

*And no one gave him anything*

The parable of the lost son (11–32) has much to teach us concerning the misery which sin brings to a person's life, of the nature of true repentance, and of the grace and love of God. Property was normally divided after the father's death, but the younger son demanded his share of the inheritance in advance (12).

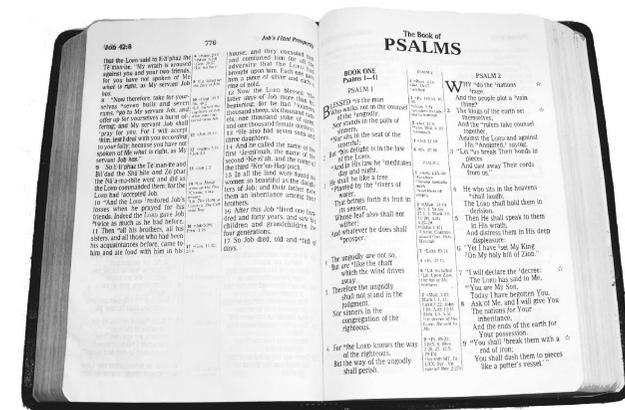
Many cultures have a very strict code of honour. Many a daughter or son has been disowned by family or even killed because they rebelled against their parents wishes and brought what was perceived as dishonour to their family. Orthodox Jews also have a strict code of honour. They may not kill those who dishonour the family but they will disown them. Honour is embedded in the fifth commandment — ***'Honour your father and your mother'***. This commandment is repeated in Ephesians 6:1–2: ***Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 'Honour your father and mother', which is the first commandment with promise.***

The scribes and the Pharisees would have been very interested to hear where the Lord Jesus was taking them in this story. The young man failed to honour his father. The father should have disowned him and driven him out of the family home in disgrace but he gave the son his portion of the inheritance. The young man soon left home for a distant country where he squandered his wealth in reckless living (11–13).

The land was struck by famine and the now penniless young man found himself destitute and friendless. He went to serve a farmer who gave him the job of feeding swine (14–15). This would have been most repugnant for a Jew as pigs were 'unclean' according to the law (Deuteronomy 14:8). Even worse, he had to feed himself on pig's food ***and no one gave him anything*** (16). No one took pity on him. A sinful lifestyle seems to offer freedom and joy but it leads to misery and death (Proverbs 13:20; Isaiah 57:21; Romans 6:23).

# PILGRIM BIBLE NOTES

God's holy Word simply explained and applied



June 2021

Bible readings from Genesis chapters 43 to 50  
Gospel of Luke chapters 12 to 15

*This man receives sinners*

This is one of the best known chapters of the Bible containing the parables of the lost sheep (3–7), the lost coin (8–10) and the lost son (11–32). The Lord Jesus told these parables because the Pharisees and scribes complained that ‘*this man* (Jesus) *receives sinners*’ (2). Tax collectors, who were infamous for their cheating, and sinners, gladly heard Jesus and he accepted invitations to eat in their homes. He had also chosen a tax collector, Matthew to be one of his twelve disciples (Matthew 9:9–13). The Pharisees and scribes considered such people to be beyond repentance or forgiveness and shunned them.

We are all sinners and our condition without God is described as being ‘*lost*’ (6, 9, 32). It is a great encouragement to know that *this man* (Jesus) *receives sinners* (2) and that he seeks them and finds them, as the parables of the lost sheep and lost coin illustrate (cp. 19:10). They were valued by their owners. The woman’s lost coin may have been part of a necklace of ten silver coins. The Lord Jesus seeks sinners, and receives them and he died to save them (Isaiah 53:6; John 10:11, 15–18). If this were not so, we could not be saved; it is a wonderful message!

The Lord Jesus was also accused of being *a friend of sinners* (7:34). but he never condoned their sin. We must not take part in the sinful activities of the ungodly but we will not win them by shunning them Do we welcome those who are lost into our homes? Do we seek to befriend them and win them to Christ? The lost sheep and lost coin were sought, found and restored, and there was great rejoicing.

The scribes and Pharisees should have been full of joy that sinners were being sought and converted. Heaven is a place of indescribable joy but there is *more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just* (‘self-righteous’) persons like the Pharisees who thought that they had no need of repentance (7,10). **The Lord delights in mercy (Micah 7:18). He loves to save sinners! This should encourage us in our prayers and in our evangelism.**

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*Whoever does not bear his cross ... cannot be my disciple*

The Lord Jesus challenged the great crowds who were following him concerning the cost of discipleship. Many have been puzzled by verse 26. Jesus is not commanding us to hate our relatives; the fifth commandment rather teaches us to honour our parents. When faced with difficult Bible verses we must allow Scripture to interpret itself. It is clear from the parallel passage in the Gospel of Matthew that we are not being told to hate our family members, but to love them less than we love Christ (Matthew 10:37). Discipleship is costly, especially when our allegiance to Christ strains family relationships. Jesus must come first! This is part and parcel of bearing our cross to follow him. *'Whoever does not bear his cross ... cannot be my disciple'* (27).

Jesus told two parables to illustrate the great need to count the cost of following him (27–33):

- Anyone planning to build a tower would first sit down *and count the cost* lest he make a fool of himself by not being able to complete the work.
- A king facing an army twice the size of his own must first consider whether he has any hope of victory; if not, he will sue for peace; he counts the cost.

The words of Jesus are a very necessary reminder that to be a Christian, a person must be his disciple, and that this demands sacrifice. Many evangelical churches have succumbed to an 'easy Christianity' which has little in common with the commitment that Christ demands. **Have you counted the cost of following the Lord Jesus? Are you prepared to follow him, whatever that cost? Does he have first place in your life? On the other hand, have you counted the cost of what it means to be lost?**

Salt is a symbol of purity and is used to preserve and to enhance the flavour of food. Jesus described the Christian as *'the salt of the earth'* (Matthew 5:13). Shallow Christianity is like salt that has lost its saltiness through exposure to the elements. It is useless and fit for nothing (34–35).

*May God Almighty give you mercy before the man*

The continuing famine drove Joseph's brothers to return to Egypt to obtain further supplies of food. Judah now spoke for the brothers, though Reuben was the first-born. John Currid points out that Reuben had lost his pre-eminent position because he had lain with one of his father's concubines (35:2; 49:4). – COMMENTARY ON GENESIS, Volume 2, page 295.

Judah knew that they had to take Benjamin with them if they were to have an audience with the Egyptian governor. Jacob was very reluctant to allow this but Judah reminded him of the stark choice that faced them. – Go to Egypt, taking Benjamin, or remain at home and die of starvation (5–8). Judah pledged his determination to bring Benjamin back to his father by being a surety for him (9). Jacob told them to take a present of *a little balm, and a little honey, spices and myrrh, pistachio nuts and almonds* for the Egyptian governor. He committed them to the Lord's care, saying, *'May God Almighty give you mercy before the man, that he may release your other brother and Benjamin'* (11–14). His fear and despair is seen in his words, *'If I am bereaved, I am bereaved.'* **When we are perplexed or uncertain, we need to commit our situation to God who is merciful and kind.**

The brothers were afraid when summoned to the home of Joseph, fearing that he would harm them (18). They had protested that they were honest men (42:11) and Joseph had put their claim to the test by secretly returning the purchase money to their sacks and they now sought to repay it. God had been working in their lives for good. Joseph's steward insisted that they keep the money (21–23).

They prostrated themselves before Joseph (26–28; cp. 37:9–11) who enquired after Jacob. He was so overwhelmed with emotion when he saw Benjamin, that he went to his room and wept. When he had composed himself, he gave a feast for the men who were astonished when he had them seated according to their birthright and age (33). Perhaps they thought that this man had great powers of divination?

*Your servant became surety*

Though Joseph was overcome with emotion when he met Benjamin (43:30), he still concealed his identity from his brothers. Before they set out on their journey to Canaan, he told his steward, *'Fill up the men's sacks with food, as much as they can carry, and put each man's money in the mouth of his sack. Also put my cup, the silver cup in the mouth of the sack of the youngest'* (1–2). John Currid points out that this was not just any cup belonging to Joseph, but a particular silver cup, and that such cups were used for divination (COMMENTARY, Volume 2, page 309).

Soon after their departure, Joseph sent his steward after them to accuse them of repaying his goodness to them with evil and of the theft of his master's silver cup. They were confident of their innocence, but were horrified when Joseph's cup was discovered in Benjamin's sack (1–13). Joseph had led them to believe that he could practise divination and this would have further troubled them. He told them that the man with whom his cup was found would be his slave (15–17)

Judah had a murky history. It was his idea to sell Joseph into slavery (37:26–27) and he had been quite heartless in his behaviour towards Tamar (chapter 38). It was a chastened and humbled Judah who eloquently pleaded with Joseph, offering himself as a slave instead of Benjamin (18–33). He said to Joseph, *'Your servant became surety'* (32; cp. 43:8–9). Tribulation had developed godly character (Romans 5:3–4) in the life of Joseph and it did the same for Judah. He had been heartless and uncaring, but now he was a different person. **He was a broken man, but he was also a better man.** He cared intensely for his young brother and for his father (34). Jacob was later to bless him with the words, *'Judah, you are he whom your brothers shall praise'* (49:8).

The Lord Jesus Christ came from the line of Judah. He was the great substitute, giving his life to save sinners through his death on the cross. He is our Surety and has freed us from the power of Satan and sin. How wonderful! He is worthy of our devotion and praise.

*I cannot come*

After Jesus had referred to the resurrection of the just, one of the Pharisee's guests exclaimed, *'Blessed is he who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God!'* (14–15). The Lord Jesus then told them a parable of another feast, in which a certain man *gave a great supper and invited many* (16). In those times an invitation would be sent in advance for such an event. When the time of the banquet arrived, those who had committed to come, would be summoned to attend. In the parable, some made excuses for not coming; one said that he had to see a piece of land that he had purchased, another had to test five yoke of oxen that he had bought. Another man was newly married and said, *'I cannot come'* (17–21). They all claimed to be too busy but their excuses were pathetic. Many people still claim to be too busy to follow Christ.

The master of the house was angry when he heard these excuses and he told his servant to go out into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind. There was still room for more and the servant was told to go out again to bring others, compelling them to come in. Israel had repeatedly rejected God's messengers and their message and were continuing to do so (13:34–35; Isaiah 65:1–2). The Lord Jesus was indicating that his gospel would go to Gentile as well as Jew and that the church would be made up of all nations (cp. Galatians 3:28; Ephesians 2:11–14,18).

What does this parable teach us? God graciously invites sinners to come into his kingdom, to repent of their sin and to trust in Christ to save them. Many make far-fetched excuses and may give plausible reasons for not following Christ but God is not deceived. If in this life, we refuse God's invitation to enter his kingdom, we will be shut out of heaven when we die. If you are not a Christian, have you been saying, *'I cannot come,'* when you have been invited to follow Christ? **A time is coming when there will be no more invitations – it will then be too late. The door of God's kingdom will be shut in your face for ever!**

*Whoever exalts himself will be abased*

The Lord Jesus was invited to eat at the home of a leading Pharisee; other guests included Pharisees and experts in religious law. A man who had dropsy (also known ‘oedema’), a condition in which an excessive amount of fluid gathers in the tissues of the body, causing swelling, was also there. The Pharisees may have invited the man to see if Jesus would heal him on the Sabbath. *They watched him closely* (1–3). They remained silent when Jesus asked them, ‘*Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?*’ He then healed the man and asked them, ‘*Which of you having a donkey* (‘son’ in some manuscripts) *or an ox that has fallen into a pit, will not immediately pull him out on the Sabbath day?*’ (cp. 13:15), but again they did not answer him (5–6).

Jesus noticed how guests at the meal sought the most prominent seats, and he challenged them to take the lowliest places; it is preferable to then be invited to fill a more honourable place than to be asked to move lower down the table. He said, ‘*For whoever exalts himself will be abased, and he who humbles himself will be exalted*’ (11). We must all learn this important lesson for our life in the church and in Christian service (cp. Philippians 2:3–4; 1 Peter 5:5–6).

Jesus then challenged the Pharisee and his guests about their practice, which was quite common, of inviting only friends, relatives and rich neighbours to meals (forming a tight social circle to promote self-interest). He urged them to invite those who were unable to repay them such as the poor and needy. Such deeds of kindness are seen by God and rewarded on the day of resurrection (12–14).

We tend to invite only relatives or close friends into our homes for a meal but there are great opportunities for Christian witness when we ask visitors to our church, neighbours or work colleagues to dine with us. Does your kindness ever reach beyond your own circle of friends? **Do those outside God’s kingdom see the love of Christ in your life? Do you think that they will be won to Christ if you are indifferent to their needs?**

*It was not you who sent me here, but God*

Joseph was deeply moved by the urgent, selfless plea from the ‘new’ Judah. He ordered his attendants to leave the room and then he wept aloud. The brothers were dismayed and silent as Joseph revealed his identity. They had been heartless and wicked in their past treatment of him. He now spoke to them in Hebrew without an interpreter (cp. 42:23) and he enquired after Jacob (3). He freely forgave his terrified brothers, telling them that God had overruled all their evil deeds (5–9). He assured them, ‘*It was not you who sent me here, but God*’ (8). **God had planned it all!** He had sent Joseph to Egypt and had made him ruler of all the land (5,7–9). This did not lessen the guilt of his brothers but it must have helped Joseph forgive them.

**It is a great source of comfort in bitter experiences to know that God is in control. He even uses hostile acts against us to further his purposes.** The apostle Paul knew this when thrown into prison at Philippi (Acts 16:22–34). That foul dungeon rang with praise to God, and the jailer and his family were saved. While a prisoner in Rome Paul wrote, ‘*The things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel*’ (Philippians 1:12). May we learn to see that God is with us in times of pain and perplexity.

Pharaoh and his court were pleased to hear of the coming of Joseph’s brothers. He had such a high regard for Joseph that he urged him to bring his father and his brothers’ households to Egypt where they would be given the best of all the land. The brothers returned home with wagons in which to bring their wives and children to Egypt. They were also given changes of garments and donkeys loaded with provisions for their journey. Joseph urged his brothers not to quarrel along the way to Canaan (16–24).

Jacob did not at first believe his sons’ report that Joseph was alive. They told him of all that Joseph had said to them and showed him the Egyptian wagons sent to carry him. The old man, now filled with hope, resolved to go to Egypt to see his beloved son (25–28).

*Now let me die*

Abraham and Isaac had both called on the Lord at Beersheba (21:33; 26:25) When Jacob arrived there, he offered sacrifices to God who spoke to him in a vision at night and reassured him about taking his family to Egypt. The Lord told him, *‘Do not fear to go down to Egypt, for I will make of you a great nation there’* (1–3). Jacob may have hesitated about settling in Egypt because of Abraham’s unhappy experience in that country (12:10–20). Moreover, God had told Abraham that his descendants would be afflicted in a foreign land (15:13) and had forbidden Isaac to go to Egypt (26:2). The Lord promised Jacob that he would go with him and that Joseph would put his hand on his eyes (would be with him when he died, 4).

Verses 7 to 27 provide a list of the seventy, including Jacob, who went to Egypt. Jacob sent Judah ahead *to point out before him the way to Goshen* (28). This indicates that he recognised Judah as leader among his sons rather than Reuben, his first-born.

Joseph went in his chariot to meet Jacob in Goshen, where he planned that his father and his extended family would settle. When they met, Joseph and his father clung to each other, weeping profusely (29). Jacob (Israel) said to Joseph, *‘Now let me die, since I have seen your face, because you are still alive’* (30). This was not an expression of despair such as uttered by Elijah (1 Kings 19:4). He had seen Joseph’s dreams fulfilled and he was now a very happy man. **He was prepared to die whenever God called him. Are you? Do you look forward to being with the Lord in heaven?** If you have any lingering doubts about your own salvation, come to the Lord now and ask him to save you and to make you his own.

Joseph told his brothers that he was going to inform Pharaoh of their arrival, and that he would say that they were shepherds which were an abomination to the Egyptians; this would influence Pharaoh to allow them to remain in Goshen and to settle there (31–34).

*But you were not willing*

Some Pharisees came to the Lord Jesus, urging him to get out of Herod’s territory (Galilee and Perea) because Herod Antipas was planning to kill him (31). This was not an act of friendship on their part (cp. Mark 3:6). Their colleagues in Jerusalem were already plotting to arrest and to kill Jesus (cp. John 7:1) and this would be easier away from the great following that he had in Galilee. Jesus was scathing in his reference to Herod as *‘that fox’*. His message for the king was that his ministry would continue until he was *perfected* – a reference to his death and resurrection (32–33).

Jerusalem, the holy city which contained the temple, was known as the city of God (Psalm 48:1–2). It was also a wicked city which had murdered God’s servants (33–34). Its people had been privileged to receive numerous opportunities to turn from their sin and come to the Lord, but they had refused his gracious offers of mercy. The Lord Jesus would have often gathered Jerusalem to himself, to have them for himself and to lovingly protect them, but they were not willing. He lamented, *‘O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you were not willing!’* (34). The intense emotion and the pathos of his grief is shown in his repetition of the word *‘Jerusalem’* (cp. David’s lament over Absalom, *‘O my son Absalom – my son, my son Absalom’*; 2 Samuel 18:33). Jerusalem and its temple were to be destroyed and left desolate (in AD 70). Jesus would not make any public appearances to the Jews after his death and resurrection. At his second coming *every eye will see him* (Revelation 1:7). People will then say, *‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD!’* (35).

The words of Jesus, *‘But you were not willing’* will haunt many a person who has rejected him. He is very patient and kind, but will not leave open his door of mercy and opportunity for ever. **If we are not willing to submit to Jesus as our Lord and Saviour now, we must not be surprised when he rejects us on the day of judgment.**

*Lord, are there few who are saved?*

The Lord Jesus was travelling on his final journey to Jerusalem, teaching in the towns and villages, when someone asked him, ‘*Lord, are there few who are saved?*’ (23). Jesus did not say, ‘Yes’ or ‘No’ to the question, and he responded not only to the questioner, but addressed all the crowd, saying, ‘*Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able*’ (24). Our English verb ‘to agonise’ is derived from the Greek verb translated ‘to strive’. We face a fierce struggle with Satan, the world, and our own sinful nature when we seek to enter the kingdom of God. The gate is narrow. All religions do not lead to God.

Many Jews believed that all their race would be saved because they were ‘Abraham’s children’ (cp. John 8:30–42). Jesus left them in no doubt, however, that their Jewish pedigree was not good enough. He warned them that the door of salvation would not remain open for ever. He had taught the people and they had eaten with him (26:– He had been a guest in the household of a Pharisee; he had fed the multitudes, but they did not follow him as their Lord). They would say, ‘*Lord, Lord, open for us*’ on the day of judgment, but it would be too late (25–27).

Many rely on their good works to save them, or their baptism, church attendance or being in a Christian family, but they have not repented of their sin or trusted in Jesus. The day of judgment will be a day of weeping and Jesus made it quite clear that many Jews (*‘the first’*) would be lost and many Gentiles (*‘the last’*) would be saved (28–30).

J.C. Ryle comments, ‘There is a time coming when many will repent too late, and believe too late, — sorrow for sin too late, and begin to pray too late, — be anxious about salvation too late, and long for heaven too late’ (EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS ON LUKE, volume 2, page 134). **How is it with you? Do not waste time speculating on whether few will be saved, but consider whether you will be saved. If you are not saved seek the Lord now.**

*My pilgrimage*

Joseph wanted his family to live apart from the Egyptians, in Goshen. He chose five of his brothers to be presented to Pharaoh and briefed them to stress to Pharaoh that they were shepherds, an occupation despised by the Egyptians (46:31–34). Pharaoh kindly received the five brothers and told them that they could settle in Goshen which was a choice area of Egypt. He also told Joseph to appoint any competent men among them to be chief herdsmen over his cattle (1–6).

Joseph afterwards brought his father to Pharaoh (7–10). While speaking to the king, Jacob described his life as ‘*my pilgrimage*’ (9). The words translated ‘*pilgrims*’ and ‘*pilgrimage*’ in Scripture mean ‘*sojourner*’ and ‘*sojourning*’ (see the English Standard Version). A ‘sojourner’ is a temporary resident in a country which is not his own. Christians are sojourners on this earth and we must live as those who are travelling to heaven, which is our own country (Hebrews 11:13–16; 1 Peter 2:11). **Our pilgrimage is not easy and there are many trials, but we have a glorious destination and the Lord is with us as we travel. What more could we want?**

*We are travelling home to God.*

*In the way the fathers trod;*

*They are happy now, and we*

*Soon their happiness shall see* (John Cennick)

Jacob had known evil times (9) which were the bitter harvest of resorting to deception to advance his own cause, but he died in faith, worshipping God (Hebrews 11:21).

Joseph’s prudent administration during the famine brought massive revenues to Pharaoh (13–26). Jacob’s family soon grew and prospered and Jacob lived in Egypt for seventeen years until his death. Jacob made Joseph solemnly promise not to bury him in Egypt, but in the family grave in Canaan (27–31). Perhaps we pay scant regard to our funerals and those of our loved ones? Our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit and it is important that they have a decent burial.

*The angel who has redeemed me from all evil*

Seventeen years after Jacob had arrived in Egypt, Joseph heard that his father's end was near. He took his two sons to see Jacob who did not recognise them because of his failing eyesight. Jacob recalled his experience of the goodness of God who had blessed him and provided for him (3,15). His blessing of Ephraim and Manasseh is described as an act of faith (Hebrews 11:21). He gave them the birthright in the place of Reuben who had acted so shamefully with Bilhah (35:22; 1 Chronicles 5:1–2). Jacob, though very frail, insisted on blessing the younger son Ephraim before the elder brother, Manasseh. This displeased Joseph, but though Jacob was partially sighted, he was able to see into the future concerning Ephraim and Manasseh (8–20).

Jacob spoke of *'the Angel who has redeemed me from all evil'* (16). Most Bible commentators believe that this Angel refers to the Lord Jesus Christ (the *'Angel of the LORD'* was worshipped as God; eg. Judges 13:17–22). He had protected Jacob when Laban had sought to harm him (31:29) and though Esau had vowed to kill him, he caused Esau to receive him in peace (29:41; 33:4). Many godless people do enjoy a prosperous life and some will say, 'Life has been good to me.' The child of God sees things quite differently; he reflects on the Lord's dealings with him and says, 'God has been good to me!'

Jacob said to Joseph, *'I had not thought to see your face; but in fact, God has also shown me your offspring!'* (11). He had been crushed by grief, but God had worked beyond his wildest expectations in his dealings both with himself and Joseph. **We must always remember that God is greater than our thoughts (cp. Ephesians 3:20–21).** Satan seeks to drive us to despair and to make us dwell on gloomy thoughts. Do not listen to him, but trust in the Lord.

Jacob expected God to bring his descendants back to Canaan (21). He gave Joseph a 'portion' (Hebrew 'Shekem') which may refer to the town of Shechem; it was near to Sychar where Jesus spoke to the Samaritan woman (22; cp. John 4:5).

*What is the kingdom of God like?*

The Lord Jesus may have still been in the synagogue when he asked, *'What is the kingdom of God like?'* He twice posed the same question and then told two parables to teach different facts concerning God's wonderful kingdom (18–21).

- The parable of the mustard seed (18–19) illustrates 'the progress of the gospel in the world' (J.C. Ryle). The mustard seed is very small, but it grows into a tree which is ten to fifteen feet high and which could shelter birds in its branches. Can it be that the kingdom of heaven is really growing like a mustard seed? From small beginnings with the ministry of the Lord Jesus and the apostles, the church has seen phenomenal growth. William Hendriksen observes, 'Within forty years of Christ's death, the gospel had reached all the great centres of the Roman world, and ever so many out-of-the-way places besides' (COMMENTARY ON THE GOSPEL OF LUKE, page 703).

In spite of intense opposition through the ages, the kingdom of God is now established in the lives of people throughout the world. We may feel discouraged by the decline of Christianity in the western world, but many millions have been brought into God's kingdom in other regions of the world, even where the persecution has been fierce. Let us be encouraged!

- The parable of the leaven (20–21) shows 'the progress of the gospel in the heart of a believer' (Ryle). *Three measures of meal* is a large amount, but just a little leaven (yeast) will permeate it until all the dough has risen. We do not see the beginning of a work of grace in the human heart. The 'leaven' may be presently working in the life of someone for whom we have prayed for years. This too encourages us to persevere in prayer and witness. God's work in the heart is never static. Little by little, it influences all aspects of the believer's life as he grows in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ (cp. Acts 17:6). **Is this apparent in your life?**

*Immediately she was made straight, and glorified God*

The religious leaders ignored the call of Jesus to repentance (3,5) and became more determined in their opposition to him. This is seen in the account of the miraculous healing of the woman. Jesus *was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath*, where there was a woman in the congregation whom an evil spirit had bound and bent for eighteen years so that she was unable to straighten herself. She was a faithful believer whom Jesus called ‘*a daughter of Abraham*’; 16) but her disability did not keep her from Sabbath worship.

*When Jesus saw her, he called her to him ... laid his hands on her, and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God* (13). The churlish synagogue ruler was angry because Jesus had healed the woman on the Sabbath. The ruler addressed the congregation, saying, ‘*There are six days on which men ought to work; therefore come and be healed on them, and not on the Sabbath day*’ (14).

Luke refers to Jesus as ‘*The Lord*’ (15) which stresses his authority. Jesus answered the ruler of the synagogue by calling him a ‘*hypocrite*’. He would not have hesitated to lead his animals to food and water on the Sabbath but he had no compassion for the disabled woman who faithfully attended his synagogue. Jesus said, ‘*Should not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has bound – think of it – for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath?*’ (16). The ruler and his allies had no answer to Christ’s telling argument and they were shamed into silence. The people rejoiced for all the glorious things that were done by Jesus (17)

J.C. Ryle comments, ‘The principle here laid down by our Lord Jesus is the same that we find elsewhere in the Gospels. He teaches us that the command to “do no work” on the Sabbath, was not intended to prohibit works of necessity and mercy. The Sabbath was made for man’s benefit, and not for his hurt’ (EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS ON LUKE, volume 2, page 122). **Ryle points out, however, that we are to keep the Sabbath day holy and give it to God. Do you?**

*The sceptre shall not depart from Judah ... until Shiloh comes*

Jacob spoke to his twelve sons before he died and prophesied concerning them and the tribes which were to descend from them. These prophecies were all fulfilled. Jacob also said something about their character. Jacob told Reuben ‘*Unstable as water, you shall not excel*’ (‘have pre-eminence’; 3–4). He had no depth of character and his sexual sin was not forgotten (35:22; 1 Chronicles 5:1). Scripture has no record of any ruler, prophet or judge who descended from him.

Jacob described Simeon and Levi as ‘*instruments of cruelty*’ who were unable to control their fierce anger which he cursed (5–7; cp 34:25–26). There is sinful anger and there is also righteous anger (cp. Ephesians 4:26). Let us be sure that when we are angry, it is for a just cause. We must never allow such anger to go out of control and never be cruel in thought, word or deed. The tribe of Simeon was the smallest in Israel (Numbers 26:12–14) and lived within the territory of Judah (Joshua 19:1).

The line of the Messiah is traced from the line of Judah whose name means ‘praise’ (8–10). Jacob said, ‘*The sceptre shall not depart from Judah ... until Shiloh comes; and to him shall be the obedience of the people.*’ The sceptre is a symbol of kingly rule. The Lord Jesus is ‘*the Lion of the tribe of Judah*’ (Revelation 5:5). John Currid points out that the meaning of ‘*Shiloh*’ is uncertain and that it ‘remains an enigma’ (COMMENTARY ON GENESIS, Volume 2, page 377).

An animal metaphor is used to describe not only Judah, but also Issachar, Dan and Naphtali. Dan, ‘*a serpent*’ (16–17) was not to be trusted (many of his descendants were treacherous; see Judges 18).

Jacob reserved the longest blessing for Joseph (22–26). He had been hated by his brothers and grieved, but the Lord had strengthened him and had made him fruitful (cp. 41:52). **If we would be fruitful like Joseph, we must persevere and trust in the Lord when we are afflicted.** Let us strive to develop a mature and godly character.

*You meant evil against me; but God meant it for good*

When he was dying, Jacob charged Joseph and his brothers to bury him in the family burial plot in Canaan (49:29–33). Jacob was embalmed and following the mourning ritual they went to Canaan with an Egyptian military escort, probably for their protection (1–14).

Joseph's brothers were very fearful after their return to Egypt. They had not forgotten their wicked treatment of him when he was a teenager and they expected him to avenge himself now that Jacob had died. They sent a message to Joseph, claiming that Jacob had left a plea that Joseph would forgive them. Joseph wept when he received this message. He may have been hurt by their attitude, for he had already shown them his love and forgiveness (45:15–20).

Joseph told his brothers, '*You meant evil against me; but God meant it for good*' (20). God sovereignly works out his purposes and he cannot be thwarted (Isaiah 14:27). It is wonderful to know that the Lord even uses the malice of our enemies for our good. **When we remember that the Lord has good purposes in the evil done against us, it helps us to forgive those who have wronged us and seek our forgiveness.** Joseph comforted his brothers with kind words (21). His experiences wonderfully illustrate the truth of Romans 8:28: *We know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to his purpose.* **Let us worship and adore the almighty, all-wise God! Let us thank him for watching over us at all times, and for bringing good out of evil!**

Joseph lived until he was one hundred and ten years old. Before he died, he told his brothers that God would visit their descendants and bring them back to the promised land. He charged them to swear on oath, to take his bones with them for burial when they returned to Canaan (22–26; cp. Exodus 13:19; Joshua 24:32). *By faith Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the departure of the children of Israel, and gave instruction concerning his bones* (Hebrews 11:22). His body was embalmed, as was that of Jacob, and was *put in a coffin in Egypt*.

*Unless you repent you will all likewise perish*

In New Testament times many Jews saw disasters as manifestations of divine justice and judgment on sinners. They would say, 'God has punished them for their wickedness.' (cp. John 9:2–3). Some people still believe this, but our reading shows us how we should react to disaster and tragedy.

Jesus was told of a terrible atrocity in which Pontius Pilate had ordered the cold-blooded slaughter of some Galileans while they were bringing their animal sacrifices to the temple. This may have been a reprisal for some terrorist attack on the Romans. Jesus pointed out that these victims were not greater sinners than any other Galileans. He referred to the eighteen who were killed when the tower in Siloam fell on them and said that they were no more sinful than other dwellers in Jerusalem (1–4). Those who are killed in a 21st century terrorist atrocity are no worse sinners than we are. Such tragic events are divine warnings to impress upon us the uncertainty of life and our urgent need to repent of our sin. Jesus told his listeners, '*Unless you repent you will all likewise perish*' (3,5). If tragedy struck you, would you be ready to meet God?

The Lord Jesus then told the parable of the barren fig tree to press home the urgent need for repentance (6–9). A man had a fig tree in his vineyard and he ordered the vine-dresser to cut it down following three fruitless years. The man pleaded for another year during which he would tend and fertilise the ground around it: '*If it bears fruit, well. But if not, after that you can cut it down*' (9). The fig-tree refers to Israel. Dale Ralph Davis observes, 'The covenant people need to repent. The trouble is not Galilean's blood nor falling towers but their own blindness to their own need – and the time for repentance was running out' (LUKE 1–13 – THE YEAR OF THE LORD'S FAVOUR, page 238).

**God is patient and slow to anger (Psalm 103:8) and when he delays sending judgment, it must not be taken to mean that he is indifferent to human wickedness; it is rather an expression of his mercy (cp. 2 Peter 3:3–9).**

*Do you suppose that I came to give peace on earth?*

The Bible often connects fire with judgment (3:17; cp. Isaiah 66:15–16; Amos 1:7; 2 Thessalonians 1:7–8). The Lord Jesus here speaks of sending fire on the earth and he warned the disciples that he himself was to be baptised with a baptism of intense suffering (49–50). He was to bear the punishment of his people to save them from divine judgment. J.C. Ryle comments, ‘Let the recollection of his burning readiness to die for us be like a glowing coal in our memories, and constrain us to live for him, and not to ourselves. Surely the thought of it should waken our sleeping hearts, and warm our cold affections, and make us anxious to redeem the time, and to do something for his praise’ (EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS ON LUKE, Volume 2, page 96).

You may be puzzled by the words of the Lord Jesus, ‘*Do you suppose that I came to give peace on earth? I tell you, not at all, but rather division*’ (51). How could the ‘*Prince of Peace*’ (Isaiah 9:6) who blesses peacemakers (Matthew 5:9) bring division rather than peace? It is because many people hate Christ and his gospel. A Christian may find that his own family members become his enemies as long as he remains faithful to Christ (52–53). When faced with such pressure, should a believer turn back from following Christ? No! Our supreme allegiance must be to our Saviour who loves us and gave himself for us. Just a word of caution: Some Christians alienate their families through lack of wisdom and a neglect of duties at home. When a person becomes a Christian, they should become a better husband, better wife, better son or daughter than they were before their conversion.

Jesus warned the crowds who were able to forecast the weather by discerning the face of the sky and of the earth but were unable to discern the present time (54–56). They needed to see their urgent need to respond to his message. They would prefer to settle matters with an earthly accuser than to face court action, but when accused by God’s holy law, they did nothing (57–58). **If you are not a Christian, now is the time to seek peace with God (Isaiah 55:6–7). It will be too late on the day of judgment!**

*Lord, teach us to pray*

A disciplined prayer life is very important! One of the disciples asked Jesus, ‘*Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples*’ (1). Jesus then gave them the model prayer which is known as ‘The Lord’s Prayer’. Verse 2 mentions three very important things – our Father’s name, our Father’s kingdom, and our Father’s will. Christian, do you realise just how great a privilege you have in knowing the almighty, sovereign, wise and good God, who is *the Lord of heaven and earth* (10:42), as your heavenly Father? **Do we really think when we pray? The way we think about God makes all the difference to the way we pray.**

When we pray, we must remember our relationship to God. He is *our Father in heaven* (2). He welcomes us to his throne of grace (Hebrews 4:16), he delights in us and wants to receive our worship and our prayers (18:1; cp. John 4:23). Though God is *our Father in heaven*, we must hallow his name which means to reverence, to honour and to exalt him. God’s name reveals his character; he is holy and awesome in splendour and purity.

We should also pray for the coming of the kingdom of God through the spread of the gospel (2: cp.10:2). Do you pray for missionaries, for revival and for the salvation of those who are lost? Prayer also involves submission to the will of God. Jesus teaches us to pray, ‘*Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven*’ True prayer involves worship, adoration and a desire for the glory of God through the increase and coming of his kingdom; it is rooted in glad submission to God’s will. How do you pray?

*Lord, teach us how to pray aright,  
With reverence and with fear;  
Though dust and ashes in thy sight,  
We may, we must draw near.*

(James Montgomery)

*Luke chapters 1 to 10 are covered in notes for January to March 2021*

*Forgive us our sins*

We repeat yesterday's reading to think about verse 4 of 'The Lord's Prayer'. We not only worship when we pray but we also express also our helplessness and dependence upon God. We should be thankful for our food each day. In times of plenty, we should never forget that God could remove everything from us in an instant. We are to ask for '*our daily bread*' and not for luxuries. God will supply our need but not for our greed (cp. Philippians 4:19).

*'Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who is indebted to us'* (4). Our sin puts us in debt to God which we cannot repay, but the Lord Jesus has cleared it through his death at Calvary. Dale Ralph Davis comments, 'Jesus implies that the Christian life will be one of continual repentance ... This petition assures us that we will never run out prayer material, for our sins will supply us with plenty to mourn and pray over' (LUKE 1–13 – THE YEAR OF THE LORD'S FAVOUR, pages 199 and 200).

If we have truly repented of our sin, we will readily forgive those who have wronged us and who seek our forgiveness. God's Word instructs us: '*Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ also forgave you*' (Ephesians 4:32). **Do you seek God's forgiveness every day, or do you ignore your own sins while refusing to forgive others?**

The prayer '*And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one*' reminds us that we are vulnerable, that we must be on our guard and that we cannot defeat Satan in our own strength. This does not mean that God tempts us to sin; the Bible is quite definite that this is not so (James 1:13–16). The Lord will not allow us to be tempted or tested beyond what we are able to bear, but will make the way of escape (1 Corinthians 10:13). We belong to God and he is our heavenly Father. We may be weak, but he is strong. He reigns in sovereign power and majesty for ever, and he will never allow the evil one to snatch us from his hands (John 10:29).

*Therefore, you also be ready*

The Lord Jesus, speaking to his disciples, emphasised in two parables the importance of being prepared for his return:

- By faithfulness in serving him (35–40). They had to be prepared for work like servants having their robes tucked in the belts around their waists enabling them to work (35). They had their lamps burning so that they would be able to open the door of their master's house immediately he arrived from a wedding that he was attending (36–38). They were ready to welcome him and serve him even if he came in the second or third watch (possibly 10 pm to 2 am and 2 to 6 am). The faithful servants are blessed when their master returns home. He will gird himself and wait on them (37). Our Master, the Lord Jesus, came to serve (22:27).

We too must faithfully serve Jesus until he comes again and be ready to welcome him. Though salvation is by grace and not through our own works, an evidence of God's grace in our lives is love for Christ and faithful service. Jesus exhorts us, '*Therefore, you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect*' (40).

- By righteous living. Peter asked Jesus if this parable applied only to them or to all people and Jesus then told the parable of the faithful servant and the wicked servant (42–48). Jesus asked, '*Who then is that faithful and wise steward?*' – He ruled his master's household well and would be rewarded when his master returned (42–44). This points to the person who occupies himself with the work given to him by Christ.

Another man betrayed his master's trust and was a cruel tyrant in the household, as well as being a self-indulgent drunkard. He was careless, thinking his master was delaying his return (45). There are some hypocrites who appear to be a true Christians but by their behaviour, they dishonour Christ. Their portion is with unbelievers (46). **If we know God's will and do not obey it, the punishment will be more severe (47–48).** '*Therefore, you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.*'

*It is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom*

The Lord Jesus said that our priority must be to seek the kingdom of God, rather than being anxious about our own needs (31). He goes on to make an amazing statement: *'Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom'* (32). God does not give grudgingly but with pleasure and delight!

Jesus was so tender in his dealings with his disciples whom he likened to a fearful flock of sheep. He had urged them to seek his kingdom, but he now states that he has given them his kingdom. Why should we seek what has already been given to us? The kingdom is ours but we are taught to pray, *'Your kingdom come'* (11:2) and to work for its increase. Since God has given us his kingdom, will he not take care of us and provide our basic necessities?

Verses 32 and 33 show us that God's love and goodness to us should motivate us to be generous in helping needy Christians. The same principle is also found elsewhere in the New Testament (2 Corinthians 8:1–9; 1 John 3:16–18). If we have wealth and it hinders our walk with the Lord, we are better ridding ourselves of it and giving it to those in need (33).

Verse 33 does not mean that we must have no comforts and live on the breadline in order to give away all that we have. Beware of any religion, even if it calls itself 'Christian', that demands that its followers hand over all that they possess, including their homes to its leaders, to live in communes. Thousands of people have had their lives ruined by such charlatans. Wealthy members of the Jerusalem church did sell houses and land to provide help for the needy in the church but there is no evidence that they also sold their own homes (Acts 4:32–37).

We cannot take our worldly possessions with us when we die, but our heavenly treasure is for ever. **What, or who, are you living for? Where is your treasure?** Take time to think about this because Jesus tells us, *'For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also'* (34).

*Ask, and it will be given to you*

The disciples had asked Jesus, *'Lord, teach us to pray'* (1). After giving them a pattern for prayer (2–4), he went on to give two important principles: we must persevere in prayer and we must expect God to answer us appropriately when we pray.

Jesus told a parable of a man who had an unexpected visitor arrive at midnight. He had no food to set before the visitor who would have been very hungry after his journey. He went to his friend's house to ask for three loaves but the friend was reluctant to get up and disturb his sleeping children. The man persisted to knock at the door and his friend eventually rose out of his bed and gave him as much as he needed (5–8). By contrast, Jesus encourages us to persevere in prayer because God is delighted to hear us.

Let us be encouraged that:

- When we pray, God does not turn us away. Our heavenly Father loves us and cares for us
- It is never 'midnight' with God and we can pray to him at any time. *My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth ... He who keeps you will not slumber* (Psalm 121:2–3).
- He is able and willing to meet all our needs. The Lord Jesus gives us a wonderful promise: *'Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you'* (9; cp. Philippians 4:19).
- The promise in verse 9 is for *'everyone'* (10).
- If sinful men know how to give good things to their children, how much more will our heavenly Father give us good gifts (Psalm 84:11; Romans 8:32) and the best of all gifts, the Holy Spirit (13). Every Christian has the gift of the Holy Spirit (cp. Acts 2:38; Galatians 4:6) but we need each day to pray for the Holy Spirit for guidance when we are perplexed, for strength live the Christian life, and for what to say when we are persecuted (12:11–12). **Are we persevering in coming to God in prayer? Do we really expect him to answer us?**

*He who is not with me is against me*

When the Lord Jesus delivered and healed a man, who was demon-possessed and mute, there were different reactions from the crowd:

- Some marvelled when they saw the demon cast out and heard the man speak (14)..
- Others demanded to see a miraculous sign, though they had just seen one (16). Jesus said, *'If I cast out demons with the finger of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you'* (20). They do not see that the kingdom of God is among them and are so hardened in their sin, that even miracles will never convinced them of the gospel.
- Some reacted by saying that Jesus cast out demons by the power of Satan (here called *'Beelzebub'*; 14–15). He responded by showing such an accusation to be foolish. Satan cannot cast out Satan; a kingdom or a house divided against itself cannot stand. The devil would be powerless if he were divided against himself. Jesus is stronger than Satan and has bound him and plundered his evil kingdom (17–22).

Jesus then gave two solemn warnings:

- *'He who is not with me is against me'* (23). We cannot be neutral and we must not sit on the fence regarding the Lord Jesus. **Are you with Christ? If you refuse to submit to his claims on your life you are against him.**
- The next warning is against seeking reformation in our lives without the transforming power of Christ in the gospel (24–26). Jesus spoke of a man who had been delivered from an unclean spirit. He had a new start but the unclean spirit then found seven others more wicked than himself. They returned to enter the man, making his latest state worse than ever. We may have a religion which has led to some reformation in our lives, and yet know nothing of repentance from sin and faith in Christ. Such a religion will lead us to hell, however sincere we may be!

*Do not worry about your life*

Jesus said to his disciples, *'Therefore, I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat, nor about the body, what you shall put on.* (22). The word *'therefore'* ('for this reason') shows us that there is a connection to the preceding verses. Jesus now explains that being *'rich toward God'* (21) involves a life of depending and trusting in our heavenly Father. We may be free from seeking to heap up riches for ourselves like the rich farmer, but be over-anxious about providing for our basic needs. What is the answer to such worry? Remember that our heavenly Father knows exactly what we need (30). The Lord Jesus urges, *'Do not worry about your life ... nor have an anxious mind ... do not fear'* (22,29,32). Life is more than food, drink and clothes (23).

Christian, God feeds the ravens: *'Of how much more value are you than the birds?'* (24). ... *'If God clothes the grass, how much more will he clothe you?'* (28). Will not God who has given you a body provide for its needs? – (cp. Romans 8:32; Philippians 4:19). Worrying will not improve your circumstances (25) but will turn your thoughts away from our heavenly Father. Are you beset by fear and care? Turn your care into prayer (Philippians 4:6–7) and trust in your Father in heaven; he will not fail you.

Just a word of caution; these verses do not encourage laziness. We do meet scroungers who rely on others to give them life's necessities and make no effort to work when they quite fit physically to do so. Such people should worry! The Bible says, *'If anyone among you will not work, neither shall he eat'* (see 2 Thessalonians 3:10–12).

We need food and clothing but we must not become preoccupied with these things. Jesus here teaches us that our priority must be to seek the kingdom of God. **He promises that he will take care of our concerns if we make his kingdom our first concern.** Jesus said, *'Seek the kingdom of God and all these things shall be added to you'* (31). We seek God's kingdom by leading godly lives (Matthew 6:33), obeying his Word and making known the gospel.

*Beware of covetousness*

The Lord Jesus has warned us against hypocrisy (1) and now goes on to warn against the sin of covetousness. A man in the crowd said to Jesus, *‘Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me’* (12). Rabbis were often approached to settle serious disputes and the man may have thought that Jesus was one of their number. Jesus refused to get involved and he warned, *‘Beware of covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses’* (15). The meaning of the Greek noun translated *‘covetousness’* is ‘the desire to have more’. In our ‘consumer society’ we need to be constantly reminded that our quality of life does not depend on material possessions. The Lord Jesus drives home the point with a parable of the man whom God called *‘You fool!’* (20).

In the parable, a certain farmer was blessed with fertile ground and he reaped bumper harvests, becoming very rich. He decided to build greater barns to store his grain and his accumulated goods, but he did not give one thought to God who is sovereign over our lives. He said to himself, *‘Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry’* (19). God told him that he was a *‘fool’* who would die that very night. He was a clever business man, but he was a *‘fool’* because he was godless (cp. Psalm 14:1). His wealth would be passed to others and he would spend eternity separated from God. He was a *‘fool’* to plan his future without God, making no preparation for eternity (16–20)! It is more important to be *rich toward God*, being thankful and content for all that he has provided for us than to seek after wealth (21; cp. Philippians 4:11).

Do you live for the things of this world or do you love God and honour him in your life? Are you covetous, always wanting the latest gadget or luxury? Covetousness violates the tenth commandment; it is idolatry and it will never bring you lasting satisfaction (Colossians 3:5; cp. 1 Timothy 6:9–10). Happy is the man who lays up treasure in heaven (Matthew 6:19–21)! ***Beware of covetousness; it could be Satan’s weapon to ruin your Christian life.***

*This is an evil generation. It seeks a sign*

Though many in the crowd were hostile to the Lord Jesus, a woman exclaimed, *‘Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breast which nursed you!’* (27). Mary was indeed blessed (1:28) but those who worship her are in great error. Jesus pointed out that better still, *those who hear the word of God, and keep it are blessed* (28). We are blessed when we hear God’s Word and obey it.

The scribes and Pharisees were so blinded by their tradition and so hardened in their unbelief, that they refused to accept the claims of Christ. They had seen many miracles, but when they were unable to dispute the evidence, they accused Jesus of being in league with the devil and wanted a sign from him (15; cp. Matthew 12:38). The Lord Jesus warned against seeking for signs, saying, *‘This is an evil generation. It seeks a sign’* (29). Many professing Christians are addicted to seeking after signs and wonders. This is not an evidence of faith, but of weakness and immaturity.

Jesus did promise a sign, that of the prophet Jonah (unlike unbelieving scholars, he accepted Jonah’s experience in the stomach of the great fish as historical fact). Jesus was here prophesying of his own resurrection from the dead (30; cp. Matthew 12:40), but even that failed to convince his enemies (see Matthew 27:62–64; 28:11–15). Jesus pointed out that the heathen of Nineveh repented at the preaching of Jonah who performed no miracles. The Queen of Sheba had travelled far to hear the wisdom of Solomon. They would be called to witness against the unbelieving Jews on the day of judgment because a greater than Jonah or Solomon was among them, but they rejected him. **Many unbelievers claim to have intellectual difficulties in believing in the gospel, but the problem is not one of intellect, but of a sinful heart (John 3:19).**

Just as healthy eye-sight is essential for our physical well-being, spiritual eyesight which comes from hearing and obeying the Word of God is essential for our safety and blessing (28, 33–36).

*You have taken away the key of knowledge*

When a Pharisee invited the Lord Jesus to eat with him, it provided an opportunity for his colleagues to try to catch him in his words so that they could accuse him (37, 53–54). They marvelled when he failed to observe their man-made ritual of ceremonial washing before eating (this washing had nothing to do with hygiene). Their religion was all outward show and Jesus denounced them for their hypocrisy:

- They were like cups and dishes that were clean on the outside but filthy within. Outwardly they appeared to be good, but inwardly they were rotten. They paid minute attention to the tithing of herbs which was not required by the law while neglecting justice and love for God (39–42).
- They loved religious pomp. They wanted to be seen in the best seats in the synagogues and to be admired for their elaborate greetings (43). They were proud but *God resists the proud* (James 4:6).
- They were like unmarked graves which defiled those who walked over them because they contained rotting corpses (44).

A lawyer (religious law-expert, responsible for interpreting Scripture) told Jesus that he was also reproaching them (45). They were closely allied to the Pharisees and Jesus denounced them with three ‘woes’:

- Their man-made rules and regulations made religion miserable and burdensome, and they lacked compassion (46).
- Though they built the tombs of the prophets whom their ancestors had murdered, they were no better. The murderous blood of their fathers flowed in their veins and would be *required of this generation* (47–51; cp Matthew 27:24–25).
- Because they had *taken away the key of knowledge* (52). They obscured the plain teaching of Scripture with their complex ritual so that seekers after God were hindered rather than helped (52). The Scribes and Pharisees hated the direct speaking of Jesus and were vehement in their response to him (53–54).

**Let us beware of hypocrisy! God wants to see reality and righteousness in our lives, not outward show (James 1:27).**

*Do not be afraid*

The Lord Jesus had condemned the Pharisees for their hypocrisy (11:37–54) and in the meantime a great crowd had gathered to hear him but he addressed his disciples, saying, ‘*Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy*’ (1). Just as leaven (yeast) works slowly but surely, affecting a whole lump of dough, our religion can degenerate into an outward show. We may hate hypocrisy but can ourselves become hypocrites without realising it. We may deceive men but we cannot deceive God who will expose all religious sham on the day of judgment (2–3).

Fear is natural when men threaten to kill us, but Jesus says, ‘*Do not be afraid*’ (4). What is the answer to the fear of wicked men?

- Remember that after they have killed, there is nothing more they can do to us (4).
- We must fear God who is able not only to kill the body but also to cast the soul into hell (5; the Greek word ‘Gehenna’ which is here translated ‘*hell*’ refers to the place where the wicked are sent on the day of judgment; cp. Mark 9:47–48). A Christless eternity is truly dreadful. The Christian’s fear of God is not one of craven dread, but is an attitude of reverence, awe and love towards him.
- Our heavenly Father lovingly cares for us. We are much more precious to him than the birds which he feeds (6–7). We were bought at tremendous cost with the precious blood of Christ (1 Corinthians 6:20; 1 Peter 1:18–19).
- *The fear of man brings a snare* (Proverbs 29:25) and may keep us from confessing Christ in the face of persecution (8). **Dare we be ashamed of our precious Saviour who loves us?** Hardened sinners may say all manner of wicked things against the Lord Jesus, but they are in peril if they blaspheme the Holy Spirit (10). The Holy Spirit is with us and he will teach us what we should say when we appear before rulers and authorities because of our Christian witness (8–12).

*I’m not ashamed to own my Lord or to defend his cause,  
Maintain the honour of his word, the glory of his cross.* (I. Watts)