



# EXPLORE THE BIBLE®

Commentary

Spring 2021



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 ...and said unto t  
 ...e thing; and ans  
 ...of John, was it from  
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 ...all say, From heaven;  
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 ...and if we say, Of men; all the  
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 ...was a prophet.  
 ...And they answered, that they cov  
 ...ell whence *it was*.  
 ...<sup>8</sup> And Jesus said unto them, Neith  
 ...I you by what authority I do these t  
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**THE LORD OF THE VINEYARD**  
<sup>9</sup>Then began he to speak to the peo  
 ...parable; 'A certain man planted a vine

...of His rejection by the city of  
 ...Genuine, lasting peace with  
 ...es through faith in Jesus Christ  
 ...1). The Jews enjoyed a temporal  
 ...imperfect peace under Roman rule,  
 ...such a peace cannot be secured forever,  
 ...the destructive events of AD 70 proved.  
 ...Due to their unbelief, many Jews did not  
 ...open their eyes to see Christ as Messiah  
 ... (2 Cor. 4:4) or recognize His coming as the  
 ...time (gk *kairos*; "opportune time") of God's  
 ...visitation and offer of salvation.  
 ...19:45-46 The court of the Gentiles in the  
 ...temple was where sacrificial animals were  
 ...sold for outrageously high prices. Accord  
 ...ing to Isa. 56:7, the temple was to be a  
 ...house of prayer. The other quote (a den  
 ...of thieves) is from Jer. 7:11, which reflects a  
 ...19:47-48 The religious leaders  
 ...were increasingly desperate to  
 ...Jesus, but they were hesitant to  
 ...cause Jesus had gained considerable  
 ...ularity among the masses.  
 ...20:1-2 The parallel account in Mar  
 ...20,27-33 Indicates this took place  
 ...Tuesday of Passion Week. Chief p  
 ...scribes, and elders were part of the  
 ...ruling council, the Sanhedrin (see  
 ...22:66). They questioned Jesus' auth  
 ...throwing the merchants out of the  
 ...complex (19:45) because such an  
 ...direct attack on the heart of Jewish  
 ...to their mind, none but a blaspheme  
 ...dare do such a thing. Thus they s  
 ...discredit Jesus in the eyes of the  
 ...al herded for Passover (see note at 1

U N D E R S T A N D | E X P L O R E | A P P L Y

# Luke 10-24



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# WHO IS JESUS?

People have varied opinions about who Jesus is. This is nothing new—they always have. Jesus once asked His disciples, “Who do the crowds say that I am?” (Luke 9:18). They replied that some thought He was John the Baptist, others thought He was Elijah or some other ancient prophet. While each of those answers reflected a high opinion about Jesus, they all fell short of Jesus’ true identity and mission.

Because it’s not enough to know what others are saying about Him, Jesus asked His disciples: “But you ... who do *you* say that I am?” (Luke 9:20). After affirming Peter’s reply that Jesus was “God’s Messiah,” He taught them His mission would involve suffering—a cross. Jesus’ death on the cross, however, wouldn’t be an accident nor a tragedy; it would be the fulfillment of God’s eternal plan for our salvation. Jesus added that the cross would not be the final word, but He would be raised on the third day.

Who do you say Jesus is, and what will you do with Him? He said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). Right now, He is waiting for you.

- **Admit** to God that you are a sinner. Repent, turning away from your sin.
- **By faith receive** Jesus Christ as God’s Son and accept Jesus’ gift of forgiveness from sin. He took the penalty for your sin by dying on the cross.
- **Confess** your faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. You may pray a prayer similar to this as you call on God to save you: “Dear God, I know that You love me. I confess my sin and need of salvation. I turn away from my sin and place my faith in Jesus as my Savior and Lord. In Jesus’ name I pray, amen.”

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After you have received Jesus Christ into your life, tell a pastor or another Christian about your decision. Show others your faith in Christ by asking for baptism by immersion in your local church as a public expression of your faith.



# LUKE 10-24

In his Gospel, Luke highlighted Jesus' great love for all people—especially Gentiles, the poor, women, social outcasts, and those labeled by society as sinners. For this reason, the Gospel of Luke has been called “the Gospel of the underdog.” Ultimately, Luke's Gospel is a testimony about God the Son as He took on human flesh and became the Son of Man. As the Son of Man, He walked among humanity, experienced love and hate, suffered rejection and death, and rose victoriously to offer salvation to whomever would repent, believe, and receive Him. This is the good news according to Luke—indeed a message of great joy for all people.

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SPRING 2021



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\*Evangelistic emphasis

# MEET THE WRITER

**Hal Lane** wrote the introduction and Bible commentary for these studies drawn from Luke 10–24. In 2018, Hal retired from the pastorate of West Side Baptist Church in Greenwood, South Carolina, where he had served since 1989. He and his wife, Eileen, continue to worship and serve at West Side as faithful and active church members. The couple has one adult son, Jonathan, who is married to Melissa. Hal and Eileen enjoy watching their five grandchildren grow in body, mind, and in the training and instruction of the Lord.

Hal received Christ as his Savior when he was seven years old. He completed his education and ministry training at the University of South Carolina (B.A.) and Dallas Theological Seminary (Th. M.). During his years of ministry, Hal was tapped to serve as president of the South Carolina Baptist Convention (2003) and as a trustee for the Southern Baptist Convention's Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission.

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# FROM THE TEAM LEADER

Truth seems to be a rare commodity at times. We don't know exactly who to trust or what to trust. We may not even trust ourselves at times when it comes to the truth. How many times have we failed to tell the truth for fear of getting labeled, of being questioned, or worse?

Luke stated in the prologue to his Gospel account that his goal in writing was so that Theophilus might know the truth (1:4). To accomplish his goal, Luke told about people who discovered the truth. We are told about a young lawyer who discovered that a Samaritan was the example of a neighbor. We are also told about a tax collector who was willing to climb a tree so he could discover the truth.

Remember the times we failed to tell the truth? Luke tells us of Peter being in the same boat, failing to tell the truth as Jesus faced a tribunal. We are told about a criminal who discovered the truth while being executed. We find a group of women who found the truth in the form of an empty tomb. Peter also discovered that same tomb and was commissioned to tell that truth in the future.

During our study of Luke 10–24, we will examine these encounters and others as people sought the truth. We will discover along with them that Jesus is the Truth and He offers Himself to any who will believe in Him. Our prayer is that we will have our faith affirmed and strengthened so that we too can know the truth with confidence and boldness.

Humbly,

**G. Dwayne McCrary**

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# INTRODUCTION TO **LUKE**

It was one of the most powerful spiritual experiences I have ever had. My wife and I had traveled to visit our son and his family soon after they moved to a city in the northeastern United States. Our son was especially excited to have us join his family in worship at their new church. The congregation included many young people who had only recently become involved in church participation and congregational worship.

My wife and I were in attendance on the Sunday after Easter. At the conclusion of the previous week's sermon, the pastor had challenged worshipers to read the Gospel of Luke from start to finish during the next seven days. On this Sunday he preached a simple message about the importance of baptism following a new believer's profession of faith in Jesus.

At the time of response, the pastor warmly invited all who had read Luke's Gospel and had made a decision to follow Christ to come forward for counseling and baptism. More than seventy people of all ages streamed forward to express their faith-commitment! Counting salvation decisions made concurrently at the church's satellite campuses, nearly two hundred people came forward that day for baptism. Many of the new believers chose to be baptized there and then in the clothes they had worn to the service.

Everyone in attendance was reminded in a most dramatic way of the power of God's Spirit working through the truth of God's Word. May we keep this power and truth in mind as we embark on this study of Luke 10–24.

## **PURPOSE**

Luke stated the primary purpose of his Gospel in its first four verses. He aimed to produce a trustworthy account of Jesus' birth, ministry, death, resurrection, and teachings for Theophilus [thee AHF ih luhs]. Luke likely anticipated, however, that others would hear and/or read his Gospel account. He stated that his sources were "eyewitnesses and servants of the word" (1:2).

A secondary aim of the writer was to present Jesus Christ as the Son of Man—Jesus' favorite self-designation. As the Son of Man, Jesus fulfilled the prophecies related to the Messiah in the Old Testament. He came to offer Himself as Savior and Lord to both Jews and Gentiles. Luke emphasized Jesus as the One who came to bring salvation to all people groups.

## **WRITER**

Although the name "Luke" does not appear in the Third Gospel's main text, second-century and third-century Christian leaders known as "church

fathers” universally identified Luke—the missionary companion of Paul the apostle—as the author of the Third Gospel and its sequel, the Book of Acts. Some Bible scholars contend that Luke was a Gentile, although he was evidently quite familiar with Jewish beliefs and traditions. Paul referred to Luke as “the dearly loved physician” in Colossians 4:14. Luke may have accompanied Paul on some of his missionary journeys if the so-called “we sections” in the Book of Acts are understood autobiographically (see Acts 16:10-17; 20:5-15; 21:1-18; 27:1–28:16).

## **DATE AND PLACE OF WRITING**

Luke is indicated as a companion of Paul during the apostle’s imprisonment in Rome (see Col. 4:14). The Book of Acts ends with reference to Paul’s two years of house imprisonment in Rome as he awaited trial before the Roman emperor (see Acts 28:30). Some Bible scholars propose that Acts was likely written at some time around AD 61 or 62. If this is the case, then Luke’s Gospel probably was completed shortly before that time. Because of Luke’s presence with Paul during his first Roman imprisonment, Rome may have been the location where both the Gospel and Acts were written.

## **THE SYNOPTIC GOSPELS**

The three Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke are sometimes referred to as the Synoptic Gospels because they share so much common material. On the other hand, Luke’s Gospel contains a number of passages that are unique. None of the other Gospels includes the birth narratives found in Luke 1:5–2:52. Additionally, much of the content found in Luke 9:51–19:27 is unique to the Third Gospel. Some Bible scholars propose that Luke drew materials from the Gospels of Matthew and Mark or from the earlier sources these two Gospels used. Any differences can be attributed to the different theological purposes or emphases of the different Gospels.

## **SOME KEY THEMES**

*Inclusion of Gentiles in God’s plan of salvation*—Luke emphasized more than any of the other Gospel writers that Jesus came to be the Savior of both Jews and Gentiles.

*High regard for women*—Luke wrote extended accounts of Elizabeth’s and Mary’s roles in God’s plan of salvation in chapters 1–2. He told of the prophetess Anna and the disciple Joanna (2:36-38; 8:3; 24:10), of Jesus’ raising of a widow’s son (7:11-18), and of Jesus’ forgiveness of a woman who anointed Him with perfume (7:36-50). In addition, Luke reported about the women who became the first witnesses of Jesus’ resurrection.

*Prayer*—Luke stressed the importance of prayer in the personal life and ministry of Jesus. Some examples include the prayer at His baptism (3:21), on the Mount of Transfiguration (9:29), and in Gethsemane (22:40-41).

*Sovereignty of God*—Luke emphasized that everything related to Jesus’ birth, ministry, death, and resurrection were according to God’s plan. The sovereignty of God is seen in the frequent use of the phrases “it must” and “it is necessary” (2:49; 4:43; 9:22; 17:25; 24:7).

*Plan of salvation*—The emphasis on Jesus’ stated purpose to “seek and to save the lost” (19:10) is prominent in Luke’s Gospel. God the Father is shown to be the One who initiated the sending of His Son as Savior of the world (2:29-32). Jesus frequently refers to His saving mission (4:18-21; 5:30-32; 10:16-20; 22:41-42). The provision of forgiveness of sins for those who believe became the message of the early church (Acts 10:34-43).

*Power of the Holy Spirit*—The Holy Spirit is prominent in Luke’s Gospel. Mary’s pregnancy with the Christ-child is attributed to the power of the Holy Spirit working in her (1:32-35). The Holy Spirit also played an important role at the baptism of Jesus (3:21-22). Jesus was led into the wilderness by the Spirit (4:1) and was empowered by the Spirit for ministry (4:14). John the Baptist promised that Jesus would baptize His followers with the Holy Spirit (3:16). Jesus instructed His disciples about the Holy Spirit (11:13; 12:10-12). Luke’s account of the Great Commission in chapter 24 commands the disciples to wait in Jerusalem until they received power from the Holy Spirit (24:49). The power of the Holy Spirit is seen as essential to fulfilling believers’ commission to take the gospel to all people groups. This command of Jesus foreshadows the similar command found in Acts 1:8.

*The cost of discipleship*—Luke did not limit the term “disciple” to the Twelve but also used the term of every follower of Jesus. Luke greatly emphasized the importance of taking up one’s cross daily as the demand placed on every disciple of Jesus (9:23).

## **FINAL CONSIDERATIONS**

The length and breadth of Luke’s Gospel provide many unique and insightful pictures of Jesus Christ. The birth narratives provide familiar passages that enrich our celebrations at Christmas. The accounts of Jesus’ ministry reveal a Savior who rejected all forms of empty religious ritualism and hypocrisy. He unashamedly sought sinners who would recognize their need of salvation and would receive God’s grace. The narratives of Jesus’ suffering, death, and resurrection provide a powerful testimony of Jesus’ identity as both the Son of Man and the Son of God. The Third Gospel ends with a call to every believer to carry the gospel to the ends of the earth.

# OUTLINE OF LUKE

- I.** Preparation for the Ministry of Jesus (1:1–4:13)
- II.** Jesus' Ministry in Galilee (4:14–9:50)
- III.** Jesus Ministry in Judea and Perea (9:51–19:44)
  - A. Setting out toward Jerusalem (9:51–13:21)
  - B. Continuing toward Jerusalem (13:22–18:30)
  - C. Final approach to Jerusalem (18:31–19:27)
- IV.** Climax of Jesus' Ministry in Jerusalem (19:28–24:53)
  - A. Arrival in Jerusalem (19:28-44)
  - B. Controversies and teaching (19:45–21:38)
  - C. Events of Jesus' final Passover (22:1-46)
  - D. Betrayal, arrest, and trials (22:47–23:25)
  - E. Crucifixion and burial (23:26-56)
  - F. Resurrection, Great Commission, and ascension (24:1-53)



## ON THE COVER

Sycamore trees, also called fig-mulberries or sycamore figs (*ficus sycomorus*), are commonplace in Israel. Often planted along roadways for their shade, their short trunks and wide branches make them easy to climb. Zacchaeus climbed a sycamore tree to get a better view of Jesus. (See Session 6.)

# Neighbors?

Believers demonstrate their love for God by extending mercy to others.

Many states have enacted so-called “good samaritan laws.” These are statutes designed to protect from liability individuals who in good faith attempt to help people who have been injured or are in danger. The label “good samaritan law” is, of course, named for the anonymous hero in the biblical parable Jesus told in Luke 10:30-35.

Ironically, there is generally no legal statute that commands an individual to rescue a stranger in peril or in desperate circumstances. While many people would feel a moral or ethical imperative to get involved in such a situation, compassion and courage cannot be legislated. On the other hand, most of us might be deeply moved to action by accounts of people who became severely injured or who died in an attempt to rescue a stranger in peril. Such accounts compel us to consider what we might do in similar situations. Would we step up and show courage to help, or would we turn and walk away?

The Bible passage that this session focuses on reminds us that the question of helping others in need is not new. Jesus often used parables in His ministry to move His listeners to think about what they would do in certain real-life situations of dire need.

## UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

### LUKE 10:1-13:21

In Luke 10:1-24, Jesus commissioned at least seventy additional disciples to expand the preaching and healing ministry of the Twelve to even more towns in Galilee. After their mission, these disciples returned with joy and told Jesus of the wonderful miracles they had witnessed.

In 10:25-37, Jesus responded to an expert in the law who wanted to know how to inherit eternal life. Jesus commended the man for recognizing that Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18 represented the two foundational

principles of eternal life—wholehearted love for God and a sincere love for one’s neighbor as oneself. In response to the lawyer’s further probe regarding the meaning of “neighbor,” Jesus told the parable of the good Samaritan.

Luke 10:38-42 describes a visit Jesus made to the home of Mary and Martha. (John 12:1-3 reveals that Mary and Martha were sisters to Lazarus, whom Jesus later raised from the dead. Their home was located in Bethany, a village less than two miles from Jerusalem.) Jesus commended Mary for her devotion to His teaching and urged Martha to have the same priority.

In Luke 11:1-13, Jesus taught important principles concerning prayer. He taught that the prayer of a believer should include praise, petition, confession, and surrender. In verses 5-13, He further emphasized the importance of persistence in prayer and faith that God delights in giving His people what they need—especially the gift of the Holy Spirit’s presence.

In Luke 11:14-26, Luke reported that Jesus healed a man who could not speak because of a demon. Some who witnessed the man’s healing accused Jesus of casting out demons by demonic power. Jesus refuted the accusation as being ridiculous in that the devil would never work against himself. Anyone who wanted to see the truth would conclude that a benevolent power—a power much stronger than the devil—had been responsible for the man’s healing.

In Luke 11:27-36, Jesus rebuked the generation of His day for failing to believe the miracles that He performed. He warned His hearers that even pagan groups such as the Old Testament people of Nineveh had repented after hearing prophetic warnings. Jesus promised that all who believe in Him would be full of light and righteousness.

In Luke 11:37-54, Jesus rebuked the religious leaders of His day who taught that obedience to God was a matter of keeping rituals rather than living changed lives. He went on to declare that these leaders would persecute Him just as wicked people in the past tortured and killed God’s true prophets.

In Luke 12:1-34, Jesus warned His followers of future persecution. He also encouraged them to trust in God so they would not be bound up with worry. Jesus warned against believers’ putting trust in earthly treasures and encouraged them to pursue heavenly treasure by seeking God’s kingdom.

In 12:35-59, Luke reported that Jesus encouraged His followers to be ready for service and persecution. He spoke of a time when families would be divided over Him and urged loyalty no matter the cost. Jesus wanted His disciples to be prepared for the time when God would judge their service.

In Luke 13:1-21, Jesus answered questions and used several parables to teach about the kingdom of God. He urged repentance from sin and further rebuked those who would deny healing to the oppressed even on the Sabbath day. Jesus predicted the kingdom of God would expand tremendously.

By doing so, He was anticipating the growth of the church following His death, burial, and resurrection.

## EXPLORE **THE TEXT**

### **THE EXCHANGE** (Luke 10:25-29)

Jesus was asked many questions during His ministry. None of them was more important than the question asked by a man who was steeped in the knowledge of the Old Testament law. It is a question whose answer continues to be vital information for every individual in every generation.

#### **VERSE 25**

**Then an expert in the law stood up to test him, saying, “Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”**

Luke did not indicate the specific place where this exchange between Jesus and **an expert in the law** occurred. In a general sense, Jesus was making His way from Galilee to Jerusalem (see Luke 9:51). Evidently, He dipped down into the territory of Samaria along the way (9:52) but eventually moved into the region of Judea and traveled “through one town and village after another, teaching and making his way to Jerusalem” (13:22). Wherever the encounter happened, the more important point made in Luke’s travel narrative is the way Jesus faced ever-increasing opposition from Jewish religious leaders.

The phrase *expert in the law* (“lawyer,” KJV; ESV) probably refers to the same type of Jewish scripture expert as the term *scribe* (see Mark 12:28; Luke 11:53). Luke presented a generally negative description of these experts. They rejected the preaching of John the Baptist (Luke 7:30), burdened others with legalism (11:45-46), and, along with the Pharisees, hindered people from the true knowledge of salvation (11:52-53).

Luke quickly revealed that the expert’s motive in asking the question was not genuine. His intent was **to test** Jesus. The Greek verb rendered *test* can also mean “tempt.” In other words, the lawyer sought to confound and embarrass Jesus, whom he referred to—perhaps in a disdainful tone—as **Teacher**. The Greek term behind the word *Teacher* is not the word *Rabbi* but in this context is likely used synonymously. The man wanted to prove whether or not Jesus was knowledgeable about important theological truths.

Interestingly, the lawyer’s question **What must I do to inherit eternal life?** probably did not represent a personal inquiry. This was a question

rabbis commonly discussed among themselves or in a teaching setting as a test question to gauge someone's scriptural orthodoxy. The phrase *eternal life* appears in the Old Testament in Daniel 12:2 and perhaps was the source of later discussions of the concept in rabbinic literature. The idea of inheriting *eternal life* pointed to the future possession of life after death. Many scribes (along with the Pharisees) differed in their view of life after death from the more politically connected Jewish sect, the Sadducees, who did not believe in resurrection at all (see Matt. 22:23).

## VERSE 26

**“What is written in the law?” he asked him. “How do you read it?”**

Evidently Jesus knew the lawyer's true motive and thus turned the question back on him. Jesus invited the lawyer to first state what was **written in the law** and then to express his understanding of the text (“**How do you read it?**”). In its narrow sense, the phrase *the law* referred to the Torah, the first five books of the Old Testament. This “expert in the law” would surely have known what the Scriptures said about receiving eternal life.

Jesus thus indicated His acceptance of the Scriptures as the source of truth in determining answers to eternal questions. Unlike most teachers of His day, Jesus did not quote the opinions of the great rabbis but always appealed to the Scriptures. All assertions about God or spiritual matters should be tested by the Scriptures, not by human opinions.

## VERSE 27

**He answered, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,” and “your neighbor as yourself.”**

The expert in the law responded with two Old Testament quotations. The first was to **love the Lord your God** supremely (quoting Deut. 6:5). Devout Jews recited this command, part of the Shema [SHEE mah], twice each day. The words **with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind** combine to emphasize a supreme love for God that consumes all of one's being.

The second command the lawyer quoted derived from Leviticus 19:18. Devout Jews were commanded to love **your neighbor as yourself**. Bible scholars are not certain if these two verses were combined in rabbinic teaching before the first century AD. However, Jesus frequently combined them (see Matt. 22:37-39; Mark 12:30-31). Perhaps the expert in the law was quoting from Jesus' teaching as a path to questioning the meaning and extent of the term *neighbor* in the scriptural command to love.

## VERSE 28

**“You’ve answered correctly,” he told him. “Do this and you will live.”**

Jesus commended and agreed with the lawyer’s answer. Jesus’ command to **do this and ... live** should not be misinterpreted to teach earning one’s salvation through works. The two commands presented in the previous verse were commands to love God and others. Such selfless, sacrificial love is not something human beings can generate in their own power. It is, rather, a relational response to God’s love working in and through us (see 1 John 4:19). Loving God with all of one’s being and loving one’s neighbor as oneself are the fruit of life-changing faith and obedience.

## VERSE 29

**But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”**

Luke again pointed out the law expert’s insincere motive in the encounter. Having been boxed in by Jesus’ use of the Scriptures, the lawyer sought **to justify himself** by probing for a definitive answer to a follow-up question—**“And who is my neighbor?”** Perhaps the man feared that Jesus was about to ask him point-blank if he had, in fact, perfectly obeyed these two foundational commands in Scripture.

The lawyer’s question reflects the legalistic approach so many Jewish religious leaders of Jesus’ day took to avoid admitting that no one could keep the law perfectly. Later in His ministry, an exasperated Jesus declared the scribes and Pharisees to be blind spiritual guides who “strain out a gnat, but gulp down a camel” (Matt. 23:24)! But before we condemn the law expert, we should examine our hearts. The sinful human heart is prone to self-justification. We are often willing to excuse ourselves by condemning others.

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## EXPLORE FURTHER

Read the article titled “Shema” on pages 1449–1450 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. How did Deuteronomy 6:4–9 set Israel apart from surrounding nations and religions?

Why did Jesus say that this passage expressed the most important commandment? Why is it the foundation of all other commandments?

What does it mean to you in practical terms to love God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind?

## THE STORY (Luke 10:30-35)

Asked a question about who qualifies to be a neighbor, Jesus told the parable of the good Samaritan. The parable answers the more important question of how to be a neighbor.

### VERSE 30

**Jesus took up the question and said, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him, beat him up, and fled, leaving him half dead.**

The familiar definition of a parable as “an earthly story with a heavenly meaning” tells only part of its purpose. Parables evoke honest responses to real-life situations and, in so doing, uncover hearers’ true attitudes. Parables appear both in the Old Testament (see Judg. 9:7-15; 2 Sam. 12:1-4) and in Greek literature prior to Jesus’ day. However, Jesus perfected the use of parables in His teaching ministry.

The parable of the good Samaritan was prompted by the law expert’s self-justifying question to Jesus regarding the commandment to love one’s neighbor as oneself (Luke 10:29). Jesus began by describing a realistic scenario in which **a man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell into the hands of robbers**. In New Testament times, the treacherous, seventeen-mile trek from Jerusalem to Jericho descended some 3,300 feet out of the Judean hills to the rift valley through which the Jordan River flowed. The road had a reputation not only for its steep decline but also for its many hiding places where thieves could lie in wait to ambush travelers.

Jesus did not specify the victim’s ethnicity. He may have purposely left out that detail for the lawyer to assume. What was more significant in Jesus’ telling of the parable is that the victim was severely injured. The robbers **stripped him, beat him up, and fled, leaving the man half dead**. Without assistance, the man would likely die.

### VERSE 31

**A priest happened to be going down that road. When he saw him, he passed by on the other side.**

Jesus then told of three successive travelers who encountered the injured man on the road. The first was **a priest** who also **happened to be going down** the road. The words *going down* suggest that the priest also was traveling from Jerusalem toward Jericho. The implication might be that the priest had completed his service at the temple and was returning home. In any case, the priest would have been versed in the Mosaic law, including the

two great commandments of loving God wholeheartedly and loving one's neighbor as oneself. However, knowledge of the law did not move the priest to action in a situation that begged for compassion and assistance. He **saw** the injured man and promptly **passed by on the other side** of the road.

#### **VERSE 32**

**In the same way, a Levite, when he arrived at the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.**

The second person to see the injured man was **a Levite**. Levites were descendants of Levi who assisted the priests at the temple and also held a high position in the eyes of the people with regard to piety and obedience to the law. Just as the priest had done previously, the Levite **arrived at the place** where the injured man lay, **saw him**, and **passed by on the other side**. Jesus did not choose these first two passersby randomly. He reserved His harshest criticisms for the hypocrites of His day who professed to know God's law yet often went to great lengths to bypass it. He condemned their observance of rituals while failing to have compassion for those in need (see 11:46).

#### **VERSE 33**

**But a Samaritan on his journey came up to him, and when he saw the man, he had compassion.**

In the Greek text, the term **Samaritan** appears as the first word of this verse for emphasis. In this way, Jesus drew a stark contrast between the religious elite of Judaism and the despised Samaritans who lived in the region between Galilee and Judea. Many Jews would not step foot in the region of the Samaritans. As the parable envisions, however, some Samaritans would travel in Jewish regions and vice versa.

In contrast to the priest and Levite, the Samaritan not only **saw the injured man** but also **had compassion** on him. *Compassion* is a divine attribute that those who love God seek to emulate. The word literally means "to suffer with" another person. Compassion moves beyond feelings of pity. In the case of the Samaritan, it demonstrated a love that resulted in immediate assistance for a stranger in need.

#### **VERSE 34**

**He went over to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on olive oil and wine. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him.**

The Samaritan acted out of compassion by rendering immediate aid to the victim using available resources. He **bandaged** the man's **wounds**, including **pouring on olive oil and wine**. This description suggests that the victim had suffered cuts and bleeding along with possible head trauma and broken bones from the beating. The Samaritan realized further that the victim needed extended care, so he **put** the injured man **on his own animal** and transported him **to an inn**. The implication is that the Samaritan gave up his own hotel bed for the night to the injured man. Moreover, he **took care of** the injured man throughout the night.

### VERSE 35

**The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, "Take care of him. When I come back I'll reimburse you for whatever extra you spend."**

The Samaritan evidently still needed to conduct the business that brought him the day before to the road between Jericho and Jerusalem, but he would not leave the injured man without care. Therefore, he arranged with **the innkeeper** to look after the man's care until he could return. **Two denarii** [dih NEHR ih igh] would be the equivalent of two day's work for a common laborer. The Samaritan promised further that he would reimburse the innkeeper for any additional expenses when he returned.

Love for one's neighbor that Christ not only displays but also expects of His followers is fueled by genuine compassion. Christlike compassion is not just feeling sorry for someone in need. It involves a radical willingness to expend time and resources to help not only one's friends but also one's opponents (see Luke 6:27-36).

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## EXPLORE FURTHER

Read the article titled "Samaria, Samaritans" on pages 1404–1406 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. If Jesus were telling this parable in your community today, what types of individuals might He name in place of the priest, Levite, and Samaritan? Why these?

## THE CHALLENGE (Luke 10:36-37)

The expert in the law asked Jesus to define "neighbor." He was hoping to justify his own limited view of obligation to help others. Jesus led him to an answer and a view of neighbor that he did not expect or want.

## VERSE 36

**“Which of these three do you think proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?”**

Jesus then posed a question that was designed to expose the lawyer’s true attitude about the commandment to love one’s neighbor. The question led the lawyer to consider whether a non-Israelite could actually prove to be obedient to God’s law while two members of the Jewish religious elite ignored one of the law’s most important commandments?

As today’s readers of the parable recognize, the answer to Jesus’ question was obvious. Yet, that was the purpose of the parable—not merely to expose correct information but to uncover spiritual attitudes. Did the lawyer truly love God wholeheartedly and his neighbor as himself, or did he believe external factors such as ethnicity (Jew or Samaritan) and social position were more important than obedience? The lawyer’s answer would reveal his heart!

## VERSE 37

**“The one who showed mercy to him,” he said. Then Jesus told him, “Go and do the same.”**

To his credit, the expert in the law answered correctly: **the one who showed mercy** to the robbery victim proved to be a neighbor. Notice, however, the lawyer could not bring himself to actually say that the Samaritan had proved to be a neighbor, that the Samaritan had compassionately put aside racial/ethnic differences, religious differences, and personal animosities to help another individual in need.

Mercy is a divine attribute and linked with God’s salvation of His covenant people in the Old Testament (see Ex. 34:6-7). The place of sacrifice on the Day of Atonement in the temple’s holy of holies was called the mercy seat (see Lev. 16:14). The quality of mercy is shown when someone who is strong helps someone who is weak. Jesus taught His disciples that mercy is an attribute of those who are saved and are part of the kingdom of God (see Matt. 5:7).

Jesus concluded the conversation by telling the expert in the law to **go and do the same**. That is, the lawyer needed to use the Samaritan in Jesus’ parable as an example of what it means to be a neighbor. The lawyer had wanted to engage in a theological discussion through which he could expose Jesus in a misstatement. But Jesus never taught theological truth without emphasizing the need to act on the truth. Jesus’ teaching was intensely practical. The implication for the lawyer was to help those in need that he encountered. And what about us? We too need to understand the implications of the parable of the good Samaritan for our lives. How can we obey the Lord’s command to love our neighbors as ourselves?

Here are some principles that can guide us in fulfilling the law of love: First, there must be a desire to help others. If we are selfish, we will not care about the needs of others. If we are greedy, we will not want to give some of what we have to help others. Humility is not thinking poorly of ourselves but rather is prioritizing the needs of others (see Phil. 2:3-4).

Second, we can seek God's help in overcoming the prejudices that limit our willingness to help certain groups of people. Our prejudices may include race, income, ethnicity, appearance, age, or any number of factors. We will not desire to help those we despise. Because prejudice is a spiritual problem, it can only be overcome with the power of the Holy Spirit. We must recognize these moral weaknesses and ask the Lord to help us eliminate them.

Third, we can seek God's will in knowing how to best help others. All solicitations are not equally valid. We are not obligated to give blindly to anyone who asks. Investigation is not always possible, and we can all be deceived. However, we must not let our disappointment in some people justify an unwillingness to help others in genuine need.

Fourth, we can keep in mind that helping others in need is a part of fulfilling the Great Commission. We are not told in the parable how the injured traveler responded to the Samaritan's rescue, but he was likely filled with gratitude. Perhaps the experience changed his views about Samaritans. Being the recipient of love and help can be transformational in the lives of those who are helped. It opens their hearts to hear the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Finally, it is important to remember the reason we as believers are to love our neighbors as ourselves. The command to love one's neighbor is the second commandment in importance. The first in importance is to love the Lord with all of our being. God's love for us as sinners was merciful and undeserved. We are able to love Him only because He first loved us and gave His Son Jesus Christ to save us. He commands that we love our neighbors as ourselves, and Jesus made it clear that the concept of neighbor must not be limited by human prejudices. Our love for others, especially those who are difficult to love, is an act of worship and gratitude to God who first loved us.

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## EXPLORE FURTHER

Read the article titled "Mercy" on pages 1081–1083 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. How has God shown mercy to His people? To His enemies? How can believers show mercy to others? To enemies? To strangers?

## Session 2 | Luke 15:20-32

# Celebrate?

Believers can celebrate God's restoring forgiveness.

We celebrate people, things, and events that are important to us. Families celebrate birthdays, anniversaries, achievements, and graduations. Sports fans celebrate the victories of their teams. Business people celebrate the profits and expansion of their companies. What we celebrate and how we celebrate can reveal a lot about our priorities and values.

The vocabulary of celebration in the Old Testament is commonly linked to the religious festivals that God commanded His people to observe. These included the festivals of Passover (Lev. 23:5), Unleavened Bread (Ex. 23:15), Harvest, and Ingathering (Ex. 23:16). The celebration of these festivals reminded Israel of God's salvation and provision. Only in times of national apostasy or during the exile were these festivals neglected.

Jesus revealed that there are celebrations in heaven too! In Luke 15, He responded to the criticism of religious leaders that He spent time with sinners and even ate meals with them (15:2). Jesus responded by telling three parables about things or people that were lost and recovered. In each parable, a celebration followed the restoration of the lost item. Jesus said there is rejoicing in heaven when even one sinner repents (15:7).

In this session, we will examine the parable of the prodigal son. The story highlights the compassion and willingness of God the Father to forgive and restore all who return to Him for salvation. It also criticizes those who, because of self-righteousness, refuse to rejoice in the salvation of sinners.

## UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

### LUKE 13:22-16:31

In Luke 13:22-35, Jesus warned that many Israelites would fail to enter the kingdom of God, while many Gentiles would repent, believe in Him, and be allowed to enter. He warned that the "first" (many Jews) would be last (not saved), while the last (many Gentiles) would be first (saved).

In Luke 14:1-24, Jesus chastised the Pharisees for their lack of compassion and their legalistic self-righteousness. In response to criticism of His healing a man on the Sabbath, Jesus silenced His critics by pointing out that they would help an animal but not a person on the Sabbath day (14:1-6). In 14:7-14, Jesus rebuked those who insisted on having places of honor at banquets. He urged humility and honoring of the poor. In 14:15-24, Jesus told a parable about people who gave poor excuses for not attending a banquet. He implied that the excuse givers represented religious leaders who failed to respond to God's invitation to share in the blessings of the kingdom of God.

In 14:25-35, Jesus challenged His followers to understand the high cost of discipleship. Disciples must love Christ supremely and be willing to die for Him. They must persevere in their walk with Him and not turn back.

In 15:1-32, Jesus responded to the criticisms of the Pharisees that He associated with "sinners." He told three parables to contrast their view of sinners with God's view. In 15:1-7, Jesus told of a shepherd who left his flock to save one lost sheep. When the shepherd returned with the rescued sheep, he invited his neighbors to celebrate the recovery. In 15:8-10, Jesus told of a woman who searched for a lost coin. She too invited friends and neighbors to celebrate with her when she found the coin. In 15:11-32, Jesus told the parable that is the focus of this session—the parable of the prodigal son. The main point again was to emphasize the joy of people repenting and being forgiven.

In 16:1-31, Jesus warned His disciples about greed. In 16:1-13, He told the parable of the unjust steward and urged His disciples to use earthly wealth wisely. In 16:14-18, He warned that what is acceptable to men is not necessarily acceptable to God. In 16:19-31, He gave an account of the fates of a rich man and a poor beggar named Lazarus. The point of this account was to emphasize that people must respond in obedience to the revelation God gives them in this life.

## EXPLORE **THE TEXT**

### **FORGIVENESS GRANTED** (Luke 15:20-24)

Luke 15 begins with Jesus' response to the Pharisees' criticism that he "welcomes sinners and eats with them" (15:2). The religious leaders did not consider themselves to be "sinners." As far as the Pharisees were concerned, only notoriously immoral individuals such as prostitutes, tax collectors, and pagan Gentiles deserved that label. In response to His critics, Jesus told three parables to demonstrate the value God placed on all people, the need

for all to repent and be forgiven, and the rejoicing by God's people that should accompany the salvation of even one such "sinner."

In the third of His trilogy of "rejoicing over repentance" parables, Jesus told the story of a man who had two sons. The younger of the two sons callously demanded his inheritance early and then promptly left home to waste his inheritance in foolish living (15:13). He soon found himself destitute, homeless, and longing to eat the scraps he fed to a person's pigs. It was in this desperate situation that the young man came to his senses and realized how much better his life had been in his father's household (15:17). He decided to go home and plead with his father to make him a servant in the household (15:18-19).

## VERSE 20

**So he got up and went to his father. But while the son was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion. He ran, threw his arms around his neck, and kissed him.**

The words **he got up and went to his father** summarize what must have been a long and difficult journey for the younger son. Probably the young man's health and strength had deteriorated along with his popularity and wealth. He likely had to beg for food from strangers just to survive the trip. He undoubtedly had just the tattered and dirty clothes on his back when he finally came in sight of his father's house.

In this condition, the young man epitomized the wretched state of every sinner who comes to God for salvation. He had nothing to offer and nothing to boast about. He was hopeless and helpless without his father. He was uncertain of how his father would receive him. He wasn't coming home as a son but as a pauper seeking sustenance through servitude.

Jesus said that the **father** first spotted the returning son **while he was still a long way off**. This phrase adds drama to the story, perhaps suggesting that the father was constantly scanning the horizon in hope that his son would one day return. Jesus then said that the father **was filled with compassion** for the son. Likewise, Jesus came to reveal the heavenly Father to us as no one else could (see Luke 10:22). He was teaching that God the Father responds with compassion toward repentant sinners who return to Him in faith.

Jesus would later describe the older son's response to his brother's return, and the contrast with the father's response could not be greater. The father in the parable **ran** to his returning son, **threw his arms around** the younger son's **neck, and kissed him**. Such actions would have sounded shocking to Jesus' first-century hearers. Ancient Near Eastern fathers did not typically

show such open affection and emotion—especially toward a rebellious son. This father’s actions, however, were intended to show the depths of compassion and forgiveness the heavenly Father gives to repentant sinners.

## VERSE 21

**The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight. I’m no longer worthy to be called your son.’**

After coming to his senses and deciding to return to his father’s house, the prodigal son had rehearsed what he would say to his father (Luke 15:18-19). Now that moment came, and the father’s surprising initiative in running to welcome his wayward son must have encouraged the prodigal to follow through on his confession and request. He began with the confession, addressing his parent as **Father**. The son had used the same term previously when he demanded to have his inheritance early (15:12). Then, however, he had not treated his father with honor; neither had he showed that he loved his father more than he loved what his father could give him. Now the father would hear a humbler tone and a different kind of request from his younger son.

The words **I have sinned against heaven and in your sight** remind us that while sinful behavior is certainly destructive to ourselves and others, it is first a vile offense against God our Creator. A repentant King David understood this fact after his horrendous acts against Bathsheba and her husband, Uriah (David’s own loyal soldier), when the king prayed to the Lord, “Against you—you alone—I have sinned and done this evil in your sight” (Ps. 51:4). Similarly, the prodigal son demonstrated that he had experienced a spiritual conviction of sin against God and recognized as well that his actions had deeply hurt his earthly father. Not everyone who feels tinges of guilt for sinful behavior turns to the Lord for forgiveness. Jesus wanted us to know that we must turn to our heavenly Father first before we seek forgiveness from others.

The young man went on to say that he felt **no longer worthy to be called** the man’s **son**. He confessed that his sinful actions had broken the family relationship. He had lost any right to be called a son of his father. Thus, the prodigal realized that his only hope was to plead for mercy.

## VERSE 22

**“But the father told his servants, ‘Quick! Bring out the best robe and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet.’**

Interestingly, the returning son had also planned to ask the father to allow him to work for his keep as a hired servant (15:19). Before he could make that request, however, the father cut him off. What a beautiful picture of salvation

Jesus painted in this parable! If any sinner ever wonders if he or she has sinned too greatly or too much to be saved, this parable offers a resounding “No!” The picture of the father’s ready acceptance of his repentant son clashed with the first-century religious leaders’ belief that salvation would be more of congratulations for a job well done rather than an acceptance of a repentant sinner. The Pharisees listening to Jesus would probably have been shaking their heads in disagreement. They could never imagine God the Father responding to a sinner in this way.

The father in the parable commanded his **servants** to quickly go and **bring out** items that were suitable for a son, not a hired worker. These items included **the best robe** to replace the prodigal’s dirty and tattered garment. The **ring** to be placed on the son’s finger may have featured a family insignia or, in the least, was a symbol of the son’s new standing and prosperity. Similarly, the placement of **sandals on his feet** suggests the prodigal was barefooted. This fact shows how desperately poor and needy the young man had become in his life of “foolish living” (15:13).

Parables, including this one, are not meant to be allegorized (a literary device in which every element represents some spiritual reality). Nevertheless, the new clothing of the son gives a beautiful picture of the immediate effects of salvation and grace. The prodigal deserved none of these items; neither could he work for them. His compassionate, merciful father freely provided them upon his return (repentance). Likewise, we as sinners come to God for salvation through faith in Christ, and He provides the inheritance that we do not deserve and cannot earn. Salvation is by grace through faith—period.

### **VERSE 23**

**Then bring the fattened calf and slaughter it, and let’s celebrate with a feast,**

The return of the son called for a feast featuring **a fattened calf** as the main course. The modern reader may not realize how special the father’s call for a celebration was in Jesus’ day. Many families ate meat only on special occasions; the slaughtering and cooking of a fattened calf was reserved for only the most important occasions. The luxury of this feast revealed how happy the father in the parable was to have his son home.

### **VERSE 24**

**because this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!’ So they began to celebrate.**

The celebration may have involved the community’s participation. The father used phrases such as **was dead and is alive again** and **was lost and**

**is found** to describe the reversal of the prodigal's perilous former state. In the parable, the son almost physically died but now was healthy and whole. Likewise, sinners are spiritually dead and brought to life by God's power (see Eph. 2:1-5). The imagery of being lost and then found connects with the previous parables where a lost sheep was rescued and a lost coin was found (Luke 15:5,9). Comparing lost, wandering people to lost sheep can also be found in the Old Testament (see Ps. 119:176; Jer. 50:6).

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## EXPLORE FURTHER

Read the article titled "Compassion" on pages 325–326 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. What are some examples of God's compassion toward Israel in the Old Testament? How are Christians expected to show compassion to the lost? To each other?

## RESENTMENT EXPRESSED (Luke 15:25-30)

In the parables of the lost sheep and coin, the climax of the story quickly followed the recovery of what had been lost. The sequence followed the pattern of crisis, recovery, and celebration. The parable of the prodigal son adds an important and different element—the reaction of the father's older son to the younger son's restoration.

### VERSE 25

**"Now his older son was in the field; as he came near the house, he heard music and dancing.**

The **older son** had not been present to witness his brother's return. The phrase **in the field** indicates that the older son had been working or at least managing the father's workers. Only as he **came near the house** and **heard music and dancing** did he begin to realize something out of the ordinary must have happened. The Greek term rendered *music* is the basis of our English word *symphony* and thus likely included various instruments such as flutes and drums. The word rendered *dancing* is the basis of our word *chorus* and could refer to a group of people chanting and dancing together joyfully.

### VERSES 26-27

**So he summoned one of the servants, questioning what these things meant. 'Your brother is here,' he told him, 'and your father**

## **has slaughtered the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.'**

The older son had to ask **one of the servants** why a celebration was being held. He knew of no plans for a feast that evening. It must have come as quite a shock to hear that his younger brother had returned home. As the older son's later words and actions indicate, he neither knew nor cared whether his younger brother was alive or dead.

The older brother's cold, unsympathetic attitude toward the younger brother was characteristic of the Pharisees' attitude toward those whom they classified as sinners (see 15:2). The real shock for the older son was that his father had **slaughtered the fattened calf** to celebrate the return of such a worthless sinner. We as hearers of the parable can imagine that if the older brother had been the first to encounter his returning brother, he would have mocked the younger brother, rehashed the younger brother's selfish and rebellious actions, and banished the younger brother forever.

### **VERSE 28**

#### **"Then he became angry and didn't want to go in. So his father came out and pleaded with him.**

The older son **became angry** and refused to join the party inside the house. Why was the older son's reaction to his brother's return the polar opposite of his father's? His anger indicated that he didn't think his prodigal brother was getting the punishment he deserved.

We all make judgments about whether we think we are being treated fairly as compared to how others are being treated. We often seem to be okay receiving merciful treatment for our own shortcomings but angry when others get such favor. The older son who stayed home and worked diligently for his father believed he deserved better treatment than that being given to the prodigal. He wanted his younger brother to receive justice, not grace.

Perhaps a second concern of the older brother was a fear that the restored prodigal would again be made an heir. The younger son had wasted his part of the inheritance. Now the concern was that a portion of what was left would be divided with his restored brother. The older brother revealed his jealousy and envy of those who receive forgiveness and grace.

Evidently the servant who informed the older brother of the celebration also went inside and told the father that his older son refused to join the party. In response, the father **came out and pleaded with** his older son. The implication of this action was clear: the father wanted to restore not only his lost son but also his broken family. He loved both sons and wanted them to enjoy the full blessings of being his children.

## VERSE 29

**But he replied to his father, ‘Look, I have been slaving many years for you, and I have never disobeyed your orders, yet you never gave me a goat so that I could celebrate with my friends.**

The two sons’ spiritual conditions were evident in their attitudes toward their father. Before leaving home, the younger son considered his father to be an impediment to his desire for an unrestricted lifestyle of selfish pleasure. He demonstrated a lack of parental respect by demanding his inheritance early. After he came to his senses, the younger son realized that his father was actually wise and loving. He returned to beg for his father’s forgiveness and to be given an opportunity to work as a servant.

The older son concluded that his father was foolish to forgive and restore the younger son. He complained about **slaving many years** for his father—a complaint that revealed not only the older son’s view of his relationship with his father but also his long-simmering anger. Jealous disdain dripped from his claim to have **never disobeyed** his father’s **orders** (“commandment,” KJV; “command,” ESV). This claim was a blatant statement of self-righteousness. It also underscored the son’s (erroneous) view that he was nothing more to his father than another hired worker. Perhaps outwardly the older son had generally obeyed, but inwardly he did not love his father.

This statement identifies the older son’s words with the Pharisees’ attitude about God. Not everyone demonstrates their separation from God (lostness) in the same way. Some are selfish and rebellious prodigals, while others secretly harbor resentment behind an external veneer of piety. After his spiritual transformation, the younger son was willing to be a slave to his father. The older son resented serving his father.

## VERSE 30

**But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your assets with prostitutes, you slaughtered the fattened calf for him.’**

The older son refused to refer to his repentant sibling as his brother; rather, he insisted on using the phrase **this son of yours**. This was a subtle way of saying, “This is all your fault, Dad! He’s your son. You caved to his dishonorable demand for money, which he then immediately wasted in an immoral lifestyle (**with prostitutes**). Now he comes home ragged, starving, and broke; and what do you do? You throw him a welcome home party.”

Some commentators have compared this parable to Jesus’ parable of the landowner in Matthew 20:1-16. In that parable, laborers who worked all day complained about the landowner’s generosity in paying the same wages to

other workers who had worked only part of a day. In a similar way, the older son in this parable had no understanding of—or appreciation for—grace. He believed that his father was wrong to act with mercy toward any of his sons.

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## EXPLORE FURTHER

Read the article titled “Grace” on pages 670–672 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. What is the definition of grace? How is grace related to the doctrine of salvation? How can we demonstrate God’s grace to the lost? To one another in the church?

## REALITY DEFINED (Luke 15:31-32)

Many readers can relate to a loving father who struggles to keep his family together. Being a great parent doesn’t guarantee that raising your children will be easy or without conflict. In the conclusion of the parable, the father urged his older son to join in the celebration of his brother’s restoration.

### VERSE 31

**“Son,’ he said to him, ‘you are always with me, and everything I have is yours.**

The father in the parable refused to be provoked by his older son’s lack of mercy toward his brother. Instead, he showed his older son the same generosity and grace that he had shown to his prodigal son. The father reminded his older son of two important realities about their family relationship.

First, the father reminded his older son that **you are always with me**. Based on the Old Testament law, a firstborn son was eligible to receive a double share of the family inheritance (see Deut. 21:17). Some commentators point to this law as a reminder to the Pharisees of the privileges they had in terms of being descendants of Israel and potential heirs of the promises God made to those who accept them by faith. There was hope in the father’s response that the older son would repent too and embrace the joy of salvation by grace.

### VERSE 32

**But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.”**

The Greek phrase translated **we had to celebrate and rejoice** indicates that the proper response to even one sinner’s repentance is joy. The heavenly Father

always rejoices when a lost person is saved. He calls for the same response from His children. This call to celebrate supports the biblical promise that all who come to Jesus Christ in faith for salvation will be joyfully accepted (see John 3:16; Rom. 10:13). Jesus came to reveal the Father; He wanted those who refused to care about the salvation of sinners to know just how opposite such an attitude was from the Father's attitude.

Jesus ended the parable without indicating whether the older son changed his mind, agreed with his father, and joined the celebration. Perhaps by leaving this detail silent, Jesus forced the religious leaders to finish the story for themselves—that is, to look inside their hearts and see their own attitudes. Were they unwilling to rejoice over a sinner's salvation? Or were they themselves willing to repent and join the salvation party?

Likewise, the questions for us today from this parable are whether we rejoice in the salvation of the lost and, if not, why not. Why would any believer today not rejoice in the salvation of the lost? First, today's believers might be tempted to have a sense of self-righteousness just as the first-century Pharisees had. We might consider some people as unworthy of salvation. If so, we must repent of this attitude.

Second, some believers might forget that the Great Commission commands us to win and disciple the lost. We can become comfortable in our fellowship with other believers and neglect the mission of evangelism. No believer can claim an exemption from the privilege of sharing the gospel with others.

Third, the desire to share one's faith is always an indicator of the believer's love for God, gratitude for salvation, and desire to do the Lord's will. Jesus taught that He came "to seek and to save the lost" (Luke 19:10). He calls upon all of us who follow Him as disciples to continue His mission so that all people have an opportunity to hear and respond to the gospel. We know from the parable of the prodigal son that when one person is saved on earth, there is rejoicing throughout heaven. Christians who have shared the gospel and led someone to Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit know that there is no other experience in the Christian life that brings greater joy to the proclaimer as well as to the new believers. Let's take every opportunity to rejoice and celebrate those who were dead but are now alive in Jesus Christ!

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## EXPLORE FURTHER

Read the article titled "Joy" on pages 934–935 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. What brings the Father the greatest joy? What do the things that we rejoice in reveal about our spirituality? What should those who are saved rejoice in?

**Session 3** | **Luke 18:9-17**

# Worthy?

God welcomes those who approach Him in humble and simple faith.

Modern sociologists often label various generations by using a memorable characteristic of each group. For example, people in the United States born between 1946 and 1954 have sometimes been called the “baby boom generation” (because of the large number of births in those years) and at other times the “me generation” (because of the cohort’s desire for self-gratification or self-fulfillment). Nearly half a century later, the generation known as “millennials” (born from 1980 to 2000) have been similarly dubbed as “generation me.” Those who use this label point out that “millennials” tend to display a heightened emphasis on self-esteem, leading at times to narcissistic and selfish behavior.

In truth, every generation of human beings since the fall in the garden of Eden could rightly be described as the “me generation.” That is, after Adam and Eve sinned in the garden and fell under sin’s curse by God’s decree, the sin nature has been inherited by humanity’s succeeding generations from that time until now. The sin nature by definition is a proneness to trust in self and live by one’s own desires rather than trusting in our Creator God and living according to His commands.

For decades in the United States, there has been a focus on the need to build self-esteem in people from childhood. The belief is that if every person has a large measure of self-love, the world would be a happier and safer place. The reality is that while self-esteem may have improved, behavior has not improved. People who possess high self-esteem may not be necessarily happier or more moral. Self-esteem must be informed by a proper relationship with God and conformity to His Word.

Jesus told a parable about two men who were polar opposites with regard to self-esteem. One man was accepted in his prayers to God and the other was rejected. Jesus also pointed to young children as examples of those who had nothing to boast of but exhibited an essential characteristic of those who would be saved. As we study these passages in this session, we can see that proper self-evaluation and confession of sin must precede and inform our thoughts about God and ourselves. Only when we are right with God can we have proper self-esteem.

# UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

## LUKE 17:1–18:30

Luke 17:1-10 contains four sayings of Jesus. In verses 1-2, Jesus taught that temptations are inevitable; further, He predicted a severe judgment for those who tempt others to sin. In verses 3-4, Jesus urged rebuke for those involved in sin and forgiveness for those who repent and confess their sins. In verses 5-6, Jesus promised powerful results for those who put their faith in God, and in verses 7-10, Jesus told His disciples that obedience to God's commands deserves no special reward.

In Luke 17:11-19, Jesus healed ten men afflicted with leprosy. After they were healed only one man returned to thank Jesus. Jesus commended the man's faith and noted the ingratitude of the other nine.

In Luke 17:20-37, Jesus responded to a question from the Pharisees about when and how the future kingdom of God would come. Jesus predicted His followers would face persecution in the future. His return would catch many people by surprise; some would be saved, while others would perish. Jesus used the flood of Noah and the destruction of Sodom as historical examples of the end times. He urged vigilance and faithfulness until His return.

In Luke 18:1-8, Jesus urged His disciples to persevere in prayer. To illustrate His point, He told the parable of an ungodly judge who was finally persuaded to give a poor widow the justice that she sought. Jesus emphasized that the judge did so because of the widow's persistence. He contrasted the reluctant judge who gave a persistent widow justice with the heavenly Father who is always ready and willing to answer the prayers of His people.

In Luke 18:9-14, Jesus told the parable of a Pharisee and tax collector who went to the temple to pray. Jesus explained that the prideful Pharisee's prayer was rejected, while the humble tax collector's prayer was accepted. The parable was a condemnation of legalistic self-righteousness.

In Luke 18:15-17, Jesus rebuked His disciples for preventing access to Him by parents who wanted Jesus to bless their children. Jesus said that those who enter the kingdom of God must demonstrate simple, childlike faith.

In Luke 18:18-30, Jesus encountered a ruler who asked what he must do to inherit eternal life. Jesus pointed the man to the commandments of the law—commands the ruler claimed to have kept from his youth. Jesus then commanded the man to sell all that he had and give the money to the poor. The ruler refused and went away sad. Jesus then commented on how the love of wealth often prevents people from entering the kingdom of God. He promised heavenly treasure to those who were willing to give up earthly treasure and follow Him with wholehearted devotion.

# EXPLORE THE TEXT

## RELIGIOUS PRIDE (Luke 18:9-12)

Jesus told a parable about two people who went to the temple to pray. One individual was a Pharisee. The Pharisee prayed with self-righteous arrogance and viewed himself as highly worthy of God's blessing.

### VERSE 9

**He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and looked down on everyone else:**

In Luke 18:1-8, Jesus taught about the importance of persevering in prayer. He illustrated the theme by telling a parable about a widow who kept coming before an uncaring judge until she received justice against an adversary. This teaching set the stage for Jesus to address another important issue related to prayer: the heart-attitude with which one comes before God in prayer. Luke pointed out in 18:9 that Jesus told this second parable in the chapter especially to confront those **who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and looked down on everyone else.**

This description of self-righteous arrogance fit many of the Jewish religious leaders of Jesus' day, particularly the scribes and Pharisees. Modern psychologists might say that these groups had very high self-esteem. But Jesus knew better; He knew the true condition of their hearts. They displayed haughtiness, not humility. They viewed themselves more highly than they ought and looked down their noses at those who were not part of their groups or who seemed unworthy of God's blessing.

The Greek verb translated *looked down on* implies not only a negative attitude but a rejection of others who did not meet the self-righteous groups' standards. Those who understand that salvation is by grace through faith and not of works realize they have no cause to exalt themselves by denigrating others.

### VERSE 10

**“Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.**

Jesus told the story of **two men** who happened to arrive at **the temple** complex at the same time to pray. Public times of prayer (with priests presiding) were held at nine in the morning and three in the afternoon. However, individuals could also come to the temple courtyards at other times and pray privately

if desired. Because the Jerusalem temple was situated on a mountain height, the Greek verb rendered **went up** was a literal description of how worshipers approached the courtyards.

The contrast of the two individuals in Jesus' parable could not have been more dramatic. They represented opposite ends of the religious and social spectrums. The first man was a **Pharisee**. The Jewish historian Josephus identified three Jewish sects in his writings—Pharisees, Essenes, and Sadducees. The origin of the Pharisees is not clear, yet it was the largest of the three sects, numbering perhaps six thousand members in New Testament times.

Pharisees were mostly men who did not receive their living from religious ministry—that is, they were not priests. Paul had been a Pharisee before his conversion to faith in Christ; he earned his living as a tentmaker (see Acts 18:3; Phil. 3:5). The Pharisees emphasized the authority of the entire Old Testament and gave authority as well to a body of legalistic interpretations and applications of the law, the latter of which earned them Jesus' rebuke. The Pharisees prided themselves in being spiritually superior to others and did not associate with those who, in their view, violated the law and traditions of the rabbis.

The second man in Jesus' parable represented just the type of “sinner” the Pharisees loathed and refused to associate with: a **tax collector** (“publican,” KJV). The Roman government established the office of *tax collector* as a means of collecting revenue from occupied lands such as Galilee and Judea. Sometimes local Jewish citizens were contracted as tax collectors. Consequently, most Jews despised them as greedy. Jewish religious leaders considered such tax collectors to be traitors and ritually defiled because of their contacts with Gentiles. Jesus, on the other hand, accepted a tax collector (Matthew) as one of His twelve disciples (see Matt. 9:9) and ate with tax collectors on occasion (see Luke 5:30; 15:1).

## VERSE 11

**The Pharisee was standing and praying like this about himself: ‘God, I thank you that I’m not like other people—greedy, unrighteous, adulterers, or even like this tax collector.**

In first-century Jewish life, praying in a **standing** posture with one's face and hands uplifted was not unusual. In the parable, however, the Pharisee's posture likely suggested a prideful attitude—especially when coupled with the description that he was **praying ... about himself**. Certainly the Pharisee's posture and attitude contrasted starkly with the tax collector's posture and attitude (see 18:13).

The first words of the Pharisee's prayer (**God, I thank you**) reflected a typical beginning to the Jewish prayer of blessing. From that point forward, however, the prayer was largely an exercise in self-congratulation. The Pharisee was grateful that he was **not like other people**. In particular, he was thankful not to be **greedy** or **unrighteous** and grateful not to be counted among the sexually immoral (**adulterers**). The Greek word rendered *greedy* ("extortioners," KJV; ESV; "robbers," NIV) describes those who cheat and steal from others, violating the eighth commandment (see Ex. 20:15). *Adulterers* are violators of the seventh commandment (see Ex. 20:14). The Pharisee's claim to not be *unrighteous* was another way of asserting a sense of self-righteousness—the precise group of people Jesus addressed with the parable (see Luke 18:9)!

Then the Pharisee contrasted himself directly with another worshiper at the temple that day. He had taken notice of the nearby presence of **this tax collector** and congratulated himself that he was not like such a despised sinner. Comparing himself to the tax collector gave the Pharisee a false sense of righteousness. Such an assumption was based on a false standard. God does not hold people accountable based on whether they are better or worse than other people but rather on how they fare based on His righteous standards.

## VERSE 12

### **I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of everything I get.'**

The Pharisee did not think of himself as average but rather as exceptional in his devotion to God. He bragged that he fasted **twice a week**. Fasts in Jesus' day consisted of refraining from food (and sometimes drink) from sunrise to sunset. The Old Testament commanded fasting for the people of Israel on the Day of Atonement each year (see Lev. 16:29) and later on four days that commemorated the destruction of Jerusalem (see Zech. 7:3,5; 8:19). Fasting was an optional religious act at other times to express mourning or to focus on seeking God's will. Jesus fasted for forty days in preparation for His ministry (see Luke 4:2). Pharisees in Jesus' day developed the practice of fasting on Mondays and Thursdays. Jesus criticized those who fasted only for public recognition (see Matt. 6:16). He commended, however, voluntary fasting for believers as a spiritual discipline (see Matt. 6:17).

The Pharisee's second claim of spiritual devotion had to do with tithing: **I give a tenth of everything I get**. The rabbis taught that Old Testament law required three annual tithes: (1) a tithe in support of the priesthood; (2) a tithe in support of the annual pilgrimage festivals; and (3) a tithe in support of the poor. Rigorous Pharisees gave tithes even from the herbs growing in their gardens. It isn't clear what the Pharisee included in his phrase *everything I get*; nonetheless, he clearly was boasting of his piety.

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## EXPLORE FURTHER

Read the article titled “Jewish Parties In The New Testament” on pages 896–897 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. Why did various parties form within Judaism? What were some of the various groups’ doctrinal differences? How can Christians today avoid developing an attitude of self-righteousness?

### GODLY HUMILITY (Luke 18:13-14)

Having described the self-righteous attitude of the Pharisee’s prayer at the temple, Jesus next described the prayer of the tax collector. Although both men went to the temple to pray, the purposes and prayers of the two men were radically different.

#### VERSE 13

**“But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even raise his eyes to heaven but kept striking his chest and saying, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner!’**

The **tax collector** stood **far off**. Likely this was a reference to the man’s distance from the sanctuary, or holy place. Evidently the Pharisee stood closer to the holy place, reflecting his confident self-righteousness before God. The tax collector, on the other hand, did not feel righteous at all and **would not even raise his eyes to heaven**. Like the Pharisee, the tax collector stood to pray, but his posture was one of humility and even unworthiness. There is an Old Testament parallel to the tax collector’s posture in Ezra 9:6, where Ezra confessed to God on behalf of the Jewish exiles, “My God, I am ashamed and embarrassed to lift my face toward you ... because our iniquities are higher than our heads and our guilt is as high as the heavens.”

While the Pharisee’s prayer was one of self-congratulation, the tax collector’s prayer was one of repentance and a plea for mercy. The act of repeatedly **striking his chest** (“smote upon his breast,” KJV; “beat his breast,” ESV; NIV) represented deep sorrow for his sins. He realized that he had no claim of righteousness in the presence of an infinitely holy God; he could only cry out, **“God, have mercy on me, a sinner.”** The Greek verb rendered *have mercy* is related to the verb meaning “to make propitiation for someone.” In the Septuagint [sep TOO uh jint], an ancient Greek translation of the Old Testament, the same root word is used to refer to the mercy seat that sat atop the ark of the covenant (see Ex. 25:17).

In the New Testament, Hebrews 2:17 indicates that Jesus “had to be like his brothers and sisters in every way, so that he could become a merciful and faithful high priest in matters pertaining to God, to make atonement for the sins of the people.” In other words, the tax collector at the temple was essentially praying for the atonement (mercy) Jesus later provided through His death on the cross (see Rom. 3:25; 1 John 2:2).

#### VERSE 14

**I tell you, this one went down to his house justified rather than the other, because everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.”**

The phrase **I tell you** appears more than two dozen times in Luke’s Gospel to introduce important and authoritative statements by Jesus. In this instance, the phrase introduces Jesus’ conclusion regarding which individual in His parable left the temple and **went down to his house justified**. The phrase **this one** refers to the tax collector who pleaded for God’s mercy and received it.

The self-righteous Pharisee, on the other hand, was not justified before God in his prayer. The Greek verb rendered *justified* anticipates its extensive use by Paul in his epistles, especially the Letter to the Romans. Paul used this term to describe salvation in terms of being forgiven of sin and made right with God through faith in Jesus Christ (see Rom. 3:24; 5:1,9; 8:30). Justification is an instantaneous act in which God declares the repentant sinner forgiven and free from condemnation (see Rom. 5:1).

The Pharisee did not believe he needed to be forgiven or justified. According to rabbinic teaching, if he had felt the need to repent, his remedy would have been through deeds of reparation to the person or persons offended. The doctrine of justification by faith was not new. Paul pointed out in Romans 4 that Abraham (and all who were saved in Old Testament times) were declared righteous by faith and not by works. Nonetheless, the doctrine of righteousness by faith and not by works became the scandalous truth that enraged Jewish leaders in Jesus’ day and beyond (see 1 Cor. 1:23; Gal. 5:11).

Jesus then explained the divine rationale by which the tax collector went home justified but the Pharisee did not: **everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted**. Jesus used this same statement in Luke 14:11 at the conclusion of His parable of the wedding banquet. That parable, like the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector praying at the temple, was a call for humility before God. Trying to convince God in prayer that we deserve His blessings or have somehow earned them by our good works is a fruitless (and false) exercise. “The sacrifice pleasing to God is a broken spirit ... a broken and humbled heart” (Ps. 51: 17).

The Pharisaic assumptions in Jesus' day about how people obtained righteousness from God were wrong. Their works-based self-righteousness was not acceptable to God. Jesus wanted them to know that salvation is only through humble faith in God's provision. In this parable, the Savior who provided the basis for justification by faith for every believer declared the doctrine of justification by faith alone. This parable is a remarkable revelation of truth in Jesus' public ministry.

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## EXPLORE FURTHER

Read the article titled "Justification" on pages 948–950 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. How did Jesus' sacrifice on the cross make justification possible? How does a proper understanding of justification eliminate any ground for self-righteous boasting in the Christian life?

## CHILDLIKE FAITH (Luke 18:15-17)

These verses are similar to an account in Mark 10:13-16 describing Jesus' commendation of childlike faith. The connection of the incident with the parable of the Pharisee and tax collector in Luke's Gospel is the theme of humility. In the parable, the tax collector's contrition and plea for mercy illustrated the proper attitude in seeking God's forgiveness and grace. In the blessing of children, Jesus demonstrated the nature of humble, saving faith.

### VERSE 15

**People were bringing infants to him so that he might touch them, but when the disciples saw it, they rebuked them.**

As noted above, this verse is similar to Mark 10:13, but Luke referred to the little children brought by their parents as **infants**. It is likely that children of different ages were being brought to Jesus. These parents wanted Jesus to bless their children by placing His hands on them (**touch them**). Some Bible commentators call attention to the Jewish practice on the Day of Atonement of parents bringing their children to a priest or other religious leader for a blessing. The Old Testament also describes the practice of conveying a blessing through the laying on of hands (see Deut. 34:9).

Jesus' **disciples saw** what was happening and **rebuked** the parents. Some Bible students suggest that the disciples wanted to protect Jesus' time for more important ministry. Indeed, in the first century Jewish

culture, children had a low social standing. Children were typically desired, of course—especially sons—for continuing the family line and eventually taking over the family business. Children’s perceived value, however, was not equal to that of adults. This fact makes the warm, respectful attitude of Jesus toward children as remarkable and out of the ordinary.

## VERSE 16

**Jesus, however, invited them: “Let the little children come to me, and don’t stop them, because the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.**

The disciples rebuked the parents who brought their children to Jesus, but Jesus stepped in and **invited them** to come to Him. (Mark 10:14 specifies that Jesus was indignant about His disciples’ effort.) This is one of many times when the disciples failed to understand the mind of Jesus. If they thought they were doing what Jesus wanted, they were wrong. As believers today, we too must be careful not to assume that we know what is best for Jesus to do in regard to others.

As noted previously, Jesus’ invitation for **the little children to come to Him** without being hindered was extraordinary compared to the attitudes of other religious teachers in His day. Young children represented a powerless group who had nothing to offer Jesus by way of status or advancement. Yet, they were exactly the type of people Jesus cared deeply about and wanted to serve. Helping others who cannot repay the favor is a uniquely Christlike act (see Luke 14:14).

The children also illustrated an important spiritual principle: **the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.** Bible commentators have pointed to the importance of the phrase *such as these*. Jesus was not saying that all children are sinless or innocent. The Bible teaches that all of us—young and old—are born with the sin nature (see Rom. 5:12-21). However, the children that were coming to Jesus were exhibiting a kingdom trait that is essential.

The children exhibited humility in coming to Jesus. The children lacked the arrogance and self-trust exhibited by adults such as the self-righteous Pharisee in Jesus’ parable. They were not looking to challenge Jesus or trip Him up with accusing questions. They exhibited a simple faith. We will examine this childlike quality in the subsequent verse.

Jesus used children’s coming to Him for blessing to reveal that the kingdom of God will be populated by those who in simple faith accept the grace God offers rather than asserting self-righteousness. Jesus implied that many would assume they had a place in the kingdom of God based on their importance in this life. Children and sinners were despised for different

reasons, but they were both underestimated in terms of God’s love and the value God places on them. Jesus said that heaven will be populated by those who humbly seek salvation through faith in Him.

## VERSE 17

**Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.”**

The phrase **Truly I tell you** (literally, “Amen, I say to you”) appears dozens of times in the Gospels preceding declarations of spiritual truth by Jesus. At times the phrase emphasizes a contrast between Jesus’ teachings and what people heard from past and current religious leaders. Here Jesus used the simple trust of a child to emphasize the kind of faith needed to **receive the kingdom of God**. Indeed, childlike faith is the key to **enter it**.

Was Jesus referring to some present form of the kingdom of God or the future perfected kingdom in the end time? Perhaps He was pointing to both realities. People’s coming in faith to Jesus as the King of God’s kingdom was current. One day—at Christ’s return—all believers (past, present, and future) will inherit the full and perfect life of the kingdom that Jesus inaugurated through His life, death, and resurrection. It is important to note here as well that Jesus was not calling for the baptism of infants for salvation. The faith necessary to enter the kingdom is childlike in that it is completely dependent on and grateful for the blessings of a forgiving and gracious God.

Jesus’ final words in this verse are an ominous warning to those “who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and looked down on everyone else” (Luke 18:9). According to Jesus, the self-righteous **will never enter** God’s kingdom. In both the parable and the account of blessing the children, we see the heart of Jesus who came to seek and save the lost. He opposed the belief that salvation is by works and clearly identified grace through faith in God’s Son as the only way to enter the kingdom of God. We must continue the mission today by calling the lost to abandon their personal attempts to be saved and embrace by childlike faith the gift of salvation Jesus offers!

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## EXPLORE FURTHER

Read the article titled “Kingdom of God” on pages 964–966 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. What was the significance of John the Baptist’s and Jesus’ call for people to repent in anticipation of the coming kingdom of God? How would you explain the kingdom of God to someone unfamiliar with the Bible?

# Worshiped

Jesus is worthy of our worship and praise.

The English term *worship* derives from the combination of two root ideas: a word meaning “worthiness” and a suffix denoting “a quality or condition of.” Thus, to worship is to declare someone’s (or something’s) worthiness to receive adoration and allegiance. The Scriptures teach that human beings are made to worship God, because He is our Creator. Worship implies obedience and giving God ultimate priority in our lives.

One of the earliest uses in Scripture of the word *worship* is found in Genesis 22:5. In the broader context of this verse, God commanded Abraham to take his beloved son Isaac to the land of Moriah and offer the boy as a sacrifice. Abraham described his intention to obey God’s instruction as “worship.” Abraham demonstrated that he loved God more than anyone or anything in his willingness to obey God’s command.

The apostle Paul, in Romans 1:23, described the tragic history of humanity’s attempts to substitute the worship of idols in place of the worship of the one true God. The Scriptures in their entirety tell the story of God’s revelation of Himself and His desire to provide a way of salvation for a lost and sin-cursed humanity.

In this session, we will explore a passage in Luke’s Gospel that describes Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem. This event inaugurated a week that concluded with Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection. The week began with people worshiping Jesus as “the King who comes in the name of the Lord” (Luke 19:38). The Gospel concludes with disciples worshiping their risen Lord and returning to the city to worship daily in the temple (24:52-53).

## UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

### LUKE 19:28-48

In Luke 19:28-35, Jesus gave His disciples specific instructions concerning His approach to Jerusalem. Jesus sent His disciples into a nearby village

to bring a young donkey for Him to ride into Jerusalem. They were told if anyone asked about their actions to simply say, “The Lord needs it.” When they returned with the donkey, they put robes on it and helped Jesus sit on it for the trip.

Luke 19:36-40 describes the reception of Jesus by the crowd and His enemies. The people put garments before Jesus as a carpet, and they used words from Psalm 118:26 to praise Jesus in worship. The Pharisees objected and commanded Jesus to rebuke the people for their worship of Him. Jesus refused and said that if the people became silent, the stones would declare His true identity.

In Luke 19:41-44, Luke described how Jesus wept when He saw Jerusalem. He predicted the future desolation of the city by its enemies. Jesus attributed the future destruction of the city to the people’s rejection of Him as Savior.

Luke 19:45-48 describes how Jesus drove out moneychangers who were taking advantage of religious pilgrims coming to Jerusalem for the Passover Festival. The anger of the religious leaders increased against Jesus, and they looked for a way to destroy Him.

## EXPLORE **THE TEXT**

### **OBEDY** (Luke 19:29-34)

All four of the New Testament Gospels describe Jesus’ preparations and entry into Jerusalem for the crucial Passover that He would celebrate with His disciples (see Matt. 21:1-13; Mark 11:1-11; Luke 19:28-48; John 12:12-19). Jesus carefully planned every detail of His entrance on Palm Sunday to leave no doubt that He came as the messianic King prophesied in the Old Testament.

### **VERSE 29**

#### **As he approached Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of the disciples**

While still ministering in the region of Galilee, Jesus had “determined to journey to Jerusalem” (Luke 9:51). He continued to minister, teach, and train His disciples in towns along the way, but now the group arrived near the city, approaching the two villages of **Bethphage** [BETH fuh jee] **and Bethany**. The precise location of first-century *Bethphage* (meaning “house of unripe figs”) is uncertain, but it was obviously near the well-known village

of *Bethany* (meaning, “house of dates”). Bethany was located two miles east of Jerusalem on the slopes of **the Mount of Olives**. Pilgrims and travelers on the road from Jericho to Jerusalem would cross the ridge of the Mount of Olives, travel down through the Kidron Valley, and enter the city through the eastern gate. The elevation of the Mount of Olives provided a spectacular view of the temple area.

The Mount of Olives is mentioned in the Old Testament as a place where King David fled from his son Absalom’s coup attempt (see 2 Sam. 15:30) and where the prophet Ezekiel saw in a vision the glory of the Lord leaving Jerusalem and resting on the mountain (see Ezek. 11:22-23). Zechariah prophesied that a huge valley would form there in the Day of the Lord (see Zech. 14:3-5). On the night of His arrest, Jesus and His disciples stayed on the Mount of Olives, where He prayed in the garden of Gethsemane until His enemies came to arrest Him (see Luke 22:39-46). From this location prior to His entry into Jerusalem, Jesus **sent two of the disciples** on a special mission of preparation. None of the Gospel accounts name these disciples.

### VERSE 30

**and said, “Go into the village ahead of you. As you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, on which no one has ever sat. Untie it and bring it.**

Jesus demonstrated divine insight in giving specific instructions to the two disciples. He was calm and resolute even though He knew that His suffering and death on the cross was but a few days away. His direction to **go into the village ahead of you** probably was a reference to the village of Bethphage.

The two disciples were assured they would **find a colt tied there, on which no one has ever sat**. The Greek word translated *colt* can refer either to a young horse or donkey; the reference here is most likely to a donkey colt given the event’s connection to the fulfillment of messianic prophecy. Genesis 49:10-12 describes the Messiah’s arising from within the tribe of Judah and tying “his donkey to a vine, and the colt of his donkey to the choice vine.” Zechariah 9:9 anticipates the Messiah’s entry into Jerusalem as the people’s righteous king, “humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”

Jesus’ description of the colt as an animal *on which no one has ever sat* may have referred to the donkey’s young age. Another possibility is that the description emphasized the animal’s unique purpose. Animals designated for holy purposes were never used for common tasks (see Num. 19:2; Deut. 21:3; 1 Sam. 6:7). Probably Jesus intended for both of these implications to be understood. His disciples would not understand the significance of the

unridden colt at the time. Later, after Jesus' death and resurrection, they would better understand the significance of such details.

#### VERSE 31

**If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' say this: 'The Lord needs it.'**

Jesus anticipated that His disciples might be questioned when they took the colt. They were instructed to respond to such inquiries by saying, **"The Lord needs it."** For Luke's audience, the mention of *the Lord* typically referred to Jesus. Interestingly, however, the Greek term for *Lord* appears two verses later in the plural form in reference to the colt's owners. Some Bible commentators suggest that this fact points to a prearranged agreement between Jesus (the ultimate "Owner" of all) and the owners of the colt. Whether or not the plan was prearranged does not diminish the intention of Jesus to fulfill the messianic prophecies that referred to His riding a young donkey into Jerusalem.

#### VERSE 32

**So those who were sent left and found it just as he had told them.**

The root of the Greek verb translated **sent** is also the basis for the noun meaning "apostle." This fact reminds us that every task assigned by Jesus is a holy mission. As followers of Christ, we are a people on mission to obey His commands in our daily lives. Some tasks are huge and public, while others are private and small; yet all God-given tasks are important.

At the time, Jesus' two disciples were likely unaware of the far-reaching significance of their simple task of finding and bringing a young donkey to Jesus. When they arrived in the village, however, everything was **just as he had told them**. Everything Jesus says is truthful and completely accurate. We can trust His promises related to the future with absolute confidence. We also can (and should) remember that Jesus' commands are always a part of a bigger plan—God's plan of redemption.

#### VERSES 33-34

**As they were untying the colt, its owners said to them, 'Why are you untying the colt?' 'The Lord needs it,' they said.**

Just as Jesus had anticipated, the colt's **owners** asked the disciples why they were **untying the colt**. The disciples then repeated exactly the words that Jesus had given them to say. Later, those who lent the donkey for Jesus' use may have learned that He rode it into Jerusalem. Their generosity toward

the Lord became an important and enduring part of the gospel story. In the same way, Jesus calls upon us as His followers today to be good stewards of the things He has given to us. We should be willing to give as He directs, knowing that our contributions to His redemptive mission will impact the eternal destinies of others.

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## EXPLORE FURTHER

What are some seemingly small tasks you have done in obedience to Jesus? When have you seen these tasks, when completed, produce significant—even life-changing—impact on you and others to the glory of God?

### PRAISE (Luke 19:35-38)

With the colt for Jesus to ride into Jerusalem now secured, He was ready to proceed from the Mount of Olives to the eastern gate of the city. Long before, King David and his entourage had sorrowfully exited the city by this route amid the coup attempt by the king's son, Absalom (see 2 Sam. 15:30). Now the messianic Son of David and His disciples would enter the city along the route amid a show of worshipful praise.

### VERSES 35-36

**Then they brought it to Jesus, and after throwing their clothes on the colt, they helped Jesus get on it. As he was going along, they were spreading their clothes on the road.**

With the arrival of the colt, Jesus was ready to begin His journey into Jerusalem. The disciples put some of **their clothes** (“garments,” KJV; “cloaks,” ESV; NIV) on the donkey to serve as a seating pad. Probably these garments were the outer garments, or robes. The interesting detail that the disciples **helped Jesus get on** the animal appears only in Luke’s Gospel. The significance of the action probably points to the disciples’ serving Jesus as their king, not to His inability to get on the animal without assistance.

Similarly, the spreading of **clothes on the road** in front of Jesus as He rode toward the city was an acknowledgment of His royalty. The phrase **they were spreading** certainly points to Jesus’ followers but also may have included other people who were coming to Jerusalem for the Passover festival. Some Bible scholars emphasize that kings in ancient times typically rode donkeys in times of peace and horses in times of war. Jesus entered

Jerusalem at this time not as a conquering general but as the humble Son of Man who would lay down His life for sinners. He would yield to those who plotted to kill Him, not resisting their efforts even though He could have. Jesus was demonstrating humility in riding the donkey into Jerusalem, but He was also declaring Himself to be the promised Son of David who would rule in the kingdom of God forever (see 2 Sam. 7:12-13).

### VERSE 37

**Now he came near the path down the Mount of Olives, and the whole crowd of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the miracles they had seen:**

Descending along **the path down the Mount of Olives**, first-century travelers would navigate through the Kidron Valley to the eastern gate of Jerusalem. Even to this day the route provides a spectacular view of the city. The mention of **the whole crowd of disciples** reveals the acceptance Jesus enjoyed with many who came to honor His arrival and celebrate Him as their Messiah and King. This group probably should not be confused with the angry mobs later led by the religious leaders to call for Jesus' crucifixion by the Roman authorities. In other words, this was likely not a fickle crowd that worshiped Jesus on Sunday and then only days later called for His crucifixion.

The people who lined the road entering Jerusalem **began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the miracles they had seen**. The only other occurrences of the Greek verb translated *praise* in this verse appear in the announcement of Jesus' birth to the shepherds. In Luke 2:13-14, the angels in their announcement of the Messiah's birth praised God for giving "peace on earth to people he favors." Then in Luke 2:20, the shepherds praised God as they returned to their work after seeing the Christ child in the Bethlehem manger. In Luke 19:37, after Jesus' life-changing ministry of preaching, teaching, and healing throughout Galilee and Judea, the number of those who praised God for what they had heard and seen Jesus do had multiplied significantly. Indeed, the crowd of worshipers foreshadowed the many millions of people who from then until now have found in Jesus a Savior worthy of highest praise. The good news concerning God's sending His Son as our Savior was, is, and always will be the most joyful message to hear!

Luke emphasized that the source of the worshipers' joy and praise was *all the miracles they had seen*. Luke provided four specific examples of miracles Jesus performed during His final journey to Jerusalem (see Luke 13:10-13; 14:1-6; 17:11-19; 18:35-43). However, Jesus' entire ministry was characterized by miraculous acts of healing, casting out demons, and acts of supernatural power. The miraculous nature of Jesus' ministry created praise

and worship for different reasons for those who celebrated His entrance into Jerusalem. Some may have been among the people He healed or were family members and friends to those Jesus helped. For them, the miracles of Jesus were personal and life-changing in so many ways. For other worshipers, the miracles of Jesus were signs that the Holy Spirit used to identify Jesus as the Savior, Messiah, and King (see Acts 2:22). Miracles continue to occur as the Holy Spirit brings salvation to all who put their faith in Jesus. He transforms their lives with the same miraculous power Jesus demonstrated during His years of ministry.

### VERSE 38

#### **Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord. Peace in heaven and glory in the highest heaven!**

The crowd of disciples who were praising God for the miraculous works Jesus did shouted Psalm 118:26. This verse was commonly used to greet pilgrims as they approached Jerusalem to worship at the temple—with one important change. In its Old Testament context, the verse welcomed “he who comes in the name of the LORD.” According to Luke’s Gospel, the worshiping crowd specified their welcome of **the King who comes in the name of the Lord**. The change from “he” to *the King* confirms the royal emphasis in the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem.

Luke’s Gospel and the Book of Acts emphasize the kingship of Jesus (see Luke 1:32; 18:38-39; 23:3,37-38; Acts 17:7). Luke’s Gospel omits the transliterated Aramaic word “hosanna” (see Matt. 21:9; Mark 11:10) that would be difficult for Gentile readers to understand. The phrase *the King* served as an equivalent to the phrase “Son of David” found in the Gospels of Matthew and Mark. The kingdom of God had not yet been fully realized, but the King had arrived, and the crowd of disciples honored Him as such.

Recognizing Jesus as King has profound implications for believers today as well. The term Messiah means “Anointed One,” and there were three offices under the Old Testament covenant that were anointed with oil to set them apart for service: prophets (see 1 Kings 19:16), priests (see Ex. 29:7-9), and kings (see 1 Sam. 10:1; 16:1,12-13). Jesus came as the ultimate Prophet, Priest, and King (see Heb. 1:1-2; 9:11; Rev. 17:14). When salvation happens, believers put their faith in Jesus not only as Savior but also as Lord. The fact that Jesus is King not only identifies Him as the rightful heir to David’s throne but also implies that those who put their faith in Him welcome and submit to His authority and rule. Jesus did not save us from our sins to enable us to continue to live according to our own will and desires. He saved us to live a new life of obedience to God through the power of the Holy Spirit.

The phrases **peace in heaven** and **glory in the highest heaven** echo the angelic praise in Luke 2:14 with an interesting difference. In Luke 2:14, the angels proclaimed “peace on earth” in announcing the birth of Jesus. Here the peace proclaimed is not on earth but *in heaven*. The change may emphasize that God is the source of peace and Jesus would be the instrument to establish peace between God and believers through the cross (see Rom. 5:1).

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## EXPLORE FURTHER

Read the article titled “King, Christ as” on pages 962–963 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. What is the relationship between Jesus as King and Messiah? In what sense is Jesus King in the present world? How will Jesus act as King at His second coming?

## WORTHY (Luke 19:39-40)

Not everyone who witnessed Jesus’ triumphal entry joined the celebratory worship of Him. Luke is the only Gospel writer to include this conversation between Jesus and Pharisees who were critical of the disciples’ praise of Him. The criticism of Jesus and His response provides an important insight into how Jesus viewed Himself and the honor bestowed on Him by the adoring crowd of disciples.

## VERSE 39

**Some of the Pharisees from the crowd told him, “Teacher, rebuke your disciples.”**

After Jesus’ encounter with Zacchaeus (see Luke 19:1-10), Jesus told a parable that illustrated the attitude of the religious leaders who refused to believe in Him (see Luke 19:11-27). In the parable, Jesus described a nobleman who traveled to a far country “to receive for himself authority to be king and then return” (19:12). He also described subjects who hated the nobleman and did not want the nobleman to rule over them (19:14). At Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem, **some of the Pharisees** on the scene fulfilled Jesus’ previous parable. They refused to recognize Jesus as the promised Messiah-King. Thus, they sought to force Jesus to **rebuke** His **disciples** for praising Him as such.

Those who opposed Jesus saw the actions and words of the crowd in praising Jesus as blasphemous. What were they upset about, and why? From a practical standpoint, they were concerned that the talk of Jesus as the Messiah-King would upset the Romans and lead to rumors of insurrection,

leading to a military crackdown. The accusation that Jesus attempted to ignite a revolt against Rome was a key charge the religious leaders later brought against Jesus before Pontius Pilate (see Luke 23:2).

From a theological perspective, these religious opponents of Jesus did not recognize Him as either the Son of David or the Son of God. The religious leaders were not criticizing the disciples for praising God but rather for equating Jesus with God. They perceived the actions and words of the disciples toward Jesus to be an act of worship.

Jesus' identity was the fundamental difference between the unbelieving Pharisees and Jesus' disciples. The Pharisees considered Jesus to be just a teacher—a misinformed rabbi who was nevertheless popular with the people. The combination of jealousy and self-righteous indignation over what they perceived as false worship fueled their intense opposition to Jesus.

This is the final time in Luke's Gospel that Pharisees are specifically mentioned. Luke recorded previously that Jesus would sometimes accept invitations to dine with Pharisees (see Luke 7:36; 11:37; 14:1). Jesus did not rule out the possibility of their salvation, and John's Gospel reports the apparent conversion of a Pharisee named Nicodemus (see John 3:1-21; 19:39). The resistance of most of the Pharisees to belief in Jesus makes Luke's description of Saul the Pharisee's conversion even more dramatic (see Acts 9).

#### VERSE 40

**He answered, “I tell you, if they were to keep silent, the stones would cry out.”**

The Pharisees sought to pressure Jesus to rebuke His disciples, but Jesus rebuked the Pharisees instead. Previously in Jesus' ministry, He asked His disciples who the crowds believed Him to be (see Luke 9:18). After hearing several popular (but incorrect) ideas about His identity, Jesus asked what the disciples believed about Him. Peter responded by saying that Jesus was “God's Messiah” (9:20). At that point, Jesus warned His disciples not to broadcast this truth until the time was right. With His arrest, suffering, and crucifixion near at hand, the time was right. There was no need any longer to conceal the truth that He was God's Messiah. Jesus welcomed the open declaration of worship by His disciples.

What did Jesus mean by the words **the stones would cry out**? Some Bible commentators believe it is a reference to Habakkuk 2:11, which says, “For the stones will cry out from the wall, and the rafters will answer them from the woodwork.” The context of the Habakkuk statement is that Babylon's wickedness was so great that even the inanimate structures would cry out in condemnation of their evil. In the Old Testament, God sometimes called upon

His creation to testify about the disobedience of human beings (see Isa. 1:2; Micah 6:1-2). The idea is that in all of God's creation, only fallen angels (Satan and his demonic minions) and human beings have disobeyed the will of the Creator. Some interpreters, therefore, believe the reference to the stones crying out refers to a judgment on those who refuse to recognize Jesus as the Messiah. At the least, the reference is an example of how inanimate creation testifies the truth when there is no one else to speak the truth.

The key aspect of this verse is that Jesus was claiming to be the Messiah—the Son of David and the Son of God. He was claiming divinity by accepting the praise and worship of His disciples. Christ's followers believe in the divinity of Jesus because He declared Himself to be the divine Son of God and proved it in His resurrection.

Jesus' entry into Jerusalem fulfilled the prophecy of Zechariah 9:9 that declared the Messiah-King would come to the city to deliver His people from their sins. The praise and worship Jesus received from His disciples would soon turn to His enemies' hostile cry for His crucifixion. As the humble, suffering Servant, Jesus entered the city riding on a young donkey. Capable of unlimited power, Jesus did not resist the evil intentions of His enemies. Instead, He willingly laid down His life for our sins—according to the heavenly Father's plan of redemption.

Jesus is not only worthy of our worship but also is the only One worthy of our worship. His substitutionary death on the cross provides all that is necessary for our salvation and acceptance by the Father. We were not there to witness Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, but we are still called upon to openly declare Him as the Son of God and only Savior. Just as happened in Jesus' day, Christ's followers today will encounter unbelieving critics who will seek to silence and rebuke the church's witness. We must not be silent.

As King of kings, Jesus deserves our worship and obedience. Today we worship Jesus with our time, talents, and treasure. We first offer ourselves to Him as humble servants, seeking to know and do His will. During this time before Easter Sunday, let's renew our love, our loyalty, and our hearts to worship Him in spirit and in truth!

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## EXPLORE FURTHER

Read the article titled "Creation" on pages 361-362 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. Why do you think God sometimes calls upon inanimate parts of His creation to testify against sinful human beings? How did humanity's sin affect the creation? What will happen to the creation when Jesus returns?

# Resurrected

Jesus is the resurrected Savior and Lord.

The gospel with its account of Jesus' resurrection proclaims the historical fact that separates Christianity from other religions. Consider four other world religions: Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Judaism. All of these religions possess sacred texts and espouse moral teachings as well as religious rituals. Some point to human founders (Islam, Buddhism, and Judaism), while one is a blending of many teachers' beliefs (Hinduism). None of them, however, claims to stand or fall on the resurrection of its founder—only Christianity does. Christianity alone offers an abiding relationship with an ever-living Savior!

The foundational truths of the Christian gospel are these: Jesus Christ was born of a virgin, lived a sinless life, was crucified on a cross for ours sins, was buried in a tomb guarded by soldiers, and on the third day was raised to life again. Fifty days after Jesus' crucifixion, Simon Peter boldly proclaimed the resurrection of Jesus. All the opponents of the gospel needed to do to stop the growth of Christianity in its infancy was produce the lifeless body of Jesus. But they could not do so! Jesus had risen from the dead and had ascended bodily into heaven.

In this session, we skip forward in our study of Luke's Gospel to focus on the narrative of Jesus' resurrection. No headline in the history of the world can or will ever replace this story as the most important news to ever be reported. Jesus is alive and is ready to change the lives of all who trust in Him as Lord and Savior!

## UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

### LUKE 23:50–24:12

Luke 23:50-56 reveals that Joseph of Arimathea, a member of the Sanhedrin yet secretly a disciple of Jesus (see John 19:38), gained permission from Pontius Pilate to remove Jesus' body from the cross and bury Him. Joseph

placed Jesus' body in a nearby tomb, which Matthew's Gospel identifies as Joseph's own recently dug family tomb (see Matt. 27:59-60). Some women followers from Galilee observed the burial place and then returned to the city to gather spices to place around Jesus' body. Since it was almost time for the Sabbath to begin, however, the women waited until after the Sabbath Day to complete their task.

In Luke 24:1-8, the Gospel writer described how the women returned to the tomb early on the first day of the week (Sunday). They came expecting to place spices around Jesus' body, as was the Jewish custom. To their dismay, they found only an open and empty tomb. Two angels (appearing as men) in bright clothes suddenly appeared, frightening the women at first. But then the angels assured the women that Jesus had risen from the dead just as He promised He would—a promise the women then remembered.

In 24:9-12, Luke reported that the women returned to the city to tell the apostles and others what they had seen and heard. Most of the apostles concluded the women's story was nonsense. Simon Peter, however, decided to go to the tomb and see for himself what had happened. He was amazed to find only the linen burial cloths remaining in the empty tomb.

## EXPLORE **THE TEXT**

### **RETURN** (Luke 24:1-5a)

Following a series of trials, physical beatings, and mockery, Jesus was condemned to death by Pilate and crucified. His body was later removed from the cross and placed in a tomb by Joseph of Arimathea. On the first day of the week, a group of women followers of Jesus came to the tomb to put spices around His body. They found the tomb open and empty.

### **VERSE 1**

**On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they came to the tomb, bringing the spices they had prepared.**

There were not many profiles in courage among the characters surrounding Jesus' arrest and crucifixion. Among the villains, Judas stands out as a greedy traitor who betrayed Jesus with a kiss. The religious leaders who brought false charges against Jesus were liars who chose to arrest Him at night for fear of the people. The Roman governor Pilate proved to be weak in condemning Jesus to death despite knowing that Jesus had done nothing

to deserve such a sentence. The cruel Roman soldiers mocked and beat a prisoner who offered no resistance to their violence. The eleven disciples of Jesus showed little courage. They fled in fear at the time of His arrest, and their leader (Peter) subsequently denied knowing Jesus three times despite promising to die for Him. Perhaps the most courageous people throughout Jesus' ordeal were a group of women disciples who followed Him from Galilee. Their example continues to be seen to this day in the contributions of many courageous Christian women in church life and ministry.

The women from Galilee returned to the tomb **on the first day of the week**—that is, the day we call Sunday. In the Jewish reckoning of time in the New Testament, a day began at sundown (approximately six p.m.) the previous evening and ended at sundown the following evening. The phrase **very early in the morning** refers to the early dawn hours of Sunday before sunrise (see Matt. 28:1; Mark 16:2; John 20:1). The women expected only to find the body of Jesus, because they were **bringing** with them the burial **spices they had prepared**. They were determined to honor their Lord and perhaps were praying for God's help to complete their task. The spices may have included myrrh and aloes that were often used at this time for burial purposes. Such spices were expensive, and the women probably intended them as a final gift to their deceased Teacher.

Sunday had no special significance in the worship of Israel before the resurrection of Jesus. The Jewish day of rest and worship was the seventh day of the week, the Sabbath Day (our Saturday). Following the resurrection of Jesus, the first day of the week (Sunday) became known among Christians as "the Lord's day" (see Rev. 1:10). The first direct mention in Scripture of believers gathering on Sunday for Christian teaching and fellowship appears in Acts 20:7. Today, every Sunday worship experience by Christians is a reminder of the joyful discovery of the empty tomb on that first Easter morning!

## VERSE 2

### **They found the stone rolled away from the tomb.**

This is the first mention in Luke's Gospel of the stone that was rolled in front of the tomb's entrance after burial. Luke reported in 23:53 that Joseph of Arimathea had placed Jesus' body "in a tomb cut into the rock, where no one had ever been placed." Mark 15:46 adds that Joseph "rolled a stone against the entrance to the tomb" (see also Matt. 27:60). Finally, John 19:41 indicates the tomb was located in "a garden in the place where [Jesus] was crucified."

Wealthy individuals in first-century Judea often secured their family burial places ahead of time. The entrance to a family burial cave typically was small, requiring those who entered to stoop down. Inside the entrance was

a small anteroom and passageway leading to the burial chambers. Recessed “shelves” were carved in the walls of the burial chambers to hold the remains of multiple family members. Jesus’ body was probably placed on one of these rock shelves in Joseph’s tomb. The stone over the tomb’s entrance was meant to seal in the odor of decay and keep out scavenging animals and grave robbers. Matthew 27:66 adds that soldiers dispatched by Pontius Pilate to guard Jesus’ burial place set a seal on the stone covering the tomb’s entrance. When the women approached Jesus’ tomb early Sunday morning, however, they **found the stone** had already been **rolled away from the tomb**.

### VERSE 3

#### **They went in but did not find the body of the Lord Jesus.**

The women entered the tomb with the spices they had prepared for anointing Jesus’ body. Their mood probably was somber and anxious as they prepared to see the lifeless corpse of their Master. Their grief must have quickly turned to confusion when they **did not find the body of the Lord Jesus**.

With the use of the phrase *Lord Jesus*, Luke connected Jesus’ resurrection with His lordship even over death and the grave. At this point, the women did not remember Jesus’ promise that He would be raised from the dead.

### VERSE 4

#### **While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men stood by them in dazzling clothes.**

The women **were perplexed about** the empty tomb. They likely thought that someone or some group had removed Jesus’ body and had taken it elsewhere during the night (see John 20:2). In any case, as they wondered about what might have happened, **two men stood by them in dazzling clothes**. While these two individuals appeared to the women in the form of men, they are later identified as angels (see Luke 24:23; compare Matt. 28:2). The Greek word translated *dazzling* (“shining,” KJV; “gleamed like lightning,” NIV) appears also in the description of Jesus at His transfiguration (see Luke 9:29).

Angels played a prominent role in announcing the births of John the Baptist (Luke 1:11,13,18-19,26) and Jesus (1:28,30,34-35,38; 2:9-10,13,15). Here they appeared to explain the empty tomb. The empty tomb alone does not prove the resurrection of Jesus, but it is one of several critical facts that pointed the disciples to its reality. The two angels provided testimony that was (and is) an important part of the proofs of the resurrection of Jesus. As in the cases of the births of John the Baptist and Jesus, angels provided divine explanations and information that were essential to the proper interpretation of the events.

## VERSE 5a

### **So the women were terrified and bowed down to the ground.**

The women quickly realized that the “men ... in dazzling clothes” (24:4) were not human beings but divine messengers. Their response of being **terrified** and bowing **down to the ground** was similar to previous human-angel encounters in Luke’s Gospel (see 1:12; 2:9). It was early in the morning when the women arrived, and the angels’ glowing appearance was extraordinary, if not overwhelming.

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## EXPLORE FURTHER

Read the article titled “Angel” on pages 66-67 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. How did angels play important roles in the coming of Jesus, His ministry, and resurrection? What roles do you think angels play in the lives of believers today?

## REMEMBER (Luke 24:5b-7)

The two angels appeared to the women to provide an explanation of the empty tomb. In this section, the angels provided the spiritual revelation essential to the gospel message. They reminded the women—and through them the other disciples—that Jesus had promised them He would be raised from the dead after His suffering.

## VERSE 5b

### **“Why are you looking for the living among the dead?” asked the men.**

The angels did not respond to the women with the usual assurance there was no need to be afraid (see 1:13,30; 2:10). Rather, they questioned why the women would be **looking for the living among the dead**. The Greek participle rendered *the living* has a masculine, singular ending; it could also be translated as “the living one,” referring specifically to Jesus as being alive, not dead.

Logically and practically, no one would search to find a living person in a tomb. With this question, the angels dramatically prepared the women for the announcement of the resurrection of Jesus. They implied that the women should have remembered Jesus’ promise. Some Bible commentators understand the angels’ question to be a mild rebuke. As courageous and

faithful as the women had been previously, they failed to fully understand or believe His promise of rising from the dead after three days. Indeed, not even the apostles fully embraced the promise of Jesus' resurrection until they saw Him, heard Him speak, and had fellowship with Him.

This initial skepticism on the part of the disciples is actually strong evidence for the truthfulness of the biblical account. The women disciples who later told their story to others humbly admitted they did not remember Jesus' promise of resurrection at first. This aspect of the gospel story is not often emphasized. No one "making up" such an amazing account would cast herself (or himself) in such a negative light.

#### **VERSE 6**

**“He is not here, but he has risen! Remember how he spoke to you when he was still in Galilee,**

In the previous verse, the angels declared that Jesus was alive. Here they specifically declared that He had been resurrected. They simply presented the truth to the women, who could then choose to believe or not. The tomb was empty, to be sure. The absence of Jesus' body needed explanation, and the angels provided the correct answer: **he has risen!** The first authoritative testimony of the resurrection of Jesus came not from men but from God's angelic messengers proclaiming gospel truth.

The angels then reminded the women that Jesus had foretold His resurrection more than once **when he was still in Galilee**. “Remember how he spoke to you when he was still in Galilee.” The angels knew that the women were familiar with Jesus' teachings. But before we are quick to judge or blame Jesus' first followers for failing to grasp His promises, we should examine ourselves and realize how often we also fail to remember the promises in God's Word. This was not just a failure of memory on the part of Jesus' disciples; rather, it was more of a failure of faith.

When we do not recall and believe the promises of God, we worry and become fearful. When faced with a great challenge, we fail to trust that God will take care of us as He promised. We don't believe that all things work together for good to those who love Him. We know these promises and can often quote the verses, but when it comes to trusting those promises by faith in real-time crises, we often falter. Thankfully, the Lord is both merciful and patient with us.

#### **VERSE 7**

**saying, ‘It is necessary that the Son of Man be betrayed into the hands of sinful men, be crucified, and rise on the third day?’”**

The angels then quoted the basics of what Jesus had taught His disciples concerning His death and resurrection. The words **it is necessary** reminded the women that Jesus, **the Son of Man**, fulfilled the Father's redemptive plan. That plan involved Jesus' being **betrayed into the hands of sinful men**. The women likely knew that Judas Iscariot had committed that betrayal. Further, Jesus had taught that He would **be crucified, and rise on the third day**. The specific prophecies by Jesus concerning his betrayal, crucifixion, and resurrection are reported in a number of verses in Luke's Gospel (see 9:22,44; 18:32-33).

Why did none of His disciples remember and find comfort in the promise of the resurrection at first? The answer is probably as simple as a lack of faith during a very stressful time in their lives. Seeing Jesus arrested, beaten, and crucified may have doused all hope of His resurrection. Perhaps they thought Jesus was speaking about something other than a physical resurrection. Traumatic, sorrowful, and frightening experiences often challenge our faith in the promises of God.

When the disciples finally believed and accepted the reality of the resurrection, their lives changed dramatically. The resurrection took away their fear of death and reassured them concerning the truthfulness of every other divine promise. Christianity expanded exponentially in the preaching of Peter on Pentecost with the central truth that Jesus' death on the cross for our sins is guaranteed by the reality of the resurrection (see Acts 2:14-36). Jesus' resurrection authenticated everything He said and every claim He made. The disciples were fearless after seeing this promise kept.

The prophecies that Jesus gave concerning His sufferings and resurrection point to the foreknowledge He had about His future. These prophecies indicate that Jesus knew His mission and voluntarily submitted to providing the way of salvation for sinners. The sovereignty of God is evident in the specific ways these prophecies were fulfilled. The evil intentions of those who arrested and crucified Jesus were their own. No one forced them to feel or act as they did. God, however, used their evil intentions to accomplish salvation through the sacrificial death and victorious resurrection of His Son Jesus Christ.

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## EXPLORE FURTHER

Read the article titled "Resurrection of Jesus the Christ" on pages 1349–1350 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. How would you explain to someone the reason that the resurrection of Jesus is essential to the gospel message? How does the resurrection of Jesus affect what happens to believers after death?

## REPORT (Luke 24:8-12)

The women left the tomb and reported their experience to the apostles and other followers of Jesus. Some of the disciples did not believe the women. Simon Peter, however, decided to visit the tomb and verify the women's story. He found only Jesus' linen wrappings in the tomb and went away amazed.

### VERSE 8

#### **And they remembered his words.**

When the angels reminded the women of Jesus' prophecies regarding His suffering, death, and resurrection, **they remembered his words**. As in 24:6, the use of the verb translated *remembered* does not refer primarily to mentally recalling information. The women had not forgotten what Jesus had taught; they simply had not properly understood His words or believed them. It took the discovery of the empty tomb and the angels' explanation for the women to realize Jesus had literally predicted His resurrection.

The Old Testament has multiple warnings about forgetting God and His covenant (see Deut. 4:23; 6:12; 8:11). We as believers need to remind ourselves of the promises and commands of God. Those of us who seek to live godly lives need to constantly keep the will of God before our eyes through spiritual disciplines such as Bible study, worship, and prayer. Disobedience occurs when we forget the will of God and pursue our own desires and will.

### VERSE 9

#### **Returning from the tomb, they reported all these things to the Eleven and to all the rest.**

The women hurried **from the tomb** to tell all they had experienced **to the Eleven and to all the rest**. The women were among the first to fully grasp the good news of Jesus' dying on the cross for our sins, being buried, and being raised on the third day according to the Scriptures (see 1 Cor. 15:3-4). Now that they knew, they hurried to tell the others what they had seen and heard. The mention of *the Eleven* pointed to the betrayal and suicide of Judas Iscariot. Judas would not be replaced until later (see Acts 1:15-26). The phrase *all the rest* applies to additional believers, probably including some or all of the one-hundred twenty followers of Jesus mentioned in Acts 1:15.

The verb translated **reported** also appears in Acts 26:20 (rendered "preached") to describe Paul's proclamation of the gospel to others. When believers discover the truth of the gospel for themselves, they cannot wait to share the good news with others. Sharing the gospel is a privilege as well as a responsibility. The women at the tomb were not thinking of duty when

they hurried to tell the others about the resurrection of Jesus. They were motivated by an excitement and joy they could not hide. Believers today can be motivated by the same excitement and joy to proclaim the gospel to all who will listen.

## VERSE 10

### **Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them were telling the apostles these things.**

Up to this point in the narrative, Luke had referred to the women at the tomb simply as followers from Galilee who had traveled to Jerusalem with Jesus and His disciples (see 23:55). Here in 24:10 Luke identified the names of three of the women. Two women, **Mary Magdalene** and **Joanna**, were first mentioned in Luke 8:2-3 as supporters of Jesus who had been “healed of evil spirits and sicknesses.” Mark 16:9 indicates that Jesus had cast out seven demons from Mary Magdalene. The term *Magdalene* refers to Mary’s hometown of Magdala [MAG duh luh]. She had been present at Jesus’ crucifixion (see Mark 15:40).

Some Bible students speculate that Mary Magdalene may have been a prostitute before Jesus set her free from demonic possession. However, there is no clear evidence of that suggestion in the New Testament. Likewise, it is pure speculation that this Mary was the sinful woman who wiped Jesus’ feet with her tears and anointed him with perfume (see Luke 7:36-50). Other Gospel accounts record that Mary Magdalene returned to the empty tomb and encountered Jesus in the garden (see John 20:1-18).

*Joanna* was the wife of Herod’s steward, Chuza, and was also healed by Jesus. The third woman Luke named was **Mary the mother of James**. The James mentioned here probably is a reference to the son of Alphaeus and one of the Twelve (see Luke 6:15). These three, in addition to the unnamed other women, constituted multiple witnesses that were required for corroborating an event in a society in which legal matters required the testimony of two or three witnesses (see Deut. 17:6).

The women reported what they saw to **the apostles**. The designation *apostles* first occurs in Luke 6:13 as an alternate term for the Twelve. By definition, the term refers to those who are sent on a mission. While the term can be used in a non-technical way to refer to a messenger (see 2 Cor. 8:23), here it is used technically of the Eleven.

## VERSE 11

### **But these words seemed like nonsense to them, and they did not believe the women.**

**These words** refer to the recounting by the women of finding the empty tomb and the explanation given by the angels. The initial response of the apostles was to discount the women's claims as **nonsense**. They did not believe the women were describing reality. The disciples' reaction demonstrates clearly that not one of Jesus' followers truly believed at that point that Jesus would rise from the dead. All of Jesus' followers had failed to remember and believe the prophecies of Jesus about His suffering, death, and resurrection.

The jaundiced view of many adults in the modern world is that people who lived in the past were more gullible and accepting of miracles. Here we see that the early disciples were as skeptical as anyone would be today in the scientific age. The idea that the first disciples invented a myth of resurrection about Jesus is simply not supported by the facts of history. These disciples were in no mood to believe the unverified account of the women no matter how excited and convincing they might sound.

## VERSE 12

**Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb. When he stooped to look in, he saw only the linen cloths. So he went away, amazed at what had happened.**

Luke recorded that despite the apostles' skepticism, one of them—**Peter**—decided to go to the tomb to check out the women's story. John 20:3-4 adds that the apostle John ran with Peter to the tomb. However, Luke focused primarily on Peter's role.

The entrance was low, and Peter **stooped to look in**, seeing **only the linen cloths** that had been wrapped around Jesus' body. That the cloths remained while the body was missing provided additional silent testimony that something extraordinary had occurred.

Having seen the empty tomb for himself, Peter **went away, amazed at what had happened**. The same apostle who recently had denied knowing Jesus three times now began to come to grips with the reality of the resurrection. So can we who are willing to hear and embrace the good news!

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## EXPLORE FURTHER

Read the article titled "Peter" on pages 1253–1254 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. What do you think was Peter's state of mind when confronted with the empty tomb? How did his belief in the resurrection change Peter's life? How has belief in the resurrection of Jesus changed your life?

# Sinners?

Acceptance awaits those who seek Jesus in repentance.

Medical triage is the separation and classification of injured individuals for the purpose of prioritizing treatment. The practice originated on the battlefield and thus involves the making of rapid life-and-death decisions in the midst of chaotic events. Today, domestic emergency response teams are also trained to utilize a triage strategy in the aftermath of natural disasters or other mass casualty events. The classifications can be sobering to think about. Some victims sustain injuries that are serious but not life-threatening; they might be moved down the priority list for immediate care and treated later. Other victims may have life-threatening injuries but are likely to survive if treated immediately. These get put at the top of the priority list. Sadly, some victims may be deemed too gravely injured to survive even if treated. Medical personnel must then make the heart-rending decision to direct their time and resources to other patients who have a likelihood of survival.

What would a triage strategy look like in spiritual terms? How many lost individuals would never have an opportunity to hear the gospel if believers decided that a particular person or group of people was too far gone for salvation. Would Saul of Tarsus have ever become the apostle Paul if Ananias of Damascus had stubbornly refused to go and share the gospel with him at the Lord's direction (see Acts 9:10-19)? For that matter, what are the chances that you or I might have been written off by some Christians as too unlikely to believe before someone obeyed the Lord's command to share the gospel with us?

The Old Testament is clear that God always expected His people to proclaim Him not only to Israel but also to Gentile nations (see Isa. 49:5-6). By Jesus' day, however, many Jewish religious leaders practiced a form of spiritual triage. They rejected the idea of salvation for large groups of people, including Gentiles, deeming them hopeless and condemned. Further, they castigated Jesus for associating with such sinners. In this session's Bible passage, we will focus on one of the so-called "lost causes" in the eyes of many religious leaders—a man whom Jesus led to faith and salvation. As we explore the passage, may we examine our own attitudes about the Lord's express command to "be my witnesses ... to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

# UNDERSTAND **THE CONTEXT**

## **LUKE 18:31–19:26**

In Luke 18:31-34, Jesus gave specific predictions about His impending arrest, suffering, crucifixion, and resurrection in Jerusalem. However, the disciples failed to grasp the significance of what He told them. In Luke 18:35-43, Jesus healed a blind man on the roadside near Jericho who called out to Him for mercy. The people who saw this miracle praised God.

In Luke 19:1-10, Jesus entered Jericho and saw a man named Zacchaeus, who had climbed a tree to see Jesus as He came by. Zacchaeus was delighted when Jesus asked to come to his house, but many onlookers criticized Jesus because Zacchaeus was considered the worst of sinners—a despised tax collector. Zacchaeus vowed to give half of all he had to the poor and make restitution to anyone he might have cheated. Jesus announced that salvation had come to Zacchaeus's house.

In Luke 19:11-26, Jesus drew near to Jerusalem and told a parable to instruct those who thought God's kingdom was going to appear imminently. The parable described a rich man who gave an amount of money to each of his ten servants, commanding them to invest the money in business ventures while he was away. Upon the nobleman's return, the servants gave an account of their stewardship. One servant disobeyed the nobleman's command by hiding the money in a cloth, thus producing no return. The nobleman condemned his faithless servant, giving the unused money to a servant who had produced a return.

# EXPLORE **THE TEXT**

## **DESPERATE** (Luke 19:1-4)

En route to Jerusalem, Jesus and His followers came to the city of Jericho. A crowd had gathered to see Jesus, among whom was a chief tax collector named Zacchaeus. Being short of stature, Zacchaeus climbed a tree on the hope of seeing Jesus as He passed by.

## **VERSES 1-2**

**He entered Jericho and was passing through. There was a man named Zacchaeus who was a chief tax collector, and he was rich.**

Since Luke 9:51, careful readers of the Third Gospel have been aware of Jesus' determined movement toward Jerusalem. Jesus and His disciples left Galilee and traveled through a section of northern Samaria (9:52-55). At some point, however, the group likely crossed to the eastern side of the Jordan River and followed it southward (see 17:11). Then they crossed back to the western side of the river near Jericho, where Jesus healed a blind man along the road leading to the city. (see 18:35-43). Jericho was located about five miles west of the Jordan River and ten miles northwest of the Dead Sea. Herod had built a winter retreat in Jericho; it had grown to become the second largest city in Judea.

As Jesus and His followers **entered Jericho**, they encountered another man with a great need. Unlike the blind man who had a major physical disability and was poor, this individual seemed to have it all. **Zacchaeus** [za KEE uhs] was apparently healthy, **and he was rich**. The Greek name *Zacchaeus* derives from a Hebrew word meaning "righteous one" or "innocent." He is the only person referred to as a **chief tax collector** in the New Testament. The title probably indicates that Zacchaeus hired and supervised other local tax collectors and received portions of their collections.

When I was a youngster, my maternal grandfather held the position of delinquent tax collector for the county in which we lived. When citizens failed to pay their county taxes, my grandfather had the responsibility of tracking them down, informing them of their delinquent tax bill, and collecting if possible. Needless to say, no family was glad to see my grandfather appear unexpectedly at their front door. If this was the usual attitude of citizens toward my grandfather—their neighbor and fellow citizen who also had to pay taxes—imagine how first-century citizens of Judea felt about a tax collector hired by the occupying foreign government of Rome. Most of Zacchaeus's fellow citizens despised him as a traitor and a vile sinner!

Jericho was a busy place for tax collection because much of the traffic between Judea and Perea passed through the town. People were assessed land, poll, income, and personal property taxes. Moreover, tax collectors often charged more than Rome demanded and were infamous for extorting money from the citizenry.

### VERSE 3

**He was trying to see who Jesus was, but he was not able because of the crowd, since he was a short man.**

In the Greek language, the phrase rendered **was trying to see** implied that Zacchaeus had been attempting to see Jesus for some time. Zacchaeus may have heard about Jesus from travelers coming through Jericho who told

stories about His miracles and teachings. Luke did not specify the precise reason Zacchaeus wanted to see Jesus. Some Bible students have speculated that it was simple curiosity but there is also the possibility that, like the blind man on the road outside the city, Zacchaeus sought help from Jesus.

Zacchaeus was living under the pressure of public hatred and probably a guilty conscience. His wealth came in part from cheating his fellow citizens. His profession was often mentioned in lists that included thieves and prostitutes. He chose the profession because of the financial security it promised, but he may not have counted the cost of conscience and public scorn for him and his family.

There are many people today who have made choices in their lives that they later regret. Some are poor; others are rich. Some are healthy, and others are sick. Some are hated, while others are admired for their skills, power, or authority. What they all have in common is that they are not satisfied with their current situations. They are seeking to fill their lives with pleasure, drugs, money, material things, careers, or any number of human pursuits. Many have attained a level of success that they thought would satisfy, but they are disappointed and discontent.

We are all created to find happiness and contentment only in submission to God and His will. There is no one else and nothing else that can take His place in our lives. Zacchaeus may not have known exactly why he was unhappy, but he knew that wealth wasn't meeting the deepest needs of his life. As we consider whether to share the gospel with others, we should remember that there are no contented and fulfilled individuals without Christ. They may appear to have it all, but without Christ they are empty (Phil. 3:7).

Here we learn the reason Zacchaeus was unable to see Jesus in the crowd: **he was a short man.** News about Jesus' healing of a blind man outside Jericho probably resulted in many people gathering to see Jesus as he entered the city. Jesus was popular at this time in His ministry. People came to see His miracles of healing and to hear His authoritative teaching. The people had access to many religious leaders, but Jesus was unlike any other rabbi. Further, Jesus' teaching frequently resulted in public conflict with the religious leaders; perhaps some were in Jericho looking for a confrontation. Zacchaeus was determined not to miss his only opportunity to see Jesus!

#### VERSE 4

**So running ahead, he climbed up a sycamore tree to see Jesus, since he was about to pass that way.**

Zacchaeus evidently had a good idea about the likely route Jesus would travel through the city, so he quickly devised a plan to compensate for his

short stature. **Running ahead** of the crowd, **he climbed up a sycamore tree** [“sycamore-fig tree,” NIV]. The type of tree Luke identified here should not be confused with the modern sycamore tree. It was instead something of a cross between a fig and mulberry tree, but producing an inferior fruit. The Old Testament prophet Amos tended these types of trees along with his being a herdsman (see Amos 7:14). The *sycamore tree* could reach a height of sixty feet and had numerous stout branches, making climbing easy.

Some Bible commentators emphasize that Zacchaeus’s climbing the tree demonstrated an unusual determination to see Jesus. Such an act would have been considered undignified, especially for a wealthy person. Nevertheless, his actions underscore that those who seek Jesus always find infinitely more than they expected.

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## EXPLORE FURTHER

Read the article titled “Wealth And Materialism” on pages 1641–1642 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. What are some main principles regarding wealth in the Scriptures? What are some dangers of the love of wealth according to Jesus? How would you describe the importance of material things to you?

## FRIENDED (Luke 19:5-7)

Jesus stopped at the very tree in which Zacchaeus was perched and directed the tax collector to come down and host Jesus at his house. Zacchaeus joyfully accepted, while others in the crowd questioned Jesus’ desire to associate with such a sinful man.

### VERSE 5

**When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, hurry and come down because today it is necessary for me to stay at your house.”**

The words **came to the place** refer to Jesus’ stopping near (or beneath) the tree in which Zacchaeus was perched. It may well be that Zacchaeus did nothing to draw Jesus’ attention. Indeed, he may have been shocked and somewhat embarrassed when Jesus stopped, **looked up**, and addressed him.

Interestingly, Luke reported that Jesus called the tax collector by his name. Perhaps this was an instance of Jesus’ supernatural knowledge of people (compare John 1:48). Or perhaps Jesus simply inquired of others

in the crowd about the identity of the short-statured man perched in the sycamore tree. Either way, the episode underscores Jesus' sincere interest in every person and His willingness to give special attention to those who might be despised or condemned by others.

That Jesus directed Zacchaeus to **hurry and come down** demonstrates urgency on the part of Jesus. He was on His way to Jerusalem to lay down His life for sinners. By way of application, the urging of haste underscores the importance of Christians sharing the gospel with others and for the lost to receive the gospel. We as believers must not hesitate to witness to others when those opportunities present themselves. Likewise, unbelievers must not hesitate to receive the gospel, because the time is short (see Eph. 5:16).

The words **it is necessary for me to stay at your house** are both unusual and important. The words are unusual because an individual typically does not invite himself or herself to stay at another person's home. Indeed, this is the only occasion in which any of the Gospels report that Jesus invited Himself into someone's home. Another unusual aspect of Jesus' self-invitation is reflected in the phrase *it is necessary* ("I must," KJV; ESV; NIV). The implication of this important phrase points to God's will being fulfilled in Jesus' encounter with Zacchaeus. In other words, Jesus' encounter with Zacchaeus was a God-ordained appointment in which grace and forgiveness would be shown to an undeserving and notorious "sinner."

Everything about Jesus' ministry—from His birth to His death and resurrection—was intentional. Nothing was random or accidental. Every encounter and every choice in ministry that Jesus made was directed toward the fulfillment of the Father's will. This was a real-life example of principles taught by Jesus in the two parables of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32) and the Pharisee and the tax collector (18:9-14).

## VERSE 6

### **So he quickly came down and welcomed him joyfully.**

Zacchaeus also demonstrated urgency (**he quickly came down**) in accepting Jesus' request to come to his house. The Greek verb translated **welcomed** refers to hospitality shown when inviting a guest to one's home (see Luke 10:38; Acts 17:7). The word rendered **joyfully** ("gladly," NIV) parallels the theme of celebration in the trilogy of parables found in Luke 15.

Zacchaeus's immediate and joyful reception of Jesus reveals that his desire to see Jesus was more than idle curiosity. His desire to see Jesus came from deep within his dissatisfied soul. If his riches had satisfied him, he would not have made such an effort to see Jesus. Being rejected by his fellow countrymen and particularly the religious leaders could have made him cynical and uninterested in spiritual matters. They had written him off

and were constantly condemning him and others like him. Despite people's mistreatment, however, Zacchaeus longed for genuine spiritual peace and acceptance. He wanted to meet Jesus, and now Jesus wanted to come into his house and spend time with him!

There are many people today who, like Zacchaeus, may have been written off as hopeless. They put on a good front boasting of their wealth or pursuits of pleasure. The reality is that many of them are hoping that someone will reach out to them with the life-changing message of truth. In other words, they are looking for Jesus—even if they do not yet realize He is the Answer to their search for joy and peace. Followers of Christ must be ever-attentive for opportunities to engage spiritual seekers with the truth they are searching for.

## VERSE 7

### **All who saw it began to complain, “He’s gone to stay with a sinful man.”**

Jesus' decision to enter Zacchaeus's house was met with scorn by many in the crowd. Some Bible commentators suggest that the statement **all who saw it began to complain** could represent the use of hyperbole (exaggeration for effect) on Luke's part; however, the description accurately fits the hardening attitude of Jewish religious leaders against Jesus. The Greek term rendered *complain* appears also in Luke 15:2 to describe the attitude of the Pharisees in objection to Jesus' association with people they considered undesirable. The everyday citizens in the crowd may have grumbled because Jesus chose to lodge with a despised tax collector and not with one of them. Possibly even Jesus' disciples were concerned about criticism they would receive for His decision **to stay with a sinful man**.

Criticism of those who seek to win the lost too often continues among some Christians today. To reach unbelievers with the gospel, believers have to have contact with them. Of course, believers are not to be unequally yoked with unbelievers (see 2 Cor. 6:14) or participate in sinful practices, yet Christ's followers are called to be in the world while not of the world (see John 17:14-16). Believers cannot reach lost people by shouting at them from a distance. Jesus built relationships with the lost to offer them salvation. His followers are called to follow His example.

Most of Zacchaeus's fellow citizens regarded him to be *a sinful man*. The phrase “tax collectors and sinners” appears numerous times in the four Gospels. One of the most familiar New Testament passages for Christians is Romans 3:23—a verse that declares all people are sinners. It is important to remember, however, that most first-century Jewish teachers did not apply the label *sinner* to everyone. Religious leaders such as the Pharisees

did not consider themselves to be sinners. Sinners were viewed as those who opposed the Mosaic law, failed to observe the law's religious ceremonies, or participated in immoral behavior. Immorality could take the form of sexual sins such as prostitution. Constant contact with Gentiles made tax collectors equally reprehensible in the eyes of pious Jews.

The failure of some in Jesus' day to acknowledge that they were sinners was at the heart of the conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders. Their erroneous belief that righteousness comes through keeping the law prevented them from understanding that salvation is by grace through faith in Jesus. This is why Jesus said to them that "tax collectors and prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God before you" (Matt. 21:31). Many who were designated as sinners by first-century religious leaders understood that salvation was by grace, and they welcomed the righteousness Jesus offered!

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## EXPLORE FURTHER

Read the article titled "Banquet" on page 170 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. How did people view hospitality to strangers in biblical times? How can believers use hospitality today to reach the lost with the gospel?

## REPENTANT (Luke 19:8-10)

In response to Jesus, Zacchaeus committed to care for the poor and pay back four times whatever he might have extorted from others. Jesus announced that salvation had come to Zacchaeus's house that day.

### VERSE 8

**But Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, "Look, I'll give half of my possessions to the poor, Lord. And if I have extorted anything from anyone, I'll pay back four times as much."**

**Zacchaeus** did not let the grumbling of the critical crowd discourage him from making a decision that would change his life and eternal destiny. Luke did not indicate whether the tax collector made his astounding declaration on the road or later in his house. Indeed, it made no difference where Zacchaeus expressed his repentance and commitment to Jesus. It simply mattered that he did it. Repentance is a change of mind and heart about salvation, which was (and is) always through faith in Jesus. Zacchaeus's faith in Jesus was made evident in the promises that he made **to the Lord**.

Zacchaeus's first promise to the Lord was to **give half of his possessions to the poor**. There is no indication in the passage that Jesus required or even recommended the tax collector do this. Giving away half of his possessions was spontaneous generosity from Zacchaeus's new relationship with God through Jesus. It is important to know that there was no requirement to sell all that he had and give to the poor as Jesus commanded the rich young ruler (Luke 18:22). The command to the rich young ruler was intended to demonstrate the young ruler's greed and idolatry.

The second promise involved reparations for past acts of extortion that characterized the profession of tax collection. The conditional phrase **if I have extorted** ("defrauded," ESV; "cheated," NIV) likely does not imply uncertainty. Zacchaeus knew he had cheated others and pledged to pay back four times as much. This commitment exceeded what the law demanded in cases of reparations for fraud (see Lev. 6:1-5). What Zacchaeus promised to pay went beyond the requirement into the realm of generosity.

In demonstrating his faith by means of good works (see Jas 2:18-20), Zacchaeus put in perspective his desire to see Jesus. It is reasonable to conclude in hindsight that the Holy Spirit had prepared Zacchaeus's heart for repentance and faith prior to Jesus' arrival. He was burdened in his conscience over his past sins. He wanted to be forgiven, changed, and equipped to live a new kind of life. The religious leaders of his day offered him nothing but condemnation. He had heard of Jesus and hoped that Jesus might offer him what no one else would. Zacchaeus was not disappointed. No one who trusts in Jesus for salvation will ever be disappointed.

## VERSE 9

**"Today salvation has come to this house," Jesus told him, "because he too is a son of Abraham.**

Jesus began His response concerning what had happened to Zacchaeus with the word **today**. The term has significance in pointing back to Jesus' introduction of His ministry and mission in the Nazareth synagogue (see Luke 4:17-21). In that setting, Jesus was handed the scroll of Isaiah, and He chose to read Isaiah 61:1-2, a text that prophesied the coming of the Messiah to bring salvation to those in need. Jesus then said to the synagogue worshipers, "Today as you listen, this Scripture has been fulfilled." Later in Zacchaeus's house, Jesus linked His mission with Zacchaeus's newfound faith.

Jesus declared that **salvation** had **come to Zacchaeus's house**. The imagery points back to the parables of the lost sheep, lost coin, and lost son in Luke 15. The reference to Zacchaeus' *house* may indicate that other members of his family also believed and were saved (compare Acts 16:31).

The final phrase of this verse, **because he too is a son of Abraham**, is also significant. Jesus was not simply referring to Zacchaeus's ethnic heritage. He was declaring that Zacchaeus had become a child of God through faith, and that saving relationship had made him a spiritual *son of Abraham*. The apostle Paul later wrote extensively about the importance for Jews as well as Gentiles that Abraham was declared righteous by faith and not by works. Those who put their faith in Jesus are declared to be spiritual sons and daughters of Abraham (see Gal. 3:7; Rom. 9:6-8).

## VERSE 10

### **For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save the lost.”**

Jesus often referred to Himself as **the Son of Man**. The probable origin of this title is Daniel 7:13-14, a passage that describes the presentation of the Messiah as the divinely appointed ruler over an everlasting kingdom. The words **has come to seek and to save the lost** may be linked to Ezekiel 34:11-16. This passage describes God's sending His chosen shepherd from the house of David to save His flock from false shepherds. The statement by Jesus was intended to rebuke the crowd that was critical of His decision to lodge with Zacchaeus. Jesus declared unapologetically that He was fulfilling the mission given to Him by the Father *to seek and to save* lost people.

The account of Zacchaeus's salvation contains many important themes that appear frequently in Luke's Gospel. The theme of salvation by grace through faith is dramatically illustrated here. In the voluntary sharing of his wealth, Zacchaeus underscored Jesus' concern for the poor and the importance of restitution for past sins when possible. The mission of Jesus contained elements, such as His sacrificial death on the cross, that only He could accomplish. However, the mission of seeking and saving those who are lost is one that continues through the church today. Believers are tasked by the Lord to continue this mission. There is great rejoicing in heaven when repentant sinners put their faith in Jesus and are saved. May we join in that rejoicing by sharing the gospel with others at every opportunity given to us!

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## EXPLORE FURTHER

Read the article titled "Son of Man" on pages 1488–1489 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. What are the three general categories of how Jesus used the title for Himself in the Gospels? How is "Son of Man" used in Luke 19:10? What does it mean to you that Jesus is both the Son of God and the Son of Man?

# Cornerstone

God offers salvation through faith in Jesus alone.

The First Great Awakening was a historic spiritual revival that began in the American colonies in the 1730s. About a decade later, on July 8, 1741, a young minister named Jonathan Edwards was asked to preach at a church in Enfield, Connecticut. His sermon for the day was titled “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God.” The text on which Edwards based his sermon was Deuteronomy 32:35, a passage in which God promises to quickly bring His wrath down upon His disobedient people. Although Edwards read the sermon from a manuscript held close to his face and in his usual monotone style, it had a profoundly powerful impact on the congregants who heard it. The result was an emotional outpouring of repentance and grief over sin.

It is difficult to imagine a typical church congregation today having a similar response to Edwards’s sermon that the colonial congregation had. Today, we live in a culture that discounts and discredits biblical truth—particularly in regard to the biblical themes of sin and salvation. One popular belief is that there are many ways to get to heaven. Another insists that God—if He exists—would never condemn anyone to suffer eternal punishment.

Contrary to such views, the Bible does not teach universalism (the belief that all will be saved). Jesus warned at different times and in different ways that people need to be prepared for a future judgment. Believers will be saved, but unbelievers will be condemned to hell for eternity.

The religious leaders of Jesus’ day were descendants of the Old Testament nation of Israel. That nation—as descendants of Abraham, Moses, and David—was blessed to receive the superior revelation of God. The climax of that revelation was God’s sending His Son Jesus Christ to be the Savior and Lord, not only of Israel but also of every Gentile who places faith in Him. Yet many of these religious leaders refused to believe in Jesus Christ and plotted His death. In response to these attitudes, Jesus once told the religious leaders a parable that is the focus of this session. The parable is a cautionary story not only for the religious leaders of Jesus’ day but also for anyone today who rejects Jesus Christ as God’s only provision for salvation. To reject Christ fully and finally throughout this life is to bring upon oneself God’s eternal condemnation in hell.

# UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

## LUKE 20:1–21:38

Luke 20:1-8 describes an encounter in the temple courtyards between Jesus and religious leaders who demanded that He identify the source of His teaching authority. Jesus agreed to answer their question only if they indicated whether or not they believed John the Baptist's authority for teaching was from God. When the religious leaders refused to answer His question, Jesus then declined to answer their demand.

Jesus turned His attention to the people around Him and told the parable of the vineyard owner (20:9-18). (This parable and its effects will be examined in depth in this session.) The religious leaders standing nearby understood what Jesus meant by the parable and looked for a way to get their hands on Him without arousing the crowd's anger at them (9:19). They sent individuals pretending to be pious pilgrims to ask Jesus trick questions such as whether it was lawful for the Jews to pay taxes to Caesar (9:20-26). The leaders hoped to trap Jesus into making a statement they could then use to arrest Him and turn Him over to the Roman authorities. Jesus detected the leaders' motives and gave His questioners an answer that could not be used to accuse Him.

A group of Sadducees—aristocratic temple officials who accepted only the Pentateuch as authoritative Scripture and did not believe in bodily resurrection—followed suit by posing a trick question to Jesus concerning the afterlife (20:27-40). They described a woman who married seven brothers in succession after each brother died, then asked Jesus which brother's wife she would be in the resurrection. Jesus replied by affirming the reality of bodily resurrection while declaring there would be no need for marriage in the afterlife. Some experts in the Scriptures commended Jesus' response and did not challenge Him further.

Jesus then challenged the scribes' view concerning the Messiah (20:41-47). Quoting from Psalm 110:1, Jesus illustrated that the Messiah would be both a descendant of King David while also being Lord over David (and all others). Then Jesus warned His disciples to beware of the hypocritical religious leaders who sought public honor yet cheated widows out of their estates and put on an empty show of religious devotion.

In Luke 21:1-4, Jesus pointed to the sacrificial gift of a poor widow who put her only two coins in the temple treasury. Jesus said her gift was the greatest because of the sacrifice it represented. He then went on to prophesy the temple's complete destruction in the future as well as other catastrophes that would signal the end of the age and the Son of Man's coming (21:5-28).

Jesus concluded His teaching at this time with the parable of the budding fig tree. He urged His followers to be spiritually alert amid the coming difficult times and to live in anticipation of His return (21:29-38).

## EXPLORE **THE TEXT**

### **THE SERVANTS** (Luke 20:9-12)

Jesus had arrived in Jerusalem and was teaching daily in the temple courtyards (Luke 19:47). Jerusalem was the base of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish supreme council comprised of seventy leaders and the high priest. Most of these leaders opposed Jesus and sought ways to discredit or destroy Him. In response, Jesus told a parable that exposed the religious leaders' hostility.

#### **VERSE 9**

**Now he began to tell the people this parable: "A man planted a vineyard, leased it to tenant farmers, and went away for a long time.**

Jesus spoke a **parable** for all the people to hear, including a delegation from the Sanhedrin. The parable was intended to reveal the true motivations of His religious opponents and to warn them of judgment if they did not repent. The parable was about **a man who planted a vineyard** and then **leased it to tenant farmers**. The owner then **went away for a long time**. Absentee owners were not uncommon in Israel during the first century AD. The owner would contract laborers to tend the vineyard, which then could take as many as four years before producing a full harvest.

Many of Jesus' hearers, especially those who knew the Old Testament Scriptures, may have thought immediately of a similar parable found in Isaiah 5:1-7. In that passage, the prophet compared Israel to a vineyard the Lord planted with choice vines and tended carefully in the hopes of harvesting fine grapes—only to discover in the end that the grapes were bitter and worthless. Jesus' hearers also likely knew that the parable in Isaiah 5 was a warning of judgment against a disobedient and unfaithful Israel. Those who were willing to listen would understand that Jesus was giving a similar warning to the religious leaders of His day.

Today, we too need to remember that God is the Creator and Owner of everything. We are stewards of His creation. Further, the church is the steward of His glorious gospel, enacted in Jesus Christ His beloved Son.

## VERSE 10

**At harvest time he sent a servant to the farmers so that they might give him some fruit from the vineyard. But the farmers beat him and sent him away empty-handed.**

The owner had been away for a long time. He trusted the tenants to do their work faithfully, but now it was time for them to return a profit for his investment. **Harvest time** was the time when the grapes reached maturity and the tenants would possess the value of what the vineyard produced. Luke referred to the tenants here as **farmers**, but the noun can also be found in secular Greek literature to refer to vineyard workers.

The owner first sent a single **servant** to collect what was due, obviously not anticipating there would be any resistance. Shockingly, however, **the farmers beat** the owner's servant and **sent him away empty-handed**. Not only did they refuse to give the servant what was due the owner but also abused the helpless messenger. The parable gives no indication that the servant did anything to provoke the beating. Rather, the violent reaction revealed the wicked, untrustworthy nature of the tenants. This feature was meant to be a description of the shocking treatment received by many of God's prophets throughout the centuries.

## VERSES 11-12

**He sent yet another servant, but they beat that one too, treated him shamefully, and sent him away empty-handed. And he sent yet a third, but they wounded this one too and threw him out.**

The owner then sent a second and then a third **servant** to retrieve what belonged to him. Like the first servant, however, these two also were beaten, **treated ... shamefully, and sent ... away empty-handed**. The sending of three servants in succession showed extreme patience on the part of the owner. He was giving the tenants an opportunity to repent of their actions and do the right thing. Their continued mistreatment of his servants demonstrated their unwillingness to repent. God's judgment is always mercifully preceded by patience. Those who are wise repent before the period of grace is exhausted.

The three servants in Jesus' parable represented the numerous Old Testament prophets that God sent to call His people to repentance. It has been said that prophets were both foretellers and forth-tellers. As foretellers, they were given revelation to declare concerning future events that God would bring about. As forth-tellers, they delivered God's messages of hope or warning about present conditions, including during times of apostasy.

Prophets often delivered unpopular messages when God’s people lived in disobedience to His covenant. In reference to persecuted prophets, the writer of Hebrews described them as being mocked, beaten, imprisoned, stoned, and even killed (see Heb. 11:36-37). In the parable of the vineyard owner, Jesus described the hostile religious leaders of His day as wicked tenants who rejected and abused the true prophetic voices—including Jesus—whom God sent to call the people of Israel to repentance.

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## EXPLORE FURTHER

Read the article titled “Sanhedrin” on page 1414 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. What was the connection between the Sanhedrin of Jesus’ day and rebellious Israelite leaders of the Old Testament? What role did the Sanhedrin play in the arrest and crucifixion of Jesus? How did this group continue to oppose Christianity in its infancy?

### THE SON (Luke 20:13-16a)

Jesus continued the parable of the vineyard owner by describing the sending of the owner’s beloved son to collect from the tenants. However, the wicked tenants went even further in their sinful response, deciding to kill the owner’s son and claim his inheritance.

#### VERSE 13

**“Then the owner of the vineyard said, ‘What should I do? I will send my beloved son. Perhaps they will respect him.’**

The Greek word translated **owner** is *kyrios* [KIHR ih ahs], which can also mean “Lord.” Jesus’ use of this term in the parable probably was intended to associate the vineyard owner with God the Father. The owner’s reflective query (“**What should I do?**”) appears also in other parables to signal important decisions that were about to be made (see Luke 12:17; 16:3).

At this point in the current parable, hearers might expect the owner to decide to hire soldiers and enforce the agreement while also punishing the wicked tenants for their mistreatment of his servants. That the owner sent one final representative—his **beloved son**—reveals the owner’s extraordinary patience and mercy with the tenants. Jesus was emphasizing God’s extraordinary patience in response to Israel’s persistent disobedience.

Previously in Luke’s Gospel, God the Father declared Jesus to be His beloved Son at Jesus’ baptism (3:22) and the transfiguration (9:35). The Greek

word translated *beloved* also carries the nuances of “esteemed, dear, favorite.” This is an unmistakable reference to Jesus Christ.

In the parable, the sending of the owner’s son is the last attempt to call the rebellious tenants to repentance. The son is contrasted with the servants who had been sent previously. Servants had no family claim to the vineyard or its harvest; the son did have such a claim. This is the hypocrisy that Jesus exposed in regard to His religious opponents. They believed they could simultaneously love God yet hate Jesus. Jesus revealed that no one can love God without also loving His Son (see John 5:23). The Book of Hebrews begins by acknowledging that God first sent prophets but finally sent His Son as the culmination of His revelation to His people (see Heb. 1:1-4). The superiority of Jesus over all other messengers (prophets or angels) is emphasized.

#### VERSE 14

**“But when the tenant farmers saw him, they discussed it among themselves and said, ‘This is the heir. Let’s kill him, so that the inheritance will be ours.’**

The tenant farmers did not respond as the owner had hoped. They did not view the owner’s son as someone to be respected; rather, they saw in the son an even greater opportunity to further their wicked intentions. The phrase **discussed ... among themselves** foreshadows the efforts Jesus’ enemies later engaged in to plot His arrest and crucifixion.

The tenants *discussed* that the son was **the heir**. The son was in line to inherit the vineyard. Bible commentators have long debated the tenants’ conclusion that somehow the son’s demise would result in their ownership of his **inheritance**. Perhaps the best we can say is that those who are controlled by evil intentions often do not think straight. They are guided more by impulse rather than honesty or logic. The wicked tenants did not want to give the vineyard owner what was rightfully his, so they grasped at any plot—no matter how far-fetched—that might give them full control.

The parable echoes humanity’s problem since the fall in the garden of Eden. God created the garden; He owned it. He created Adam and Eve and put them in the garden to tend it, enjoy its benefits, and also honor God as the Owner by obeying His restrictions regarding one tree. Adam and Eve, at the temptation of Satan, decided they wanted to rebel against God. They disobeyed His express command. As a result, the couple lost their innocence, their life in the garden, and their right relationship with God. Moreover, they passed down to all humans after them a deadly inheritance: the sin nature. This sad story of human rebellion against the Creator continues throughout human history. It was the reason Jesus came to earth.

## VERSE 15

**So they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. “What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them?”**

The tenants acted upon their evil thoughts. They **threw** the son **out of the vineyard and killed him**. These words foreshadow the suffering and crucifixion of Jesus just days after Jesus told this parable. The violent escalation in the parable from beatings of the servants to the murder of the son should have been a warning to the religious leaders who were already looking for an opportunity to kill Jesus. Jesus was prepared for His own suffering and crucifixion at the instigation of the religious leaders.

The words **what then will the owner of the vineyard do to them** challenged all who heard the parable to respond with an answer. The moral response would logically be that the wicked tenants would face judgment and justice according to their deeds. There was no justification for what they had done. Once again, this was an attempt to awaken the religious leaders concerning their evil plans to murder Jesus. The religious leaders would later develop justifications for their plan to have Jesus executed. Like the wicked tenants in the parable, however, they would be without excuse. God would eventually bring down His judgment on them.

## VERSE 16a

**He will come and kill those farmers and give the vineyard to others.”**

Jesus quickly answered the question He set forth in the parable. The vineyard owner would have every right to **come and kill those farmers** who had mistreated his servants and killed his beloved son. There are three parts to Jesus' statement. First, there is the ominous warning that the owner would *come*. Perhaps the tenants imagined the owner would not come in person since he had not done so to this point. Second, there is the forthright warning that the owner would *kill* the wicked tenants. They underestimated the owner's willingness to come and execute justice.

Third, there is the interesting conclusion that the owner would **give the vineyard to others**. Jesus did not specify who these *others* were. Probably this is a foreshadowing of the inclusion of Gentiles in the gospel. In the Book of Acts, Luke emphasized the new covenant's inclusion of both Jews and Gentiles in salvation and in the gospel mission (Acts 13:48; 15:6-11). The parable's prophetic statement is ultimately pictured in the establishment of the kingdom of God at Jesus' second coming—when the wicked are destroyed and the righteous inherit what the wicked had falsely claimed as theirs.

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## EXPLORE FURTHER

Read the article titled “Son of God” on pages 1487–1488 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. How is the title “Son of God” used prophetically of Jesus in the Old Testament? How did Jesus portray Himself uniquely as “the Son of God” in His teaching? How is “Son of God” related to the deity of Jesus Christ?

### THE STONE (Luke 20:16b-19)

When the crowd reacted with shock and unbelief at the parable’s conclusion, Jesus used the moment as an opportunity to relate the parable to Psalm 118:22 and the Messiah. The Jewish leaders’ rejection of Jesus as “the cornerstone” of God’s salvation would seal their judgment and demise.

#### VERSE 16b

**But when they heard this they said, “That must never happen!”**

The implications of the owner’s replacement of the wicked tenants with others was obvious to those who grasped the meaning of Jesus’ parable. They knew that Jesus was predicting a loss of the kingdom by the unbelieving Jewish leadership and replacement with others that included Gentiles. The words **that must never happen** (“God forbid,” KJV; NIV; “Surely not,” ESV) comprise an emphatically negative exclamation in the Greek language of the New Testament. Paul used the exclamation more than a dozen times in his epistles. Perhaps Luke’s use of it in this verse was prompted by his association with Paul during the apostle’s missionary journeys.

Because Jesus used the well-known depiction of Israel as a vine, the people listening to Jesus understood the radical idea He predicted. The Owner of the vineyard (God the Father) would judge His disobedient people and yet move His plan of salvation forward in the gospel message by grafting Gentile believers into the people of God. The manifestation of that forward movement would be evident at Pentecost when the church was empowered with the Holy Spirit’s abiding presence.

#### VERSE 17

**But he looked at them and said, “Then what is the meaning of this Scripture: The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone?”**

The crowd thought that what Jesus predicted was unthinkable, and He responded to them with a quotation from Psalm 118:22. The root of the Greek word translated **Scripture** literally means “to write.” Thus, *Scripture* refers to God’s inspired, written revelation of His Word. In Jesus’ day, of course, the reference was to the Old Testament writings—the Torah, the Prophets, and the Wisdom books. In due time it included the twenty-seven books of the New Testament, including of course Luke’s Gospel. Jesus’ commendation and use of the Old Testament as God’s Word is an important argument for the doctrine of the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture.

The specific verse Jesus quoted here, Psalm 118:22, referenced a **stone that the builders rejected**. The setting envisioned in the psalm was that of a construction site at which stones were being prepared for the construction of the temple. Jesus quoted the verse because it pointed to His rejection as the Messiah by the Jewish religious leaders. By rejecting Jesus, they were rejecting the very *stone* God had appointed to be the vital centerpiece of His new temple, or dwelling place.

The exact identification of the word translated **cornerstone** (“the head of the corner,” KJV) is not clear. Was this a reference to the stone placed at the top of an arch or a stone that connected two walls at the foundation. Either way, Jesus was identifying Himself as the unique, indispensable life on which the new covenant people of God would be built.

## **VERSE 18**

**Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, but on whomever it falls, it will shatter him.”**

Jesus continued His appeal to the Old Testament’s symbolic use of stones with an allusion to Isaiah 8:14-15. The picture of a stone that crushes the opponents of God is also found in other prophetic passages (see Dan. 2:34-35,44-45). In Luke 2:34, the elderly Simeon also alluded to words found in Isaiah 8:14 when he told Mary that Jesus would one day “cause the fall and rise of many in Israel.”

The idea of eternal punishment for sin and unbelief is not popular today. Jesus clearly taught those who heard Him that He would be either their Savior or their Judge. Those who reject Him will be broken to pieces. Those who believe in Him become “living stones” in the church (see 1 Pet. 2:5).

## **VERSE 19**

**Then the scribes and the chief priests looked for a way to get their hands on him that very hour, because they knew he had told this parable against them, but they feared the people.**

Luke identified those portrayed as wicked tenants in the parable as **the scribes and the chief priests**. They knew that Jesus **had told this parable against them**. Their response was to try to **get their hands on Him that very hour**. The parable had not caused them to reevaluate their opinion of Jesus. Their angry and hateful response demonstrated that they were described accurately as the wicked tenants in Jesus' parable. The only deterrent to their acting immediately on their murderous intentions was revealing: **they feared the people**. This statement reveals the popularity Jesus had with the common people in Jerusalem. The religious leaders were cowards and decided to attack Jesus in a way that would not bring repercussions on them from the crowds that followed and listened to Jesus.

The religious leaders of Jerusalem were enraged when the people gave Jesus a royal welcome on Palm Sunday. Their anger increased as crowds gathered regularly to hear Him teach with authority. They attempted to defeat Him with arguments and questions but failed. They wanted to seize Him but were afraid of the people's reaction. In contrast, Jesus taught openly and boldly. He told a parable that described the leaders' evil motivations and predicted their demise.

What the religious leaders in Jerusalem intended for evil, God would overrule for the salvation of those who believe in His Son. The parable actually crystallizes much of biblical history. God sent His prophets to warn the people to repent and some of them were persecuted or martyred. Ultimately, God sent His Son with the mission to provide the way of salvation through faith in Him. The decision of Jesus' opponents to have Him crucified revealed the unworthiness of sinful humanity to receive salvation and displayed God's amazing grace.

Believers today are not called to be abrasive in our gospel witness, but we are not to neglect warning unbelievers of the consequences of rejecting Jesus. Jesus is the Cornerstone who saves or condemns, depending on the individual's response to His offer of salvation.

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## EXPLORE FURTHER

Read the article titled "Cornerstone" on pages 349–350 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. What Old Testament passages referred to the coming Messiah as the Cornerstone? How is the cornerstone imagery used by the apostle Peter in reference to the church? What does this image of Christ mean to you as a believer?

# Remembered

Jesus' costly sacrifice should be remembered by believers.

The capacity for memory is one of the most amazing features of God's design for the human brain. The ability to recall past information and experiences is an important component of daily life and evaluation of mental health. Some memories evoke emotions that range from pleasant to sorrowful. Other memories provide the foundation for our interactions with others and the development of skills we need to work or simply enjoy life. The loss of memory capacity is often the result of brain injury or aging. Everyone wants to retain their ability to remember and fears the consequences of losing that faculty.

Because forgetting can have negative consequences, many of us depend on reminders to help us recall important events. The development of computers and smartphones has provided powerful tools to help us remember important appointments or anniversaries. Long before the modern age, however, God provided and encouraged reminders in His relationship with His people. One ancient reminder God gave was the rainbow following the flood in Noah's day. The rainbow was a promise God made that He would never again destroy the entire earth with a flood. Still later, God designated the building of monuments, celebrating of festivals, and performing of rituals for His people to remember important events and truths of the covenant. The written Word of God remains a powerful and accurate reminder of who God is and what He expects of us.

It is no surprise, therefore, that Jesus would establish a ritual reminder so that believers could regularly commemorate His death on the cross for our sins. The reminder He established and commanded His followers to perpetuate was a transformation of the Passover into what Christians commonly refer to as the Lord's Supper.

In this session, we will focus on the passage in Luke's Gospel that describes the origin and meaning of the Lord's Supper. Whenever believers celebrate this ordinance, it gives a powerful reminder of the substitutionary atonement of Christ that allows us to have a right relationship with God. We will also examine the past, present, and future implications of the Lord's Supper for believers.

# UNDERSTAND **THE CONTEXT**

## **LUKE 22:1-28**

In Luke 22:1-6, the Gospel writer reported that Jewish religious leaders in Jerusalem plotted the death of Jesus. They found an accomplice in one of Jesus' own disciples—Judas Iscariot. Judas agreed to betray Jesus and hand Him over to them for a price.

Luke 22:7-13 reveals that Jesus instructed Peter and John to prepare a place for the group to celebrate the Passover meal together. The two disciples were told to find a man carrying a water jug, follow him to the house where he was going, and request the use of a room in the house for the Passover meal. Jesus further instructed the two disciples to prepare for the meal in a furnished, upstairs room.

In Luke 22:14-20, Jesus spoke to His disciples about His impending suffering. He used elements of the Passover meal to signify His death. The bread represented His body that would be given for them, and the cup represented His blood that would establish a new covenant between them and God. Jesus urged the disciples to continue to commemorate His death in this way as a remembrance of His sacrifice.

In Luke 22:21-23, Jesus revealed that one of the disciples at the table would betray him. The disciples argued among themselves concerning the identity of the traitor.

In Luke 22:24-28, an argument broke out among the disciples about who was the greatest among them. Jesus rebuked the disciples and warned them not to act like Gentile leaders by abusing their authority over others for personal gain. Jesus urged His followers to be servants of one another as He had been—and continued to be—to them.

# EXPLORE **THE TEXT**

## **PREPARED** (Luke 22:7-13)

Jesus greatly desired to share His final Passover meal on earth with His disciples. During the meal, He previewed His atoning death on the cross and established a remembrance of that sacrifice. The Lord's Supper, along with Christian baptism, are the two ordinances that Jesus commanded believers to observe. We will see the necessity of believers preparing both physically and spiritually whenever churches partake of the Lord's Supper.

## VERSE 7

### **Then the Day of Unleavened Bread came when the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed.**

The **Day of Unleavened Bread** technically referred to the first day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread (see Luke 22:1). Traditionally, this festival began the day after the Passover and lasted seven days (see Ex. 23:15; Deut. 16:1-8). It commemorated the haste required in leaving when the Israelites were delivered from slavery in Egypt. Thus, when Luke referred to the overlap of the *Day of Unleavened Bread* and the day **when the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed**, he was simply using a popular way of referring to them as one celebration.

Passover was the first of three annual festivals for which all Jewish males were expected to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. According to Deuteronomy 16:6, the Passover sacrifice was to be offered only “at the place where the LORD your God chooses to have his name dwell”—that is, at the temple in Jerusalem. The first-century Jewish historian Josephus reported that in AD 66 more than 250,000 Passover lambs were sacrificed at the temple. Extrapolating from the number of sacrifices, some Bible students estimate that a throng of around two-and-a-half million pilgrims could have crowded into the city and the surrounding region. More importantly, however, Jesus chose the Passover to signify the meaning of His atoning death on the cross: He became the believer’s Passover sacrifice (see 1 Cor. 5:7).

## VERSE 8

### **Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, “Go and make preparations for us to eat the Passover.”**

Luke emphasized the initiative of Jesus in preparing for the Passover meal. Only Luke specifically named **Peter and John** as the disciples Jesus tasked with making **preparations**. Presumably these two were to confirm the use of a place large enough for Jesus and the disciples **to eat the Passover**. They may also have been responsible for obtaining the food items and wine for the meal. The presence of large crowds of pilgrims in Jerusalem at this time would have necessitated that such preparations be made in advance.

*Peter and John*, along with John’s brother James, served as a kind of inner circle among Jesus’ disciples (see Matt. 26:37; Mark 9:2; Luke 8:51). They continued to serve in primary leadership roles in the early church. Peter and John’s willingness to do preparation tasks would be followed with major spiritual responsibilities in the church. As in the case of securing a particular donkey for Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem (see Luke 19:29-30), no task done in service to Jesus is menial or unimportant.

## VERSE 9

**“Where do you want us to prepare it?” they asked him.**

The two disciples may have assumed that Jesus had already arranged for the use of a room or had a preference in regard to the location. In any case, they asked Jesus for more information. In regard to Luke’s account of the event, the disciples’ question (“**Where do you want us to prepare it?**”) reveals that Jesus was in control of every aspect of His final week. He would fulfill the Father’s plan of salvation in every detail.

These subtle indications of Jesus’ calmness in the face of His impending suffering also reveal God’s sovereignty in what would soon appear to be an out-of-control situation. The passage reminds us as believers that God is always in control. Nothing can or will happen to us that is beyond His awareness or His power to use for our eternal benefit (see Rom. 8:28).

## VERSE 10

**“Listen,” he said to them, “when you’ve entered the city, a man carrying a water jug will meet you. Follow him into the house he enters.**

Jesus instructed the two disciples to enter **the city** and then look for **a man carrying a water jug**. While this might not seem to be a very noticeable distinction, especially in a bustling city, this particular chore typically was performed by the women of a household. In addition, Jesus indicated that the man with the water jug would **meet** the two disciples, suggesting the possibility that Jesus had prearranged the encounter and the man knew what Peter and John were tasked to do. The main point of the narrative is the same whether or not there had been prearrangements made.

In any case, the disciples were instructed to **follow** the man **into the house he enters**. This detail, plus the specific identification of “the owner of the house” in the next verse, may indicate that the man with the water jug was a house servant. Speculation by some Bible commentators that Jesus was purposely being secretive in His instructions to hide the location from Judas Iscariot does not seem likely, since Judas was later present with the group in the upper room (see Luke 22:21).

## VERSE 11

**Tell the owner of the house, “The Teacher asks you, “Where is the guest room where I can eat the Passover with my disciples?””**

Jesus then told Peter and John to speak to **the owner of the house** and say that **the Teacher** wanted to know the location of **the guest room**

“guestchamber,” KJV) where He could **eat the Passover** meal with His disciples. Evidently, the house owner was a follower of Jesus, although perhaps a secret disciple like Joseph of Arimathea (see John 19:38). Luke did not specify the owner’s name, but his knowing Jesus as **the Teacher** would have revealed deep respect if not an expression of faith (see Matt. 8:19; Mark 13:1; John 1:38; 3:1-2).

## VERSE 12

**Then he will show you a large, furnished room upstairs. Make the preparations there.”**

Presumably, the **large, furnished room upstairs** was in the owner’s house. The room needed to be of sufficient size for at least thirteen people (Jesus and His twelve disciples). The furnishings probably included one or more low tables and cushions around the tables for guests to recline as they ate the meal. Perhaps a wash basin and towel were also part of the furnishings (see John 13:4-5). Peter and John were assigned to **make the necessary preparations** for the group to eat the Passover meal in this room.

## VERSE 13

**So they went and found it just as he had told them, and they prepared the Passover.**

When Peter and John entered Jerusalem to complete their assignment, events happened **just as** Jesus **had told them**. That is, they were met by a man with a water jug. They followed the man into a house and then spoke with the owner of the house concerning the location of a large, furnished upstairs room. There the two disciples **prepared the Passover**.

Verses such as Luke 22:13 assure readers of Luke’s Gospel that God was in control of events surrounding Jesus’ mission. Just as Jesus gave His disciples careful instructions for preparing the Passover, we as believers are to prepare our hearts for participating in the Lord’s Supper (see 1 Cor. 11:27-28).

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## EXPLORE FURTHER

Read the article titled “Festivals” on pages 564–569 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. What was the origin of the Feast of Passover? What were the requirements for the Israelites in celebrating the Passover? Why did Paul refer to Jesus as “Christ our Passover lamb” (1 Cor. 5:7)?

## LOOKING FORWARD (Luke 22:14-18)

While eating the Passover meal with the apostles, Jesus declared His desire to do this with them before He suffered. He then explained that He would not eat the meal again until it was fulfilled in the kingdom of God.

### VERSE 14

**When the hour came, he reclined at the table, and the apostles with him.**

The phrase **the hour came** may refer either to the time for the Passover meal or the designated time for Jesus to complete His mission. Likely, the term *hour* in this context does not refer to a sixty-minute period but to the beginning of a significant event that had been predicted (see Luke 22:53; John 13:1; 17:1). The phrase **reclined at the table** reminds us that important meals were eaten while reclining on cushions next to low tables.

### VERSE 15

**Then he said to them, “I have fervently desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.**

Jesus’ statement in this verse is unique to Luke’s account. The phrase **I have fervently desired** reveals the importance that Jesus gave to this meal with His disciples. The words **to eat this Passover** may refer specifically to the Passover lamb. If that is the case, the lamb would be a picture and type of Jesus as the sacrificial Lamb of God. The Passover lamb would have been slaughtered earlier by a priest at the temple. Later in Scripture, the apostle John envisioned the resurrected Jesus as “a slaughtered lamb standing in the midst of the throne” in heaven (Rev. 5:6).

The phrase **before I suffer** confirms that Jesus was fully aware of what would follow this meal with His disciples. The meal would be the last time He would enjoy this fellowship with His disciples before He was arrested, beaten, and crucified.

Jesus’ suffering reminds us that suffering is often a part of God’s plan for His people and is not always a punishment for disobedience. The purposes for suffering are often complex and hidden, at least for a time, from those who experience the suffering. In this case, Jesus would be suffering intentionally for our sins and salvation (Isa. 53:4-6).

### VERSE 16

**For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.”**

The phrase **for I tell you** often introduces important statements by Jesus (see Luke 3:8; 10:24; 14:24; 22:18,37). In the statement **I will not eat it again**, the term *it* refers to the Passover meal. However, the term *again* implies there would be a future meal they would share together. The phrase **until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God** points to the end times and the messianic banquet when Jesus will once again gather believers for a fellowship celebration. This future banquet will occur after the second coming of Jesus when He rules victoriously (see Rev. 19:7-9). Until that time, believers celebrate the Lord's Supper in anticipation of that consummation of God's redemptive plan (see 1 Cor. 11:26).

This verse has important application as Christians celebrate the Lord's Supper today. The Lord's Supper has both past, present, and future implications. Looking to the past, it commemorates the death of Christ on the cross, making possible forgiveness of sin and right-standing with God. In the present, the Supper signifies not only the relationship believers have with God through Jesus Christ but also their relationships one with another as brothers and sisters in God's family. The future aspect of the Supper gives hope to believers that death is not the end but rather the transition to an everlasting kingdom that God has planned for His creation.

## VERSE 17

**Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks, he said, “Take this and share it among yourselves.**

Verse 17 describes the partaking of “the fruit of the vine” (22:18) during the Passover meal. The text does not indicate whether Jesus also partook the elements of the meal, but it is likely that He did. The emphasis of the entire account focuses on Jesus' leading and interpreting the elements of the meal.

The term **a cup** refers to one of four cups of wine that were traditionally served to participants during or following the Passover meal. The four cups pointed to four truths the Lord God promised the Israelites regarding their deliverance from slavery in Egypt (see Ex. 6:6-7). Bible scholars differ on which of the four cups is referred to in Luke 22:17. Many believe it is the first cup, because it follows the blessing, or **giving thanks**, that began the formal celebration of the Passover meal. Verse 20 evidently points to a later cup, drank at a later point or after the meal proper.

The instruction to **take this and share it among yourselves** points to the shared experience the supper was designed to create. The Lord's Supper was not intended as an individual act of worship but as a shared communion among a family of believers—a local church congregation, for example. Of course, the Lord's Supper can be shared by believers in any setting.

The emphasis is on the community of believers sharing in their common faith and relationship with God through Jesus Christ. To demonstrate our love for God, we must also demonstrate love for one another in the body of Christ.

#### VERSE 18

**For I tell you, from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.”**

Again Jesus introduced an important declaration with the words **for I tell you**. The profound declaration was that He would **not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes**. Bible scholars point out that the phrase *until the kingdom of God comes* is not found in the Old Testament or Jewish writings before the first century AD. The coming of the kingdom is associated with the second coming of Jesus. We as believers anxiously await the fulfillment of these events when God brings in His eternal kingdom, bringing punishment to the wicked and salvation to those who are saved.

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### EXPLORE FURTHER

Read the article titled “Ordinances” on pages 1197–1200 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. What are the two ordinances commanded by Jesus for His followers? What does the Lord’s Supper commemorate? How does it strengthen your relationship with Christ when you participate in the Lord’s Supper?

#### LOOKING BACK (Luke 22:19-20)

Jesus presented the unleavened bread to the apostles, proclaiming that it represented His broken body. He called on the disciples to eat the bread as a way of remembering His suffering and sacrifice. He also presented the cup and proclaimed it to represent the new covenant established in His shed blood.

#### VERSE 19

**And he took bread, gave thanks, broke it, gave it to them, and said, “This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.”**

Before distributing food and drink to His disciples, Jesus **gave thanks**. The Greek verb used here to describe the giving of thanks is the basis for

the English term *Eucharist*—a term some Christian groups use in reference to the Lord’s Supper. Thanking God for the provision of food at mealtimes was a standard practice in first-century Judaism. The reference to giving thanks also became a standard part of the formula used by the early church in observing the Lord’s Supper (see 1 Cor. 11:24).

The first of two elements of the Lord’s Supper was **bread**. In the context of the Passover meal, the bread was made without any yeast. This practice recalled that the Israelites were to be ready at a moment’s notice for their deliverance from slavery in Egypt (see Ex. 12:39). Jesus **took bread, broke it, and gave it** to His disciples. Each disciple was given a part of the whole, emphasizing their acceptance and unity.

Jesus then referred to the bread as His **body, which is given** for sinners. Over the centuries, Christian groups have differed in their interpretation of Jesus’ statement. Generally speaking, evangelical Christians affirm Jesus was teaching that the broken bread represented the brokenness of His physical body from the beatings and crucifixion He would suffer. He did not mean that the bread used in the Lord’s Supper would somehow become His literal body before, during, or after the believer ingested it.

Jesus’ use of bread to symbolize His physically broken body was unprecedented in Judaism. In other words, Jesus transformed the Passover elements with new meaning designed to commemorate the new covenant He would inaugurate with His death and resurrection. The Greek verb rendered *given* implies sacrifice (see Mark 10:45; Gal. 1:4). God the Father sent His Son as a sacrifice, and Jesus surrendered His life to be that sacrifice. The phrase **for you** emphasizes that Jesus took our place as sinners and provided forgiveness of our sins as a substitutionary atoning sacrifice.

The final words of Luke 22:19, **do this in remembrance of me**, were used by Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:24-25 to give instructions regarding a church’s observance of the Lord’s Supper. Importantly, the statement underscores the nature of the Lord’s Supper as a memorial event for believers.

## VERSE 20

**In the same way he also took the cup after supper and said, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.**

Jesus then took **the cup after supper** (probably the third in the sequence of four cups of wine served during the Passover celebration) and served it to the disciples. The phrase **in the same way** demonstrates the close association of the cup with the mention of the bread in the previous verse. The cup, according to Jesus, represented His **blood ... poured out** for sinners. The drinking of blood—human or animal—was forbidden in the Mosaic law,

because the blood represented the very life of the animal or person (see Lev. 17:14). The law's prohibition of drinking blood is further evidence that the elements of the Lord's Supper are to be understood as representative, not literal. Just as the bread symbolized Jesus' broken body, the cup represented Jesus' very life given as an atoning sacrifice. Again, the phrase **for you** emphasizes the substitutionary nature of Jesus' death (see Isa. 53:4-6).

Jesus said further that the cup represented the establishment of the **new covenant**. This is a clear reference to an amazing prophecy in Jeremiah 31:31-34. In the sixth century BC, Jeremiah prophesied that one day the Lord would establish a new covenant in which He would write His law on people's hearts rather than on stone tablets. Moreover, He would "forgive their iniquity and never again remember their sin" (31:34). Jesus, in effect, was declaring that His atoning death on the cross would establish this *new covenant*. Then later in the first century AD, the writer of Hebrews went to great lengths to explain the deep and abiding meaning of the new covenant for believers (see Heb. 8:1-9:28).

No instructions are given in the New Testament regarding how frequently Christians are to observe the Lord's Supper. Paul's instructions to believers in 1 Corinthians 11:24-28 simply emphasize that as often as churches observe the ordinance they are to do so in remembrance of Christ and His atoning sacrifice. A danger of repeated worship rituals is that they can become rote rather than meaningful and transformational. The early disciples no doubt observed the Lord's Supper many times in the years following Jesus' death and resurrection. Their remembrances of that night and what followed would be seared into their memories.

Today, we too as believers can personalize our observance of the Lord's Supper by soberly reflecting on what Jesus did for us on the cross. The bread and the cup should remind us that Jesus loved us to the extent that He gave His perfect life for our imperfect and profoundly sinful lives. No one else could have paid the price that would redeem us from our sins and condemnation. We can also remember that the Lord's Supper looks forward to the return of Christ and the establishment of His eternal kingdom.

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## EXPLORE FURTHER

Read the article titled "Covenants" on pages 355-360 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. What are some differences between covenants made between people and covenants made between God and people? What made the new covenant possible? What are some of the blessings of the new covenant for believers?

# Willing

Jesus willingly submitted to the Father's redemptive plan.

Life has its challenges, no matter who you are. Sometimes we face difficult situations that happen unexpectedly and uninvited. Think of automobile accidents, illnesses, job losses, or being victimized by someone else's criminal actions. At other times, we intentionally choose to engage difficult circumstances in an effort to make a difference or solve a problem. Examples might include pursuing a potentially dangerous career—law enforcement, emergency management, or the military—or devoting oneself to serve as a missionary or aid worker in challenging regions of the world. No one enjoys suffering, but sometimes we must choose to engage challenges to help others.

What's the most difficult thing you've ever willingly chosen to do in your life? Depending on your age and life experiences, the answer to that question probably ranges from things that are mildly uncomfortable to excruciatingly painful. If we were to ask that question of Jesus, He would no doubt point to His decision to submit to the will of His Father in accomplishing our salvation through His death on the cross. No one has ever been so innocent and yet suffered so deeply. Those who viewed the arrest, beatings, and crucifixion thought that Jesus was experiencing suffering that was forced on Him. We know from God's Word that Jesus' death on the cross was a choice that He made.

In this session, we will observe Jesus' love and submission to the Father's plan and marvel at His love for us. As we reflect on what Jesus willingly did for us, we will be motivated to submit ourselves to His will even if that means enduring suffering for the purpose of making a difference in others' lives.

## UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

### LUKE 22:39-53

In Luke 22:39-46, Jesus led His disciples to the Mount of Olives following the Lord's Supper. He went there to pray and prepare Himself for what He

was about to endure. Jesus also encouraged the disciples to pray for strength against temptation. He then went a short distance away from them and prayed to the Father about His impending death on the cross. Jesus struggled with the severity of taking on the sins of the world but submitted Himself to the Father's plan of redemption. The Father sent an angel from heaven to strengthen Him.

In Luke 22:47-53, a crowd came to where Jesus and His disciples were praying to arrest Him. Judas Iscariot betrayed Jesus with a kiss, and the mob proceeded to arrest Jesus. One of the disciples cut off the ear of a servant to the high priest. Jesus stopped the disciple's attempted resistance and healed the servant's ear. He then rebuked the cowardice of the religious leaders for arresting Him in private and at night. The mob took Jesus away for trial.

## EXPLORE THE TEXT

### IN PRAYER (Luke 22:41-46)

Having led His disciples to the Mount of Olives, Jesus withdrew from them to pray. He asked God if there was another way of providing salvation. After an angel appeared to Him, Jesus prayed again with great fervency. Finding His disciples asleep, He awoke them and warned them to pray so that they would not fall into temptation.

### VERSE 41

**Then he withdrew from them about a stone's throw, knelt down, and began to pray,**

After urging His disciples to pray so that they could avoid falling into temptation, Jesus **withdrew from them about a stone's throw** for private prayer. The phrase *a stone's throw* refers to a short distance. The typical posture for prayer among first-century Jews was standing; however, in Scripture, kneeling in prayer was associated with fervency (see 1 Kings 8:54; Ezra 9:5; Dan. 6:10; Acts 7:60; 9:40).

When Jesus faced His greatest challenge, He chose prayer as His number one priority. Jesus urged His disciples to pray at this time as well, because He knew that they needed prayer to be victorious in the face of unprecedented suffering. Jesus was both fully human and fully divine. The divine characteristics of Jesus such as His omnipresence, omniscience, and omnipotence cannot be shared by His followers. The human nature of Jesus

presents many essential qualities that His followers can and should imitate. Prayer was an essential practice in Jesus' life and must also be a priority for those who are believers.

Prayer is fundamental for many reasons in the Christian life, and here the importance of providing spiritual strength in the face of temptation is emphasized. We are often urged by health professionals to practice good habits of health and diet to prevent disease. In a similar way, prayer prepares us to resist temptations that could lead us into sin or trials that could weaken our faith. Because we never know when severe temptations will come, we should pursue daily prayer with passion and consistency. Only when we are men and women of fervent prayer will we be prepared for the unexpected challenges that Satan, the world, or our sinful flesh will introduce. If Jesus needed a regular and zealous prayer life, how much more do we need to make prayer a daily priority in our lives?

## VERSE 42

**“Father, if you are willing, take this cup away from me—  
nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done.”**

The content of Jesus' prayer is stated succinctly and powerfully in this verse. Luke used the Greek term for **Father** that is the basis of the English word *paternal*. (Mark's Gospel adds the familiar Aramaic term *Abba* in the parallel verse, Mark 14:36.) Addressing God in this familiar way was not typical of Jewish prayers in Jesus' day. The vocabulary in approaching the Father that He used and taught His disciples to use revealed an intimate access to the Father that Jesus came to establish for believers.

The phrase **if you are willing** was typical of Jewish prayers and expressed belief in the sovereignty of God as the One who evaluates and determines the answer to every request. The purpose of prayer is not to compel God to do our will but to submit our requests to a wise God who answers according to His best purposes. We know what we desire, but our desires do not always coincide with God's purposes or timing.

This does not mean prayer is meaningless in a predetermined divine plan that cannot be overruled. Our obtaining certain blessings from God is dependent on our asking (see Luke 11:9). Jesus expressed a desire and left the answer to the Father. The prayer was an act of submission. As believers, we know that God hears our prayers and responds with His will (1 John 5:14-15).

The use of the term **cup** to describe an experience—good or bad—is biblical (see Ps. 16:5; Jer. 49:12). Jesus previously used this imagery to ask if His disciples were prepared to suffer with Him (see Matt. 20:22; Mark 10:38). In this verse, He used the term to refer to His suffering and crucifixion. He asked

the Father to **take ... away** the *cup* from Him—if the Father was *willing* to do so. This prayer has puzzled some Bible students because it appears to show a lack of resolve by Jesus in completing His mission. However, the follow-up words **nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done** demonstrate that Jesus was not expressing doubt or having second thoughts. Why, then, did Jesus express a desire to avoid the cross if possible? The following paragraphs offer a few possible answers.

First, the deep emotion expressed in the request emphasized the intense suffering Jesus anticipated. Physically and emotionally, crucifixion was death by torture, and Jesus knew there would be humiliation and beatings that preceded the crucifixion. The greatest aspect of His suffering, however, was unique to Jesus. It involved His taking the wrath of God for all human sin upon Himself on the cross. This is the greatest suffering imaginable; there is truly nothing comparable in the suffering of any other human being. We can never fully understand the depths of suffering Jesus endured to pay the price for our redemption.

A second possible motive behind Jesus' prayer was to demonstrate His sinlessness. As the writer of Hebrews points out, Jesus was "tempted in every way as we are, yet without sin" (Heb. 4:15). God created the first human beings as sinless in the garden of Eden. But when He tested Adam and Eve's obedience by putting the tree of the knowledge of good and evil off limits to them, they failed the test. They yielded to Satan's temptation and rebelled against God's express will. The test of faith is always whether we will follow our will or God's will. Jesus demonstrated His complete surrender to the Father's will in the most difficult test of His life.

A third possible reason for this request by Jesus was to demonstrate there was no other way other than God's plan to provide for our salvation. Other world religions base the obtaining of salvation on human beings' good works. Jesus' request and subsequent commitment makes clear there is no other way to be saved apart from what He accomplished through His suffering and death on the cross for our sake. In John 14:6, Jesus declared, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

## VERSE 43

### **Then an angel from heaven appeared to him, strengthening him.**

The Father did not remove Jesus' cup of suffering, but He did send **an angel from heaven** to strengthen Jesus. The coming of an angel to minister to Jesus is reminiscent of the angelic help He received early on following His temptations in the wilderness (see Matt. 4:11; Mark 1:13). Jesus' fervent prayer followed by the angel's **strengthening him** demonstrates that the Father listens and often responds immediately to our prayers for help.

#### VERSE 44

**Being in anguish, he prayed more fervently, and his sweat became like drops of blood falling to the ground.**

Luke then described Jesus as **being in anguish**. The Greek word rendered *anguish* is the basis of our English noun *agony* and its verbal form *agonize*. Jesus was not merely troubled; He was agonizing over the prospect of suffering on the cross. This verse is part of the convincing evidence that Jesus was fully human as well as fully divine. He experienced deep emotions just as we do in stressful situations. We also see the courage of Jesus on display as He overcame the anxiety created by His anticipation of such bitter and violent suffering.

Nevertheless, with the angel's help to strengthen Him, Jesus was able to pray even **more fervently** ("more earnestly," KJV; ESV; NIV). Of the four New Testament Gospel writers, only Luke reported the dramatic detail that Jesus' **sweat became like drops of blood falling to the ground**. Interpretations of this phrase vary. Some Bible scholars contend the description should be interpreted figuratively, not literally. That is, Jesus was so fervent in His praying that sweat dripped from His brow as though He were bleeding. Other scholars propose that the intensity of Jesus' agony prompted an actual physical reaction in which blood actually came through the pores of Jesus' skin. In either interpretation, the description shows the physical agony Jesus literally felt as He prayed about His impending suffering.

#### VERSE 45

**When he got up from prayer and came to the disciples, he found them sleeping, exhausted from their grief.**

After Jesus' intense time of prayer, He returned to His disciples and **found them sleeping**. The reason given for their being asleep was that they were **exhausted from their grief**. They did not have, as Jesus had, the full understanding of what was about to take place. Evidently, however, they were aware from Jesus' mood and statements He made that something terrible was soon to happen. Anyone who has experienced the emotions associated with grief can attest that grief saps our energy and drains us emotionally.

#### VERSE 46

**"Why are you sleeping?" he asked them. "Get up and pray, so that you won't fall into temptation."**

The question Jesus asked—"Why are you sleeping?"—was a warning to the disciples, not a request for explanation. Jesus urged them **to get up and**

**pray, so that** they would not **fall into temptation**. Jesus knew that His disciples would need the strength only prayer could provide to withstand the pressures of the next days. Their lack of prayer would prove to be a weakness for the disciples in the face of some upcoming temptations. Physically, the disciples craved sleep, but spiritually they needed prayer. Spiritual needs are believers' highest priority, because our battles are not against flesh and blood but against spiritual forces in the heavens (see Eph. 6:12).

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## EXPLORE FURTHER

Read the article titled "Prayer" on pages 1291–1293 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. What are the main purposes of prayer in the believer's spiritual life? How does the example of Jesus emphasize to you the importance of prayer for believers?

### IN BETRAYAL (Luke 22:47-50)

Judas led a mob to the garden and betrayed Jesus with a kiss. One of the disciples pulled a sword and struck the high priest's servant, severing an ear.

#### VERSE 47

**While he was still speaking, suddenly a mob came, and one of the Twelve named Judas was leading them. He came near Jesus to kiss him,**

The phrase **while He was still speaking** links this verse with the previous verses and suggests there was no gap between Jesus' awakening His disciples and the appearance of **a mob**. While Jesus prayed, the plot to arrest Him had been put in motion. The group was likely comprised of Jewish leaders who opposed Jesus and temple police (or perhaps hired Roman soldiers). The mob was led by **Judas**, who apparently had left the upper room when Jesus identified him as the one who would betray Him (see John 13:30). Luke's description of Judas as **one of the Twelve** underscores the pain of the betrayal for Jesus. This was one of the men who had walked with Jesus and watched Him minister to so many needy people!

Adding to the shame of the betrayal, Judas **came near to Jesus to kiss him**. In the context of the ancient Near East, a kiss on the cheek (or on both cheeks) signified friendship and welcome (see Luke 7:45; Rom. 16:16). Judas chose a greeting that was intended to show great trust and distorted it into a signal of deep treachery.

## VERSE 48

**but Jesus said to him, “Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?”**

Jesus’ penetrating question to Judas evidently struck the betrayer’s conscience like a jagged rock. Later, Judas would be overwhelmed by such deep remorse for his actions that it led to taking his own life (see Matt. 27:3-5). Judas was betraying not just his Teacher but **the Son of Man**—the very Messiah whom the heavenly Father had sent to provide salvation!

Many people—believers and non-believers—have speculated throughout the years about Judas’s relationship with God and his possible motivation for betraying Jesus. The view that Judas was somehow collaborating with his Teacher in a plan to guarantee Jesus’ becoming a beloved martyr has been thoroughly discredited. There simply is no biblical evidence (or logic) to support such a view. Indeed, the Scriptures make clear that Judas’ betrayal was an act of someone under Satan’s control (see John 13:2,27; 17:12; Acts 1:25). The motivation of Judas to betray Jesus could be as simple as greed or doubts about Jesus as the Messiah. His story highlights the possibility of being exposed to the deepest spiritual truths but then rejecting them as an act of a sinful and rebellious will. Judas’s example reveals the possibility of being a church member or even a recognized leader without ever having truly believed in Jesus as Lord and Savior.

## VERSE 49

**When those around him saw what was going to happen, they asked, “Lord, should we strike with the sword?”**

The apostles (**those around him**) then realized that the mob led by Judas had come to arrest Jesus. The words **should we strike with the sword** are expressed in a grammatical construction that implies awaiting a command rather than asking for permission. The Greek word translated *sword* could refer either to a dagger or a full-length blade. Obviously, at least one or more of the disciples was armed. While they might not have had a full understanding of the events that were about to transpire, they appear to have anticipated the possibility of danger. Their first reaction to the mob that included armed soldiers was to resist with force. The disciples showed courage initially; but their actions were misguided, as Jesus’ response to them revealed.

## VERSE 50

**Then one of them struck the high priest’s servant and cut off his right ear.**

Apparently without waiting for Jesus' reply, one of the disciples took action. He **struck the high priest's servant and cut off** the man's **right ear**. John's Gospel specifically names both the aggressive disciple—Simon Peter—and the high priest's servant—Malchus (see John 18:10). The impetuous nature of the attack fits with the description of Peter in the Gospels. Moreover, the detail of Peter's severing the servant's *right ear* underscores how carefully Luke researched and reported these chaotic events.

The severing of the servant's ear likely suggests that Peter was attempting a lethal blow to the neck or head but missed in the dim lighting. In any case, the arrest of Jesus quickly turned into a confusing and violent situation. If He had not intervened, there likely would have been more casualties as the two groups engaged in hand-to-hand combat. In taking control of the situation, Jesus spared the lives of His disciples who would live on to accomplish great things in the power of the Holy Spirit after the Day of Pentecost.

Matthew 26:53 reveals that Jesus was hardly defenseless in the garden of Gethsemane. In constraining His disciples from fighting, He asked, "Do you think that I cannot call on my Father, and he will provide me here and now with more than twelve legions of angels?" Jesus was not taken because He was overpowered but because He chose to surrender to God's will in paying the price for the salvation of sinners. This fact, of course, was not evident to Jesus' enemies who came to arrest Him. Their intentions were evil, but God was overruling their plans to accomplish His will.

We as believers should never forget this important truth as we see God allowing persecution of the church in our day. The suffering of faithful believers in the gospel mission always has a larger divine purpose. We can be confident that God is in control and will never leave or forsake His people.

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## EXPLORE FURTHER

Read the article titled "Humility" on page 777 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. What are some important areas in today's culture that could benefit from Christians practicing humility? How can we as Christians imitate Jesus' humility in our interactions?

## IN ACTION (Luke 22:51-53)

Jesus took control of the chaotic scene and restored the servant's severed ear. Jesus would first address His disciples and then turn His attention to the mob that came to arrest Him. Jesus displayed great courage and love for sinners as He surrendered to the arresting mob.

## VERSE 51

**But Jesus responded, “No more of this!” And touching his ear, he healed him.**

Jesus quickly put an end to the disciples’ efforts to confront the mob with force. The words **no more of this** (“suffer ye thus far,” KJV) were addressed to His disciples who were resisting. In reacting this way, Jesus put into practice His own teachings in the Sermon on the Mount about loving one’s enemies and refusing to retaliate (see Matt. 5:38-45).

Among the writers of the four Gospels, only Luke recorded that Jesus restored the servant’s **ear** and **healed him**. Jesus continued His ministry of healing even in the last moments before His arrest. Perhaps the healing also calmed the mob and prevented more violence. Some Bible students have wondered why the mob continued with their unjust quest of arresting Jesus even after seeing Him demonstrate mercy and healing power. Maybe some of the crowd did not see the healing in the dim light. Others perhaps refused to be persuaded by what they saw and simply decided to follow orders.

In similar situations, anyone other than Jesus would no doubt be deemed a helpless victim of violence by a superior force. However, because we know who Jesus was and what He was capable of doing, we know that He intentionally chose to surrender to the mob. Motivating His surrender was His love for the Father in fulfilling His mission and His love for sinners in providing for our salvation.

Jesus’ response is an example for His followers then and now. Believers do not always have to demand their rights or retaliate when they are attacked. The fleshly temptation is to retaliate in kind with angry words of condemnation or violent actions. Jesus taught His followers to love their enemies and show them a different response based on their faith in God. Jesus trusted the Father’s plan, and He wants His followers to do the same during difficult times in their lives.

## VERSE 52

**Then Jesus said to the chief priests, temple police, and the elders who had come for him, “Have you come out with swords and clubs as if I were a criminal?”**

Jesus then addressed the mob that came to arrest Him. He mentioned three groups of participants, all of which were associated with the Jewish council, or Sanhedrin. The **chief priests** controlled and administered the Jerusalem temple’s sacrificial system. They probably were Sadducees. The **temple police** likely were Levites (descendants of the tribe of Levi) who were responsible

for guarding the temple treasury and maintaining order in the temple courtyards. The **elders** may have included those who were the chief teachers of the Mosaic law. Luke indicated in 22:4 that Judas had conspired with the *chief priests* and *temple police* in his plan to betray Jesus to Jewish authorities.

Jesus questioned why the mob thought they needed to **come out with swords and clubs** to arrest Him. The words **as if I were a criminal** were intentionally ironic. The Greek word translated *criminal* could refer to either a common thief or a political revolutionary. The irony of treating Jesus as a criminal is stunning. Those who plotted to seize, arrest, and execute Him were the true criminals; Jesus was without sin, and the religious leaders knew it.

We are reminded that the opinions of people can often be the opposite of reality. Only the judgment of God is accurate and final in the end. Jesus was not worried about His reputation with people. He was only concerned about obedience to the Father. May we as believers follow His example!

### VERSE 53

**Every day while I was with you in the temple, you never laid a hand on me. But this is your hour—and the dominion of darkness.”**

Jesus continued to point out the hypocrisy and cowardice of the religious leaders. He referred to His daily practice of teaching in the temple complex. Unlike a revolutionary who operates in the dark and secretly, Jesus operated in the light—that is, in public. Of course, the reason the religious leaders did not arrest Jesus in the temple courtyards was because they feared the reaction of the people who listened to Him.

The last phrases in this verse have an ominous tone and reference. When Jesus said the words **this is your hour**, He was referring to the appointed time of their actions that originated with Satan in **the dominion of darkness**. It was literally dark when the mob arrested Jesus in the garden, but the *dominion of darkness* was the ungodly spiritual realm of sin and wickedness. The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ would make it possible for sinners to escape the kingdom of darkness and find the light of forgiveness and eternal life.

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## EXPLORE FURTHER

Read the article titled “Darkness” on page 390 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. Why is the rule of Satan referred to as a “kingdom of darkness”? How does the kingdom of darkness contrast with the kingdom of light?

# Denied

Denying Jesus leads to sorrow and guilt.

An early controversy in church history occurred during the third century AD following the brutal persecution of Christians by the Roman Emperor Decius [DEH shuhs]. At issue was whether Christians who had publicly offered sacrifices to pagan gods—to show loyalty to Rome and avoid persecution—should be admitted back into the church. Some believers (especially those with family members who refused to compromise their faith and became martyrs), argued against reinstating the compromisers. In their view, to offer a sacrifice to a Roman god even under the threat of death was to deny Christ as Savior and Lord. Other believers, however, argued those Christians who genuinely repented of their compromise should be welcomed again into the full fellowship of the church.

Most of us are inspired when we hear accounts of Christians who boldly face martyrdom rather than compromise their commitment to Jesus Christ. The stories of those who falter in their faith during persecution are rarely recorded. How would you respond to threats against your life or the lives of your loved ones for refusing to compromise your faith? Sadly, there are Christians in various parts of the world who are faced with such a dilemma today. As in previous centuries, some Christians remain faithful even in the face of persecution; others do not.

This session focuses on the experience of one of Jesus' first disciples, Simon Peter. Peter boasted to Jesus that he would never deny Him. But Jesus knew His disciple better than Peter knew himself. Jesus warned Peter that the devil wanted to sift him like wheat and that Peter would stumble badly in his faith. At a crucial point, Peter would deny that he was a follower of Jesus—in fact, he would deny even knowing Jesus!

The account of Peter's denial of Christ is a cautionary story that warns all of us as believers to beware if we think ourselves invulnerable to a faltering faith. Peter's denial is also a story that reveals the compassion and forgiveness Jesus has for His followers who sometimes fail. As we explore this session's Bible passage, we will discover help for avoiding a faltering faith. We will be reminded of God's amazing grace. His enduring love and ready forgiveness of faltering yet repentant believers are life-changing realities.

# UNDERSTAND **THE CONTEXT**

## **LUKE 22:54-71**

Luke 22:54-62 describes how Jesus was taken to the house of the high priest following His arrest. Peter followed at a distance to see what would happen. As Peter sat around a courtyard fire with a group of people, three individuals in succession identified him as being with Jesus in the garden. Peter denied the charge each time, even denying that he knew Jesus at all. After the third denial, a rooster crowed. Peter then remembered that Jesus had predicted his denials. He fled the high priest's courtyard and wept bitterly.

In 22:63-65, Luke reported the initial abuse Jesus experienced at the high priest's residence. The men who surrounded Jesus mocked and beat Him, derisively demanding that He prophesy which one of them had hit Him.

Luke 22:66-71 then describes Jesus' early morning appearance and trial before the Sanhedrin. The chief priests and scribes demanded that Jesus confess to them whether He was the Messiah. Jesus knew their motives, however, and responded by pointing out they would not believe the truth even if He told them. He then assured His accusers that from then on the Son of Man would be seated at the right hand of God's power. The chief priests and scribes then asked whether by His statement that Jesus was claiming to be the Son of God. When Jesus did not deny the claim, His accusers declared they didn't need to hear any further testimony. They knew they could bring the charge of blasphemy against Him.

# EXPLORE **THE TEXT**

## **DISTANCE** (Luke 22:54-55)

It isn't entirely clear whether Simon Peter's sword strike against the high priest's servant was an act of panic, courage, or a combination of the two. What is clear is that after Jesus intervened and stopped the violence, all the disciples, including Peter, scattered from the garden in a state of fear. However, Peter summoned enough courage to secretly follow the arresting mob at a distance until the group arrived with their prisoner at the house of the Jewish high priest. As Jesus was taken inside the residence for questioning, Peter slipped into the courtyard and quietly joined a smaller group of people sitting around a fire for warmth.

## VERSE 54

### **They seized him, led him away, and brought him into the high priest's house. Meanwhile Peter was following at a distance.**

This verse serves as a transition from the scene in the garden of Gethsemane to the initial place where Jesus was taken for interrogation before Jewish leaders. The events describe the treatment of Jesus, yet the narrative's focus is on Simon Peter in verses 54-62. The Greek verb translated **seized** is a technical term that means "to arrest" (see also Acts 1:16; 12:3). Jesus was first taken to **the high priest's house**.

Two individuals are referred to as the high priest in the Gospels' accounts of Jesus' trials—Annas and Caiaphas [KAY uh fuhs]. John's Gospel reports that Jesus' first interrogation took place before Annas (see John 18:13). Annas had been appointed as the high priest in Jerusalem about AD 6 by Quirinius, the Roman governor of Syria. He had been deposed in AD 15, however, and his son-in-law, Caiaphas, actually held the position at the time of Jesus' trials. Caiaphas served as high priest in Jerusalem from AD 18 to 37.

Annas retained considerable influence over the Jerusalem priesthood even after being deposed. This is likely the reason that he was the first to interrogate Jesus. However, it is equally likely that Caiaphas's residence was the *high priest's house* mentioned in Luke 22:54. The ruling high priest's residence would have been large enough to host all the members of the Sanhedrin who came to judge Jesus.

Luke reported that as the arresting mob led Jesus to the high priest's residence, **Peter was following** the group **at a distance**. Although this leading disciple had quickly drawn the sword to defend his Master in the garden, Peter now was controlled by fear. Perhaps Jesus' rebuke of his severing the ear of the high priest's servant contributed to Peter's anxiety. He had previously boasted that he would die with Jesus (see Mark 14:31); however, the present circumstances now made his boast a real possibility, and Peter fearfully kept his distance from the mob. Did Peter still hear the haunting echoes of Jesus' prediction of his denials? We can only speculate.

Peter's physical distance from Jesus at this time may not have been great, but his spiritual distance must have felt like a chasm. Peter's spiritual distance from Jesus was evident in his words and actions. Likewise, when believers today grow spiritually distant from Jesus, it shows up in our words and actions. We may sometimes lament that we don't feel close to the Lord. What we are actually recognizing is that we have moved away from prayer and other spiritual disciplines that keep us close and obedient to Jesus. He never forsakes us, but we sometimes choose to distance ourselves from Him through neglect of regular spiritual fellowship.

## VERSE 55

### **They lit a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down together, and Peter sat among them.**

The temperature in the early morning hours was cold enough that the group who remained outside the high priest's house **lit a fire in the middle of the courtyard**. Evidently, they also expected to be there for some time, because they **sat down together** around the fire pit. Exactly who these people were is not clear; they may have been part of the mob in the garden, since three of them appear to recognize Peter as being with Jesus when He was taken into custody.

The fact that **Peter** could sit down **among them** without being recognized immediately could have several explanations. First, the group around the fire might not have been at the forefront of the arresting mob; thus, they might not have gotten a good look at Peter in the dim light of torches. Second, the fire in the courtyard might have been too small at the start to provide much visibility. Third, Peter may have covered his head or face as he approached the fire and sat down. He probably attempted to be as inconspicuous as possible, avoiding eye contact with the other people gathered around the fire. In any case, the recent events in the garden no doubt were replaying in Peter's mind.

We should commend Peter for wanting to know what was going to happen to Jesus. Peter genuinely loved Him and had spent some three years traveling, observing, learning, and ministering with Jesus. In the garden, however, he had watched as Jesus was taken into custody like a criminal. He had tried to defend his Master but succeeded only in receiving his Master's rebuke. Peter was both fearful and uncertain about what to do in the situation. He wanted to help, but he did not want to experience what was happening to Jesus.

There is a word of truth here for believers today. Jesus' call to discipleship demands that we love Him more than any others, including ourselves. He calls on His disciples to follow Him whatever the cost (see Luke 14:26-27). May we never spiritually distance ourselves from Him and the radical life of discipleship that He calls each of us to live!

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## EXPLORE FURTHER

Read the article titled "Disciple" on pages 424–425 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. Why are the requirements of Christian discipleship so high? Are all Christians expected to obey the high standards of discipleship? How do you exhibit discipleship to Christ in the use of your time, talents, and treasure?

## **DENIAL** (Luke 22:56-60a)

When approached by a servant girl, Peter denied knowing Jesus. When another person accused Peter of being one of Jesus' followers, he denied it. When yet another person insisted that he was a follower of Jesus—since Peter was a Galilean—Peter denied knowing what the man was talking about.

### **VERSE 56**

**When a servant saw him sitting in the light, and looked closely at him, she said, “This man was with him too.”**

The courtyard was likely occupied by members of the high priest's household workers as well as some who had been involved in supporting Jesus' arrest. It was a part of the high priest's villa, which likely was enclosed by a wall. Peter's face would not have been a frequent one seen in the courtyard; thus, the disciple attracted the attention of a female **servant**—the Greek word here is the feminine form.

Although darkness still hung over the courtyard, people's faces were somewhat visible in the firelight. The servant-woman **looked closely** (“earnestly looked,” KJV) at Peter, suggesting that she thought she might have seen the man somewhere before but couldn't remember where. Then suddenly she remembered: **This man was with him** (Jesus) **too**. We can imagine that the woman expressed her observation with an accusing tone, for no one felt more threatened by her words than Peter. All other conversations probably stopped, and all eyes focused on the nervous visitor **sitting in the light** of the fire.

When Jesus taught His followers that in Him they are the light of the world, He went on to urge them not to hide their identification with Him (the true Light of the world) but to “let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven” (Matt. 5:16). Publicly identifying ourselves as followers of Christ in the United States today typically isn't newsworthy; certainly it is seldom costly. But occasionally it is genuinely costly. And in some places in the world today, believers still risk ostracism, arrest, and even martyrdom on a daily basis for openly promoting faith in Christ.

In the highly charged atmosphere of the high priest's courtyard, Simon Peter felt the hostile stares of others. He heard the servant-woman identify him loudly as one of Jesus' followers. He felt the rush of fear and the natural desire of self-preservation. Then Satan pounced to sift Peter like wheat.

### **VERSE 57**

**But he denied it: “Woman, I don't know him.”**

As soon as the servant-woman identified Peter as having been with Jesus at His arrest, Peter **denied it**. The expression **I don't know him** implies more than Peter's simply denying he was a follower of Jesus. Peter insisted that he did not even know who Jesus was. This was the deceptive response from a disciple who when asked by Jesus whom the disciples thought He was, answered, "God's Messiah" (Luke 9:20). This was the frightened response of a believer who only a few hours earlier had boldly boasted to his Master, "I'm ready to go with you both to prison and to death" (22:33). Peter's faith was vastly weaker than he knew, just as Jesus had predicted (see 22:34).

The fear that Peter experienced is in direct contrast to the courage that Jesus would show before His accusers. Jesus would withstand the accusations of the powerful members of the Sanhedrin, the high priest, and Pontius Pilate without wavering. Peter could not stand up against the accusation of a servant-woman. Everyone faces fear. Courage is the ability to overcome fear and do what is right. Peter responded to fear with panic and dishonesty.

The statement that Peter made was a lie. There are many reasons why people might choose to tell a lie instead of the truth. Here the reasons clearly were fear and a desire to avoid the consequences of telling the truth. A lie might allow Peter to slip unharmed from the group that was hostile to Jesus. The truth probably would have led to his arrest and sharing the fate of his Master.

There is a reason Jesus called Satan "the father of lies" (John 8:44). In a world in which Satan has great influence, truth can be a costly way of speaking and acting. We live in a culture today that constantly attempts to intimidate Christians and silence the truth of God's Word. Some of the potential consequences of telling the truth in modern culture are a loss of friends, loss of a job, shunning by family members, vilification on social media, and even violence. The more prevalent that evil becomes in society, the greater the temptation becomes for people to resort to believing and telling lies. Peter failed his test in this case; we as believers must also recognize that there are almost certainly times when we have failed to be courageous disciples too. Maybe we remained silent when we should have taken a stand. Perhaps we lied or at least concealed our faith to protect ourselves or the things we love. Peter's example in Scripture is a warning to all of us as believers that one day we might face a similar situation when our commitment to Christ is severely put to the test. We will have to choose: Will I shine the light of my faith before others, or will I try to hide it under a basket of deception?

## **VERSE 58**

**After a little while, someone else saw him and said, "You're one of them too." "Man, I am not!" Peter said.**

Peter was not safe despite his earlier denial of knowing Jesus to the female servant. This time it was a man who took notice of Peter. It is unclear whether the man had heard the female servant's previous accusation. The atmosphere at the high priest's house was highly charged and suspicions were raised regarding strangers. The accusation was slightly different: **"You're one of them too!"** He accused Peter of being a part of a group that followed Jesus. The phrase *one of them* probably refers to the group of apostles. The charge that Peter belonged to Jesus' inner circle may have presented an even greater threat to his safety. The question was whether Peter would gain courage and openly identify with Jesus or compound his previous lie with another.

Peter sadly chose the latter direction, answering, **"Man, I am not!"** Peter's courage was not growing but diminishing further. There were many times in Jesus' ministry when Peter gladly identified with Jesus. When Jesus was popular and healing people, Peter was happy to stand with Jesus and be known as His disciple. When the crowds were amazed at the teaching of Jesus, he would proudly stand close to Jesus and be recognized as one of the followers in His inner circle.

It is easy to identify as a Christian when we're surrounded by other believers. It doesn't take much courage to stand for truth in a Bible study or church worship service. Peter had earlier promised never to betray Jesus and offered to die with Him if necessary. Hypotheticals are easy, and we easily present ourselves as heroic before the battle. We shouldn't forget that millions of Christians around the world face real dangers associated with their faith and worship of Jesus each day. Only God knows how many Christians have been persecuted in private and faraway places. Their stories may never be known to us, but God knows and will reward them for their faithfulness and sacrifice.

## VERSE 59

**About an hour later, another kept insisting, "This man was certainly with him, since he's also a Galilean."**

If Peter thought he was safe after fending off the second accusation, he was once again under pressure **about an hour later**. According to John 18:26, the third accusation came from a relative of Malchus, the high priest's servant whose ear Peter had severed with a sword in the garden. It is unclear either whether the relative was aware of Peter's role in the incident or whether Peter was aware of the man's kinship to Malchus. Luke's account does not include those ironic details; instead, Luke reported simply that **another kept insisting, "This man was certainly with him (Jesus), since he's also a Galilean.** Presumably, this was a reference to Peter's manner of speech.

For those living in and around Jerusalem, it would not be difficult to recognize the distinctives of Galilean accents or expressions. Peter's background was indeed that of an everyday working man (fisherman) from the region around the Sea of Galilee. This characteristic easily suggested that he was likely a follower of Jesus, who was also sometimes referred to as a Galilean (see Matt. 26:69).

#### **VERSE 60a**

### **But Peter said, “Man, I don’t know what you’re talking about!”**

Peter responded, **“Man I don’t know what you’re talking about!”** The Gospels of Matthew and Mark add that Peter was so adamant in this denial that he also cursed and swore an oath (see Matt. 26:74; Mark 14:71). As Peter's accusers multiplied, his lies and denials also escalated. Evidently, he was now overwhelmed by fear. He would say anything to save himself. He denied being a follower of Jesus. He denied knowing anything about Jesus. In the end, he denied having any knowledge about anything that had to do with Jesus.

One disciple, Judas, had betrayed Jesus to His enemies. Now another disciple—one of Jesus' most trusted followers—had denied having any relationship to Jesus not once but three times! Those who have ever felt the sting of betrayal by a close friend may have at least a tiny measure of understanding of what Jesus experienced in these beginning events of His suffering. Judas's treacherous action did not end well for him. Peter, however, would eventually be repentant and receive the astounding forgiveness of the risen Lord Jesus.

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## **EXPLORE FURTHER**

Read the article titled “Fear” on pages 559–561 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. What are some causes of human fear? What does it mean to have a proper fear of God? How does fear of God enable us to overcome other fears we might have?

## **DEFEAT (Luke 22:60b-62)**

After Peter's third denial, a rooster crowed, fulfilling what Jesus had foretold. Peter then remembered the prediction that he would deny Jesus three times before the rooster crowed. He quickly left the courtyard of the high priest's residence, weeping bitterly as he fled.

## VERSES 60b-61

**Immediately, while he was still speaking, a rooster crowed. Then the Lord turned and looked at Peter. So Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said to him, “Before the rooster crows today, you will deny me three times.”**

Before Peter could finish his third denial, **a rooster crowed**. The sound was loud enough to hear—and not unusual to hear in the pre-dawn hours of the day. But the rooster’s crowing at that precise moment had a special significance for Peter.

Only Luke’s Gospel records the dramatic scene that occurred **immediately** in conjunction with the third denial and the rooster’s crowing. Up to this moment, it was not obvious that the group huddled around the fire (including Peter) could see Jesus and what was going on with Him. Or perhaps this was the very moment when Jesus’ captors brought Him outside the high priest’s house after the interrogation to mock and beat Him (see Luke 22:63). In any case, Luke reported that at the moment of the rooster’s crowing, **the Lord turned and looked at Peter**. What a heart-piercing look this must have been! Peter suddenly realized that Jesus knew about—perhaps even had heard—his cursing denials of knowing and following Jesus. Their eyes met and silently conveyed the powerful emotions of the moment.

Before Jesus’ arrest, Peter had been full of pride and courage. He would have argued with the other disciples that he would be the last of them to fail in courage. He had promised to die with Jesus if necessary. He could not imagine the series of denials that were now a part of his personal story. When Peter saw Jesus looking at him, the reality of what he had done struck his conscience forcefully. No doubt Peter saw disappointment and sadness in his Master’s eyes. He saw and **remembered the prophetic word of the Lord**. Surely Jesus had known Peter better than he knew himself. Yet, if Peter had gazed into Jesus’ face a bit longer, perhaps he would also have seen the Lord’s loving mercy. Jesus loved Peter despite his denials in the courtyard. The Lord was not ready to give up on Peter.

## VERSE 62

**And he went outside and wept bitterly.**

Peter abandoned his quest to stay and learn of Jesus’ fate. **He went outside and wept bitterly**. Yet, Peter appears to have been in the initial stage of genuine repentance. He began to grieve over what he had to admit was an abject failure of faith. He did not try to justify his actions or make excuses for his failure. He took responsibility for his weak and sinful behavior.

It is important here to draw a distinction between Judas Iscariot's betrayal of Jesus and Peter's denials. The apostle Paul later described two distinctive kinds of sorrow in this way: "For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, but worldly grief produces death" (2 Cor. 7:10). I have also heard this distinction described thus in modern terms: One way says, "I'm sorry I got caught." True repentance says, "I am sorry for what I have become and what I did." Judas regretted making the deal to betray Jesus to His enemies, but his sorrow led him to hopelessness and self-destruction. Peter's grief was also intense, but it eventually led him to seek the Lord's forgiveness and restoration. The apostle John reported this post-resurrection scene of forgiveness and restoration of Peter in John 21:15-19. For each of Peter's three denials, Jesus asked the repentant disciple to declare his love for the Lord and to renew a commitment to serve Him.

As stated in the opening paragraphs of this session, Luke's account of Peter's denials serves as a cautionary story for believers today. It is also a vivid illustration of the apostle Paul's warning to Christians that "whoever thinks he stands must be careful not to fall" (1 Cor. 10:12). Peter's denials in some respects may be linked to his failure to pray in the garden as the Lord urged him to do. Peter's story reminds us that serious moral failures are possible for genuine believers. Yet, his story is also a wonderful illustration of God's grace toward His children. Peter was not only restored by Jesus after his denials, but given great opportunities for ministry that the disciple boldly embraced. As believers, we are sometimes too quick to write off fellow Christians who fall into sin and disobedience. Once again, Paul had the proper response for the church to those who sin by commanding the ones who are mature to restore a sinning brother or sister with gentleness (see Gal. 6:1).

The story of Peter's denials is first a lesson for our personal walk with the Lord. We are to be vigilant lest we also deny Him for the praise and approval of others. We must be courageous to identify with Jesus, especially when we are confronted by those who oppose Him and His Word. It is also a vivid reminder to treat those who falter in the body of Christ with the same mercy and forgiveness that Jesus demonstrated to Peter—and to us!

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## EXPLORE FURTHER

Read the article titled "Repentance" on pages 1344–1345 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. How does repentance play a vital role in salvation? Why do Christians continue to need repentance in their walk with the Lord? Is there something in your life for which you need to repent? Will you do so now?

# Sacrificed

Jesus' death provides salvation to all who trust in Him.

Human history contains many examples of individuals who gave their lives to save others. Loving parents have sacrificed their lives to save their children from accident or injury. Brave soldiers have run into harm's way to save their comrades. Police, firefighters, and other first responders have rushed into peril in order to save the lives of strangers. So the question is worth asking, Was the death of Jesus on the cross really unique?

The short answer to that question is yes; a longer answer is that Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross is the very heart of the gospel. The mission of Jesus included many aspects. He came to reveal the Father as no one else had done or could do. He came to teach and transform the Abrahamic covenant in light of His mission to establish the new covenant. He came to bring divine deliverance by healing diseases, casting out demons, and raising the dead. Still, the most crucial thing Jesus accomplished is tied directly to His sacrificial death on the cross.

Only Jesus' death on the cross qualified as an effective substitutionary atonement for human sin. While sacrificial acts by other people might preserve someone's physical life, only Jesus' death can save us from eternal, spiritual death. Only Jesus could substitute for the sins of others, because Jesus alone was (and is) the sinless Son of God. Only Jesus could accomplish salvation, because He alone was the Father's provision to do so. In light of these truths, this session focuses on the passage in Luke's Gospel that narrates Jesus' crucifixion for our sins. May we approach this study with the reverence and humility the Scripture—and the event itself—deserves!

## UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

### LUKE 23:1-49

In Luke 23:1-5, the Gospel writer described how the Jewish religious leaders brought Jesus before the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate. Cleverly, and with

evil intent, the Jewish leaders announced to Pilate that Jesus was guilty of fomenting insurrection. They accused Jesus of opposing Rome, encouraging Jews not to pay taxes to Caesar, and claiming to be the Messiah—in other words, a king. After questioning Jesus for himself, Pilate declared that he found no reason to charge Jesus. However, the Jewish leaders kept insisting that Jesus was stirring up the people throughout all Galilee and Judea.

In 23:6-12, Luke reported Pilate's attempt to appease the Jewish leaders by sending Jesus (and His accusers) to be judged by Herod Antipas, who happened to be in Jerusalem at the time. Herod welcomed the opportunity to meet and question the prisoner, but when Jesus would neither answer his questions nor work a miracle for him, Herod turned Jesus over to his soldiers. The soldiers mocked Jesus, put a robe on Him in contempt, and returned Him to Pilate.

Luke reported in 23:13-25 that Pilate made several attempts to release Jesus, knowing that His accusers had presented no evidence for their serious charges. He brought out a prisoner named Barabbas—who was actually guilty of fomenting rebellion—in hopes that the crowd would choose to condemn Barabbas and release Jesus. The crowd would not be dissuaded, however. They kept clamoring for Jesus' execution. Pilate finally gave in to the crowd's demands. He released Barabbas and handed over Jesus to be crucified.

Verses 26-31 reveal that Jesus was now so physically battered that the authorities ordered a bystander named Simon to carry the cross for Jesus to the place of execution. Meanwhile, a group of women followed the solemn procession. Jesus turned and told the women not to weep for Him but for Jerusalem, because the city was destined for destruction following His death.

In 23:32-43, Luke described the dramatic scene of Jesus hanging on the cross. Two criminals were crucified alongside Him, one on each side. Jesus asked the Father to forgive His executioners even as the Jewish leaders and soldiers mocked Jesus for His apparent inability to save Himself. Even one of the criminals hanging beside Him yelled insults at Jesus. The other criminal, however, rebuked the first one and pleaded with Jesus to remember him when Jesus came into His kingdom. Jesus promised that the repentant criminal would be with Him in paradise that day.

In 23:44-49, Luke noted the timing and extraordinary circumstances of Jesus' death on the cross. An unusual darkness fell over the scene from noon until three in the afternoon. At that time the temple curtain separating the most holy place was ripped down the middle, and Jesus uttered a final commitment of His spirit into the Father's hands. A centurion who witnessed these events glorified God, declaring that Jesus truly was righteous. Some groups of onlookers left the scene striking their chests in grief. A group that included women followers from Galilee stood at a distance and watched.

# EXPLORE THE TEXT

## FOCUSED (Luke 23:33-34)

The religious trials before the Sanhedrin and the secular trials before Herod and Pilate were over. Pilate reluctantly sentenced Jesus to death at the insistence of the crowd spurred on by the Jewish religious leaders. Soldiers then took Jesus and crucified Him; alongside Him they crucified two criminals, one on each side of Jesus' cross.

### VERSE 33

**When they arrived at the place called The Skull, they crucified him there, along with the criminals, one on the right and one on the left.**

Luke identified **the place** of Jesus' execution as **The Skull**. The Greek term rendered *skull* is the basis of the modern English word *cranium*. Of the four New Testament Gospel writers, only Luke used this Greek term, perhaps for the benefit of his Gentile audience. The Greek term's Latin equivalent is the basis of the English term *Calvary*. (See the KJV rendering of verse 33.) The three other Gospel writers used the corresponding Aramaic term *Golgotha* yet also go on to explain that the term means "Place of the Skull" (see Matt. 27:33; Mark 15:22; John 19:17).

Modern Bible historians throughout the years have suggested a number of possible sites for the place of Jesus' crucifixion. One such site, sometimes referred to as "Gordon's Calvary," is a craggy hill that vaguely resembles a human skull. Today, however, most Bible scholars associate the crucifixion's location with the site of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem.

Luke recorded that Jesus was **crucified** at *the place called The Skull*. Modern day executions in the United States are typically kept out of the public view. First-century Roman government, however, did exactly the opposite. Roman rulers intentionally crucified criminals and political enemies in open places for all to see. They did so for the purpose of deterring, intimidating, and terrorizing the general population.

Although various forms of crucifixion (death by impalement) had been practiced by barbaric tribes for centuries before the Roman era, the Romans perfected this kind of torturous execution to the extent that they confined its use to only certain groups—slaves, violent criminals, and those captured in war. Death by crucifixion was usually slow; a victim might hang helplessly, painfully, and unaided on the cross for days while life ebbed away. Some victims might be tied to their crosses with ropes, while others were affixed by

huge spikes driven through their hands (or wrist bones) and ankles. Victims were stripped of all clothing to add to their humiliation.

A notable instance of Rome's use of crucifixion prior to Jesus' death came in 71 BC following a slave rebellion led by Spartacus, a Thracian gladiator. Although Spartacus was killed in battle, the victorious Roman general, Marcus Licinius Crassus, ordered six thousand of Spartacus's captured troops to be crucified along the heavily traveled Appian Way. This grisly scene was dramatized—with a degree of historical license—in the 1960 American film titled *Spartacus*.

Luke reported that the two **criminals** (“malefactors,” KJV) crucified alongside Jesus were situated **one on the right and one on the left**. The Greek word rendered *criminals* literally means “doers of evil.” Both Matthew and Mark used a different Greek word that meant “thief, robber, bandit” or in some contexts “insurrectionist” (see Matt. 27:38; Mark 15:27). Jesus, of course, had committed none of these crimes, although the Jewish leaders had charged Him before Pilate with fomenting rebellion against Rome. In truth, Jesus was (and is) the sinless One who bore the penalty for all sinners!

#### VERSE 34

**Then Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, because they do not know what they are doing.” And they divided his clothes and cast lots.**

The saying of Jesus on the cross found in this verse appears only in Luke's Gospel. In the saying, Jesus called upon the heavenly **Father** to “**forgive them, because they do not know what they are doing.**” Exactly to whom the pronoun *them* refers is not clear. It could be a reference to the Roman soldiers who were carrying out a command of execution without any thought of Jesus' innocence. Or Jesus may have been referring to the Jewish leaders and people who cried out for His crucifixion. If so, He was putting into practice the hard truth He had taught His disciples—to forgive even one's enemies. Or perhaps the word *them* was a broad reference to all of sinful humanity. What a cruel tragedy that the one part of God's creation made in His image would be so sin-sick, so spiritually blind and wicked, as to crucify the Son of God—God in the flesh! Yet it was Jesus' prayer for our forgiveness that dramatically demonstrated God's unfathomable love for us while we were yet sinners (see Rom. 5:8).

While the pronoun *them* could refer to a broader group, the word **they** in the latter part of the verse clearly refers to the squad of soldiers conducting the execution. John 19:23-24 confirms that it was the soldiers who **divided Jesus' clothes and cast lots** for the garments, particularly a seamless tunic, or robe, that Jesus had been wearing.

The dying words of Stephen, the first martyr in church history, are probably based on this statement by Jesus from the cross (see Acts 7:60). Today, we also would do well to remember this statement of Jesus when we are tempted to respond in anger or vengeance toward those who offend us. If Jesus displayed a forgiving spirit on the cross, should we not show the same attitude of grace toward those who harm us in lesser ways?

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## EXPLORE FURTHER

Read the article titled “Cross, Crucifixion” on pages 368–371 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. How did the crucifixion of Jesus fulfill Old Testament prophecies? Why did the cross become a central part of the preaching of the gospel? How would you explain to an unbeliever the significance of Jesus’ death on the cross?

## MOCKED (Luke 23:35-39)

The focus in this section is on the reactions of four groups who witnessed the crucifixion of Jesus. At least three of the groups mocked Jesus with taunts that could be interpreted as temptations for Jesus to abort His saving mission at the last moment. The unbelievers who taunted Jesus unintentionally revealed the heart of His saving work in their jeering.

### VERSE 35

**The people stood watching, and even the leaders were scoffing: “He saved others; let him save himself if this is God’s Messiah, the Chosen One!”**

The first group, and perhaps the only group that did not openly mock Jesus consisted of unspecified **people who stood watching** (“stood beholding,” KJV). These may have been curious bystanders who happened by the scene on their way into or out of the city of Jerusalem. The group also may have included the remnant of Jesus’ supporters who watched the crucifixion from a distance (see Luke 23:48-49).

A second group consisted of **the leaders** (“rulers,” KJV; ESV; NIV) who **were scoffing** (“derided,” KJV; “sneered,” NIV) at Jesus. These were the religious opponents of Jesus who followed the procession from the city to the place of execution to celebrate their victory in getting rid of Jesus—or so they thought. They mocked Jesus as a would-be deliverer who reportedly **saved others** but could not even **save himself**. They believed that if their

challenge of self-deliverance went unheeded, then Jesus' silence and inaction would discredit Him in the crowd's eyes to the claim that He was **God's Messiah, the Chosen One**. Some Bible commentators have pointed out that this mocking taunt (**if this is**) echoes two of the devil's temptations presented to Jesus at the outset of His ministry (see Luke 4:3,9). Indeed, Jesus did have the power to save Himself but chose rather to die on the cross to provide salvation for all who believe in Him.

#### VERSES 36-37

**The soldiers also mocked him. They came offering him sour wine and said, "If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself!"**

The third group around the crucifixion consisted of the Roman soldiers who were charged with the duty of carrying out the sentence of crucifixion. They **also mocked him** by offering Jesus **sour wine** ("vinegar," KJV; "wine vinegar," NIV) and shouting "**If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself!**"

Interestingly, the offer of wine vinegar prophetically fulfilled a statement found in Psalm 69:21, which reads: "Instead, they gave me gall for my food, and for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink." In other words, the soldiers likely did not offer the drink for the purpose of alleviating Jesus' suffering but to add to it. They appear to have echoed the cruel taunt of the religious leaders in challenging Jesus to save Himself from the cross. The words *if you are the king of the Jews* may have arisen from the placard affixed to the cross that Luke mentioned in the next verse.

#### VERSE 38

**An inscription was above him: This Is the King of the Jews.**

To add to the deterrent effect of an execution, Roman officials fastened **an inscription** ("superscription," KJV; "written notice," NIV) **above** a crucified person's head, detailing the crime. The sign over Jesus' head stated **This Is the King of the Jews**. John's Gospel adds that the statement was inscribed in three languages—Aramaic, Latin, and Greek (John 19:20). These were the dominant languages used in the holy land in the first century. John went on to report that the Jewish chief priests sought to get Pilate to revise the statement. They wanted it to specify that Jesus only claimed to be the King of the Jews, not that He actually was such a king.

The priests well knew that *King of the Jews* was a messianic title; it pointed to Jesus as the One who fulfilled the Lord's promise to King David that he would have a descendant who would reign forever (see 2 Sam. 7:12-16). The wise men had used this title when a star led them to Jerusalem in search of the One "who has been born king of the Jews" (Matt. 2:2). The crowds that

had praised God at Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem did so by shouting the words, "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord" (Luke 19:38). In all likelihood, Pilate intended this royal inscription over Jesus' head not as truth but rather as an attempt to mock and threaten would-be rivals to his power. Ironically, he was revealing the truth about Jesus' identity.

### VERSE 39

**Then one of the criminals hanging there began to yell insults at him: "Aren't you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!"**

A fourth group Luke reported as being part of the crucifixion scene was the two men crucified on either side of Jesus. In this verse, Luke revealed that **one of the criminals** picked up on the taunts being spewed by the religious leaders and soldiers. He too **began to yell insults at** ("railed on/at," KJV; ESV) Jesus, exclaiming, **"Aren't you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!"** Pain and suffering can sometimes bring out the worst in human nature. Sadly, this individual attempted to alleviate his pain by heaping abuse on another. How sad to think that in the last moments of this man's life, he was so close to the Savior who could have given him eternal salvation and a place in God's kingdom that very day! He chose instead to die in rebellion and sin.

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## EXPLORE FURTHER

Read the article titled "Christ, Christology" on pages 281–284 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. What were the Jewish expectations of the coming Messiah in the first century AD? What did Jesus say His mission was as the Messiah in His first coming? What is the mission of Jesus Christ in His second coming?

### TRUSTED (Luke 23:40-43)

These verses contrast with the previous verse by showing a different response to Jesus by the other criminal crucified alongside Him. The exchange between Jesus and this second man reveals the heart of Jesus' mission and has important implications for the doctrine of salvation by faith alone.

### VERSE 40

**But the other answered, rebuking him: "Don't you even fear God, since you are undergoing the same punishment?"**

One of the men crucified alongside Jesus had joined with the mockers and scoffers around the cross. **The other** condemned man, hanging on the opposite side of Jesus, displayed a radically different attitude. Both criminals knew they were facing imminent death. One was unrepentant and, so far as we can judge, departed this life in anger and resistance to man's laws as well as God's law. The second criminal, on the other hand, appears to have displayed genuine repentance and saving faith.

After hearing the first criminal's verbal abuse of Jesus, the second rebuked him with a question: **"Don't you even fear God, since you are undergoing the same punishment?"** The second man attempted to warn the first that they were both about to come before God in judgment. Those who lack biblical knowledge or conviction about the afterlife deny the reality of judgment—that is, of giving an account of themselves to God after death. The second criminal acknowledged the reality of divine judgment and wanted to be prepared to stand before God.

#### VERSE 41

**We are punished justly, because we're getting back what we deserve for the things we did, but this man has done nothing wrong."**

The repentant criminal acknowledged his wrongdoing and confessed that the two of them were being **punished justly**. The man's understanding of justice was consistent with Old Testament law. That is, the two criminals were being repaid in kind **for the things** they **did**. This confession may be an indication that the two men had taken the lives of others in the past. In any event, the repentant criminal acknowledged that his crimes had been serious—that is, deserving of the death penalty. Further, he recognized that Jesus had **done nothing wrong**. How the man knew this truth about Jesus is not clear. The next verse suggests that he either knew Jesus or had heard about Him before the crucifixion.

It is important to emphasize at this point that true repentance begins with an honest admission of one's guilt and sinfulness. True repentance admits sin and then turns from it to embrace in faith the One who has broken sin's power. The repentant criminal gave evidence that he feared God and believed when he declared that Jesus was completely righteous.

#### VERSE 42

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

This verse reveals that the repentant criminal had some degree of true understanding about Jesus and His divine mission. The man's expression of faith was extraordinary because of the situation. He almost certainly did not expect Jesus at this point to somehow escape the cross, defeat the Romans, and set Himself up as a ruler on earth. With eyes of faith, however, the repentant criminal saw in Jesus a different and vastly greater kind of ruler. He believed that Jesus would soon be ruling over a better, greater, more enduring kingdom. And he wanted to be part of that kingdom. He therefore pleaded, **“Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”**

#### VERSE 43

**And he said to him, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.”**

Jesus responded to the man's expression of faith with an equally amazing pronouncement: **“Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.”** The term *paradise* appears only three times in the New Testament (Luke 23:43; 2 Cor. 12:4; Rev. 2:7). It was, however, a familiar term in Jewish literature at this time and referred to the destination of the righteous after death. The phrase *with me* emphasizes the most important promise of salvation: heaven is where believers will forever be in the presence of God—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

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### EXPLORE FURTHER

Read the article titled “Paradise” on page 1218 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. How was the paradise of Eden lost by Adam and Eve? What does the promise of paradise to the repentant criminal tell us about Jesus? What does it promise for believers at death?

#### SACRIFICED (Luke 23:44-46)

These verses soberly describe the time that Jesus was on the cross and the final moments of His life. After three hours of darkness in the midday, the curtain of the sanctuary split as Jesus entrusted His spirit into the hands of the Father. Following His expression of commitment, Jesus died.

#### VERSES 44-45a

**It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three, because the sun's light failed.**

Time-of-day references in the Greek text are usually designated in terms of hours. The “sixth hour” (see KJV; ESV) is thus translated into modern time as **about noon**, and “ninth hour” is rendered as **three p.m.** Luke’s point in this verse was to emphasize that **darkness came over the whole land** at a time when the sun was normally at its zenith—the brightest time of the day. The literal darkness was a terrifying portrait of the spiritual darkness (and judgment) that had fallen over humanity. It pointed to the time when Jesus became our substitute and bore the sins of the world in atonement.

#### **VERSE 45b**

#### **The curtain of the sanctuary was split down the middle.**

At some point in the three hours of darkness, **the curtain of the sanctuary** (“the veil of the temple,” KJV) **was split down the middle**. There were a number of curtains in the temple complex, but most Bible scholars opt for this *curtain* being either the one leading into the holy place (where the lampstand, incense altar, and table of showbread were located) or the one separating the holy place and the holy of holies (where the ark of the covenant rested). In either case, the message of the torn curtain suggested open access and communication between God and His people. Only Jesus’ atoning death made this open access possible.

#### **VERSE 46**

#### **And Jesus called out with a loud voice, “Father, into your hands I entrust my spirit.” Saying this, he breathed his last.**

The moment came; Jesus knew that He was about to enter the realm of physical death. As He had done at other critical moments in His journey, He prayed. **Jesus called out with a loud voice** to say, **“Father, into your hands I entrust my spirit.** This was a final display of obedience and trust in the Father’s plan of redemption. Jesus’ life was not taken from Him; He gave it up in obedience to the Father for us—sinners. The sovereignty of God is evident in the language emphasizing that Jesus was still in control.

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### **EXPLORE FURTHER**

Read the article titled “Atonement” on pages 144–147 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. How did Old Testament sacrifices picture the need for atonement? How can people obtain the benefits of Jesus’ atonement for sin?

# Revealed

Jesus reveals His identity to those seeking Him.

Scientific investigation has uncovered amazing data about the way the world and the universe works. Yet there are questions that some of the world’s top scientists admit seem to be beyond the capabilities of science to answer definitively—at least for now. One basic question science has been unable to answer is this one: “Why does anything exist?” Or to frame the question another way, “Why is there something rather than nothing?”

Theologians sometimes refer to the existence of the physical universe as general revelation. As the apostle Paul explained in Romans 1:20: “For [God’s] invisible attributes, that is, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen since the creation of the world, being understood through what he has made.” In other words, like a masterpiece sculpture, the creation reveals truth about itself and also truth about its Creator. Yet, such general revelation still does not answer the question of why—that is, for what purpose—creation exists. Thankfully, God did not limit our knowledge of Him to general revelation.

Theologians refer to the Scriptures as part of God’s special revelation. The Bible is truth that God revealed to human writers through inspiration by the Holy Spirit. These inspired writers—over a period of more than a thousand years—produced a written record that is truth without any mixture of error. The pinnacle of God’s special revelation, however, came in the miracle of the incarnation. According to Hebrews 1:2, “In these last days, [God] has spoken to us by his Son.” And as Jesus Himself explained to one of His disciples, “The one who has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9).

In this Bible study session, we will focus on a passage in Luke’s Gospel in which the risen Son of God appeared to two of His followers in the aftermath of His resurrection. In the encounter, the two followers learned more about God and His purposes than they had ever known before. Through their story, today we too can learn more about God and His purposes than we have ever known. This session will remind us that Jesus graciously reveals His identity to those who seek Him.

# UNDERSTAND **THE CONTEXT**

## **LUKE 24:13-35**

In Luke 24:13-35, Luke detailed one of the most extensive resurrection appearance accounts in all of the Gospels. The risen Lord Jesus appeared to two of His followers—one named Cleopas and the other unnamed—as they walked from Jerusalem to the village of Emmaus some seven miles away. As they traveled, the two disciples discussed and argued about the recent events that had occurred (24:13-14).

The risen Lord came alongside the two followers on the road, but they were prevented from recognizing Jesus. When He inquired about the dispute the two disciples had been having, they expressed surprise that anyone who had been in Jerusalem would not be aware of the things that had happened concerning Jesus of Nazareth. Cleopas then told about the disciples' dashed hope that Jesus was the Messiah who would restore the kingdom of Israel. He went on to tell about hearing reports from some women and others about the tomb being empty (24:15-24).

Jesus rebuked the two disciples for being slow to believe the many prophecies concerning the Messiah's path of suffering. He then used the Old Testament Scriptures to explain the prophecies He had fulfilled (24:25-27).

When the group arrived at Emmaus, the two disciples urged Jesus to stay with them for the night. At their meal, Jesus served as the host. His doing so opened the disciples' eyes to recognize Him, but Jesus then disappeared from their midst. The two disciples recalled how their hearts had been stirred when Jesus explained the Scriptures to them on the road, so they decided to return immediately to Jerusalem and inform the apostles of their encounter with the risen Lord (24:28-35).

# EXPLORE **THE TEXT**

## **QUESTIONS** (Luke 24:18-24)

Two of Jesus' disciples—confused and disappointed over the turn of events—decided to leave Jerusalem. They set out walking to Emmaus, discussing and arguing as they went. The risen Lord came alongside the two disciples, but they did not recognize Him. Jesus inquired about the argument they had been having as they walked. The two disciples could not imagine that anyone having been in the city in recent days would be unaware of what had occurred.

## VERSE 18

**The one named Cleopas answered him, “Are you the only visitor in Jerusalem who doesn’t know the things that happened there in these days?”**

Here Luke revealed the name of one of the two followers: **Cleopas** [KLEE oh puhs]. (This is a shortened form of the Greek name *Cleopatros*.) Luke never stated the second follower’s name, for reasons that can only be speculated. One possibility is that Luke’s source for this account did not reveal (or remember) the name. Others have suggested the second follower might have been Cleopas’s wife. (See John 19:25, where the husband’s name is spelled “Clopas.”) Perhaps, then, only Cleopas was named because only the husband would have engaged an unknown male in conversation on the road. In the end, though, we have to admit that efforts to identify either of the two followers are guesses. The most we can say definitively is that they were part of the larger group of Jesus’ followers beyond the eleven apostles.

That there were two followers who encountered the risen Lord on the road to Emmaus may have been significant to Luke for another reason. In first-century Jewish tradition, at least two eyewitnesses were required to establish testimony as truth. While the testimony of women—if the second follower was indeed Cleopas’s wife—often was disallowed or at least viewed with suspicion in ancient culture (see Luke 24:11), Luke’s Gospel (as well as the Book of Acts) elevates the role of women in the Christian movement.

In any case, the two followers could hardly imagine that any **visitor in Jerusalem** would be unaware of **the things that happened there** during the Passover festival. Their question to Jesus suggests that the sham trials, the brutal beatings, and the death and burial of Jesus had become widely known in Jerusalem. And for Jesus’ followers, including these two, the events of recent days had been both confusing and disheartening.

## VERSE 19

**“What things?” he asked them. So they said to him, “The things concerning Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet powerful in action and speech before God and all the people,**

Jesus’ follow-up question (“**What things?**”) was obviously not prompted by a lack of knowledge. Rather, it was a way to draw out the two followers’ understanding of the events that had occurred. Their narration of the events would reveal clues as to their convictions and hopes about Jesus.

The two travelers responded by acknowledging their argument had been about **the things concerning Jesus of Nazareth**. The mention of Jesus’

hometown was a reminder that His followers had not forgotten the details of His childhood and family heritage. In fact, the village had such a negative reputation in the first century that one of Jesus' first followers, when told of His hometown, asked the question, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" (John 1:46).

Well, Jesus did. Moreover, the two disciples on the road to Emmaus acknowledged that Jesus had proven to be **a prophet powerful in actions and speech before God and all the people**. While these are accurate descriptions of Jesus, they may give evidence that these two followers still struggled to embrace the faith commitment expressed by Simon Peter at Caesarea Philippi—that Jesus was (and is) "God's Messiah" (Luke 9:20). Jesus had a reputation as a great teacher and healer even by those who did not believe in Him as Messiah. Even today, many people hold a high opinion of Jesus but fall short of trusting Him as God's Son and our only Savior.

#### **VERSE 20**

**and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him.**

The two travelers then summarized the recent events related to Jesus by identifying the **chief priests and leaders** as those who **handed Jesus over to be sentenced to death and crucified**. While Pilate shared responsibility for the death of Jesus, everyone knew that the governor had initially refused to pronounce Jesus guilty of a capital crime. He had even proposed to release Jesus after a public whipping (see Luke 23:15-16).

Moreover, the death of Jesus was not the only crucifixion during the recent Jewish festival, but it was the one that had everyone talking. These were the events that everyone agreed on. The events that followed, beginning with the discovery of the empty tomb, were the controversial ones that led to different opinions.

#### **VERSE 21**

**But we were hoping that he was the one who was about to redeem Israel. Besides all this, it's the third day since these things happened.**

The two followers also confessed that they had hoped Jesus **was the one who was about to redeem Israel**. When Joseph and Mary first presented the infant Jesus to the Lord at the temple, an elderly prophetess named Anna had praised God and spoke about Jesus "to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem" (Luke 2:38). The concept of redemption has

a rich and deep foundation in the Old Testament (see Ex. 13:14-15; Lev. 25:47-55; Ruth 3:11-12; 4:1-10; Pss. 49:5-9; 69:18; Isa. 48:20; 50:2). In terms of the *redemption of Israel*, the two followers likely understood the concept primarily in a political sense. That is, they had hoped Jesus was a national deliverer who would throw off Rome's dominance and restore the covenant nation to its former Davidic glory. Now that Jesus had been crucified by the Romans, however, their hopes had been dashed. They questioned whether Jesus truly was the Messiah and Redeemer prophesied by the Old Testament.

The followers' disappointment was heightened by the fact that it was **the third day since these things happened**. Some commentators suggest this was a reference to the Jewish belief that the soul left a deceased person's body on the fourth day, voiding any hope of resuscitation (compare John 11:39). Interestingly, the pair did not appear to put any hope in Jesus' promise to "be raised the third day" (Luke 9:22; see also 18:33). This may be one of Luke's most poignant uses of irony: two believers insisting to the risen Christ that He must surely be dead since it was now the third day since His crucifixion!

#### VERSES 22-23

**Moreover, some women from our group astounded us. They arrived early at the tomb, and when they didn't find his body, they came and reported that they had seen a vision of angels who said he was alive.**

The travelers had one piece of the puzzle they had not been able to understand. The reference to **some women from our group** demonstrates these two followers were indeed disciples of Jesus. They had been with the apostles and others earlier that day when the women who first discovered the empty tomb returned and **reported** the news to the group. The entire gathering of disciples had been **astounded** by the women, who testified that they not only **didn't find** Jesus' **body** in the tomb but also **had seen a vision of angels who said he was alive**. The Greek word rendered *astounded* ("amazed," ESV; NIV) carries the sense of an event's being extraordinary, even supernatural (see Luke 8:56; Acts 2:7,12). Like many others in the group, however, these two followers evidently did not believe the women's testimony (see Luke 24:11).

#### VERSE 24

**Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they didn't see him."**

Luke reported that, among the apostles, Peter had gone **to the tomb and found it** empty **just as the women had said** (see 24:12). John's Gospel adds

the fascinating details that Peter was accompanied by another disciple, “the one Jesus loved” (probably a reference to the apostle John), and the two apostles raced to the tomb to find only the linen cloths folded neatly in two separate piles (see John 20:3-10). Both Gospel accounts, however, acknowledge that even the apostles who saw the empty tomb did not immediately conclude that Jesus had been raised from the dead.

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## EXPLORE FURTHER

Read the article titled “Redeem, Redemption, Redeemer” on page 1339 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. In what ways did the Old Testament predict that the Messiah would fulfill the role of Redeemer? In what ways has Jesus fulfilled prophecies as the Redeemer? What prophecies still await fulfillment?

## ANSWERS (Luke 24:25-27)

Still unrecognized, Jesus chided His two followers for their failure to believe the Old Testament prophecies that would have given them understanding and hope in their present situation. He then explained to them how the Old Testament Scriptures pointed to Him as the Messiah.

### VERSE 25

**He said to them, “How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken!”**

The two disciples had factual information about the recent events in Jerusalem, but they failed to correlate those events with Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah or even with Jesus’ previous teachings about what would happen to Him. Jesus thus rebuked His followers for being **foolish** and **slow to believe** (literally, “slow of heart to believe”; see KJV; ESV) **all that the prophets have spoken**. The Greek word rendered *foolish* refers to a lack of understanding, a failure to think through a matter and reach a reasoned conclusion based on the evidence of events, the teachings of Jesus, and the testimony of the Scriptures.

Before we rush to join in rebuking these two disciples, we should admit that sometimes we too can be *foolish* and *slow to believe* the Scriptures. We know the promises of God, but discouraging circumstances and a lack of faith often lead us to worry and falter rather than trust the Lord. The Scriptures, coupled with the faithful instruction of the Holy Spirit (see John 16:13-14), provide

all that we need to understand who Jesus is, what happened to Him and why it happened, and to respond to Him in faith and obedience. We can be grateful that Jesus was patient with His two followers on the road to Emmaus, and we can be thankful as well that He is patient with us today whenever we fail to understand and live by God's Word.

## VERSE 26

### **Wasn't it necessary for the Messiah to suffer these things and enter into his glory?"**

The concept of a suffering Messiah was not widely accepted or taught by Jewish leaders in the first century. Most of the Jewish populace likely would have reacted to such an idea with the same shock that Simon Peter did at Caesarea Philippi when Jesus revealed that He would face suffering, death, and resurrection. Peter vigorously exclaimed, "Oh no, Lord! This will never happen to you!" (Matt. 16:22). Further, Old Testament messianic prophecies such as Isaiah 53—which clearly presents the concept of substitutionary suffering—were often interpreted as referring to the nation's suffering, not the suffering of its Deliverer.

Because Jesus had taught His disciples the truth about the Messiah's purpose on numerous occasions, His two followers should have understood that it was required **for the Messiah to suffer these things and enter into his glory**. The words **wasn't it necessary** render a single Greek term that speaks of a moral or divine requirement. Jesus had prayed in the garden that the Father might take the cup of suffering and death away from Him. But there was no other plan of redemption than the way of suffering; thus, Jesus submitted to the Father's will (see Luke 22:42).

The phrase *enter into his glory* points to the resurrection. By definition, resurrection is the glorious victory of eternal life over sin, suffering, and death. In John 17:3-5, Jesus prayed to the Father: "This is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and the one you have sent—Jesus Christ. I have glorified you on the earth by completing the work you gave me to do. Now, Father, glorify me in your presence with that glory I had with you before the world existed."

## VERSE 27

### **Then beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted for them the things concerning himself in all the Scriptures.**

Jesus then provided a Bible study for these two followers to help them understand the events that had recently occurred in Jerusalem. The phrase **Moses and all the Prophets** was a comprehensive way of describing all

of the Old Testament, the Hebrew Scriptures. The Greek term translated **interpreted** is the basis for our English word *hermeneutics*, meaning “the method and process of biblical interpretation.” Luke did not specify which Old Testament texts Jesus *interpreted* for His followers, but we can probably assume they included passages that predicted His coming, nature, and mission. He may also have explained how the Old Testament canon as a whole—not just in certain passages—pointed to His purpose as the Messiah.

Today, divine guidance is still needed for believers to properly interpret the Scriptures. That is why God sent the Holy Spirit on the church following Jesus’ ascension. Jesus promised that the Spirit would be given to “convict the world about sin, righteousness, and judgment” (John 16:8) and also to “guide [believers] into all the truth” (16:13). The Holy Spirit inspired the writers of Scripture (see 2 Pet. 1:20-21), and we cannot rightly interpret the Scripture’s meaning without the aid of the Holy Spirit. Praise God that He has given us all that we need to know Him, trust Him, and obey Him!

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## EXPLORE FURTHER

Read the article titled “Bible Hermeneutics” on pages 204–208 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. What are some of the challenges you face in understanding the Scriptures? How does your view of the Bible’s truth and authority affect your approach to Bible study?

## RECOGNIZED (Luke 24:28-31)

After arriving at Emmaus, the two followers of Jesus invited Him to remain with them for the evening. Jesus served as the host at their meal. The two disciples then recognized Jesus, but He disappeared from their sight.

### VERSES 28-29

**They came near the village where they were going, and he gave the impression that he was going farther. But they urged him, “Stay with us, because it’s almost evening, and now the day is almost over.” So he went in to stay with them.**

As the group **came near the village** of Emmaus, Jesus **gave the impression that** (“acted as if,” ESV; “continued on as if,” NIV) **he was going farther**. What exactly Jesus did to indicate this intention is not clear. Perhaps the way into the village was a side path off the main road, and Jesus kept walking on the main road as the two disciples veered toward the village.

In any case, the two followers knew that traveling on foot in the nighttime could be dangerous. Moreover, the two still had not recognized that their fellow traveler and teacher was the risen Jesus.

Two possible factors may have motivated the two disciples to urge Jesus to **stay with** them in Emmaus for the night. First, most people in the ancient Near East were guided by a strong ethic of hospitality. The people of Israel in particular had the added motivation that the Mosaic law commanded the practice of hospitality to strangers (see Lev. 19:33-34; Deut. 10:18-19). Because it was **almost evening** and **the day** was **almost over** (“far spent,” KJV; ESV), the pair felt compelled to invite this stranger to stay the night with them—perhaps in their home.

Another possible motivating factor behind the two disciples’ invitation was the impact this stranger had on them in their conversation along the road. He had taught them things from the Scriptures they had never understood before. Later—after they recognized Jesus and He disappeared from them—the two agreed that their “hearts [were] burning within us while he was talking with us on the road and explaining the Scriptures” (Luke 24:32). Perhaps, then, their urgent invitation to Jesus was born out of a spiritual hunger for the gospel and fellowship with Christ. They didn’t want their experience with this stranger to end!

### VERSE 30

#### **It was as he reclined at the table with them that he took the bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them.**

At mealtime, Jesus fulfilled the role of host to His traveling companions. Bible commentators have pointed to other post-resurrection appearances of Jesus that also featured meals (see Luke 24:41-42; John 21:9-14). The description of Jesus’ actions here (**he took the bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them**) is similar to the accounts of His actions in feeding the five thousand (see Luke 9:16) and the Lord’s Supper (see Luke 22:19).

Some Bible students have wondered if Luke intentionally described the meal at Emmaus as similar to the Lord’s Supper. It should be noted, however, that the two disciples at Emmaus were not apostles and thus were not present at the Lord’s Supper. In addition, Jesus did not distribute a cup. (At least Luke did not report that He did, which would have been significant support if the Gospel writer was indeed trying to connect the Lord’s Supper with this meal.) Neither did Jesus make any remarks about the new covenant or the symbolism of the bread. Perhaps, then, the most that can be concluded from this verse is that the resurrected Savior desires to have intimate fellowship (typified by a meal) with His followers (see Rev. 3:20).

## VERSE 31

**Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him, but he disappeared from their sight.**

During the intimacy of the shared meal, the two disciples **recognized** Jesus. The words **their eyes were opened** are to be understood figuratively, not literally. That is, their previous inability to recognize this stranger who walked and talked with them along the road was lifted as though blind eyes had been healed to see clearly. What was the source of their previous inability to recognize Jesus? One suggestion is that Satan had obscured the two followers' spiritual sight with a sense of hopelessness. Their hopes about Jesus had been dashed by the crucifixion.

An alternate view is that the risen Lord intentionally hid His identity from the two followers until He could teach them to rely on God's Word. In John's Gospel, the apostle Thomas declared that he would not believe that Jesus was resurrected from the dead unless he could see the nail marks in Jesus' hands and feel the spear wound in Jesus' side. After the risen Lord appeared and invited Thomas to do just as he demanded, the Lord then said, "Because you have seen me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe" (John 20:29). Jesus' statement to Thomas foreshadows the experience of believers from the first century until now who believe in the Lord Jesus because the Holy Spirit awakens the truth of God's Word in them.

Luke 24:31 concludes with the interesting detail that as soon as the two disciples recognized Jesus, **he disappeared from their sight**. John's Gospel also emphasizes the extraordinary abilities Jesus had in His resurrected state. For example, He appeared to His disciples as they huddled in a house with locked doors (see John 20:19). Although His body was still recognizable by the scars of crucifixion, Jesus could appear and disappear at will. While we as believers will not attain deity when we experience resurrection, we can be assured that our resurrection bodies also will no longer be limited by the ravages of sin's curse. As Revelation 21:4 describes it, "[God] will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; grief, crying, and pain will be no more, because the previous things have passed away."

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## EXPLORE FURTHER

Read the article titled "Holy Spirit" on pages 759–761 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. What is the role of the Holy Spirit in justification? In sanctification? How does the Holy Spirit impact your life as a believer?

# Commissions

Jesus commissioned His followers to proclaim the gospel.

Growing up in a rural area in the South, I was never far from large, open fields of cotton, corn, soybeans, or other commercial crops. I learned early on that farming is hard work. Farmers often have to toil from sunrise to sunset. The land has to be made ready. Then comes planting, followed by cultivating the fields to protect the young plants from weeds, bugs, and other dangers. Even with all of that work, however, farmers know that other factors beyond their control can spell the difference between a disaster and a bountiful harvest. So they hope for—many pray for—favorable temperatures and the right amounts of rain. If all of those factors are optimum, then the work of the harvest commences. Crops have to be gathered and stored or transported to market and sold. Shortly thereafter, the cycle of hard work begins again.

Jesus grew up in the similarly work-intensive setting of the carpentry business. Yet, He too was never far from scenes of agriculture. He knew what was required to cultivate and harvest fields of grain. One of the most memorable parables He taught was about sowing and reaping (see Luke 8:4-15). The point Jesus made with the parable was to reveal the way God's kingdom on earth would work when the gospel message was proclaimed.

This truth was never more important for the disciples to grasp than after Jesus' death and resurrection. They would be commissioned as witnesses to take the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ to all the nations of the world—a monumental mission they could never accomplish without empowerment by the Holy Spirit. As the risen Lord met with His disciples just prior to His ascension, He promised them that very empowerment was on the way. And as they had learned in the parable of the sower, when they went about broadcasting the seed of the gospel message, the Spirit of God would give the harvest of growth—sometimes steady, at other times overwhelmingly bountiful.

Until Jesus returns, the church continues to operate under Jesus' gospel commission. This session thus focuses on Luke's account of Jesus' final resurrection appearance to His disciples before the ascension. We will be challenged as believers to take up the vital (and hard) work of being witnesses at home, in our communities, and to the ends of the earth.

# UNDERSTAND **THE CONTEXT**

## **LUKE 24:36-53**

In Luke 24:36-43, Luke reported that the resurrected Jesus appeared to His gathered disciples following the encounter with the two followers going to Emmaus. Jesus greeted the disciples; but they became frightened, thinking that He was a ghost. He calmed their fears and showed them the scars of His crucifixion, inviting them to touch Him to confirm His flesh-and-blood presence. To further confirm His bodily resurrection, Jesus asked for some food, eating a piece of broiled fish in their presence.

Jesus then reminded the group of disciples about what He had taught them prior to the crucifixion and had emphasized to the two followers at Emmaus (24:44-49). That is, He had fulfilled all that the Old Testament Scriptures prophesied concerning the Messiah. His mission as the Messiah had been to suffer, die, and rise from the dead on the third day. Consequently, the powerful message of repentance for forgiveness of sins could now be proclaimed to all the nations, beginning at Jerusalem. The disciples were to wait in Jerusalem until the promised Holy Spirit empowered them as witnesses of these things.

Luke concluded his Gospel account with a description of Jesus' ascension into heaven (24:50-53). After the event, the joyful disciples returned to Jerusalem to await their empowerment. They gathered daily in the temple precincts to praise God.

## **ASSURES** (Luke 24:36-43)

Luke concluded his Gospel with a resurrection appearance of Jesus to His disciples that included a version of the Great Commission. Jesus was preparing His disciples for their great task of declaring the gospel to the nations. Before they could begin, they needed assurance of Jesus' resurrection, understanding of His completed mission, and power to proclaim it to a lost world.

## **VERSE 36**

**As they were saying these things, he himself stood in their midst. He said to them, "Peace to you!"**

The phrase **as they were saying these things** refers to the conversation between the two followers from Emmaus and the group of disciples (including the apostles) still gathered in Jerusalem. The two followers

presumably told about their recent encounter with the risen Lord. The group excitedly spoke of their own confirmation of the resurrection, telling of the Lord's appearance to Simon Peter (see 24:33-34). Neither Luke nor any of the other Gospel writers included all of Jesus' post-resurrection appearances. (Compare Paul's list of appearances in 1 Cor. 15:5-8.) However, with the note that Jesus had appeared to Peter, Luke acknowledged there were in fact other appearances he did not fully describe in his Gospel. That said, the appearance of the risen Lord to His disciples described in Luke 24:36-49 probably has a briefer parallel version in John 20:19-23. In that passage, John noted that the disciples were inside a room with the doors locked for fear of the Jews (see 20:19). The locked door was no hindrance to the resurrected Lord.

The description that Jesus simply **stood in their midst** suggests a supernatural entrance. Although Jesus' resurrection body could be seen and touched like any human body—as was later demonstrated—it also had new and extraordinary capabilities. That Jesus simply appeared in the locked room emphasizes that the resurrection overcomes all physical limitations and hindrances. Jesus' resurrection was not simply a resuscitation of the physical body but a radical transformation into a new body.

Jesus immediately spoke a word of greeting designed to give assurance: **Peace to you!** Luke's Gospel emphasizes a noticeable connection between salvation and God-given peace (see 1:79; 2:14; 7:50; 8:48; 19:38,42). God's peace is far more than the absence of conflict. It is right standing with God brought about by forgiveness and reconciliation through Jesus Christ (see Rom. 5:1). Moreover, it gives assurance that God will take care of His children in all circumstances (see John 14:27).

## VERSE 37

### **But they were startled and terrified and thought they were seeing a ghost.**

Despite Jesus' calm word of greeting, the disciples **were startled and terrified**. This reaction might seem odd, given that they had just been confirming to one another the fact of His resurrection. Peter had already seen the risen Lord, as had the two followers from Emmaus. But before we judge the disciples too harshly for their reaction, we should remember that we might have had the same response. How often have a group of believers in our churches prayed intently for the Lord to "show up" in a certain way, then reacted with surprise and fear when He did?

The Gospels all agree that the early disciples struggled initially with the reality of the resurrection—despite the growing evidence. Moreover, the disciples already were anxious enough about the Jewish leaders' possible

backlash against them that they locked the door to the room. When Jesus suddenly appeared in their midst, the disciples **thought they were seeing a ghost**. The word translated *ghost* is the Greek term (*pneuma* [NYOO mah]) that can also mean “wind” or “spirit.” The reality of Jesus’ bodily resurrection was difficult for them to grasp, especially in that they were aware of the abuse His physical body endured before and during His crucifixion. Yet, the resurrection body of Jesus assured them—as it assures believers today—that no matter how physically crushed the human body may be at death, the Father can and does give us a perfect resurrection body after death.

### VERSE 38

**“Why are you troubled?” he asked them. “And why do doubts arise in your hearts?”**

Jesus asked the disciples two questions related to their terrified reaction. He first asked **why** they were **troubled**. The Greek verb rendered *troubled* was used often to describe a human response to supernatural phenomena (see Matt. 14:26; Luke 1:12). The disciples were terrified because the supernatural event was difficult to explain, and their natural response was fear of the unknown. However, John used this verb in a different sense to describe Jesus’ state of mind in anticipation of the cross (see John 12:27; 13:21). Jesus’ death on the cross and the promise of salvation for those who believe in Him removes the need to ever feel troubled about the prospect of death (see John 14:1).

In His second question to the disciples, Jesus asked, **“Why do doubts arise in your hearts?”** The *doubts* He referred to had to do with the resurrection. The disciples were still struggling with the reality of whether Jesus was raised from the dead. They thought His appearance was a ghost or apparition. Jesus had provided more than sufficient preparation for their understanding of His resurrection, but they still doubted. As long as the disciples had doubts about the resurrection, they would be unable to fulfill their mission of declaring the gospel to the nations. Jesus was assuring them of His resurrection to prepare them for carrying on His mission.

### VERSES 39-40

**Look at my hands and my feet, that it is I myself! Touch me and see, because a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you can see I have.” Having said this, he showed them his hands and feet.**

To assure them His body was real, Jesus urged His followers to **look at** (“behold,” KJV; “see,” ESV) His hands and feet. The Greek word rendered *look*

at literally means “to stare at”—that is, to observe something closely until it is clearly understood. In John 20:20, that Scripture specifies that Jesus “showed [the disciples] his hands and his side.” Luke specified that **he showed them his hands and his feet**. In this way Jesus assured His disciples that He was the same Jesus Christ who three days earlier had been crucified on the cross and buried in the tomb. He answered their doubts by pointing out that **a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you can see I have**.

#### VERSES 41-43

**But while they still were amazed and in disbelief because of their joy, he asked them, “Do you have anything here to eat?” So they gave him a piece of a broiled fish, and he took it and ate in their presence.**

Despite overwhelming proof from hearing Jesus’ voice as well as observing and touching Him, the disciples **were amazed and in disbelief**. Interestingly, this was not unbelief but *disbelief* attributed to **their joy**. In other words, this was a case of being overjoyed because something seemed almost too good to be real. As we might say today, the disciples could hardly believe their eyes!

Ever patient with His followers, Jesus continued to offer additional proof that He was truly alive again after being dead and in His actual flesh-and-bones body, albeit a supernaturally unconstrained, resurrection body. He asked the disciples if they had **anything ... to eat**. When they presented Him with **a piece of broiled fish**, Jesus **took it and ate it in their presence**. No ghost or hallucination would (or could) actually partake of food the disciples had prepared and had on hand in the room.

Jesus’ patient efforts to demonstrate the reality of His resurrection to the disciples were crucial. The resurrection is the basis of Christian hope and the indispensable foundation of the gospel (see 1 Cor. 15:16-17). We can be forever grateful that the Lord patiently convinces skeptics—then and now—of the truth of the resurrection.

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### EXPLORE FURTHER

Read the article titled “Resurrection” on pages 1348–1349 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. How was Jesus’ resurrection body different from His body before death? How was it the same? How does the promise of a resurrection body in the future impact your life now?

## **OPENS (Luke 24:44-46)**

Jesus opened the minds of His followers so they could understand the Scriptures about Him that He had taught. He particularly emphasized that He, as the Messiah, would suffer death and yet be raised on the third day.

### **VERSE 44**

**He told them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms must be fulfilled.”**

When Jesus referenced the **words that I spoke to you while I was still with you**, He was specifically pointing to the predictions He had made concerning His suffering, death, and resurrection (see Luke 9:22,44; 17:25; 18:31-33; 22:37). Jesus knew what was going to happen to Him, not only as a matter of His divine omniscience but also because the Scriptures (specifically the Old Testament at this time) revealed these truths. Here Jesus referred to the Scriptures in terms of **the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms**. While the disciples would have been familiar with the twofold description of the Scriptures as the Law and the Prophets, Jesus likely added the specific reference to *the Psalms* because they contained numerous prophecies related to the Messiah in them.

The phrase **must be fulfilled** is significant. This phrase demonstrated Jesus’ teaching that the Old Testament was (and is) true and authoritative Scripture for His followers. Prophecies are promises made by God concerning future events. God sovereignly controls history, and He will fulfill every promise that He has made in the Scriptures.

### **VERSE 45**

**Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures.**

Jesus next **opened** the disciples’ **minds to understand the Scriptures**. This is similar to what Jesus did for the two followers on the road to Emmaus (see Luke 24:27). The experience would again be amazing as the Living Word explained the meaning of the written Word of God for His people. Jesus revealed truth to them on both an intellectual and spiritual level. Belief in Jesus was (and is) essential to understanding the truth of God because it must be spiritually discerned. As mentioned in the previous session, the same opportunity for spiritual instruction is available today to believers through the indwelling Holy Spirit. Jesus had told His disciples that they would receive additional instruction in the truth after His departure; that instruction would come through the Holy Spirit (see John 16:13).

## VERSE 46

**He also said to them, “This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead the third day,**

Jesus explained how the Old Testament prophecies revealed that **the Messiah** would **suffer and rise from the dead the third day**. Old Testament passages that predict the suffering of the Messiah include Psalm 22:1 and Isaiah 53:1-12. The resurrection of the Messiah is prophesied in passages such as Psalm 16:10.

The failure of first-century Jewish leaders to recognize these passages and their implications speaks to their lack of understanding concerning the role of the Messiah as God’s provision as the atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world. The failure to understand the coming resurrection demonstrated a lack of comprehension that the Messiah would be both fully human and fully divine. On the other hand, some Jewish leaders properly understood at least one Old Testament prophecy—the place (Bethlehem) where the messianic king would be born (see Matt. 2:5-6).

The ignorance of the Scriptures’ prophecies concerning the Messiah’s suffering, death, and resurrection probably related to the Jewish hope for a political messiah who would restore the nation of Israel to its former independence and prosperity. They failed to understand that the need for spiritual deliverance was more important than physical deliverance from foreign enemies.

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## EXPLORE FURTHER

Read the article titled “Revelation of God” on pages 1351–1353 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. What were the purposes of Old Testament prophecies that revealed the character and mission of the Messiah? How did Jesus revolutionize an understanding of Old Testament messianic prophecies?

## SENDS (Luke 24:47-49)

In this section, we see Luke’s account of the Great Commission. The proof of Jesus’ resurrection was necessary for the disciples to have the boldness and understanding to proclaim the gospel without fear of opposition, attempts to distort the message, and even persecution. The command by Jesus to preach the gospel to the nations was a fitting conclusion to Luke’s Gospel and pointed to the story of the birth and growth of the church in the Book of Acts.

## VERSE 47

**and repentance for forgiveness of sins will be proclaimed in his name to all the nations, beginning at Jerusalem.**

The central message of the gospel that Jesus commanded His disciples to proclaim was **repentance for forgiveness of sins**. Luke used the language of repentance and forgiveness in describing the preaching of John the Baptist (see Luke 3:3). At the start of His ministry, Jesus described His own mission as one of calling “sinners to repentance” (Luke 5:32). The Greek term translated *repentance* literally refers to a change of mind. It is sometimes described as a wholesale change of direction in one’s life—from a change of attitude and thinking to a new behavior or lifestyle. Theologically, repentance refers to turning away from sin and turning to God in faith, resulting in obedience to His will and ways. Repentance is thus an act of the will and never simply an emotional feeling. Salvation involves a transformation of one’s heart and devotion to God. Those who are saved demonstrate the fruit of repentance and forgiveness through obedience to God’s will (see Luke 3:8).

Jesus then challenged His disciples to proclaim the gospel message of forgiveness **in his name to all the nations, beginning at Jerusalem** (compare Matt. 28:19-20). The inclusion of Gentiles in God’s plan of salvation was a radical idea to Jews who believed only Israel would benefit from the Messiah’s coming. Despite the clarity of Jesus’ statement to His disciples at this moment, Peter would later need a dramatic vision to convince him that God accepted Gentiles through faith in Christ (see Acts 10:9-16,34-35).

## VERSE 48

**You are witnesses of these things.**

Jesus authorized His disciples to share the meaning of the cross and the fact of the resurrection as **witnesses of these things**. Those who first proclaimed the gospel were eyewitnesses of the resurrected Jesus. The Greek word translated *witnesses* is the basis for the English word *martyr*. This is a testament to the tragic fact that throughout the centuries far too many believers have been killed for their devotion to Christ.

On the other hand, the reality of Christian martyrdom is also a testament to the bold nature of saving faith. Jesus warned that following Him was costly; it requires denying self and taking up one’s cross (see Luke 9:23). Thankfully, the apostle John saw in his vision of the end times that Christian martyrs will never be disappointed that they remained faithful unto death. John saw the souls of Christian martyrs resting beneath the altar and given a white robe of purity and victory (see Rev. 6:9-11). May the Lord grant all of us as believers the boldness to be His faithful witnesses whatever the cost!

## VERSE 49

**And look, I am sending you what my Father promised. As for you, stay in the city until you are empowered from on high.”**

One more event was necessary before the disciples could begin fulfilling the commission to carry the gospel to the nations. The disciples needed the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit. Jesus confirmed that He would soon send to the disciples the One whom the **Father** had **promised**. The phrase **I am sending** is in a tense that emphasizes future certainty. The disciples need not fret or doubt the promise even though some time would pass between the Lord’s ascension and the coming of the Holy Spirit. Delay must not give rise to doubt or distrust.

Jesus instructed the disciples to **stay in the city** (Jerusalem) **until** they were **empowered from on high**. The disciples were eyewitnesses of the risen Christ. They understood the spiritual truths associated with His substitutionary death on the cross. Yet, they would not be effective in fulfilling the mission of taking the gospel to the nations without the Holy Spirit’s presence and empowerment. The necessity of the Holy Spirit in witnessing to others demonstrates that evangelism can only succeed with divine power. Salvation is not merely the presentation of information that leads to a purely intellectual decision. Salvation involves the conviction of sin and acceptance of Jesus as God’s only provision for sin. It is the regeneration from spiritual death to spiritual life. Only God can accomplish such a miracle!

The power that Jesus promised from the Holy Spirit affects the witness as well as the person who hears the gospel. The witness is equipped and emboldened to reveal the truth of the gospel. Such was the case in Acts 2:13-37 when Simon Peter—the same disciple who out of fear denied knowing Jesus three times—stood up and proclaimed the gospel to the citizens of Jerusalem with such clarity and power that the hearers were cut to the heart and cried out to know how to be saved. And how did Peter answer the crowd? He said, “Repent and be baptized, each of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38). May we carry on the gospel mission today with equal boldness!

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### EXPLORE FURTHER

Read the article titled “Mission(s)” on pages 1114–1116 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. What is the mission that Jesus gave to His disciples? How are you fulfilling the Great Commission as a disciple of Jesus Christ?