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*May God Almighty give you mercy before the man*

The continuing famine forced the return of Joseph's brothers to Egypt to obtain further supplies of food. Judah now appears as the spokesman for the brothers, though Reuben is 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 (49:4; cp. 35:2. – COMMENTARY ON GENESIS, volume 2, page 296).

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 himself as a surety for Benjamin to show his determination to bring Benjamin back to his father (9). Jacob told them to take a present for the Egyptian governor and he committed them all to the Lord's care, saying, *'May God Almighty give you mercy before the man, that he may release your other brother and Benjamin'* (14). His despair and fear 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 (cp. 2 Timothy 1:16).**

The brothers were afraid when summoned to the house of Joseph. They had protested that they were honest men (42:11) but Joseph knew that they had not been honest in the past (37:20). He put their claim to the test by secretly returning the purchase money to their sacks and they sought to repay it (21–23). God had been working in their lives for good. They were not allowed to return the money. Joseph's steward said, *'Your God ... has given you treasure'* (23).

They prostrated themselves before Joseph (26–28; cp. 37:9–11) and he enquired after Jacob. He was so overwhelmed with emotion when he saw Benjamin, that he went to his chamber and wept. When he had composed himself, he gave a feast for the men who were astonished when he seated them according to their 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. He wanted further proof of their change of character. Before the brothers set out on their journey to Canaan, he told the steward to put his silver cup into Benjamin's sack. This was a special cup and John Currid points out that such cups were used for divination (COMMENTARY, volume 2, pages 309–310). Soon after their departure, Joseph sent his steward after them to accuse them of theft and of repaying his goodness with evil. They were horrified and humbled when Joseph's cup was discovered in Benjamin's sack (1–13). Joseph led his brothers to believe that he could practise divination and this would have further troubled them (15–17).

Judah had a murky history. He had been the ringleader in selling Joseph into slavery (37:26–27) and he had been quite heartless in his attitude to 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). 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 different. **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).

'*Your servant became surety*' (32; cp. 43:8–9). Judah had taken responsibility for his young brother and offered himself as a substitute. The Lord Jesus Christ came from the line of Judah. He was the great substitute, giving his life at Calvary to save sinners. He is our Surety and has freed us from the bondage of Satan and sin. Free indeed (John 8:36), but at what cost!

*Bearing shame and scoffing rude,  
In my place condemned he stood;  
Sealed my pardon with his blood:  
Hallelujah! what a Saviour!*

(Philip P. Bliss)

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

Joseph could not help but be deeply moved by the urgent, selfless plea from the ‘new’ Judah. He ordered his attendants to leave the room and broke into loud weeping. 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 his interpreter (cp. 42:23) and he enquired after Jacob (45:3). 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 lord 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 at 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 of Egypt. The brothers returned home with Egyptian carts in which to bring their wives and children into Egypt. They were also given changes of garments and donkeys loaded with provisions for the return journey. Joseph urged his brothers to avoid strife along the way to Canaan (16–24).

Jacob did not at first believe his sons’ report that Joseph was alive. They went on to tell him of all that Joseph had said to them and showed him the Egyptian carts 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 strange land (15:13). The Lord had forbidden Isaac to go to Egypt (26:2) but 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 list those who went with Jacob to Egypt. Sixty-six moved to Egypt plus the wives of his sons (26). Jacob sent Judah ahead *to point out before him the way to Goshen* (28). This shows that he recognised Judah as leader among his sons rather than Reuben, his first-born. He had a joyful and tearful reunion with Joseph in Goshen, the territory of Egypt where they would settle. 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.

*It is not death to die,  
To leave this weary road.  
And midst the family on high,  
To be at home with God.*

*Jesus, thou Prince of life,  
Thy chosen cannot die;  
Like thee, they conquer in the strife  
To reign with thee on high.*

(George W. Bethune)

*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 introduced to him by Joseph and told them that they could settle in Goshen which was a choice area of Egypt (1–6).

Joseph afterwards brought his father to Pharaoh (7–10). While speaking to the king, Jacob described his life as ‘*my pilgrimage*’ (9). He had known evil times which were the bitter harvest of resorting to deception to advance his own cause, but he died in faith, worshipping God (Hebrews 11:21). We, too, are pilgrims on this earth and we must live as those who are travelling to heaven (Hebrews 11:13–16; 1 Peter 2:11). John Bunyan was much aware of this in calling his spiritual classic ‘The Pilgrim’s Progress’ (if you have not read this book, you are missing a real treat). **Our pilgrimage is not easy and there are many battles, but we have a glorious destination and the Lord is with us as we travel. What more could we want?**

*Since, Lord, thou dost defend  
Us with thy Spirit.  
We know we at the end  
Shall life inherit.  
Then fancies flee away!  
I’ll fear not what men say;  
I’ll labour night and day  
To be a pilgrim.*

(John Bunyan)

Joseph’s prudent administration at the time of famine brought in a massive revenue to the royal treasury (13–26). Jacob’s family soon grew and prospered and the patriarch lived in Egypt for seventeen years until his death. He made Joseph promise to bury him not 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 passed and Joseph heard that his father's end was near. He took his two sons to see Jacob who did not recognise his grandsons because of his failing eyesight. The old man rallied and his blessing of Ephraim and Manasseh is described as an act of faith (Hebrews 11:21). He also 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 above the elder one, Manasseh (8–20). He expected God to bring his descendants back to Canaan (21). The portion that Jacob gave to Joseph may refer to the plot of ground near to Sychar where Jesus spoke to the Samaritan woman (22; cp. John 4:5).

As he lay dying, Jacob rehearsed his experience of the goodness of God who had blessed him and provided for him (3,15). He spoke of *'the Angel who has redeemed me from all evil'* (16). This angel is accepted by most commentators as referring 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 sought to harm him (31:29) and had caused Esau to receive him in peace (remember, Esau had vowed to kill him, 29:41; 33:4). Many godless people do enjoy a prosperous life and some will acknowledge, 'Life has been good to me.' The child of God sees things quite differently and he has the attitude of Jacob. 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 the life of 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.



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

Before he died, Jacob called his twelve sons to him to bless them. He also prophesied concerning them and the tribes which descended from them. These prophecies were all fulfilled. Jacob also said something about their character. Reuben is described as being ‘*unstable as water*’ (3–4; cp 35:22). He had no depth of character and he did not excel. Scripture has no mention of a single ruler, prophet or judge who descended from him. **Christian, you must have stability in your life if you are to be kept from sin and error** (Psalm 1).

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. **Let us seek to be instruments of kindness and never to be cruel in thought, word or deed.**

Jacob prophesied of the coming of the Messiah (Shiloh) through the line of Judah whose name means ‘praise’ (8–10). He 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).

Dan, ‘*a serpent*’ (16–17) was not to be trusted (many of his descendants were treacherous; see Judges 18). Naphtali was a giver of ‘*goodly words*’ (21). We should follow his example. ‘*Let your speech always be with grace*’ (Colossians 4:6).

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). Let us strive to develop a mature and godly character. We must be stable in our lives and gracious in our speech. **If we would be fruitful like Joseph, we must persevere and trust in the Lord when we are afflicted. How are you doing?**

*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). They honoured their father’s wishes and following the mourning ritual they returned from Canaan to Egypt (1–14).

Joseph’s brothers were very fearful after their return to Egypt. They had not forgotten their wicked treatment of their young brother when he was a teenager. They expected him to avenge himself now that Jacob had died. They sent a message to Joseph in which they claimed that Jacob had left a plea that Joseph would forgive them. Joseph wept when he received this message. They could not accept that Joseph had really forgiven them for the evil they had done to him. He must have been hurt by their attitude, for he had already shown them his love and forgiveness (45:15–20).

Joseph was a great man. He 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.** Joseph comforted his brothers with kind words (21). Joseph’s experiences wonderfully illustrate the words of Scripture: *We know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to his purpose* (Romans 8:28). **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 prophesied that God would surely visit the Israelites and bring them back to the promised land. He also charged the Israelites on oath that they should take his bones with them for burial in Canaan when they returned to the promised land (22–26; cp. Exodus 13:19; Joshua 24:32).

*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 as your heavenly Father? **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 and he is holy and awesome in splendour and purity. We must never be familiar with God or sloppy in our worship like some who address God in prayer as ‘Dear Dad’.

We should also pray for the coming of the kingdom of God through the spread of the gospel and the return of Christ (10:2; Revelation 22:20). Do you pray for missionaries, for revival and for the salvation of sinners in your locality? Prayer also involves submission to the will of God. *Your will be done*. If we are rebelling against God’s will and providence in our own lives, we can hardly pray sincerely and effectively. Prayer involves worship, adoration and a desire for the glory of God through the increase and coming of his kingdom; it involves submission to God. 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 and think now of the second part of 'The Lord's Prayer'. Prayer not only expresses our worship but 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 is concerned for our needs but not for our greed (cp. Philippians 4:19).

Our sin puts us in debt to God. We cannot repay this debt, but the Lord Jesus has cleared it through his death at Calvary. We must pray, '*Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who is indebted to us*' (4). If we have truly repented of our sin, we will seek God's help to enable us to forgive those who have wronged us and who seek our forgiveness. The Word of God instructs us: '*And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ also forgave you*' (Ephesians 4:32). We sin every day in thought, word and deed, and by failing often to do what God requires of us. **Do you seek God's forgiveness every day or do you blissfully 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*' (4) recognises that God is sovereign in all our trials and temptations. It reminds us that we are vulnerable, that we must be on our guard and that we cannot defeat Satan in our own strength. We must not take this verse to 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).

*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 be persistent and expectant when we pray. Jesus told a parable of a man who had an unexpected visitor arrive at his home 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 the loan of three loaves but the friend was reluctant to disturb his sleeping children. The man persisted in knocking at the door and his friend eventually rose out of his bed and gave him as much as he needed (5–8). We may obtain from reluctant men because they are displeased with our persistence. We receive from a willing God who is pleased with persistent prayer. Zacharias and Elizabeth had learned this lesson (1:13) which the Lord Jesus repeats later in this Gospel (18:1).

Let us be encouraged that:

- When we pray, we come to more than a friendly neighbour. We come to our heavenly Father who loves us.
- It is never midnight with God. *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 a wonderful promise to those who persist in prayer. ‘*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).
- Sinful men know how to give good things to their children; how much more will our heavenly Father give us good gifts and the best of all gifts, the Holy Spirit (13; cp. Psalm 84:11; Romans 8:32). Every Christian has the gift of the Holy Spirit (cp. Acts 2:38; Galatians 4:6) but we need each day to ask him to enable us to live the Christian life and to direct us as we read God’s Word. **Are you persevering in prayer? Do you really expect God to answer you?**

*He who is not with me is against me*

After Jesus delivered and healed a man, who was demon-possessed and mute, the amazed crowds wondered whether he could be the promised Messiah (cp. Matthew 12:23) but others wanted to see miraculous signs, though they had already seen the dumb man speak (14,16). The Pharisees reacted to this by saying that Jesus cast out demons by the power of Satan (14–15; cp. Matthew 12:22–24). He responded by showing that such an accusation was foolish – Satan cannot cast out Satan; a kingdom or a house divided against itself cannot stand. The devil would be completely powerless if he were divided against himself. Jesus is stronger than Satan and has bound him to bring deliverance to the captives (17–22).

Jesus said, *‘If I cast out demons with the finger of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you’* (20). Some people are so hardened in their sin, that they will never be convinced that Jesus is the Holy Son of God who came into the world to save sinners. He went on to give 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 through the Holy Spirit. Jesus spoke of a man who had been delivered from an unclean spirit. The man had a new start and the ‘house’ of his life was in order but the unclean spirit then found seven other spirits more wicked than himself. They returned to enter the man, making his last state worse than ever. The Jews had been privileged to hear John the Baptist and Jesus but an interest in religion was not good enough. We may have religion which has led to some reformation in our lives, and yet know nothing of repentance from sin and faith in Christ. If we have that kind of religion, it will lead us to hell, however sincere we may be.

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

Though many in the crowd were hostile to the Lord Jesus, a woman lavished praise upon him by saying how blessed was the mother of such a Son. He corrected her by pointing out that the truly blessed are *those who hear the word of God, and keep it!* (27–28). Mary was indeed blessed (1:28) but those who worship her are in great error. You too are blessed if you 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 gainsay 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 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 modernist scholars, he accepted Jonah’s three day experience in the stomach of the great fish as historical fact). Jesus was here prophesying 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). 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 them 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.** *This is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil’* (John 3:19). There are none as blind and stubborn as those who refuse to see (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 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 paid minute attention to outward show and ritual while neglecting the justice and love of God (39–42). **Harsh, loveless religion does not honour the Lord.**
- They loved religious pomp. They were proud and wanted to be seen in the best seats in the synagogues and to be admired for their elaborate greetings (43). *God resists the proud* (James 4:6).
- They were like beautiful tombs which contained rotting corpses. They appeared to be good but were rotten inside.

Jesus also reproached the lawyers (religious law-experts) who were responsible for interpreting Scripture and were allies of the Pharisees. (45). He pronounced three ‘woes’ upon them:

- Because their man-made rules and regulations made religion a miserable and burdensome affair and they lacked compassion (46).
- Because though they honoured the very prophets whom their fathers had murdered, their evil deeds showed that they were no better than their fathers (47–51). They insisted that they would never have slain God’s servants had they lived at the time of their ancestors, but the murderous blood of their fathers flowed in their veins.
- 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 plain speaking of Jesus (53) and hypocrites today are no different. **Let us beware of hypocrisy in our own lives; it dishonours God and hinders the work of the gospel.**



*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 words to his disciples: *‘Beware of the leaven (‘yeast’) of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy’* (1). Just as yeast affects a whole lump of dough, hypocrisy affects how we live and our religion can degenerate into an outward show. We may hate hypocrisy but we can ourselves become hypocrites without realising it. We must beware of hypocrisy because 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 wicked men threaten to kill us, but Jesus says, *‘Do not be afraid’* (4). What is the answer to the fear of wicked men?

- We must fear God who can not only kill the body but is able 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. He feeds the birds but we are much more precious to him than the birds (6–7). We were bought at tremendous cost, even the precious blood of Christ (1 Corinthians 6:20; 1 Peter 1:18–19). Hardened sinners may say all manner of wicked things against the Lord Jesus and may even blaspheme the Holy Spirit, but we must not be afraid of their threats and accusations.
- The fear of man brings a snare (Proverbs 29:25) and may keep us from confessing Christ in the face of persecution (8). The Holy Spirit is with us and he will teach us what we should say when we appear before magistrates and authorities because of our Christian witness (8–12). **Do not be ashamed of our precious Saviour who loves us?**

*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)

*Beware of covetousness*

The Lord Jesus has warned us against hypocrisy (1) and now goes on to warn against the sin of covetousness. The meaning of the Greek noun is ‘the desire to have more’. Someone in the crowd did not have his mind on the words of Jesus. He was hurting within because of a family dispute over inheritance and he wanted Jesus to get involved. Rabbis were often approached to settle serious disputes and the man may have taken Jesus to be one of their number. The Saviour would have none of this and he warned, ‘*Beware of covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses*’ (15). 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 the 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 crops and his accumulated goods but he did not give one thought to God who is sovereign over our lives. He planned an early and comfortable retirement but God told him that he would die that very night. His wealth would be passed to others and he would spend an eternity separated from God. What a fool he was to make elaborate retirement plans and yet make 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 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.***

*Do not worry about your life*

Anxiety brings weariness and distress to many people and may make a child of God weak and prayerless. You may be free from the tyranny of seeking to heap up riches for yourself, but be over-anxious about providing for your basic needs. What is the answer to such worry? Remember that your heavenly Father knows exactly what you 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). Will not God who has given you a body provide for its needs (cp. Romans 8:32; Philippians 4:19)? Let us remember that God values us very highly and that he will always take care of us (24)

Worrying will not improve your circumstances (25) but will turn your eyes away from our heavenly Father. Are you beset by fear and care? Turn your care into prayer (Philippians 4:6–7) and trust your Father in heaven. He will never fail you. Look at the promise in verse 31: ‘*But seek the kingdom of God and all these things shall be added to you.*’ 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.** We do this by our fellowship with him in worship and prayer, by living for him and by making him known, and seeking the well-being of our fellow believers. Have you got your priorities right?

Anxiety is often caused through having our treasure in the wrong place. We are either storing up treasure on earth or in heaven. Treasure on earth is not secure; it may perish through decay or be snatched from us (33; cp. 1 Timothy 6:17.). The ‘health and wealth’ movement which teaches that it is every believer’s birthright to be wealthy is a denial of the Word of God; it does the very thing that Jesus warns against here.

*I love thy kingdom, Lord,  
The house of thine abode,  
The church our blest Redeemer saved  
With his own precious blood.*

(Timothy Dwight)

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

The Lord Jesus makes it clear that our priority is to seek the kingdom of God, rather than be 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 vulnerable flock of sheep. He had urged them to seek his kingdom, but now he states that he has given them his kingdom. This does not contradict the fact that we should seek the kingdom that has already been given to us. The kingdom is ours but we must pray, *'Your kingdom come'* (11:2) and 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 our needy Christian brothers and sisters. 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 becomes a hindrance to our walk with the Lord, we are better ridding ourselves of it and giving it to the needy (33).

Verse 33 does not mean that we must have no comforts and live on the breadline 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).

*Therefore, you also be ready*

The Lord Jesus now emphasises the importance of being prepared for his return by faithfulness in serving him and by righteous living (35–48). He gives us two parables, the first of them about servants who are watching for their master's return from a wedding. They have their waists girded to enable them to work. Servants were hindered in their work if they left their long robes hanging loose. They tucked them into their belts so that they had greater freedom of movement to work (35). Their lamps were kept burning so that they would be able to open the door immediately on their master's arrival.

Verse 37 has an amazing statement. The master will gird himself and serve his servants. Little wonder that they are blessed. This is a picture of the Lord Jesus who came to serve (22:27). We must follow his example and serve one another (John 13:15–17). We too must be ready to welcome him when he comes again and be involved in faithfully serving him. Jesus exhorts us, *'Therefore, you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect'* (40).

Jesus then told the parable of the faithful servant and the wicked servant (42–48). One had been appointed to rule his master's household but he had betrayed that trust. He knew his master's will, but he was cruel and careless because the master was delaying his return. Such a person is like the hypocrite who appears to be a true Christian and may even have a position in the church, but by his actions dishonours Christ. His portion is with unbelievers (46). **If we know God's will and do not obey it, the punishment will be more severe.**

Jesus asked, *'Who then is that faithful and wise steward?'* (42). He is the person who occupies himself with the work given to him by Christ. 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. If God has entrusted us with gifts, we have an awesome obligation to use them in his service. There will be rewards for the faithful but punishment for the wicked (43–44, 47–48).

*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 at Calvary and thus satisfy divine justice. 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 greatest 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 who 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 the urgent need to respond to his message. They would sooner settle matters with an earthly accuser than 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! It will be too late on the day of judgment.**

*Unless you repent you will all likewise perish*

When some disaster or tragedy occurs, many people question the love and the goodness of God. They ask, ‘If God is a God of love, why did he allow such-and-such to happen ...?’ 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.’ Some people still believe this, but our reading shows us how we should view 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 in the temple. This may have been a reprisal for some terrorist attack on the Romans. Jesus pointed out that these victims were not worse 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). Disasters and tragic happenings 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). The owner of the vineyard ordered the manager to cut down the fig tree following three fruitless years. The man pleaded for another year during which he would tend and fertilise the ground around it. If it then failed to bear fruit, it would be cut down. The parable refers to Israel which was being given a final opportunity to produce godly fruit. Judgment came after the message of Christ and his apostles was rejected (AD 70).

**When God 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, giving sinners further time to repent (cp. 2 Peter 3:4–9).

*Immediately she was made straight, and glorified God*

The religious leaders did not heed the call of Jesus to repentance but became more determined in their opposition to him. This is seen in the account of the miraculous healing of the woman (10–17). 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 (Jesus called her ‘*a daughter of Abraham*’ 16) and her sorry physical condition did not keep her from Sabbath worship. **She would shame many who profess the name of Christ and yet make all manner of excuses for their absence from 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. He 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).

Jesus responded 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 poor woman who faithfully attended his synagogue. Jesus said, ‘*Should not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has bound ... for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath?*’ (15–16). 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 him.

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?**



*What is the kingdom of God like?*

What answer would you give, if you were asked, ‘*What is the kingdom of God like?*’ The obvious answer would be that it is a kingdom over which God reigns, whose subjects own him as their King. The Lord Jesus twice posed the same question, ‘*What is the kingdom of God like?*’ He 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 the shade of its branches. Can it be that the kingdom of heaven is really growing like the mustard seed? From small beginnings with the ministry of the Lord Jesus and the apostles, the church has seen phenomenal growth. In spite of intense opposition throughout the ages, the kingdom of God is now established in the lives of people throughout the world. When China fell to the Communists in 1948, reliable estimates put the number of Christians in that great country at one million. It is now estimated that there are well in excess of 50 million Christians in that land. Yes, the church is rapidly growing in many parts of the world, even if it appears to be in decline in certain countries. Let us be encouraged! \*

- The parable of the leaven (20–21) shows ‘the progress of the gospel in the heart of a believer’ (Ryle). 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 we have on our heart and 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. **Is this apparent in your life?**

\* See CHINA’S CHRISTIAN MILLIONS by Tony Lambert, published by Monarch Books, 1999. Lambert was formerly a British diplomat in Beijing and is a thoroughly reliable witness

*Lord, are there few who are saved?*

Many Jews believed that all their race would be saved because they were ‘Abraham’s children’ (cp. John 8:30–42). The teaching of Jesus left them in no doubt, however, that their Jewish pedigree was not enough. They had to repent of their sin and trust in Jesus as the holy Son of God; they had to deny themselves daily as they followed him. Someone asked Jesus, ‘*Lord, are there few who are saved?*’ (23). Jesus did not say, ‘Yes’ or ‘No’ but challenged the man about his own soul, 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 are in a fierce struggle against 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.

The Lord Jesus warned that the door of salvation would not remain open for ever. He had taught the people and they had eaten with him (26; eg. when he was a guest in the household of a Pharisee, when he fed the multitudes) but they did not own him as their Lord. They would say, ‘*Lord, Lord, open for us*’ on the judgment day, but it would be too late (25–27). Many believe that some connection with Jesus will bring them salvation. They rely on their baptism, on church attendance, saying prayers, or having Christians in their family, but they are not relying on Jesus and they will be lost. The day of judgment will be a day of weeping and Jesus made it quite clear that many Jews would be lost and many Gentiles 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.**

*But you were not willing*

Some Pharisees urged Jesus to get out of Herod's territory (Galilee and Perea) because Herod 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 he worked to God's timetable and that his ministry would continue until he was *perfected* – a reference to his death for sinners (32–33; cp. Hebrews 2:10).

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 to come to the Lord, but they had refused God's gracious offers of mercy. The Lord Jesus grieved and lamented over Jerusalem. The intense emotion and the pathos of his grief is shown in his repetition of the word '*Jerusalem*' (cp. David's lament over Absalom, 2 Samuel 18:33. '*O my son Absalom – my son, my son Absalom*'). The Lord would have often gathered Jerusalem to himself, to have them for himself and to lovingly protect them, but they were not willing. Jerusalem and its temple was to be destroyed and left desolate (in AD 70). Jesus would not make any public appearances to the Jews after his death and resurrection until his second coming when *every eye will see him* (Revelation 1:7). People will then say, '*Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD!*'

The words of Jesus, '*But you were not willing*' will haunt many a person who has rejected him. He is very patient and very kind, but will not leave open his door of mercy and opportunity for ever. Is your heart right with God? Have you responded to Christ's invitation to turn from your sin and to follow him? **If you are not willing to submit to Jesus as your Lord and Saviour now, do not be surprised when he rejects you on the day of judgment.**

*Whoever exalts himself will be abased*

The Lord Jesus was invited to take a Sabbath meal at the home of a leading Pharisee; other guests included Pharisees and experts in religious law. A man who had dropsy was also there, perhaps deliberately brought along 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 healed the man and then asked them another question regarding their own observance of the Sabbath but they did not answer him (5–6).

Jesus noticed how guests at the meal sought the most prominent seats. 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 his host about his 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 to their feasts, such as the poor and needy. Such deeds of kindness are seen and rewarded by God on the day of resurrection (12–14). **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?

*Give me a faithful heart,  
Likeness to thee,  
That each departing day  
Henceforth may see  
Some work of love begun,  
Some deed of kindness done,  
Some wanderer sought and won,  
Something for thee.* (Sylvanus O. Phelps)

*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, of a certain man who *gave a great supper and invited many* (15–21). Invitations had been sent out and when the supper was ready, those invited were summoned to the feast. They then began to make their 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 for his farm. Another man had married a wife and said, '*I cannot come.*' They all claimed to be too busy but their excuses were weak. Many people still claim to be too busy to follow Christ.

The master of the house was angry when he heard these pathetic excuses and he told his servant to go out and bring in the poor, the maimed, the lame and the blind. There was still room 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 here indicating that his gospel would go to Gentile as well as Jew and 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. Have you taken this solemn lesson to heart? If you are not a Christian, have you been saying, '*I cannot come,*' when you have been invited to follow Christ? **One day, there will be no more invitations – it will be too late. The door of God's kingdom will be shut in your face for ever!**

*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 urged 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 discipleship demands sacrifice. Many evangelical churches have succumbed to an 'easy Christianity' whose practices have little in common with the commitment that Christ demands.

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). **Does the Lord Jesus have first place in your life? Have you counted the cost of following him? Are you prepared to follow him, whatever that cost?**

*This man receives sinners*

This is one of the best known chapters in 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 of the murmuring of the Pharisees and scribes (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 to be one of the twelve disciples (5:27–32). The Pharisees and scribes had no message of hope for these people. They considered them to be beyond repentance or forgiveness.

We are all sinners and our condition without God is described as being *lost* (6, 9, 32). What a comfort it is 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 formed part of a necklace with the other nine. The Lord Jesus seeks sinners, receives sinners and he died to save sinners (Isaiah 53:6; John 10:11,15–18). This 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 meetings? 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. How different they were from the angels! Heaven is a place of indescribable joy but that joy is even greater whenever a sinner repents. There is *joy in heaven over one sinner who repents* (7) and *joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents* (10). **The Lord delights in mercy (Micah 7:18). He loves to save sinners. That should encourage us in our prayers and in our evangelism.**

*And no one gave him anything*

The parable of the lost son has much to teach us concerning the misery which sin brings to a person's life, of the nature of true repentance, of the grace and love of God (11–32). The younger brother was entitled to a third of his father's estate under Jewish law (Deuteronomy 21:17). Property was normally divided after the father's death, but the younger son demanded his share of the inheritance in advance.

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 the family. The same view of honour is held among orthodox Jews. 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 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 wild living (11–13).

The land was struck by famine and the desperate young man went to serve a farmer who gave him the job of feeding swine, unclean animals for a Jew. Even worse, he had to feed himself on pig's food *and no one gave him anything* (16). No one took pity on him. The young man found himself destitute and friendless and was forced to look after pigs in order to survive. This would have been most repugnant for a Jew as pigs were 'unclean' according to the law (Deuteronomy 14:8). 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).