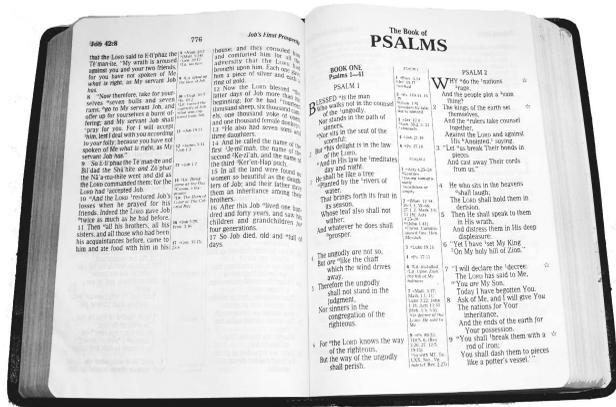


PILGRIM BIBLE NOTES

God's holy Word simply explained and applied



July 2021

Gospel of Luke chapters 15 to 23

His father saw him and had compassion

True repentance leads to action! ‘*When he came to himself*’ (17), the wayward son reasoned that his father’s servants were far better off than himself and he determined to return to his father, confessing his sin and worthlessness, and begging to be received as a servant. The son who had so selfishly said, ‘*Give me*’ now says, ‘*Make me*’ (12,19).

Repentance involves a change of attitude. This is seen in the young man whose self-assertion and selfishness has gone (18–19). He is humbled and he confesses that his rebellion was sin against God and against his father. He had not honoured his father and mother when he demanded his inheritance. He had to cast himself on the mercy of his father to whom he owed more than he could ever repay.

The necessity of repentance is often lacking in the preaching and teaching of many churches but it is a vital part of gospel preaching found in the message of John the Baptist and the Lord Jesus (Mark 1:4,14; cp. Luke 24:46–49). Peter preached repentance in his sermon on the Day of Pentecost and Paul had the same message: ‘**God commands all men everywhere to repent**’ (Acts 2:38; 17 30). There can be no forgiveness without repentance.

The father saw his son at a distance and ran to greet him. He *had compassion on him*, embraced him and kissed him. The son confessed his sin and his the father told the servants to clothe him and to prepare a welcome feast (20–24). No Jewish father would normally receive a rebel son back home, let alone give him a lavish welcome.

The parable illustrates the amazing love and grace of God to repentant sinners. The Pharisees failed to grasp this. **God not only freely forgives sinners, but heaps blessings upon them when they come to him, just as the lost son received far more than he deserved.**

Who is a pardoning God like thee?

Or who has grace so rich and free? (Samuel Davies)

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It was right that we should make merry and be glad

The elder brother came from working in the field when he heard music and dancing. He asked a servant what was happening and was told, ‘*Your brother has come*’ (25–27). He was very angry when he heard that the merrymaking was for his worthless younger brother and he refused to enter the house (28). His father came out and pleaded with him to join them but he was vehement in expressing his feelings. He angrily retorted, ‘*These many years, I have been serving (slaving for) you*’ (29) The Greek verb ‘*douleuō*’ translated ‘*servicing*’ means ‘*slaving*’. He was full of his own good works and his resentment was so great, that he referred to his brother as ‘*this son of yours*’ when speaking to his father, who said in reply, ‘*Your brother*’ (30).

The father assured the elder brother of his love for him but pointed out, ‘*It was right that we should make merry and be glad, for your brother was dead and is alive again, and was lost and is found*’ (31–32). Notice that these are words which describe our state before and after conversion – ‘*dead and alive – lost and found*’. The elder brother was also ‘*lost*’ but did not recognise it. He was like the scribes and Pharisees who were proud, peevish, hard and unforgiving and did not receive those they perceived as sinners (2).

If God is willing to forgive repentant sinners, we must also be prepared to forgive those who have wronged us. If we nurse grudges and bitterness, our Christian life and witness will be severely damaged. .

There is no joy like that of seeing the lost brought to faith in Christ and seeing their lives transformed through the grace of God! If you are not a Christian and wonder whether or not God will forgive you and accept you, take heart! Come to the Lord Jesus, trust in him and repent of your sin; he will not turn you away.

*Amazing grace! how sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now I'm found;
Was blind, but now I see.*

(John Newton)

No servant can serve two masters

There are two parables concerning rich men in this chapter. In the first (1–8), a rich man discovered that his steward (business manager) was squandering his goods. The steward knew that he would lose his job and he summoned every one of his master’s debtors and reduced their debt (the two debtors mentioned had very large debts). This shrewd move put his master’s debtors into his debt and he knew that they would help him when he was out of work and destitute. He was commended for his ingenuity but not for his dishonesty (8).

This parable teaches us that our lives and money are a stewardship from God. We must follow the example of the dishonest steward and look to the future. We must use our money (*‘mammon’* – 9) in such a way that we will be received *into everlasting habitations* (heaven) at the end of our lives when money will be of no use to us. Money used to support the work of God will reap eternal dividends. Do we take seriously the teaching of the Lord Jesus concerning the stewardship of our possessions? If we are faithful with our money, the Lord will entrust us with spiritual riches (10–11). We must remember that we too must give an account on the day of judgment (Romans 14:10,12; 2 Corinthians 5:9–11).

Many Christians are not generous in their giving to the Lord’s work because they love money. We must never let money be our master. Jesus said, *‘No servant can serve two masters ... You cannot serve God and mammon’* (13; cp. 1 Timothy 6:9–10). If we live for money it will eventually master us. If we make an idol of money, we will soon despise God. The love of wealth brought disaster to the lives of Lot and Achan (Genesis 13:10–13; 19:30; Joshua 7:10–26). The Word of God is quite clear – *‘You cannot serve God and mammon’* (*‘money’* – 13). **Are you restless and uncomfortable in your Christian life? Do you have divided loyalties by trying to serve two masters? Are you trying to please God and your own selfish interests? It does not work; do get your priorities right!**

God knows your hearts

The Lord Jesus had been speaking to his disciples (1), but *the Pharisees who were lovers of money* had also been listening. The words of Jesus, ‘*You cannot serve God and mammon*’ (‘money’ – 13) had made them feel uncomfortable *and they derided him* (14). The Pharisees appeared to be very religious but they were hypocrites. Those who despise the Word of God sometimes resort to scorn rather than to reasoned discussion when they are challenged with the claims of Christ. Jesus told the Pharisees who sought to be right in the sight of men that they were wrong in the sight of God. He said, ‘*God knows your hearts*’ (15). Their kind of religion was *an abomination in the sight of God*,

A great number were now pressing into the kingdom of God (‘*everyone*’ in verse 16 does not mean literally every Jew, but refers to everyone entering the kingdom of God). The Pharisees thought that they were in God’s kingdom, but were deceiving themselves. John Blanchard writes ‘Jesus calmly pointed out that while John the Baptist’s preaching marked the end of the Old Testament era (16), God’s moral law remained unchanged (17 – a ‘*tittle*’ was a small hook on some letters of the Hebrew alphabet) ... Jesus completed God’s law; the Pharisees corrupted it’ (LOOK THROUGH LUKE, page 87).

Jesus showed that the manner in which the Pharisees regarded divorce demonstrated their corruption of God’s law. They took the statement permitting a man to divorce his wife (Deuteronomy 24:1) as a sanction to divorce their spouses for the most trivial reasons (18). The Bible teaches the sanctity and permanence of marriage. Permission for divorce was only given because of the hardness of men’s hearts and to give legal protection to the deserted wife (cp. Matthew 19:8–9).

The Bible is despised by many, but let us remember that though the ideas of men often change, God’s law, his holy standards, do not change and will never pass away (17). **God knows our hearts. Does he see within us a love for his Word and joyful obedience to it?**

There is a great gulf fixed

The Lord Jesus reinforced his warning against the love of mammon (riches) with the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. The rich man enjoyed a self-indulgent, opulent way of life but was lacking in compassion for a beggar. Lazarus was laid at the gate of his house hoping to receive some scraps of food from his table. He was a wretched sight, covered in sores which were licked by scavenging half-wild dogs. It is obvious that the rich man had seen Lazarus in his wretched state, for he recognised him at Abraham's side (23).

The two men were different in death as well as in life. Lazarus died and was carried by angels to Abraham's bosom. The rich man died but he went to Hades (hell) where he was tormented (22–23). Lazarus did not go to heaven because he was poor any more than the rich man went to hell because of his wealth. Lazarus was received into heaven because of the grace of God in his life. God does not bestow his grace according to our possessions. When we die, we do not cease to exist; we will either be in the presence of God or in a conscious state of torment in hell (Matthew 13:41–43; 2 Corinthians 5:8; Philippians 1:21–23)

The rich man gave no serious thought to what would happen to him after he died. After death it was too late! He was told that *'there is a great gulf fixed'* between heaven and hell (23–26). He also made another mistake. He arrogantly thought that Abraham should send Lazarus back from the dead to testify to his five brothers who would then repent of their sin. The answer was clear – if they refused to listen to the Word of God (*'Moses and the prophets'*) they would not be persuaded to repent even if someone rose from the dead (27–31).

Another man named Lazarus was raised from the dead but the enemies of Jesus still refused to believe (John 11:43–53). Saving faith comes through hearing the Word of God (Romans 10:17), not through seeing miracles. **Have you repented of your sin, or are you living for the passing pleasures of this world which could be snatched from you in an instant? It will then be too late to repent.**

If your brother sins against you

The Lord Jesus reminded his disciples that *offences* were bound to come (the Greek word translated ‘*offences*’ means ‘traps’ or ‘stumbling-blocks’). He said that any person who causes a believer (‘*one of these little ones*’) to stumble and fall into sin, will face a dreadful judgment (1–2; cp. Matthew 18:6–7).

What must you do *if your brother sins against you* (3)? You must go to him privately and seek to win him over by his repentance. There can be no forgiveness without repentance. Forgiveness brings reconciliation between the aggrieved parties and the restoration of fellowship. Is there someone in the church to whom you are not talking because they have offended you? Jesus said that you must ‘*rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him*’ (3). You may have misunderstood him and discover that no sin is involved at all. Satan will seek to cause misunderstanding between believers.

What should we do when a Christian repeatedly sins against us and yet expresses his sorrow and repentance for his sin? We must go on forgiving him as long as he seeks our forgiveness (4). We also sin frequently against the Lord and need often to come to him for forgiveness. He is very patient with us and readily forgives; we must follow his example. **If we refuse to forgive someone who has sinned against us and repents of that sin, we must question our own salvation and what we know of the love of God in our heart.**

J.C. Ryle comments, ‘Let us leave the whole passage with jealous self-inquiry. ... How often we have given offence, and caused others to stumble! How often we have allowed unkind, and angry, and revengeful thoughts to nestle in our hearts! These things ought not so to be. The more carefully we attend to such practical lessons as this passage contains, the more shall we recommend our religion to others, and the more inward peace shall we find in our own hearts’ (EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS ON LUKE, VOLUME 2, pages 223–224).

Increase our faith

The disciples had been privileged to perform miracles but they were aware of the weakness of their faith (9:6, 40–41). They said to the Lord Jesus, *'Increase our faith'* (5). We may think that it requires great faith to work miracles, but it takes greater faith to live the Christian life (eg. to forgive those who have wronged us, whose repentance appears to be shallow (3–4).

Jesus spoke to his disciples of *'faith as a mustard seed'* which at a word, can uproot a mulberry tree and cast it into the sea (6). A mustard seed is very small and yet grows into a tree which is large enough to shelter birds (Matthew 13:31–32). Dale Ralph Davis comments, 'It is, Jesus says, not great faith but genuine faith that matters. Even "small" faith can achieve difficult or unthinkable results' and he adds, 'We must not make an idol out of our faith. Our help is not in our faith but in the Lord to whom our faith clings' (LUKE 14–24 – ON THE ROAD TO JERUSALEM, pages 58 and 60). **Our focus must not be on great faith in God but faith in a great God.** *'Faith as a mustard seed'* is a trust in God which does not give way to despair when prayer is not immediately answered. It continues to pray, expecting great things from God and attempting great things for God.

Slavery was very common in New Testament times and the Lord Jesus told a parable about a servant (Greek is 'doulos' – 'a slave') who had been working in his master's field. He comes in from his toil in the field and is obliged to prepare his master's supper before he is allowed to rest and refresh himself. The master does not thank his slave for doing the work that is expected of him. Jesus is telling us that even when we have done all that he has commanded there is no room for smug self-congratulation. *'We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do'* (7–10). **Whatever we do for the Lord is insignificant compared to what he has done for us.** The earthly master does not thank his servant for his toil, but our heavenly Master will indeed reward us for faithful service (Matthew 25:21, 23, 34–40).

But where are the nine?

The Lord Jesus was about to enter a village on the border between Galilee and Samaria when he was met by ten men who were lepers. They remained at a distance because of the strict quarantine laws relating to their condition (cp. Leviticus 13:45–46); it is obvious that they had heard of Jesus because they called on him by name to have mercy on them (11–13). Jesus did not touch them nor command that they be healed but told them to show themselves to the priests who would be able to pronounce them clean (cp. Leviticus 14:1–32).

The men took Jesus at his word and as they left they were healed. One of them, a Samaritan, seeing that he was healed, returned to Jesus, *and with a loud voice glorified God, and fell down on his face at his feet, giving him thanks* (15–16). Jesus asked, *‘Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine?’* (17). Only one had returned to give thanks, and he was a Samaritan, belonging to a race despised by most Jews. Jesus told the grateful man to go on his way, saying, *‘Your faith has made you well’* (19). He never said such words to a Pharisee or Jewish religious leader, but only to sinners (7:50; 8:48; here, and in 18:42).

Being unthankful to God is a terrible sin which is found throughout humanity: *Although they knew God, they did not glorify him as God, nor were thankful* (Romans 1:21; cp. 2 Timothy 3:2). **A thankful, praising heart glorifies God and brings great blessing (Psalm 50:23; Philippians 4:6–7, 11–12).** J.C. Ryle comments, ‘Let us pray daily for a thankful spirit. It is the spirit which God loves and delights to honour. ... Above all, let us pray for a deeper sense of our own sinfulness, guilt, and undeserving. This, after all, is the true secret of a thankful spirit. It is the man who daily feels his debt to grace, and daily remembers that in reality he deserves nothing but hell, — this is the man who will be daily blessing and praising God. Thankfulness is a flower which will never bloom well excepting upon a root of deep humility’ (EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS ON LUKE, volume. 2, pages 234–235).

Remember Lot's wife

The Pharisees asked Jesus when the kingdom of God would come (20). The Jews at that time were expecting the Messiah to crush the Romans and establish an earthly kingdom over which the Messiah would reign. He told them that the kingdom of God does not come with outward display (eg. national proclamation, great military victories, etc.); it was already among them. It is a spiritual, not a political kingdom. They were looking for a kingdom but failed to recognise that its king was standing among them (20–21).

Jesus then told the disciples that he would be rejected by the people of their generation and that he would suffer (25). He told them of suffering to come when they would '*desire to see one of the days of the coming of the Son of Man*' but they would not see it. We are not to follow any who teach that he has come (22–23). Church history has many accounts of false christs and heretical teachers who proclaimed that the Messianic era was here, often with disastrous results.

The kingdom of God will be clearly seen when Jesus comes again to judge the world. He will come suddenly at a time when conditions on the earth will be like those which prevailed during the time of Noah and in Sodom (widespread wickedness, violence and materialism, 26–30). The return of Christ will bring a great day of separation when the angels will take those who belong to the Lord to be with him for ever (Matthew 24:31). Two will be sleeping in the same bed, two other pairs working together, but *the one will be taken and the other left* (34–36).

We do not know when Jesus will return but we must always be prepared. He urges, '*Remember Lot's wife*' (32). Why are we to remember her? She loved wicked Sodom with its comforts and pleasures. She was brought out of Sodom but her heart was still there. She lost everything – her possessions, her pleasures, and her life (Genesis 19:15–26). **If you are living for this world and its passing pleasures, remember Lot's wife. If the Lord Jesus returned today, would you be ready?**

Men always ought to pray and not lose heart

The two parables in verses 1 to 14 teach us two vital lessons concerning prayer. The Lord Jesus told his disciples the parable of the persistent widow to encourage us to persevere in prayer: *‘Men always ought to pray and not lose heart’* (1). This follows his words concerning their suffering when they would desire to see his second coming but would not see it (17:22). Jesus now focuses on a particular type of prayer, that continues to plead with God to put things right for us, and to deal with our enemies who are persecuting us. At such times we may soon lose heart and give up praying through discouragement.

A widow went to seek help from a godless judge and pleaded, *‘Avenge me of my adversary’* (3). He refused to be bothered with her request but he became tired of her continual coming to him, and he eventually saw that justice was done for her. If an unjust judge was moved to act on behalf of a persistent widow how much more will God who is righteous and loves us, hear and avenge his own suffering people (*‘his own elect’*; cp. Revelation 6:9–11).

Jesus asked, *‘Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he really find faith on the earth?’* (8). This does not mean that there will be no believers left on the earth by the time he returns because Scripture does not teach this. The faith spoken of here is one that perseveres in prayer in the face of discouragement. **Are you so disheartened that your prayers have become an empty, faithless exercise?** Oh, come now to the Lord, confessing your unbelief and prayerlessness and trust in him. J.C. Ryle wrote, *‘Prayer is the very life-breath of true Christianity. Here it is that religion begins. Here it flourishes. Here it decays. Prayer is one of the first signs of conversion (Acts 9:11). Neglect of prayer is the sure road to a fall (Matthew 26:40–41).’* – EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS ON LUKE, Volume 2, page 253.

*Restraining prayer, we cease to fight;
Prayer makes the Christian’s armour bright;
And Satan trembles when he sees
The weakest saint upon his knees.* (William Cowper)

God be merciful to me a sinner!

We must not only persevere in prayer (1) but also approach God with humility. Jesus *spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and despised others* (9). This parable contrasts the prayers of a Pharisee and a tax collector. The Pharisee smugly thanked God, saying, ‘*God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax-collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess*’ (10–12). His ‘prayer’ did not contain any requests because he felt no personal need of God.

We too can be like the Pharisees in our hearts, having a self-righteous attitude (12:1). J.C. Ryle observes, ‘We are all naturally self-righteous. It is the family disease of all the children of Adam. From the highest to the lowest we think more highly of ourselves than we ought to do. We secretly flatter ourselves that we are not so bad as some, and that we have something to recommend us to the favour of God’ (EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS ON LUKE, Volume 2, page 253).

The tax collector was deeply aware of his wretched state before God. He stood ‘*afar off*’ (13). Though he was in the temple, he kept his distance from the Pharisee and others because of his sense of shame. He hung his head and beat his breast in lamentation, saying, ‘*God be merciful to me a sinner!*’ (Greek = ‘the sinner’). He readily confessed his sinfulness and he cast himself upon God for mercy. He went home justified (right with God) but the proud Pharisee remained blind to the state of his own sinful heart (13–14). His visit to the temple had failed to do him any spiritual good.

Jesus repeated a warning made on another occasion when he was in the company of Pharisees. ‘*Everyone who exalts himself will be abased, and he who humbles himself will be exalted*’ (14; cp. 14:11). Genuine prayer involves humility and confession of sin to the Lord. **A profession of Christianity without a heartfelt need of God’s mercy is not biblical religion. When did you last confess your sin to God?**

He became very sorrowful

Some parents brought their children to the Lord Jesus to be blessed but the disciples, probably wanting to protect him from further demands on his time, wanted to send them away (15). Jesus said, *‘Let the little children come to me, and do not forbid them, for of such is the kingdom of God.’* He then stressed that we must come to him with a childlike dependence if we are to receive the kingdom of God (16–17); this stood in stark contrast with the proud Pharisees (11–12). Many Christians come to Christ in their youth and we must always encourage the children in our church and never despise them or under-value work among the young. Sunday School and similar mid-week activities provide an opportunity to bring the gospel to children.

The young man who came to Jesus was rich and esteemed in Jewish religious circles; he was a ruler (probably an official in charge of the local synagogue, 18) but his wealth and religion did not meet his deepest needs. He called Jesus *‘good’* which was a confession that Jesus is God (18–19). Jesus reminded him of the fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth and ninth commandments (Exodus 20:12–16) and he claimed that he had kept all these from his youth (20–21). This did not make him good in the sight of God and Jesus replied, *‘You still lack one thing, Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.’* but when he heard this, *he became very sorrowful* (22–23). He wanted eternal life but his status and wealth were more important to him than following Jesus as his lord; they were his *‘god’* and no one can serve two masters (16:13).

Becoming a Christian involves much more than *‘making a decision for Christ’*. It means taking up the cross (9:23–25) which is a symbol of self-denial. Salvation is free but we must embrace the lordship of Jesus, forsake our sin and deny ourselves if we want to be his disciples. Many find cost of following Jesus too great and turn away disillusioned (Matthew 13:20–21). **If Jesus is not Lord of all, he is not Lord at all!** There is a price to pay for *‘treasure in heaven’*, but great blessing is enjoyed by all who truly follow Christ.

The things which are impossible with men are possible with God

The disciples were surprised when the Lord Jesus said, *‘How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God! For it is easier for a camel to go through a needle’s eye than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.’*(24–25). Some commentators have explained that the eye of a needle was a very narrow and low gate into Jerusalem through which a camel had to struggle on its knees if it were to gain entry. This theory dates from the 11th century AD and it has no foundation. It seeks to make possible what Jesus said is impossible; the work of salvation in the life of a sinner is miraculous.

The shocked disciples asked, *‘Who then can be saved?’* Jesus reassured them with a wonderful truth: *‘The things which are impossible with men are possible with God’* (26–27). Jesus was very soon to demonstrate this truth to his disciples when he saved Zacchaeus, who was rich (19:1–10). We must never lose heart when we encounter indifference to the gospel. The Lord is able to melt the hardest of hearts and to save the vilest sinner; he can easily break the chains of sin which enslave people! We may think, ‘Impossible,’ but Scripture says, *‘For with God nothing will be impossible’* (1:37). **Let us persevere in prayer and in our evangelism. The Lord has many a surprise for those who wait upon him.**

Peter remarked that he and the other disciples had left all to follow Jesus who then assured him that God is no man’s debtor. Those who sacrificially follow him will not only receive everlasting life in the world to come, but will also be richly blessed in this life (28–30).

Jesus took his disciples aside and told them that all things that are written by the prophets concerning him would be accomplished in Jerusalem where he would be mocked, insulted, spat upon, scourged and put to death, and that he would rise on the third day, but they were unable to understand or to take in his words (31–34). Any sacrifices that we make for the Lord Jesus are insignificant when compared with his great sacrifice to save us from our sin!

What do you want me to do for you?

Many Galilean pilgrims going to Jerusalem would take the route through Jericho to avoid going through Samaria. Jesus and his disciples joined them on this route. A blind beggar (Bartimaeus; Mark 10:46) was sitting at the road-side near to Jericho. He heard the noise of the multitude following Jesus and asked what was happening, and they told him that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by (35–36). The blind beggar would have heard about Christ’s mighty miracles, and he had strong faith in the power and the willingness of the Lord Jesus to heal him. When he addressed Jesus as ‘*Son of David*’ (37–38), he was acknowledging him to be the Messiah (or ‘*the Christ*’ – God’s anointed One; cp. 20:41–44).

Bartimaeus had a persistent faith in the face of discouragement. He was warned to be quiet but *he cried out all the more* (39). He was determined to make the Lord Jesus aware of his need. This is the pattern for us when we pray. We should always come to the Lord trusting in his willingness and in his power to answer our prayers. He knows our needs (Matthew 6:32) but he expects us to bring those needs to him in prayer. Despite the hustle and bustle of the crowd, *Jesus stood still* and called Bartimaeus to himself (40).

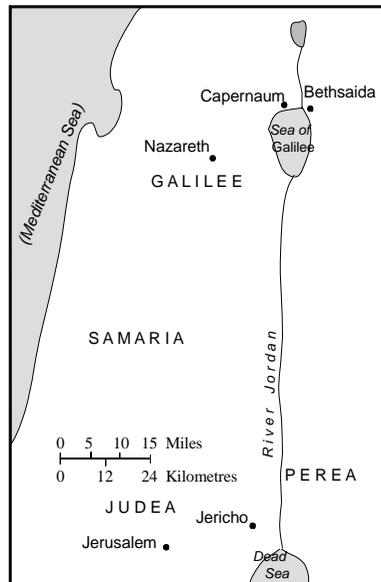
Jesus was travelling to Jerusalem to suffer and to die on the cross, but he took time to speak to this needy man and asked him, ‘*What do you want me to do for you?*’ The beggar did not ask for wealth so that he would not need to beg. His greater need was for sight and he said, ‘*Lord, that I may receive my sight*’ (41). Jesus gladly granted his request, saying, ‘*Receive your sight; your faith has saved you.*’ He was healed immediately and he followed Jesus, glorifying God (42–43).

God wants us to come to him and trust in him. *Without faith it is impossible to please him* (Hebrews 11:6). **If the Lord said to you, ‘What do you want me to do for you?’ what would you say?** Do you bring your greatest needs to God in prayer? Read Philippians 4:19; Hebrews 4:14–16 and be encouraged.

The Son of man has come to seek and to save

Jericho was famous for its fragrant balm derived from the balsam tree and was an important trading centre which yielded high taxes for the Roman government. Zacchaeus held the influential post as chief tax collector for that region (2). Most tax collectors overcharged traders, keeping the surplus for themselves. They became rich through fraud and Zacchaeus was no exception (7–8). They were also considered to be traitors because they served the Romans. Zacchaeus may have heard that Jesus received tax collectors (who were hated and despised by most people; 15:1–2). He was curious to see Jesus but was unable to see him above the crowd because he was small. He was so determined however, that he climbed up into a sycamore tree (3–4). This fruit-bearing evergreen tree is not to be confused with the British or American sycamore trees; cp. Amos 7:14).

We can imagine his surprise when the Lord Jesus called him by name and told him to be quick and to come down from the tree because he ‘*must*’ stay at his house. The crowd murmured against Jesus for going into the house of such a sinner whom they would have considered to be far from God. Zacchaeus was transformed as he came to faith in Christ. He promised to give away half of his possessions to the poor and to restore fourfold to those he had defrauded (8). Jesus said that salvation had come to his house and that Zacchaeus was ‘*a son of Abraham; for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost*’ (9–10). **The disciples saw the words of Jesus demonstrated** – ‘*The things which are impossible with men are possible with God*’ (18:25–27).



Do business till I come

Jesus had left Jericho and was now near to Jerusalem. Some thought that he was going to Jerusalem to take power and to establish his kingdom but they were mistaken (11). He told them a parable in which there are three groups of people: the citizens of a country who reject the rule of the new king (14,27). the faithful servants of the king; and an unfaithful servant (13, 15–24). Verse 14 contains the very words that would be uttered by the mob in Jerusalem before the crucifixion. This parable is not to be confused with the parable of the talents, where a man entrusted each of three servants with a huge amount of money, (Matthew 25:14–30).

A nobleman went to a far country to receive a kingdom for himself (new kings in Palestine had to go to Rome to have their right to the throne confirmed). He gave a *mina* to each of ten servants (Greek = ‘slaves’) and told them, ‘*Do business till I come*’ (12–13). A ‘*mina*’ was the equivalent of one hundred days’ wages for a labourer. When he returned, he called his servants to account. He commended those who had increased their money by trading but condemned the servant who had hidden his money (15–24).

The nobleman represents the Lord Jesus Christ who has now ascended to heaven and will come again to receive his kingdom. His servants are Christians who are charged to do business (serve the Lord) in a hostile environment. When Jesus returns, there will be rewards for faithful service, but the rebel citizens, representing those who reject Christ will be banished from his presence to hell. **We face many difficulties but have a solemn responsibility to do business until Jesus comes again.** We will have to give an account of our stewardship of the gifts that God has given to us. Let us persevere in serving him faithfully!

*Go, labour on, spend, and be spent,
Thy joy to do the Father's will;
It is the way the Master went;
Should not the servant tread it still?* (Horatius Bonar)

Because you did not know the time of your visitation

When Jesus reached the Mount of Olives just outside Jerusalem, it appears that he stayed at the home of Lazarus whom he had raised from the dead (John 12:1–12). He sent two of the disciples to bring him a young donkey (John 12:14). The Lord Jesus knows all things and the men found the colt tethered just as he had described. The owners of the colt may have been followers of Jesus, for they were willing to allow the two disciples to take the animal when they said, *‘The Lord has need of him’* (28–34). Do you respond as willingly as they did to meet needs in God’s work?

Many people who had seen the raising of Lazarus from the dead were among the great multitude attending the Passover feast (John 12:12,17–18). They proclaimed Jesus as the messianic King as he rode towards Jerusalem, quoting Psalm 118:26. Some of the Pharisees called to Jesus from the crowd urging him to rebuke his disciples because of their enthusiastic acclaim of him, but he replied that if they were silent, the stones would cry out (37–40). The Lord Jesus entered Jerusalem to public acclaim, but within a few days, many who welcomed him would be among those crying out for him to be crucified.

As Jesus drew near to Jerusalem, he saw it in all its splendour with its beautiful temple and buildings. He wept over the wicked city which was to crucify him because he saw the desolation that would befall it. He prophesied that Jerusalem would be laid waste: *‘They will not leave one stone upon another, because you did not know the time of your visitation’* (41–44). This prophecy was literally fulfilled in AD 70 when the Roman army besieged the city, destroyed it and massacred over a million men, women and children after the Jews rebelled against their rule. The holy Son of God had taught and worked miracles among them but they had rejected him. **When God’s visitation of mercy is rejected, a visitation of judgment is inevitable. How tragic not to recognise the day of God’s visitation in grace and mercy!**

A den of thieves

The Jews had become so corrupt in their religion that the temple was more like a market-place than a place of worship. Money for the upkeep of the sanctuary (Exodus 30:13) had to be paid in Jewish coinage. Moneychangers charged exorbitant rates, and doves sold for sacrifices were sold at sky-high prices to the Passover pilgrims (Matthew 21:12). The moneychangers and animal traders would have paid much money to the religious authorities for permission to operate within the temple precincts. Such activities were for the market place, and not in the temple precincts. Religion had become a racket! Jesus, quoting Jeremiah 7:11, said, *'My house is a house of prayer, but you have made it a den of thieves'* (46). The furious religious leaders sought to destroy Jesus but were unable to do so because of his popularity among the people (47–48).

The people were very attentive to the words of Jesus as he taught them and preached the gospel in the temple (19:48 to 20:1). The chief priests and elders interrupted him to ask him who had given him the authority to do the things that he was doing (eg. cleansing the temple). They were probably hoping to trap him into making a claim that would appear to be blasphemous; they then would have a case against him.

Jesus responded by asking them a question concerning the ministry of John the Baptist who had proclaimed him as the Messiah: *'The baptism of John – was it from heaven or from men?'* (4). They knew that if they acknowledged that John's ministry was from God, Jesus would ask them why they had refused to believe him. If they denied the validity of John's ministry they would incur the wrath of the people who acknowledged John as a prophet. They refused to answer the question of Jesus and so he refused to answer their question (5–8).

In some churches, the gospel has been obscured by money-making rackets such as the prosperity movement with its health and wealth heresy. **Let us be sure that our religion is pure and undefiled (James 1:27).**

I will send my beloved son

The parable of the wicked vinedressers (‘tenant farmers’) reflects the history of the nation of Israel which had enjoyed the special care and goodness of God (see Isaiah 5:1–7). The man who planted the vineyard represents God and the tenant farmers represent Israel. The servants who were treated shamefully represent the Old Testament messengers including John the Baptist (10–12). Israel *mocked the messengers of God, despised his words, and scoffed at his prophets* (2 Chron. 36:16).

The owner of the vineyard sent his servants to receive fruit but they were shamefully treated and sent away empty-handed. He then decided, ‘*I will send my beloved son. Probably they will respect him when they see him*’ but the wicked tenants had no respect for him and they killed him (13–15). The Lord Jesus was revealing what was to happen to him that very week. The Jewish religious leaders rejected him and were plotting the murder of the sinless Son of God. Just as the owner of the vineyard destroyed the wicked tenants, so the Jewish nation would be rejected and the kingdom given to another nation (the church, which includes Gentiles – cp. Matthew 21:43).

The astonished people said, ‘*Certainly not!*’ and Jesus looked at them, and asked them the meaning of Psalm 118:22: ‘*What then is this that is written: “The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone”?*’ (16–17; cp. Acts 4:11; 1 Peter 2:6–8). Jesus, the stone which the builders rejected, has become the chief cornerstone. The chief priests and the Pharisees recognised that Jesus was speaking of them. They had rejected Jesus and would be crushed by him when the day of judgment came. They wanted to lay hands on him, but refrained for fear of the people who recognised him as a prophet (19; cp. Matthew 21:46).

Do you love Jesus, the Son of God by, obeying him, by giving him first place in your life? One day everyone will bow to him (Philippians 2:9–11). **It is far better to submit to him now, than to be punished by him in the day of judgment.**

Render ... to God the things that are God's

The religious leaders now attempted to set a trap for Jesus and they sent spies to watch him. These men pretended to be sincere enquirers but they sought to make Jesus incriminate himself so that he could be accused of treason against Rome and be delivered to the Roman governor (20). These smooth-talking hypocrites said that Jesus taught *the way of God truly* but they persistently rejected his claims (21).

They asked him whether it was lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not. The Jews resented paying taxes to the Romans and if Jesus were to say, 'Yes, pay your taxes,' they would have branded him as a traitor who had no love for the Jewish nation. If he told them that it was wrong to pay these taxes, they would have accused him of stirring up rebellion against Rome. The wicked Jewish leadership later accused him before Pilate of this very thing (23:2).

Jesus saw through their craftiness and said to them, '*Why do you test me?*' (23). He asked them to show him a denarius. This was a small silver coin which was worth the average wage for a day's work. The front of the coin carried the image of Caesar with the inscription, 'Tiberius Caesar, son of divine Augustus' and the Pharisees were carrying such coins. He asked them whose image and inscription was on the coin and they admitted that it was Caesar's (24). He then told them, '*Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's*' (25). His superb answer to their trick question caused them to marvel (26).

We must be law-abiding citizens and pay our taxes whether we like it or not. Even more important, we must *render ... to God the things that are God's* (21). He demands first place in our lives (see Deuteronomy 6:4–5). Are we robbing God by not rendering money, time or talents to be used for his work (cp. Malachi 3:8)? He has done so much for us in giving his Son to die for us, and in saving us from our sins. He heaps blessings upon us and he has given us eternal life. **Dare we rob God who loves us so much?**

For he is not the God of the dead, but of the living

The Sadducees were very influential in Jewish religious affairs but they were materialistic and they denied that there is a resurrection after death. The high priests were drawn from their ranks and they controlled the temple which Jesus had cleansed. They hated the Lord Jesus put to him a question designed to make him appear to be foolish. Such people often resort to scoffing because their own position is very weak.

The five books of Moses (Genesis to Deuteronomy) were esteemed by the Sadducees above the other books of the Old Testament. They raised with Jesus the principle of ‘levirate marriage’ taught in Deuteronomy 25:5–10. When a man died childless, his widow was not to remarry outside his family, but be married to his brother. The marriage would enable the widow to bear children from the same flesh and blood as her deceased husband. This would hopefully enable her to bear a son to preserve her deceased husband’s name and inheritance.

The Sadducees related a far-fetched story about a woman who married seven brothers in turn, surviving all of them. They asked to which brother she would be married in the resurrection (27–33). His answer exposed their ignorance of Scripture. There is no marriage in the age to come; we are like the angels who do not marry (35–36). Jesus showed from an incident in one of the books of Moses (Exodus) that the dead are raised. He referred to the incident at the burning bush where God told Moses that he was ‘*the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob*’. The great patriarchs were alive with God in heaven, who ‘*is not the God of the dead but of the living*’ (37–38). The scribes who believed in the resurrection of the dead, said to Jesus, ‘*Teacher, you have spoken well*’ (39).

The Bible does not give a detailed description of heaven, but we do know that it will be wonderful beyond our wildest dreams (Philippians 1:21,23; 1 John 3:2–3; Revelation 21:4; 22:3–4). Let us be encouraged and praise God for giving such a glorious future to all those who have repented of their sin and are trusting in the Lord Jesus.

She out of her poverty has put in all the livelihood that she had

The Lord Jesus had been asked questions from the scribes, Pharisees and Sadducees while he taught in the temple and he now asked them a question. The scribes and Pharisees (Matthew 22:41–42) rightly acknowledged that the Christ is David's Son, but why did David call him, 'Lord'. (41–44; Psalm 110:1)? In other words the Messiah is more than a descendant (Son) of David. He is David's Lord and God! The scribes and Pharisees refused to recognise Jesus as the Messiah and they would not submit to his lordship.

Jesus went on to warn his disciples in the hearing of the people, 'Beware of the scribes.' (45–47). They loved all the pomp and the outward trappings of religion so that people would notice them and admire them. They appeared so dignified in their long, flowing robes and in their formal greetings when they addressed each other as 'Rabbi' (Matthew 23:7–10). They loved to have the best seats in the synagogues and the place of honour in feasts. They appeared to be holy by reciting long prayers but they were wicked. They extorted money from widows who were weak and vulnerable people. They would not escape the judgment of God and would receive the greater condemnation because of their hypocrisy (45–47).

The Court of the Women in the temple had thirteen collecting-boxes shaped like upturned trumpets. Jesus looked up to observe the rich putting their gifts into one of these boxes. He also saw a poor widow putting in two mites (Greek = 'lepta'). One 'lepton' was worth 1/128 of a denarius which was the daily wage for a labourer. Jesus commended this poor woman, saying, '*She out of her poverty has put in all the livelihood that she had,*' whereas many gave from their considerable wealth and still had much left for themselves (21:1–4). **What is important in the sight of God is not how much we give but how much we keep back for ourselves.**

But it will turn out for you as an occasion for testimony

The Lord Jesus twice lamented over Jerusalem because of the terrible things that were to happen to her (13:33–35; 19:41–44). The disciples were admiring the beauty and the grandeur of the temple and were shocked to hear Jesus say that it would be destroyed (5–6). They asked him, ‘*When will these things be?*’ (7).

Verses 5 to 24 are mainly concerned with the destruction of Jerusalem. In AD 66, the Jews rebelled against the Romans who besieged Jerusalem, destroying the city and the temple in AD 70. These were days of vengeance on the city which had rejected and crucified Jesus. (22; cp. 11:49–51). Many Christians in Jerusalem remembered the warning of Jesus (20–24) and were saved from the appalling massacre, leaving before the Romans cut off all escape routes from the city.

The conditions which preceded AD 70 are not unique; they are to be found in any age. There are false teachers, wars, earthquakes, famine, disease, unrest and signs in the skies (8–11) and persecution of God’s people (12–19). **How are we to react in uncertain, turbulent times or when there is persecution?**

- We must be on our guard against deceivers. Jesus said, ‘*Take heed that you be not deceived*’ (8). There have been many who have claimed to be Christ throughout church history. Many are still deceived by false teachers today because they do not know the teaching of the Bible.
- We are not to be terrified (9). God is sovereign and he is in control of all these things, even persecution. Jesus warned that some Christians would be hated by their own families, betrayed and even put to death, ‘*but not a hair of your head shall be lost*’ (16–18). This is not a contradiction but means that though our enemies may be allowed to destroy our bodies, they cannot destroy our souls (Matthew 10:28)
- We are to persevere (‘*patience*’ in verse 19 = ‘endurance’).
- Let us remember that God uses persecution for the furtherance of his kingdom and as an opportunity to bear gospel witness. ‘*But it will turn out for you as an occasion for testimony*’ (13).

But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down

Jesus now directs us from the destruction of Jerusalem (20–24) to his second coming (25–36) and he speaks of the signs preceding his return. There will be frightening cosmic disturbances and upheaval in the sea, distress and perplexity, *men's hearts failing them for fear* (25–26). When these things begin to happen, we will know that Christ's return is near just as summer is near when a fig tree comes into leaf (29–31). Jesus said, *'Then will they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory'* (25–27; Daniel 7:13–14). These things will surely happen! Jesus said, *'Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will by no means pass away'* (33).

Those who love the Lord should not panic like those who are not saved. Every true Christian will be gathered by the angels to meet the Lord Jesus in the air, together with every believer from previous ages. It will be the day of resurrection and redemption for our bodies (28; cp. Matthew 24:31; John 5:29; Romans 8:23; 1 Corinthians 15:51–55).

Verse 32 is one of those Scripture verses which is difficult to understand. It would appear that Jesus was saying that those listening to him would still be alive when he comes again but they died almost two thousand years ago. William Hendriksen points out that the word *'generation'* can be translated *'race'*. His suggestion that the verse means that the Jewish race will continue until all the things concerning the return of Christ are fulfilled is quite convincing, especially when Jesus had also been speaking about the destruction of Jerusalem, which may have appeared to cast doubt on the future of the Jews (20–24).

No one knows when Jesus will return but he warns, *'Take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life'* (34). **We must be watchful and prayerful and lead holy lives if we are to be ready for his coming (36; cp. 1 John 3:2–3).**

Though he was to die that week, Jesus taught in the temple from morn till night before retiring to the Mount of Olives (37–38).

Then Satan entered Judas

On the Tuesday before the crucifixion, the chief priests and scribes were still seeking a way in which they could kill Jesus without causing a rebellion among the people (1–2; cp. Mark 14:1–2). Judas Iscariot was privileged to be among the closest associates of the Lord Jesus but he was not a genuine believer (John 6:70; 13:10–11). He was the treasurer for Jesus and the disciples but he was a thief (John 12:6) and the love of money led to his ruin. It is dangerous to hear the teaching of Jesus and then to harden one's heart. *Then Satan entered Judas* (3).

The treacherous disciple plotted with the chief priests to betray Jesus when alone with his disciples. Judas knew that such an opportunity would come when Jesus went to the Mount of Olives as was his custom (39). The chief priests gladly paid Judas thirty pieces of silver (4–6; cp. Matthew 26:14–15). **To be tempted by Satan or to be attacked by him is bad enough, but when the devil enters into a man, he is doomed to hell.** The devil cannot enter a true believer who is able to resist him in the strength of the Lord (1 Peter 5:8–9)..

The first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Thursday) arrived and Jesus sent Peter and John to prepare the Passover. They would have to take their sacrificial lamb to be slaughtered in the temple forecourt. They also had to purchase unleavened bread, wine and bitter herbs and prepare the room and the feast. Peter and John did not know where they were to celebrate the Passover. Jesus told them that when they entered the city, they would see a man carrying a pitcher of water. They were to follow him to the house he entered; the master of the house would show them the guest room where they were to eat the Passover (7–12). Peter and John found it as Jesus had said to them and made the necessary preparations (13).

This Passover meal was to have great significance. Jesus was to point the disciples to his own death when he instituted the Lord's Supper. This has been left to us as a precious ordinance when we remember with gratitude all that he has done for us.

This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is shed for you

When the Lord Jesus sat down for the Passover meal, he said to his disciples, *‘With fervent desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer’* (14–15). He greatly loved them (John 13:1) and wanted them to be with him before he went to the cross. He said that this was the last Passover that he would celebrate with them on earth (16, 18). As Jesus celebrated the Passover meal with the twelve disciples, he warned them that one of them would betray him. He said, *‘woe to that man by whom he is betrayed.’* Judas was on the slippery slope to hell! The shocked disciples questioned among themselves which of them would do such a thing (21–23).

The Feast of Unleavened Bread began with the Passover meal when lamb, unleavened bread and bitter herbs were eaten and wine was drunk. The bitter herbs were a reminder of the slavery and suffering of the Israelites in Egypt. The lamb commemorated the protection of Israel’s first-born when the blood of a lamb slain for each household was sprinkled on the doorposts and lintel of the house (Exodus 12:1–7): The unleavened bread was a reminder of the haste in which the Jews escaped from Egypt. Jesus gave his disciples bread and wine which were symbols of his body and blood to be given for us at Calvary. He said to them, *‘Do this in remembrance of me’* (17–20; 1 Corinthians 11:24–25). He is *‘our Passover’* (1 Corinthians 5:7) and he has delivered us from a far greater tyranny than Israel suffered in Egypt. He has saved us from our sins and from the power of Satan (John 8:34–36; 1 John 3:8).

Jesus said of the wine that we take at the Communion service, *‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is shed for you’* (20). At this service, we especially remember how our Saviour was tortured and slain to save us. The holy Son of God was punished for his people’s sins (Matthew 1:21; 1 Peter 3:18). **We must never take our salvation for granted; it is free but it was purchased at tremendous cost.** *You were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s* (1 Corinthians 6:20).

But I have prayed for you

The Lord Jesus had most solemnly spoken of his death as he ate the Passover with his disciples and had warned that one of them would betray him (15–23). It is almost beyond belief that the disciples began to argue *as to which of them should be considered the greatest* (24). This was not the first time that they had argued about greatness (9:46–48). Jesus told them that they were not to imitate the ways of the world but to follow his example. They had continued with him in his trials but needed to see things in their true perspective; he was giving them a kingdom (25–30; cp. 12:32). True greatness lies in humble service and Jesus washed the disciples' feet that evening (John 13:1–11)..

Jesus said to Peter, *'Satan has asked for you (Greek 'you' is plural), that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you (Greek 'you' is singular), that your faith should not fail'* (31–32). Satan desired to have all the disciples. Jesus assured Peter that he was praying for him. **It is a great comfort to know that the Lord Jesus is praying for us (Romans 8:34; Hebrews 7:25)**. Peter protested that he was ready to go with his Lord to prison and to death but Jesus told him that before the cock crowed he would deny him three times (33–34). Peter was full of self-confidence but he did not know his own heart. Though Satan wanted to have Peter, he was not allowed his evil desire. God is sovereign over Satan who cannot touch us without divine permission (cp. Job 1:12).

The Lord Jesus told his disciples that they would need to make provision for themselves (35–36). He did not literally mean that they should rely on swords for their protection. Jesus also told them that the prophecy from Isaiah 53:12 was about to be fulfilled in him (37).but their minds were on swords. They misunderstood him, saying that they had two swords (35–37). Jesus said, *'Enough of that'* (Hendriksen's translation of the end of verse 38). *We do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God* (2 Corinthians 10:3–4).

Nevertheless not my will, but yours, be done

The Lord Jesus and his disciples went from the house to go to the Mount of Olives. When they arrived at Gethsemane, he urged them, *‘Pray that you may not enter into temptation’* (41). He took Peter, James and John apart with him and he knelt down to pray. He said, *‘My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death’* (39–41; Matthew 26:36–38). He prayed, *‘Father, if it is your will, remove this cup from me; nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done’* (42). His love for us is so great that he submitted to the Father’s will to be punished for our sin. He was overwhelmed with anguish as he contemplated this cup of suffering and sorrow which he had to drink in order to save us from our sins and give us a cup of blessing (1 Corinthians 10:16).

As he prayed that an angel appeared from heaven to strengthen him. His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground (43–44). **When we think of what it cost him to save us, we should shudder at even the thought of sinning.**

Jesus roused his disciples who were sleeping from sorrow and he again urged them to pray, saying, *‘Why do you sleep? Rise and pray lest you enter into temptation’* (46). As he was speaking, Judas arrived with a crowd who were armed with swords and clubs (47; Matthew 26:47). They arrested Jesus after Judas betrayed him with a kiss. Peter, in an act of bravado, cut off the right ear of Malchus, a servant of the high priest. Jesus, full of grace, healed him and said to Peter, *‘Put away your sword into the sheath. Shall I not drink the cup which my Father has given me?’* (48–51; John 18:10–11).

The cowardly chief priests and elders had sent the armed crowd to the Lord Jesus as if they were to arrest a robber. They had not touched him while he taught in the temple but this was their hour *and the power of darkness* when they would have their own way with him (52–53). They should have been terrified at being the willing tools of Satan! Jesus willingly went to death to save us from our sin. What amazing love! May we willingly obey him, whatever the cost!

And the Lord turned and looked at Peter

After they had arrested Jesus, he was put on trial before the Sanhedrin that lasted through to the early hours of morning (Matthew 26:57–68). Peter followed at a distance and sat among a crowd gathered round a fire in the courtyard of the high priest's house. He loved his Lord, and would have been anxious to see what would happen to him, As he waited, *a servant girl looked intently at him and said, 'This man was also with him'* but Peter denied it. After a little while he again denied his Lord and about an hour later another said, *'Surely this fellow also was with him, for he is a Galilean.'* Peter denied Jesus for the third time (54–60). It was now early morning and before he had finished speaking, he heard the crowing of a cock,

And the Lord turned and looked at Peter (61). Jesus had been betrayed by Judas and he was now disowned by one of his closest friends. That look would have conveyed grief and disappointment, but also love and yearning for the fearful apostle. Peter saw that look which melted him and he dissolved into bitter weeping as he remembered the words of Jesus, *'Before the cock crows, you will deny me three times.'*

The Lord Jesus sees us at all times and observes our behaviour among those who are not believers. Do we honour him by the things that we say and do? Let us remember that he is always ready to forgive us when we truly repent of our sin. Peter wept over his sin and he was restored. He went on to accomplish great things for his Lord. The grace of God is wonderful to the fearful, faltering, sinning Christian!

Peter's denial is a warning to us to beware of self-confidence. We may think that we would never deny our precious Saviour but we must never forget that despite our best intentions, we are capable of any sin. We have already seen that Jesus prayed for Peter (31–32) and it is encouraging to know that he also prays for us (Hebrews 7:25). If you are burdened by guilt because of some sin in your life, come to the Lord Jesus and ask him to forgive you. He will accept you and freely forgive you as you repent of your sin and trust in him.

Are you then the Son of God?

Luke does not report the preliminary trial of Jesus which took place following his arrest. The religious authorities decided that Jesus should be put to death (see Matthew 26:57–66; Mark 14:53–64). After this trial Jesus was mocked, beaten and spat upon by those guarding him (63; Matthew 26:67). They blindfolded him and taunted him to prophesy which of them had struck him and they repeatedly blasphemed him (64–65). Why did the Lord Jesus submit to such insults when he could have summoned thousands of angels to destroy his enemies? (see his words to Pontius Pilate: Matthew 26:53). This was part of the suffering which he endured to save us from our sins.

We often react very strongly when someone offends or ill-treats us, but these insults are small when compared with the humiliation suffered by our great Saviour? We are called to suffer for the Lord, and when we are mocked, we must follow his example. This means taking suffering with patience and committing ourselves to the Lord, the righteous Judge (1 Peter 2:21–23; cp. Philippians 1:29).

The trial of Jesus at night had no legal standing and the council (Sanhedrin) assembled to condemn Jesus as soon as it was day. They asked him to say if he were the Christ (Messiah); if he agreed that he was, they could accuse him before the Roman authorities of setting himself up as a rival to Caesar. He replied that it was pointless answering them because, whatever he said, they would not believe him.

Jesus told them that the Son of Man would sit at God's right hand (66–67; cp. Daniel 7:13). They knew that by saying this he was claiming to be God, and they asked him, '*Are you then the Son of God?*' and Jesus replied in the affirmative (69–70). The Sanhedrin obtained what they wanted. They could accuse him of blasphemy and say that he deserved to die (71; cp. Matthew 26:65–66). **Let us thank the Lord Jesus for all that he endured to save us and let us always strive to please him who for our sakes did not please himself.**

But he answered him nothing

The chief priests needed the approval of the Roman governor for the execution of Jesus. They led Jesus to Pontius Pilate but did not press religious charges against him; they did this later (John 19:7). They accused Jesus of inciting the people to refuse to pay taxes to Caesar (2). This was a deliberate lie (see 20:22–25) and of setting himself up as a king. This was another lie. They had plenty of religion but their hearts were wicked.

When Pilate asked Jesus, ‘*Are you the King of the Jews?*’ he would have hardly considered the battered and bruised prisoner as a king. His statement could read, ‘YOU, the King of the Jews?’ Jesus agreed that he was a king but he said that his kingdom is not of this world; it is a spiritual kingdom (3; John 18:33–38). Pilate’s verdict was that Jesus was not guilty, but the chief priests and the crowd became vehement in accusing Jesus, insisted that he was guilty (4–5). When Pilate discovered that Jesus was from Galilee, he decided to pass the case over to Herod Antipas, ruler of Galilee, who was visiting Jerusalem.

Wicked Herod had heard much about Jesus and was very glad for this opportunity to see him. He wanted to see a miracle performed and he asked Jesus many questions, *but he answered him nothing*. Jesus had nothing to say to the murderer of John the Baptist (6–9). Herod had been given ample opportunity to repent and to obey God (Mark 6:20) but it was now too late. God, who is holy, will not satisfy the whims of proud or wicked men, but he is full of grace to those who truly seek him. **A time comes when the Holy Spirit no longer speaks to those who persistently refuse to repent (Proverbs 29:1; 2 Corinthians 6:1–2). They are in dire peril!**

A frustrated Herod led his soldiers in mocking Jesus. We are not told why Herod and Pilate had been hostile to each other, but they were now reconciled. They became friends but they were both the enemies of God (10–12).