home—the Temple—and build a new one, with Jesus as the foundation.
- 'when will these things happen?'—in what follows, we'll read a lot of things that sound quite cataclysmic, but the cataclysm that's being talked about is local. 'These things' is the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem. For Jesus' listeners, the destruction of the Temple would be simultaneously geographically limited and almost incomprehensibly significant, like Washington, D.C., or Manhattan all of a sudden ceasing to exist.
- 'what will be the sign'—a sign is something that comes just before the thing it's pointing to. For example, a freeway exit sign comes just before the exit itself, so that

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you know that it's coming and are able to make the exit. The disciples want to know what comes just before the destruction of the temple, so that they have a chance to escape just before it happens.

- 'the end will not come right away'—it will take longer than they might think. In particular, the disciples will be tempted to listen to rumors that Jesus has returned. As Jesus said before, they'll know it when he's returned (17:24).
- 'fearful events and great signs'—many of the things that are typically thought of as signs of terrible events—wars, earthquakes, natural disasters, epidemics, strange things happening in the stars—will happen, but they aren't the signs they need to be concerned about.
- 'they will lay hands on you'—up until this point, they won't need to worry about the Temple. For a while, the Temple will be fine: they themselves, however, will face a considerable amount of trouble. These stories of being thrown in prison and of testifying in front of governors are much of what Luke's sequel, the book of Acts, is all about. Almost from the beginning, Jesus' followers would be in and out of prison at the hands of the chief priests; and they would face their first major persecution from the Romans during the reign of Nero, just a few years before the war between the Romans and the Jews and the eventual destruction of the Temple.
- 'Stand firm, and you will win life'—as long as they trust Jesus to guide them and give them the words to say, they'll be in absolutely no real danger. The danger is not that they will be harmed, but that they will fall prey to fear or worry. If they succumb to worry, they may try to save their life, and lose it; but if they lose their life for Jesus' sake, they'll win it (9:24). It will be difficult to wait. It will look like they are on their way to death. But, if they stay the course, it will turn out very well.
- 'When you see Jerusalem being surrounded by armies'—back to Jerusalem's destruction. The sign of the Temple's doom is obvious enough: Jerusalem being surrounded by an enemy army. Once that happens, people should leave immediately; there's enough time to escape, but just enough. Jesus recommends that everyone run away from the city and into the hills, advice which goes against instinct; in times of trouble, people would usually run toward the city to get behind the safety of the walls. In this particular case, whoever ignored Jesus' advice would end up trapped by the Roman siege, from which absolutely no one would escape (*IVP Bible Background Commentary* 248).
- 'Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles'—many of Jesus' contemporaries thought that because Jerusalem was the home of the Temple, God would never let it be destroyed. This confidence was somewhat foolish, seeing as God had already shown in the past that he was indeed willing to allow his own house to be destroyed if that's what it took to get the attention of his people; about 600 years before Jesus, Jerusalem was conquered and the Temple destroyed by the Babylonians. In AD 70, the Temple would be destroyed again by the Romans. The Jewish overconfidence in the inviolability of Jerusalem proceeded partly from an overvaluation of the importance of the Temple. The Temple was never as important to God as it was to the people of Jerusalem. It wasn't even his idea; it was David's (I Chronicles 17). God accepted the Temple and chose to bless the place with his presence, because the temple was a generous expression of gratitude from his people—parents always show

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pride in the gifts their children give them. But his plans never depended on the Temple as much as his people came to think they did.

- ‘they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory’—Jesus refers to one of the most famous prophecies of the Messiah, found in Daniel 7:13-14:

There before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven.

He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshipped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.

I think, in context of the story Jesus is telling, this prophecy is about ‘the stone that the builders rejected’ becoming the cornerstone. This is describing the destruction of the Temple, but from a heavenly rather than earthly perspective. In Jerusalem on earth, the Gentiles entering Jerusalem will be followed by the destruction of the Temple. In heaven, Jesus will come into his full authority. The Temple will be replaced by Jesus and his followers as the sign of God’s presence on earth. The shaking of the heavenly bodies probably refers to a shake-up in the heavenly hierarchy: the sun, moon, and stars were often used in prophecy to describe the spiritual power behind earthly rulers (Ezekiel 32:7-8, in which the downfall of Pharaoh is accompanied by stars falling and the sun being darkened, is a good example).

- ‘this generation will certainly not pass away’—all of the things Jesus has said up until this point will happen within the average lifespan of his listeners.
- ‘Heaven and earth will pass away’—not just the Temple, but all of heaven and earth, will eventually fade away; but Jesus’ words will last beyond it all. They’re like a lifeline to eternity.
- ‘and that day will close on you suddenly like a trap’—I think ‘that day’ is the day when heaven and earth pass away. What Jesus was talking about until now was something that will happen in Jerusalem, which can be avoided by running to the mountains, for which there will be plenty of warning. What Jesus is talking about now happens suddenly, across the face of the whole earth. However, even it—the end of the world—can be escaped by the person who faithfully watches in the expectation of Jesus’ rescue.
- ‘each evening he went out to spend the night on the hill called the Mount of Olives’—the Mount of Olives was just outside of the city limits.
- ‘the Festival of Unleavened Bread, called the Passover’—this festival commemorates the Israelites’ escape from Egypt. The unleavened bread (bread without yeast) symbolizes the suddenness and haste with which the Israelites left Egypt: they didn’t even have time to let the dough rise. The first Passover, and instructions for future feasts, is found in Exodus 12.
- ‘they were afraid of the people’—the priests and teachers are looking for a way to arrest Jesus without causing a stir in front of the crowds.
- ‘Satan entered Judas, called Iscariot, one of the Twelve’—after tempting Jesus (chapter 4), the devil withdrew, but he was still on the lookout for a good opportunity (4:13). Now, he sees that opportunity, not directly with Jesus, but with one of the Twelve.

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- ‘delighted and agreed to give him money’—Judas agrees to sell Jesus for money. This is the ultimate choice of treasure on earth over treasure in heaven: ‘Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed’ (12:15).
- ‘on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed’—the Passover lamb is sacrificed on the first night of the feast. At the first Passover, in Egypt, the people spread some of the lamb’s blood on their doorframes. God sent a plague on the firstborn of the Egyptians, to punish them for keeping the Israelites in slavery. But whenever the destroying angel came across the blood on the doorframe, it passed over that house, saving the life of the firstborn of that house (Exodus 12:23).
- ‘a man carrying a jar of water will meet you’—it’s unclear whether this is some sort of supernatural arrangement, or it’s a little bit of cloak-and-dagger so that the priests and teachers don’t know where Jesus is having his Passover dinner.
- ‘found things just as Jesus had told them’—they are preparing for Jesus’ feast, but Jesus has already prepared for them to prepare. He gives them what they need to serve him.

Taking it home:

- *For you and your family:* Pray that God would protect you from worry or distraction or unbelief that would get in the way of you being ready and on the lookout for the things he would like to do in your life.
- *For your six:* This life is full of the possibility of unexpected dangers. Pray that God would mercifully protect your six from being harmed by any disaster.
- *For our city:* When the disciples look at the Temple, they see something impressive and enduring. But Jesus tells them that they’re mistaken: many of them will outlive the Temple. Our government, our banks, the large businesses in our area, our sports teams, and the universities all look solid and impressive enough; but who knows what changes may come in the future? Pray that God would save our city from placing undue trust in institutions that won’t last.

Thursday, April 21st

Luke 22:1-46

14 When the hour came, Jesus and his apostles reclined at the table. 15 And he said to them, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. 16 For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God."

17 After taking the cup, he gave thanks and said, "Take this and divide it among you. 18 For I tell you I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes."

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."

20 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. 21 But the hand of him who is going to betray me is with mine on the table. 22 The Son of Man will go as it has been decreed. But woe to that man who betrays him!" 23 They began to question among themselves which of them it might be who would do this.

24 A dispute also arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest.

25 Jesus said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. 26 But you are not to be like

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that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves. 27 For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves. 28 You are those who have stood by me in my trials. 29 And I confer on you a kingdom, just as my Father conferred one on me, 30 so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

31 "Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift all of you as wheat. 32 But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers."

33 But he replied, "Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death."

34 Jesus answered, "I tell you, Peter, before the rooster crows today, you will deny three times that you know me."

35 Then Jesus asked them, "When I sent you without purse, bag or sandals, did you lack anything?"

"Nothing," they answered.

36 He said to them, "But now if you have a purse, take it, and also a bag; and if you don't have a sword, sell your cloak and buy one. 37 It is written: 'And he was numbered with the transgressors'; and I tell you that this must be fulfilled in me. Yes, what is written about me is reaching its fulfillment."

38 The disciples said, "See, Lord, here are two swords."

"That is enough," he replied.

39 Jesus went out as usual to the Mount of Olives, and his disciples followed him. 40 On reaching the place, he said to them, "Pray that you will not fall into temptation." 41 He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, 42 "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done." 43 An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. 44 And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.

45 When he rose from prayer and went back to the disciples, he found them asleep, exhausted from sorrow. 46 "Why are you sleeping?" he asked them. "Get up and pray so that you will not fall into temptation."

Points of Interest:

- 'I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God'—this is a goodbye meal. Like the nobleman from the story in chapter 19, Jesus is going away for a while to take possession of his kingdom. They will someday all celebrate this feast together again. It will be a double celebration: the celebration of the Passover, and the celebration of their new kingdom.
- 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood'—For the centerpiece of this Passover meal, Jesus replaces the usual lamb with the bread and wine, the symbols of his own body and blood. He is establishing a new tradition, with a new sacrificial lamb: himself. The Passover lamb was a symbol of God's protection of his people from death, his rescue of them from captivity, and his guidance of them to a new land. The bread and wine commemorate a new but similar relationship between Jesus and his followers; the bread and wine symbolize salvation from death, rescue from sin, and the coming of a new kingdom.

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- ‘as it has been decreed’—numerous Psalms speak of the Messiah being betrayed by a friend. Psalm 41:9 is a good example:
Even my close friend,
someone I trusted,
one who shared my bread
has lifted up his heel against me.
- ‘those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors’—*benefactor* means, ‘helper,’ or, ‘sponsor.’ It comes from the Latin, ‘to do well.’ Basically, these worldly leaders call themselves servants, but really they’re all about telling other people what to do.
- ‘But I am among you as one who serves’—Jesus suggests that there are better ways to be great than arguing about it; sensibly enough, he suggests that they watch the one who is greatest—him—and imitate what they see.
- ‘so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones’—this sounds like two different stories Jesus has recently told: the man throwing the big party, and the nobleman who goes away to get royal authority. Jesus’ kingdom will be the best party ever, and it will also be real work. Jesus wants to share both his fun and his authority with his followers; they will be guests at his party, but also deputies ruling in his kingdom.
- ‘Satan has asked to sift all of you as wheat’—having had success with Judas, Satan turns his attention on the rest of the disciples as well. Satan offers, ‘Let me help you test your follower’s faith,’ but Jesus knows that Satan’s goal is not to refine them, but to destroy them.
- ‘when you have turned back’—there will be a time when Peter’s faith will fail under Satan’s temptations and accusations. But that won’t be the end. He can repent: that is, recalibrate himself toward Jesus again. When he does, he’ll find that he not only has enough strength to follow Jesus himself but to lead others toward him as well.
- ‘did you lack anything?’—it’s important that they remember that Jesus was able to provide for them even when it looked like they had nothing.
- ‘But now if you have a purse, take it, and also a bag’—I think Jesus is saying here that there’s a moment—the few days when he is in the grave—when they will be in danger but he will be unable to help. It later becomes clear that he is not recommending that they literally defend themselves with swords: two swords wouldn’t do much good anyway, and when they do try to use them (in tomorrow’s passage) he tells them to put them away. I think Jesus is speaking hyperbolically here to get across the message that they will soon be considered the fugitive followers of a criminal.
- ‘Pray that you will not fall into temptation’—the chances that they will cave to temptation are very high. Jesus is praying that their faith will not fail under Satan’s attack, and he encourages them to pray the same.
- ‘take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done’—having advised his followers to pray against temptation, he follows his own advice. Jesus is fighting in this prayer against the temptation to try to save his life. If he were to fall to this temptation, it would be devastating, not just for everyone else whom he would save by his sacrifice, but for him: ‘whoever wants to save their life will lose it’ (9:24). Even Jesus is in danger of losing his life. Even he is tempted to desperately grab at

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life in these final moments; if he does, he'll—temporarily—save his earthly life, but he'll lose heavenly life. Jesus doesn't rely on his own strength to face this last and strongest of the devil's temptations. He asks the Father to supply him with the strength he needs.

Taking it home:

- *For you and your family:* Consider attending a Holy Thursday service today, to remember Jesus with the bread and the wine. Or, celebrate the last supper with your family or household by reading this passage together and sharing bread and wine.
- *For your six:* Pray that Jesus would protect your six from the devil's plans for their destruction. Ask God to unmask the work of Satan's lies, accusations, and temptations in their lives.
- *For our city:* Pray for a proliferation of true greatness in our city. Pray that we would have many great servants in our city, and that God would equip and reward those servants for their service.

Friday, April 22nd

Luke 22:47-23:25

47 While he was still speaking a crowd came up, and the man who was called Judas, one of the Twelve, was leading them. He approached Jesus to kiss him, 48 but Jesus asked him, "Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?"

49 When Jesus' followers saw what was going to happen, they said, "Lord, should we strike with our swords?" 50 And one of them struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his right ear.

51 But Jesus answered, "No more of this!" And he touched the man's ear and healed him.

52 Then Jesus said to the chief priests, the officers of the temple guard, and the elders, who had come for him, "Am I leading a rebellion, that you have come with swords and clubs? 53 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."

54 Then seizing him, they led him away and took him into the house of the high priest. Peter followed at a distance. 55 And when some there had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and had sat down together, Peter sat down with them. 56 A servant girl saw him seated there in the firelight. She looked closely at him and said, "This man was with him."

57 But he denied it. "Woman, I don't know him," he said.

58 A little later someone else saw him and said, "You also are one of them."

"Man, I am not!" Peter replied.

59 About an hour later another asserted, "Certainly this fellow was with him, for he is a Galilean."

60 Peter replied, "Man, I don't know what you're talking about!" Just as he was speaking, the rooster crowed. 61 The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him: "Before the rooster crows today, you will disown me three times." 62 And he went outside and wept bitterly.

63 The men who were guarding Jesus began mocking and beating him. 64 They blindfolded him and demanded, "Prophecy! Who hit you?" 65 And they said many other insulting things to him.

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66 At daybreak the council of the elders of the people, both the chief priests and the teachers of the law, met together, and Jesus was led before them. 67 "If you are the Messiah," they said, "tell us."

Jesus answered, "If I tell you, you will not believe me, 68 and if I asked you, you would not answer. 69 But from now on, the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the mighty God."

70 They all asked, "Are you then the Son of God?"

He replied, "You say that I am."

71 Then they said, "Why do we need any more testimony? We have heard it from his own lips."

23: 1 Then the whole assembly rose and led him off to Pilate. 2 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."

3 So Pilate asked Jesus, "Are you the king of the Jews?"

"You have said so," Jesus replied.

4 Then Pilate announced to the chief priests and the crowd, "I find no basis for a charge against this man."

5 But they insisted, "He stirs up the people all over Judea by his teaching. He started in Galilee and has come all the way here."

6 On hearing this, Pilate asked if the man was a Galilean. 7 When he learned that Jesus was under Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him to Herod, who was also in Jerusalem at that time.

8 When Herod saw Jesus, he was greatly pleased, because for a long time he had been wanting to see him. From what he had heard about him, he hoped to see him perform a sign of some sort. 9 He plied him with many questions, but Jesus gave him no answer. 10 The chief priests and the teachers of the law were standing there, vehemently accusing him. 11 Then Herod and his soldiers ridiculed and mocked him. Dressing him in an elegant robe, they sent him back to Pilate. 12 That day Herod and Pilate became friends—before this they had been enemies.

13 Pilate called together the chief priests, the rulers and the people, 14 and said to them, You brought me this man as one who was inciting the people to rebellion. I have examined him in your presence and have found no basis for your charges against him. 15 Neither has Herod, for he sent him back to us; as you can see, he has done nothing to deserve death.

16-17 Therefore, I will punish him and then release him."

18 With one voice they cried out, "Away with this man! Release Barabbas to us!" 19 (Barabbas had been thrown into prison for an insurrection in the city, and for murder.)

20 Wanting to release Jesus, Pilate appealed to them again. 21 But they kept shouting, "Crucify him! Crucify him!"

22 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."

23 But with loud shouts they insistently demanded that he be crucified, and their shouts prevailed. 24 So Pilate decided to grant their demand. 25 He released the man who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, the one they asked for, and surrendered Jesus to their will.

Points of Interest:

- ‘are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?’—that’s a level of hypocrisy and betrayal that Jesus can’t allow Judas to stoop to.
- ‘touched the man's ear and healed him’—Jesus shows that he really is a child of God. He shows mercy even to the people who are trying to kill him.
But love your enemies, do good to them . . . 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 (6:35-36).
- ‘But this is your hour—when darkness reigns’—it’s usually the criminals that work at night or in secret. Jesus is being arrested for things he’s been doing in the middle of the day, in front of huge crowds. It’s the so-called authorities who are hiding their actions under cover of darkness.
- ‘Peter followed at a distance’—Peter has just sworn that he will follow Jesus to prison and death. In the book of Acts, Peter does indeed follow Jesus to prison (Acts 4:3, for example); and church tradition tells us that he eventually follows Jesus to execution, perhaps even on a cross (quite possibly during the persecutions under Nero, mentioned in Wednesday’s passage). Right now, though, the best he can muster is following at a distance—and he doesn’t even sustain that for very long.
- ‘The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter’—Jesus knew this would happen. But there’s room for encouragement in this sobering story. Jesus predicted that Peter would betray him; but he also predicted that Peter would repent, that he would strengthen his companions, that he would eat with Jesus in his kingdom, and that he would share in ruling that kingdom.
- ‘Prophecy! Who hit you?’—they think they’re being clever, but they’re actually in the middle of fulfilling prophecies he has already given: ‘The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law’ (9:22); and, ‘They will mock him, insult him, and spit on him; they will flog him and kill him’ (18:32-33).
- ‘At daybreak’—now that day has come, they can hold a formal trial. Of course, the outcome of the trial is a foregone conclusion.
- ‘the council of the elders of the people’—the council was sort of like a combination of Congress and the Supreme Court; its members were the chief priests, the teachers of the law, and the elders. The Roman government gave them a wide degree of authority in all kinds of internal Jewish affairs.
- ‘If I tell you, you will not believe me, and if I asked you, you would not answer’—Jesus doesn’t like the idea of answering their question when they don’t really want to know the answer.
- ‘the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the mighty God’—Jesus is referring again to the Messianic prophecy from Daniel 7:13-14. It’s a concise, poetic way of saying, ‘Yes, I am the Messiah. Now that I’ve told you, you will kill me; but killing me will only end up leading to my exaltation and the establishment of my kingdom. You’re going to end up bringing about the very thing you are resisting.’ They might not catch all of it, but they understand enough to respond, ‘So, you’re saying you’re the Son of God, then?’
- ‘You say that I am’—basically, ‘See, you figured it out for yourself.’

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- ‘led him off to Pilate’—Pilate is the Roman governor. The council needs his approval to apply the death sentence.
- ‘opposes payment of taxes to Caesar’—their real reason for killing Jesus is jealousy. Their formal charge is blasphemy (according to them, he’s claiming to be God when he is not). Neither of these reasons would be of any interest to the Romans; so the council beefs up the charges a bit—with an outright lie.
- ‘claims to be Messiah, a king’—they also frame him as a rebel leader setting up an alternative to Roman rule. That’s another charge that Pilate would have to take seriously.
- ‘I find no basis for a charge’—upon further examination, Pilate determines that Jesus is not a significant political threat.
Luke is stressing the lack of legitimate charges against Jesus to clearly establish that Jesus is not a common criminal. For Luke’s readers, it would be quite scandalous that Jesus was crucified; it’s a form of death reserved for the lowest of the low. Luke is therefore careful to demonstrate that the sentence is completely undeserved. This doesn’t absolve Pilate of responsibility. Rather the opposite, Pilate is all the more guilty because he knowingly sends an innocent man to death because he’s afraid to let him go.
- ‘he sent him to Herod’—Herod is probably in town for the feast. As a Galilean, Jesus is technically Herod’s citizen. But since the charges have to do with actions in Judea, Pilate has the right to try Jesus (*IVP Bible Background Commentary* 253); he’s just trying to pass off a difficult case.
- ‘Jesus gave him no answer’—Herod reminds me of something Jesus said earlier: ‘This is a wicked generation. It asks for a sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah’ (11:29). Herod is asking for a miracle, but for entertainment purposes only. If he were truly concerned about the kingdom of God, he would have listened to John’s call to repent (the sign of Jonah); but instead of receiving John, he killed him. So, Jesus has nothing to say to him.
- ‘I will punish him and then release him’—Pilate suggests that they just send Jesus away with a stiff warning, but the mob gathered by the chief priests and other leaders won’t be placated so easily.
- ‘for an insurrection in the city, and for murder’—they pretend to arrest Jesus out of concern that he will lead an insurrection, but they lobby for a real insurrectionist and murderer—basically, an anti-Roman terrorist—to be let go.
- ‘their shouts prevailed’—they accuse Jesus of stirring up the crowds, but it’s they who have started a riot.

Taking it home:

- *For you and your family:* Do you feel as if you’ve failed God in some significant way? Ask God for forgiveness. If Jesus’ treatment of Peter is any indication, he’s more than willing to give you another chance. God is rooting for you to succeed.
- *For your six:* Jesus healed the ear of one of the people who came to arrest him and kill him. Particularly if any of your six have been hostile to Jesus, pray that he would draw them to himself by showing them kindness in a way that they know is from him.
- *For our city:* Pray for the justice system in our city. Ask God that justice would be done. Pray that corruption would be unearthed, and that the innocent would not be punished but protected.

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Saturday, April 23rd

Luke 23: 26-56

26 As the soldiers led him away, they seized Simon from Cyrene, who was on his way in from the country, and put the cross on him and made him carry it behind Jesus. 27 A large number of people followed him, including women who mourned and wailed for him. 28 Jesus turned and said to them, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children. 29 For the time will come when you will say, 'Blessed are the childless women, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!' 30 Then

" 'they will say to the mountains, "Fall on us!"

and to the hills, "Cover us!""

31 For if people do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?"

32 Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed. 33 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. 34 Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." And they divided up his clothes by casting lots.

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."

36 The soldiers also came up and mocked him. They offered him wine vinegar 37 and said, "If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself."

38 There was a written notice above him, which read: THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS.

39 One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: "Aren't you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!"

40 But the other criminal rebuked him. "Don't you fear God," he said, "since you are under the same sentence? 41 We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong."

42 Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

43 Jesus answered him, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise."

44 It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, 45 for the sun stopped shining. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two.

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.

47 The centurion, seeing what had happened, praised God and said, "Surely this was a righteous man." 48 When all the people who had gathered to witness this sight saw what took place, they beat their breasts and went away. 49 But all those who knew him, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things.

50 Now there was a man named Joseph, a member of the Council, a good and upright man, 51 who had not consented to their decision and action. He came from the Judean town of Arimathea, and he himself was waiting for the kingdom of God. 52 Going to Pilate, he asked for Jesus' body. 53 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. 54 It was Preparation Day, and the Sabbath was about to begin.

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55 The women who had come with Jesus from Galilee followed Joseph and saw the tomb and how his body was laid in it. 56 Then they went home and prepared spices and perfumes. But they rested on the Sabbath in obedience to the commandment.

Points of Interest:

- ‘made him carry it behind Jesus’—Simon of Cyrene serves as a very vivid picture of Jesus’ call to his followers: ‘Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me’ (9:23). Unfortunately, it’s a complete stranger who unwittingly and unwillingly provides this image. None of Jesus’ actual followers are anywhere to be seen. Simon Peter, who just last night talked of dying with Jesus, has run away; so Simon of Cyrene has to temporarily fill in for him. Cyrene, by the way, is in North Africa, in modern Libya (*IVP Bible Background Commentary* 254).
- ‘including women who mourned and wailed for him’—it’s not quite true that all of Jesus’ followers have abandoned him. The men among the disciples are hiding, but the women continue to follow him to the very end.
- ‘what will happen when it is dry?’—another reference to the destruction of Jerusalem. Even on the day of his death, Jesus is more concerned for the citizens of Jerusalem than he is for himself. I think the point of Jesus’ image is if, during relatively prosperous times, people can so quickly turn on him and kill him, imagine what they will do to one another when times get rough. Indeed, during the Roman siege of 70 AD, much of the damage was caused by fighting among Jewish factions (*IVP Bible Background Commentary* 248).
- ‘Father, forgive them’—Jesus continues to follow his own advice from the sermon on the plain: ‘bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you’ (6:28), and, ‘Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned’ (6:37). To the very end, Jesus is giving generously to others, particularly to those who won’t or can’t give anything in return. Jesus is aiming at greatness. He’s living in such a way as to get the best possible rewards from God: ‘For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you’ (6:38).
- ‘they divided up his clothes by casting lots’—it was common practice for the executioners to get the personal effects of the prisoner (*New Bible Commentary* 1017), but this is also a reference to Psalm 22. Psalm 22 (written by David, about 1,000 years before Jesus) bears some striking resemblances to Jesus’ crucifixion, including this division of clothes by lot, the sufferer’s great thirst, piercing of hands and feet, and being the object of mockery:
All who see me mock me;
they hurl insults, shaking their heads.
‘He trusts in the LORD, they say,
‘Let the LORD rescue him’ (Psalm 22:7-8).
- ‘THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS’—the charge against Jesus is ironically accurate. He’s being killed because he is the true king of the Jews, not because he falsely claims to be the king of the Jews. He is the son of the owner of the vineyard, being killed so that the tenants can take the vineyard as their own (20:14-15).
- ‘Aren’t you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!’—this criminal is pointing Jesus in the wrong direction: ‘For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever

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loses their life for me will save it' (9:24). Jesus is saving himself—and them—by submitting to death. When he first started on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus warned:

I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after your body has been killed, has authority to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him. Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God. Indeed the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows (12:4-7).

This criminal is afraid for his body, but shows no concern at all for his soul. Jesus, on the other hand, is showing respect for—and trust in—the one who has the authority to throw him into hell but the desire to save his life; as he prayed in Thursday's passage, 'yet not my will, but yours be done' (22:42)

- 'since you are under the same sentence?'—the moment before you die is not a great time to rack up new complaints against you.
- 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom'—this second criminal reminds me of Jesus' story of the tax collector who humbly asks for mercy and gets it (18:13-14). Criminal though he is—and as far as we know a complete stranger to Jesus—he is the only person we've encountered who believes that this is not the end for Jesus. Even as Jesus hangs on a cross next to him, this criminal believes that Jesus will survive and triumph.
- 'the curtain of the temple was torn in two'—the curtain is the divider between the Holy Place (the priestly area of the temple) and the Most Holy Place (where only the chief priests could go, and only once a year). Perhaps this is the symbolic beginning of the destruction of the temple.
- 'Father, into your hands I commit my spirit'—this is the first line of Psalm 31:5, which continues, 'redeem me, LORD, my faithful God.' This is not some vague statement of trust. Jesus is truly handing his spirit over to God in a quite real and immediate way. Jesus, the very son of God, the Lord of God's kingdom, the one who cast out demons, healed diseases, forgave sins, calmed seas, and even raised the dead, is now dead. He's a completely helpless corpse. And his last words before dying are, 'Father, I'm putting myself in your hands, and I'm trusting you to bring me back.' Jesus is pushing to the utter limit the principle that it is always a good idea to be generous to others. He recommended to the rich ruler that he give all of his possessions to the poor to gain treasure in heaven (18:22). Jesus himself takes it a few steps further, giving his very life. This choice takes tremendous faith in God's goodness and his power. Jesus is sacrificing himself to an incredible degree for the sake of others, but he's not expecting that others will gain at his expense; even he can't afford to do that when the price tag is his life. Jesus is trusting God to make this sacrifice worthwhile to him. Even in giving his life, Jesus depends on God to out give him: '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' (18:29-30)
- 'a member of the Council'—apparently, not all the council members are Jesus' enemies. Maybe the leaders of the council left any dissenters out of their deliberations, or maybe Joseph and any other members sympathetic to Jesus were simply shouted down.

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- ‘placed it in a tomb cut in the rock’—the fact that Jesus’ body is placed in a tomb bought by this influential councilman brings to mind an odd little detail in one of Isaiah’s prophecies of the suffering servant: ‘He was assigned a grave with the wicked,/and with the rich in his death’ (Isaiah 53:9). Like Isaiah’s suffering servant, Jesus dies the death of a criminal (and would have simply been buried in a public burial ground with them except for Joseph’s intervention [*New Bible Commentary* 1018]) but is buried in a rich man’s grave. Even more than Psalm 22, Isaiah 53 (written about 800 years before Jesus) is startling in how accurately and vividly it portrays Jesus’ suffering—it might be worth finding a Bible and reading the entire chapter. Isaiah’s prophecy also offers what to me is the clearest (yet still fairly mysterious) explanation of why Jesus had to suffer in all of the Old Testament, maybe in all of the Bible:

Surely he took up our pain
and bore our suffering,
yet we considered him punished by God,
stricken by him and afflicted.
But he was pierced for our transgressions,
he was crushed for our iniquities;
the punishment that brought us peace was on him,
and by his wounds we are healed (Isaiah 53:4-5)

All the way back in chapter 5 (5:31), Jesus declared himself to be a sin-doctor. He had come to the world specifically to heal people of their sin-sickness. Now, we see his method of healing. He somehow takes on himself the pain, the suffering, and the punishment for our sins. In effect, he kills off sin by having it die with him on the cross. It’s as if he undergoes sin-chemotherapy, but for all of us, not for himself. And by God’s great and mysterious power, this crazy plan works.

Taking it home:

- *For you and your family:* Jesus’ death is undeniably a very powerful story, but it’s also one that can be very difficult to grasp. Pray that God would give you a new understanding today of the meaning of Jesus’ death.
- *For your six:* Pray that like Simon of Cyrene your six would be drawn into Jesus’ story in surprising ways.
- *For our city:* While their companions are sneering, the second criminal and the centurion find in Jesus’ death something compelling and faith-inspiring. Pray that many people in our city would also gain a new appreciation for Jesus during these few days when there is so much focus on him and his death. Pray that they would not be deterred by any cynicism about Jesus they see around them.

Sunday, April 24th

Luke 24

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. 2 They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, 3 but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. 4 While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. 5 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? 6 He is not here;

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he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: 7 'The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.' " 8 Then they remembered his words.

9 When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others. 10 It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles. 11 But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense. 12 Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb. Bending over, he saw the strips of linen lying by themselves, and he went away, wondering to himself what had happened.

13 Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. 14 They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. 15 As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; 16 but they were kept from recognizing him.

17 He asked them, "What are you discussing together as you walk along?"

They stood still, their faces downcast. 18 One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, "Are you only a visitor to Jerusalem and do not know the things that have happened there in these days?"

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. 20 The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; 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. 22 In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning 23 but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. 24 Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see."

25 He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! 26 Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" 27 And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

28 As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus continued on as if he were going farther. 29 But they urged him strongly, "Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over." So he went in to stay with them.

30 When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. 31 Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. 32 They asked each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?"

33 They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together 34 and saying, "It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon." 35 Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread.

36 While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you."

37 They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. 38 He said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? 39 Look at my hands and

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my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have."

40 When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet. 41 And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, "Do you have anything here to eat?" 42 They gave him a piece of broiled fish, 43 and he took it and ate it in their presence.

44 He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms."

45 Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. 46 He told them, "This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, 47 and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. 48 You are witnesses of these things. 49 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."

50 When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them. 51 While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven. 52 Then they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. 53 And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God.

Points of Interest:

- ‘very early in the morning’—they go to visit the body as soon as is practical after the Sabbath ends. They’re bringing embalming spices to slow the decay of the body and hide the smell; but Jesus isn’t even dead long enough for them to do the embalming. It somehow seems fitting to me that, with one of the primary complaints against Jesus and his followers being Sabbath-breaking, these women miss their window to anoint Jesus’ body because they are observing the Sabbath.
- ‘suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them’—when Jesus spoke with Moses and Elijah on the mountain, Jesus’ clothes ‘became as a bright as a flash of lightning’ (9:29), just like the clothes of these two men do now. I assume the two men are angels, because they’re fulfilling the usual angelic role of passing along an important message from God, like Gabriel did in chapter 1 (1:11,26). Then again, it might be Moses and Elijah again—or Abraham, or Isaac, or Jacob or some other long-dead person. After all, what they’re testifying to is life after death. The prayer meeting on the mountain and this heavenly encounter at the empty tomb serve as bookends for Jesus’ experience in Jerusalem. In his prayer time on the mountain, Jesus talked with two resurrected people about his own impending departure from the world (9:31). Here, the women talk with two heavenly or resurrected men about the fact that Jesus has indeed risen.
- ‘Why do you look for the living among the dead?’—As Jesus told the Sadducees, ‘God is not the God of the dead, but of the living’ (20:38). God is certainly Jesus’ God; therefore, Jesus is alive.
- ‘Then they remembered his words’—again and again, Jesus has told his followers these things, but they haven’t been able to understand. Finally, this thing that’s remained a mystery is unveiled: ‘No one lights a lamp and hides it in a clay jar or puts it under a bed. Instead, they put it on a stand, so that those who come in may see the light’ (8:16).

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- ‘the Eleven’—Judas, of course, is no longer counted with the apostles.
- ‘Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James’—these are some of the same women who have been traveling with Jesus since chapter 8 (8:2-3). Luke mentions their names to show that he is relying on the eyewitness testimony of specific people, not on rumor, hearsay, or anonymous tips. The testimony of women was considered less reliable than that of men (*IVP Bible Background Commentary* 256); nonetheless, Jesus gives the first news of his resurrection to these faithful women who have been following him and who have come to do honor to his body.
- ‘their words seemed to them like nonsense’—the women were able to hear the words and have them bear fruit, but the men are still somewhat poor soil (8:12).
- ‘Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb’—Peter doesn’t quite believe the women, but he takes what they say seriously. He moves from unbelief to curiosity, which is a good step. If he sticks with it, his perseverance will eventually pay off (8:15).
- ‘it is the third day since all this took place’—they’re practically repeating Jesus’ own words, about being rejected by the chief priests, being crucified, and rising on the third day; but they don’t put it all together.
- ‘and then enter his glory?’—Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53, which so vividly portray Jesus’ suffering, don’t stop there. They go on to describe the sufferer’s glorious future even after death. Psalm 22 starts with, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’ but it ends with,
 - Posterity will serve him;
 - future generations will be told about the Lord.
 - They will proclaim his righteousness,
 - declaring to a people yet unborn:
 - He has done it! (Psalm 22:30-31).And Isaiah 53 says,
 - he will see his offspring and prolong his days,
 - and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand.
 - After he has suffered,
 - he will see the light of life and be satisfied . . . (Isaiah 53:10-11).What his followers thought of as Jesus’ tragic end is only his glorious beginning.
- ‘Jesus continued on as if he were going farther’—Jesus waits to see if they are interested in hearing more. When they invite him to eat with them, he accepts, just like he commanded them to do when they went to the villages to share his good news (10:8).
- ‘Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him’—the broken bread, the symbol of his broken body, finally cures them of their blindness to who he is.
- ‘Peace be with you’—I think this would be a standard greeting, but it’s particularly meaningful here. He knows that seeing someone they think is dead all of a sudden pop up in the middle of them might be a bit scary. The first thing he wants them to know is that they have no reason to be afraid; he has good intentions toward them.
- ‘they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement’—they go from overwhelmingly scared to overwhelmingly happy.
- ‘he took it and ate it in their presence’—I think eating the fish both proves that he’s not a ghost and brings some normality to the situation.

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- ‘he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures’—Jesus walks his followers through some of the very passages we’ve been looking at the past few days, opening their eyes to the fact that what looked terribly wrong was actually going exactly according to the script.
- ‘forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations’—Jesus isn’t just the sin doctor for a few people in a room, or even just for one nation. He has the power and the desire to cure the whole world of sin. Isaiah speaks of this as well:

And now the LORD says—

he who formed me in the womb to be his servant
to bring Jacob back to him

and gather Israel to himself,
for I am honored in the eyes of the LORD
and my God has been my strength—

he says:

‘It is too small a thing for you to be my servant
to restore the tribes of Jacob
and bring back those of Israel I have kept.

I will make you a light for the Gentiles,

That my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth’ (Isaiah 49:6)

Jesus is indeed Israel’s Messiah, just as Mary and Zechariah foresaw at the beginning of our story (1:54-55, 68-69). But he is so much more than that: he’s a Savior for the whole world.

- ‘beginning at Jerusalem’—this rescue from sin is even available to Jerusalem, the city that killed him. In fact, Jerusalem will get the offer before anyone else.
- ‘I am going to send you what my Father has promised’—that would be the Holy Spirit: ‘how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him’ (6:13). Before Jesus began his work, the Father sent him the Holy Spirit. Jesus is now sending his followers out to continue his work: the work of healing the sick, of casting out demons, of bringing forgiveness, or freeing people who are bound up, and of spreading good news. To do these things, they will need the same source of power Jesus relied on.
For some reason, Jesus’ command here not to leave until they’ve been equipped with heavenly power reminds me of his cryptic saying at the Passover supper about taking their purses, bags, and swords (22:36). Perhaps Jesus didn’t mean those things literally, but as a sort of parable about the Holy Spirit: they don’t want to find themselves naked or unprepared in the task he now has for them.
- ‘he left them and was taken up into heaven’—just like in the story where the servants are given the money to invest (19:11-27), Jesus goes away to get royal power for himself. His followers are left behind to put what he’s given them to work, until he returns.

Taking it home:

- *For you and your family:* Just as you prayed for a greater understanding of the meaning of Jesus’ death yesterday, ask God to give you a deeper appreciation of the significance of his resurrection today. Ask God to fill you today with wonder and praise.

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- *For your six:* Ask Jesus to show himself to your six. Ask him to give them whatever explanation or demonstration they need to believe in his death and his resurrection.
- *For our city:* Pray for God's forgiveness and his salvation to be poured out on our city. That's what Jesus came for.