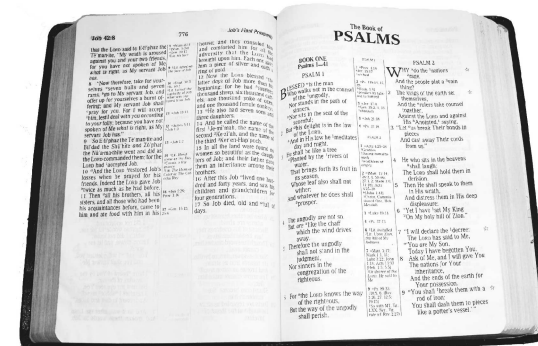


PILGRIM BIBLE NOTES

God's holy Word simply explained and applied



March 2014

Luke chapters 17 to 24

These Bible notes were substantially revised in August 2016 and there is an additional reading and set of notes (undated) at the end of Luke chapter 23.

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And they worshipped him

The Lord Jesus appeared to the apostles and to others and taught them over a period of forty days before he ascended into heaven (cp. Acts 1:3; 1 Corinthians 15:3–7). He then led the disciples out to Bethany which is on the eastern slopes of the Mount of Olives. As he lifted up his hands and blessed them, he ascended into heaven (50–51; see Acts 1:9–11). What a wonderful memory those disciples had of their Master when he left them! He was in the act of blessing them and they would continue to know countless blessings heaped upon them from heaven. The same is true of every believer. We have an abundance of spiritual blessings and the smile of God upon our lives (cp. Ephesians 1:3).

The disciples no longer had any doubts about the resurrection of their beloved Master. They were quite clear in their understanding that Jesus is God. *And they worshipped him* (52). It would be blasphemous to worship Jesus if he were not God. The Gospel of Luke begins with a description of the appearance of the angel Gabriel to Zacharias, in the temple (1:5–23). It ends with the disciples continually in the temple, praising and blessing God. Their sorrow had given way to *great joy* (52–53).

The Lord Jesus now sits *at the right hand of the Majesty on high*. From that exalted position *he ever lives to make intercession* for all who come to God through him (Hebrews 1:3; 7:25). One day he will return as King in great power and glory when everyone shall see him and when every believer will be taken to be with him for ever (Matthew 25:31; 1 Thessalonians 4:14–17; 2 Thessalonians 1:7–10; Revelation 1:7). We serve a risen, ascended Saviour. **Let us persevere in our work for the Lord, whatever the disappointments and obstacles. Our labour is not in vain in the Lord (1 Corinthians 15:57–58).**

Remember Lot's wife

The Jews were expecting the Messiah to establish an earthly kingdom and the Pharisees asked Jesus when it would come. He told them that the kingdom of God does not come with observation (eg. national proclamation, great military victories, etc.) but it was already among them. It is a spiritual and not a political kingdom. They were looking for a kingdom but failed to recognise that the King was standing among them (20–21). The Lord Jesus later told his disciples that there would be troubled times when they would long for his coming. They were not to follow any who proclaimed that he had come (22–23). Church history has many accounts of false christs and heretical teachers who prophesied that the end of the world was at hand, but all their prophecies failed. Jesus warned the disciples that he would be rejected by the people of their generation and that he would suffer (25).

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

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

Men always ought to pray and not lose heart

The two parables in verses 1 to 14 teach us two vital lessons concerning prayer. The Lord Jesus tells the parable of the persistent widow to encourage us to persevere in prayer. He said, ‘*Men always ought to pray and not lose heart*’ (1). This encouragement follows the words of Jesus concerning his second coming and the long interval until that time (17:22). In troubled or perplexing times we may soon lose heart and give up praying through discouragement.

A widow went to seek help from a godless judge who was not too concerned to administer justice. The man refused to be bothered with the widow’s plea but she persisted in coming to him and he eventually saw that justice was done for her. If an unjust judge was moved to act on behalf of a persistent widow how much more will God hear and avenge his own suffering people (*his own elect*). God will never fail those whom he has chosen and *loved ... with an everlasting love* (Jeremiah 31:3).

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

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

It was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead

After the risen Lord had revealed himself to the two at Emmaus, they were so excited that they immediately returned to Jerusalem to share their good news. They found a rejoicing company who told them that the Lord had appeared to Simon Peter. They told the disciples of their encounter with Jesus and how they had recognised him in the breaking of bread (31–35). While they were speaking, Jesus appeared and stood among them. He greeted them with the words, ‘*Peace to you*’ (36). He said this to those who had forsaken him three days earlier when he was arrested, one of them denying him. No words of condemnation fell from his lips. How gracious and how kind is our blessed Lord!

They were terrified, thinking that they had seen a ghost. The risen Lord Jesus asked them why they were troubled and doubting. He reminded them that a spirit does not have flesh and bones and he invited them to touch him and to feel him; he further proved his bodily resurrection by eating with them (37–43). Jesus then reminded them of the things that he had taught them when he was still with them. He opened their understanding to comprehend all that the Old Testament Scriptures taught concerning himself (44–45).

He then told them that *it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name to all nations* (46–47). **It is just as important to preach the necessity of repentance as it is to preach the death and resurrection of Christ for sinners, yet it is a neglected teaching among many professing Christians.** Without repentance there can be no remission of sins, no salvation. The apostles were witnesses of Christ’s resurrection, but before they spread the good news they were to wait in Jerusalem to receive the promise of the Father when they would be *endued with power from on high* (48–49).

O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe

Two downcast followers of Jesus were travelling from Jerusalem to Emmaus on the day that he rose from the dead. As they discussed the events of the past few days, they were joined by the risen Lord but were restrained from recognising him. He asked them what they were talking about and why they were so sad. One of them, Cleopas, expressed surprise that he had not heard how Jesus of Nazareth had been condemned by the chief priests and rulers and had been crucified. They had entertained high hopes that he would have redeemed Israel. Like many Jews they had been mistaken in looking for the Christ (the Messiah) to rule over a visible and political kingdom. They had not been convinced by the report of the women that Jesus had risen from the dead (13–24).

Jesus said to them, ‘*O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken!*’ He then opened up the Scriptures to prove that the Messiah had to suffer and to die before entering his glory (25–27). The Old Testament is full of references to Christ for those who have eyes to see. As they approached Emmaus, they persuaded the stranger to stay with them. When he prayed before the meal, their eyes were opened to recognise Jesus and he vanished from their sight. They then remembered how their hearts had burned within them when he opened the Scriptures to them (28–32).

Many Christians have had their faith shaken through listening to the useless ideas and theories of those who scorn the Bible. They have become slow of heart to believe in all that the Bible teaches. Does this describe you? Has your Bible been closed except for a few rushed moments each day? Have you lost the delight of heartfelt praise and worship? Has prayer become a cold and barren exercise, rather than a believing and joyful privilege when you bring your requests to God? Is it any wonder that your mind is in turmoil like the two on the Emmaus road? Come now to your risen Saviour. Confess your sin and unbelief, and ask him to strengthen your faith. **He will hear you and restore to you the joy of your salvation.**

God be merciful to me a sinner!

We must not only persevere in prayer but also come to God with humility. The parable that we have just read contrasts the prayers of a Pharisee and a tax collector. The proud Pharisees trusted in their own self-righteousness to bring them salvation and they despised others (9). Jesus directed this parable to all who have such a sinful attitude.

The Pharisee in the parable was not really praying to God. He prayed ‘*with himself*’ (11). He rehearsed his own good works as he smugly thanked God that he was not like other men or even as the tax collector (10–12). His ‘prayer’ did not contain any requests because he felt no personal need of God. J.C. Ryle observes, ‘We are all naturally self-righteous. It is the family disease of all the children of Adam. From the highest to the lowest we think more highly of ourselves than we ought to do. We secretly flatter ourselves that we are not so bad as some, and that we have something to recommend us to the favour of God. “Most men will proclaim every one his own goodness” (Proverbs 20:6).’ – EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS ON LUKE, volume 2, page 253.

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

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

He became very sorrowful

Some parents brought their children to be blessed by Jesus but the disciples wanted to send them away (15–17). We must never despise children or work among the young. Many Christians come to Christ in their youth and we must always be aware of the children in our church. The old saying, ‘Children should be seen, but not heard’ is not to be practised among God’s people. Children’s work is most important. Sunday School and similar mid-week activities provide an opportunity to bring the gospel to the young. If you are serving Christ in this way, persevere. There is great joy, blessing and reward in such work.

The young man who came to Jesus was rich and esteemed in religious circles; he was a ruler (probably an official in charge of the local synagogue, 18). He called Jesus ‘good’ which was a confession that Jesus is God (18–19). His wealth and religion did not meet his deepest needs. Why was this? He wanted eternal life but he also wanted to hold on to his possessions. Jesus reminded him of the fifth, sixth, seventh and eighth commandments and the man claimed that he had kept all these from his youth (20–21). Jesus told him to sell all that he had give it to the poor and follow him and he would have treasure in heaven (22). His wealth was his ‘god’ and no one can serve two masters. We cannot serve God and riches (16:13). *He became very sorrowful* (23) because he was not willing to face up to the cost of following the Lord Jesus. This involves getting rid of anything that has become a ‘god’ in our lives.

Becoming a Christian is more than ‘making a decision for Christ’. It means taking up the cross (9:23–25). The cross is a symbol of self-denial. We must die to the old selfish life if we want to be disciples of Jesus. We must embrace his lordship. **If Jesus is not Lord of all, he is not Lord at all.** Many have turned away from the Christian faith disillusioned because they find the cost of following Jesus too great. Salvation is free but we must forsake our sin and be prepared to deny ourselves when we come to Christ. There is a price to pay for treasure in heaven, but what blessing is enjoyed by all who truly follow Christ!

Their words seemed to them like idle tales

The women who followed the Lord Jesus were faithful to the very end. They observed the burial of Jesus before going away to prepare spices and oils with which to anoint his body (23:49,55–56). The Sabbath ran from sunset on Friday to sunset on Saturday and the women waited until early Sunday morning before returning to the tomb. They found that the stone had been rolled away from the entrance of the tomb and that the body of Jesus was missing (1–3).

The perplexed women had a further surprise as two angels appeared to them. They were filled with fear and bowed their faces to the earth. The angels asked them, ‘*Why do you seek the living among the dead?*’ They told the women that Jesus had risen and reminded them of his words when he was in Galilee – that he would *be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again* (4–7; cp. 18:31–34). They then remembered his words and hurried to tell the good news to the eleven disciples; *and their words seemed to them like idle tales, and they did not believe them* (8–11). Peter rushed to the tomb to check out the women’s story and found the cloths that had been wrapped around the body of Jesus. He went away marvelling at what had happened (12).

Many people still consider the death and resurrection of Christ to be ‘*idle tales*’ but those of us whom God has graciously saved know differently. The resurrection of Jesus is good news. Christ’s resurrection declares him *to be the Son of God with power* (Romans 1:4). Death could not hold him (Acts 2:24). He triumphed over the grave and his resurrection is a guarantee that all who belong to him will be raised at his coming to have new bodies which will be immune from weakness, pain, ageing and suffering (John 14:19; 1 Corinthians 15:20–28; Philippians 3:20–21; 1 John 3:1–3). **Let us persevere in proclaiming the wonderful gospel news to those around us, even though some will dismiss it as ‘*idle tales*’.**

A man named Joseph

Joseph of Arimathea, a member of the council (Sanhedrin), had been a secret believer (John 19:38). Mark informs us that he was *a prominent council member ... coming and taking courage, went into Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus*. Pilate would have recognised Joseph as a member of the Jewish Sanhedrin. He sent for the centurion to confirm that Jesus was dead before granting Joseph's request (Mark 15:42–45). William Hendriksen points out that according to Roman law, those condemned to death lost the right to be buried (COMMENTARY ON THE GOSPEL OF LUKE, page 1043). God's hand was in all this for under normal circumstances Pilate would not have granted Joseph's request. Joseph's action meant that Jesus had an honourable burial and that Scripture was fulfilled (Isaiah 53:9; Acts 13:35–37).

Joseph was aided by Nicodemus. They may have had servants to help them as they extracted the nails that bound the corpse of Jesus to the cross and lifted him down. They acted speedily, and would have washed the body and then bound it with strips of linen and embalmed it with spices (see John 19:38–42). It would seem that Joseph and Nicodemus had begun their preparations when Jesus was condemned to death. Joseph laid Jesus in his own family tomb, in a garden at Calvary (50–53; cp. Matthew 27:60; John 19:41–42). The women who had followed Jesus, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Salome (Mark 16:1) went into the tomb to see how the body of Jesus was laid (55). When they entered the tomb after the resurrection they would see the grave clothes lying in place but no body (24:3).

Joseph paid a price for his confession of Jesus. He knew that he would be cast out of the synagogue and from the council once his secret was out (cp. John 12:42). We hear no more of him after the Gospels; both he and Nicodemus would have been content to serve the Lord without seeking prominence in the infant church. **Are you a secret disciple?** Why are you fearful? The Lord can make the most timid person bold. If you confess Christ, you will be greatly blessed and strengthened.

The things which are impossible with men are possible with God

The disciples were surprised at the comments of the Lord as he warned that riches are a great hindrance to any who want to go to heaven (24–25). Jesus said that *it is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God*. Some commentators have explained that the eye of a needle was a very narrow and low gate into the city through which a camel had to struggle on its knees if it were to gain entry. This theory was first propounded in the 11th century AD and it is without foundation. The Lord Jesus used this illustration to demonstrate that the work of salvation in the life of a sinner is miraculous in its nature.

The shocked disciples asked, *'Who then can be saved?'* Jesus reassured them with a glorious truth: *'The things which are impossible with men are possible with God'* (26–27). No one is too hard for the Lord to save! Jesus very soon demonstrated this truth to his disciples when he saved Zacchaeus, who was very rich (19:1–10). We must never lose heart when we encounter indifference to the gospel. The Lord is able to melt the hardest of hearts. He is able to save the vilest sinner and he can easily break the chains of sin which enslave people! We may think, 'Impossible,' but Scripture says, *'For with God nothing will be impossible'* (1:37). **Let us persevere in prayer and in our evangelism. The Lord has many a surprise for those who wait upon him.**

Peter reminded Jesus that he and the other disciples had left all to follow him. Jesus assured him that God is no man's debtor; those who sacrificially follow him will not only receive everlasting life in the world to come, but will be richly blessed in this life (28–30). Jesus again spoke of the suffering and death that awaited him in Jerusalem and of his resurrection the third day. The disciples were unable to understand or to take in his words, however (31–34). When we ponder the great sacrifice of Jesus to save us from our sin, is it too much for him to expect us to serve him, whatever the cost?

What do you want me to do for you?

The blind beggar (Bartimaeus; Mark 10:46) was sitting at the roadside near to Jericho. He heard the noise of the multitude following Jesus and asked what was happening. Though he was blind, he saw what the scribes and the Pharisees failed to see – that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah promised in the Old Testament. When he addressed Jesus as ‘*Son of David*’ (37–38), he was acknowledging him as the Messiah (or ‘*the Christ*’ – God’s anointed One; cp. 20:41–44).

The blind beggar had seen none of Christ’s mighty miracles, but he had strong faith in the greatness, the power, and the willingness of the Saviour to heal him. He also had a persistent faith which did not give up when faced with discouragement. He was warned to be quiet but *he cried out all the more* (39). He was determined to make the Lord Jesus aware of his need. This is the pattern for us when we pray. We should always come to the Lord, trusting in his willingness and in his power to answer our prayers. The Lord knows our needs (Matthew 6:32) but he expects us to bring those needs to him in prayer.

Despite all the hustle and bustle of the crowd, *Jesus stood still* and called Bartimaeus to himself (40). The Lord Jesus was travelling to Jerusalem to suffer and to die on the cross, but he still took time to speak to this needy man. He asked him, ‘*What do you want me to do for you?*’ The beggar did not ask for wealth so that he could leave off begging. His greater need was for sight and he asked, ‘*Lord, that I may receive my sight*’ (41). The Lord Jesus gladly granted his request. He said, ‘*Receive your sight; your faith has saved you.*’ He was healed immediately and he followed Jesus, glorifying God (42–43).

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

Father, into your hands I commit my spirit

A supernatural darkness lasting three hours came down at the sixth hour (12 noon). Jesus then commended himself into the hands of God the Father saying, ‘*Father, into your hands I commit my spirit*’ (44–46). We must remember that he is divine as well as human. He chose the moment of his departure from this life (John 10:17,18). He willingly died so that those who trust in him would have eternal life (John 3:16).

When the Lord Jesus died, the curtain which separated the Holy Place from the Holy of holies in the temple (Exodus 26:31–33; cp. Hebrews 9:3) was torn in two (45). Only the high priest was permitted to go through the veil into the Holy of holies, when he made atonement for the sin of the people. Jesus died to allow access to God for all who trust in him and come to the Father through him (John 14:6; Ephesians 2:18; Hebrews 10:19–22).

The Roman centurion was profoundly affected by the darkness and the death of Christ. He glorified God, confessing the righteousness of Jesus who had been condemned as a criminal. He exclaimed, ‘*Certainly this was a righteous Man!*’ (47). The watching crowd beat their breasts (a sign of grief). J.C. Ryle comments, ‘The Roman officer felt convinced that he had been superintending an unrighteous action, and crucifying an innocent person. The gazing crowd were pricked to the heart by a sense of having aided, countenanced, and abetted a grievous wrong. Both Jew and Gentile left Calvary that evening heavy-hearted, self-condemned, and ill at ease’ (EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS ON LUKE, volume 2, page 481).

*Here is love, vast as the ocean,
Lovingkindness as the flood,
When the Prince of life, our ransom,
Shed for us his precious blood.
Who his love will not remember?
Who can cease to sing his praise?
He can never be forgotten
Throughout heaven’s eternal days.* (William Rees)

He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Christ

The chief priests, scribes and Pharisees hated Jesus because he claimed to be the promised Messiah ('the Christ') and the Son of God. To the Jews this was a terrible form of blasphemy (cp. Matthew 26:63–65; John 5:18) and it would have been were not Jesus the Son of God. Muslims also hate and vigorously oppose the truth that Jesus is the holy Son of God.

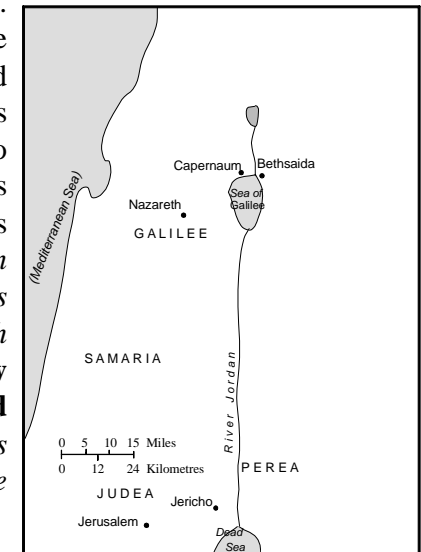
The Lord Jesus was now hanging from the cross and his enemies gloated over the apparent helplessness of the one who said that he was the Son of God and the Messiah King. They taunted him, saying, '*He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Christ, the chosen of God*' (35; cp Matthew 27:40–43). Those words had a far deeper significance than his enemies realised. He could have saved himself and come down from the cross, but he would not! It was not the nails that bound him to the cross, but his great love for sinners like you and me. Had Jesus chosen to come down from the cross and to destroy his enemies, we would have no way of being saved from our sins. He obeyed the will of the Father (Philippians 2:8; Acts 2:23) to fulfil his plan to save sinners. *By one Man's obedience many will be made righteous* (Romans 5:19). **Are you having problems with obedience to God? Meditate upon Christ's great love and obedience to save us. If you love him, surely you will want to obey him.**

One of the murderers crucified with Jesus challenged him to save himself and them also if he were truly the Christ. The other criminal rebuked him, becoming aware of the fear of God, of his own guilt, and of the power of Jesus to save him (39–42). He was wonderfully saved even as he hung dying on a cross. He may have never prayed in his life, but his simple prayer was all that was needed: '*Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom.*' Jesus assured him that he would be with him in heaven that very day (43; '*paradise*' = 'heaven; cp. 2 Corinthians 12:2–4). **No one is beyond the reach of the grace of God, even when they are dying!**

The Son of man has come to seek and to save

The Lord Jesus went through Jericho on his way to Jerusalem (1). Jericho was famous for its fragrant balm derived from the balsam tree and was an important trading centre which yielded high taxes for the Roman government. Zacchaeus held the influential post as chief tax collector for that region. His name means 'righteous' or 'pure' but he was a scoundrel who had lined his pockets to become rich through fraud (2,7–8). He may have heard that Jesus received tax collectors (who were hated and despised by most people; 15:1–2). He was curious to see Jesus but was unable to see him above the crowd because he was small. He was so determined however, that he climbed up into a sycamore tree (3–4; this fruit-bearing evergreen tree is not to be confused with the British or American sycamore trees; cp. Amos 7:14).

The Lord Jesus knew all about Zacchaeus. You can imagine his surprise when Jesus called him by name and told him to be quick and to come down from the tree because he wished to stay at his house. The crowd murmured against Jesus for going into the house of such a sinner whom they considered to be far from God. Zacchaeus was transformed as he came to faith in Christ and promised to give away half of his possessions to the poor and to restore fourfold to those he had defrauded (8). Jesus said that salvation had come to his house and that Zacchaeus was '*a son of Abraham; for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost*' (9–10). **The disciples saw the words of Jesus demonstrated before their very eyes – 'The things which are impossible with men are possible with God'** (18:26–27).



Do business till I come

Some thought that Jesus was going to Jerusalem to take power and to establish his kingdom but he told them a parable which showed such an idea to be false (11). Verse 14 contains the very words that would be uttered by the mob in Jerusalem before the crucifixion. This parable is not to be confused with the parable of the talents, where there are only three servants, each entrusted with a huge amount (Matthew 25:14–30).

A certain nobleman went to a far country to receive a kingdom for himself (new kings in Palestine had to go to Rome to have their claim to the throne confirmed). He gave a *mina* to each of ten servants and told them, ‘*Do business till I come*’ (12–13). A ‘*mina*’ was the equivalent of one hundred days’ wages for a labourer. There are three groups of people in this parable: the faithful servants of the king; an unfaithful servant and the citizens of the country, who were at the same time rejecting the rule of the new king. When he returned, he called his servants to account. He commended those who had increased their money by trading but condemned the servant who hid his money (15–24).

The nobleman represents the Lord Jesus Christ who has now ascended to heaven and will come again to receive his kingdom. His servants are professing Christians who are charged to do business (serve the Lord) in a hostile environment. When Jesus returns, there will be rewards for faithful service, but those who have had only an empty profession and have not served the Lord will be punished. The rebel citizens represent those who reject Christ. They will be banished from his presence to hell. **We have a solemn responsibility to do business until Jesus comes again, even though we face many difficulties.** We will have to give an account of our stewardship of the gifts that God has given to us. Let us be determined to serve him with all our might. If you are among those who continue to reject Christ and refuse to have him reign over you, do not be surprised when he rejects you on the day of judgment and refuses you admission to his kingdom.

Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do

The Roman soldiers inflicted terrible injuries on the Lord Jesus (see Matthew 27:27–31; Mark 15:16–20). He was then led out of Jerusalem, carrying his cross, but he was soon unable to carry it further owing to his injuries and sheer exhaustion. Simon, from Cyrene (north coast of Africa, Libya), was compelled to bear the cross of Jesus (26). This was possibly a great turning point in his life. He was the father of Alexander and Rufus, who appear to have been Christians well known to the first readers of Mark’s Gospel (Mark 15:21).

The weeping women (‘*Daughters of Jerusalem*’) were not the women who had faithfully followed Jesus (eg. Mary Magdalene). They were inhabitants of Jerusalem who had perhaps heard him teaching that very week and who recognised that he was the victim of a terrible miscarriage of justice. Jesus turned to them and said that they should be weeping for themselves and for their children. Jerusalem was to be destroyed and there would be great terror and slaughter (27–30). This prophecy was fulfilled forty years later when the Roman army surrounded Jerusalem following Jewish rebellion against their rule. The siege brought famine, starvation and terrible suffering and then the slaughter of a million people. Verse 31 was a common proverb which may have meant, ‘If men (in this case, the Romans) do this to someone who is innocent, what will they do to those who are guilty?’

They crucified the Lord Jesus with two criminals, Jesus hanging between them. How great is our Saviour! He was full of pity for the weeping women and he prayed for those who condemned and crucified him, and for those who mocked him. ‘*Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do*’ (34). This wonderful prayer was soon answered with the repentance of the dying robber, and the many conversions that were to follow on the day of Pentecost and in the months to follow (Acts 2:41; 6:7). **Do you pray for those who have wronged you (Matthew 5:44–45)? Do you really want them to repent of their sin and to be reconciled to you and to God?**

But he delivered Jesus to their will

After Jesus was sent back to Pilate, the governor summoned the chief priests, the leaders and the people to announce his verdict on Jesus. He again told them that he could find no fault in him and that Herod had also found nothing in him worthy of death. There was a custom of releasing a prisoner at the feast and Pilate, who had little time for the Jews, sought to embarrass them by making Barabbas the alternative choice to Jesus. He said that he would have Jesus chastened (beaten) and then released (13–16).

Barabbas was guilty of insurrection and murder (19) and Pilate expected the crowd to ask for the release of Jesus but his plan failed. The wicked chief priests and elders were so determined to have our Saviour killed that they persuaded the crowd to press for the release of the murderer (Matthew 27:20). *They denied the Holy One and the Just*, and asked for the release of a murderer (Acts 3:14). *But he delivered Jesus to their will* (25).

The guilty man was set free and Christ the innocent was condemned. This points us to what the Lord Jesus has accomplished for guilty sinners. *For he* (God the Father) *made him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in him* (2 Corinthians 5:21). We do not understand the gospel of Christ if we do not realise that the sin of every Christian has been put to Christ's account and that he, the holy one, was punished for their sins. The just one died for the unjust (1 Peter 3:18). Our sin is imputed to him (put to his account). What a wonderful blessing that our sins no longer count against us if we belong to Christ (cp. Psalm 32:1–2). The righteousness of Christ is also imputed to every believer (Romans 4:4–6, 22–25). As far as God is concerned, we are accepted as righteous. Let us be determined always to lead a righteous life!

**Amazing grace! Wonderful Saviour! Do you love the Lord Jesus?
Have you come to him for the forgiveness of your sins?**

Because you did not know the time of your visitation

When Jesus reached the Mount of Olives just outside Jerusalem, he sent two of the disciples to bring him a colt. The Lord Jesus knows all things and the disciples found the colt just as he had described. The owners of the colt may have been followers of Jesus, for they were willing to allow the two disciples to take away the animal when they said, *'The Lord has need of him'* (28–34). Do you respond as willingly as they did to meet needs in God's work? – *'There's a work for Jesus none but you can do'* (Elsie D. Yale).

A multitude of disciples proclaimed Jesus as the messianic King as he rode towards Jerusalem, quoting Psalm 118:26. The Pharisees urged Jesus to rebuke these disciples for their enthusiastic acclaim of him, but he replied that if they were silent, the stones would cry out (37–40). Jesus entered Jerusalem to public acclaim, but many who welcomed him would have been among those crying out for his death a few days later. How different it will be when the Lord Jesus comes again. There will then be no opposition to his rule but every knee will bow before him and acknowledge him as Lord (Philippians 2:11).

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

A den of thieves

The Jews had become so corrupt in their religion that the temple precincts were more like a market-place than a place of worship. Foreign money was not accepted in the temple, and temple tax (Exodus 30:13) had to be paid in Jewish coinage. Money-changers charged exorbitant rates and sacrificial animals were sold at sky-high prices. These people would have paid much money to the religious authorities for permission to operate within the temple precincts. Religion had become a racket! A place of religious worship had become a *den of thieves* (46).

The furious religious leaders sought to destroy Jesus but were unable to do so because of his popularity among the people (47–48). Judgment must *begin at the house of God* (1 Peter 4:17). We long for and pray for revival, but when the Holy Spirit comes in power, shallow religion is exposed and cleared out. This is painful. **Let us be sure that our Christianity is living and real.**

The people were very attentive to the words of Jesus as he taught them and preached the gospel in the temple (1; cp. 19:48). The chief priests and elders confronted Jesus and asked him who had given him the authority to do the things that he was doing (eg. cleansing the temple). He responded by asking them a question concerning the ministry of John the Baptist who had proclaimed him as the Messiah – was the baptism of John *from heaven or from men?* (4).

They knew that if they acknowledged that John's ministry was from God, Jesus would ask them why they had refused to believe him. If they denied the validity of John's ministry they would incur the wrath of the people who acknowledged John as a prophet. They refused to answer the question of Jesus and so he refused to answer their question (5–8). Men still reject the authority of Christ, but we must pray that they will come to faith in him and submit to his lordship.

But he answered him nothing

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

When Pilate asked Jesus if he were the King of the Jews, he agreed that he was a king but he went on to explain that his kingdom is not of this world; it is a spiritual kingdom (3; cp. John 18:33–38). Pilate found in favour of Jesus, but the chief priests and the crowd insisted that he was guilty (4–5). When he discovered that Jesus was from Galilee, Pilate decided to pass the case over to Herod Antipas, ruler of Galilee, who was visiting Jerusalem.

Wicked Herod had heard much about Jesus and was very glad for this opportunity to see him. He wanted to see a miracle performed and he bombarded Jesus with questions *but he answered him nothing*. Jesus had nothing to say to the murderer of John the Baptist (6–9). Herod had been given ample opportunity to repent and to obey God (Mark 6:20) but it was now too late. **It is not enough to be interested in Jesus or curious about him. We must understand that we are sinners who need to be forgiven and reconciled to God. We must follow Christ, trust in him and obey him.** God who is holy will not satisfy the whims of proud men, but he is full of grace to those who truly seek him.

The chief priests and scribes were vehement in accusing Jesus and a frustrated Herod joined his soldiers in mocking Jesus. We are not told why Herod and Pilate had been hostile to each other, but they were now reconciled. They were united in their opposition to Christ. They became friends but they were both the enemies of God (10–12).

Are you then the Son of God?

Luke does not report the preliminary trial of Jesus which took place at night. The Sanhedrin then decided that Jesus should be put to death (see Matthew 26:57–66; Mark 14:53–64). After this trial Jesus was mocked, beaten and spat upon by those guarding him (63; cp. Matthew 26:67). They blindfolded him and taunted him to prophesy which of them had struck him and repeatedly blasphemed him (64–65). Why did the Lord Jesus submit to such insults when he could have summoned thousands of angels to destroy his enemies (cp. Matthew 26:53)? Remember, this was part of the suffering which he endured to save us from our sins. How marvellous his love for guilty sinners like us!

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

The trial at night had no legal standing and the council (Sanhedrin) assembled to condemn Jesus as soon as it was day. They asked him to say if he were the Christ (Messiah); if he agreed that he was, they could accuse him before the Roman authorities of setting himself up as a rival to Caesar. He replied that it was pointless answering them because, whatever he said, they would not believe him. He told them that the Son of Man would sit at God's right hand (66–67; cp. Daniel 7:13). They knew that by saying this he was claiming to be God, and they asked him, '*Are you then the Son of God?*' and Jesus replied in the affirmative (69–70). The Sanhedrin had obtained what they wanted. They could accuse him of blasphemy and say that he deserved to die (71; cp. Matthew 26:65–66). **Let us thank the Lord Jesus for all that he endured to save us and let us always strive to please him who for our sakes did not please himself.**

I will send my beloved son

The parable of the wicked vine-dressers reflects the history of the Jewish nation who had enjoyed the special care and goodness of God for centuries (9–16). He had given them good laws and had favoured them above other nations, but they still rejected him. The servants in the parable represent the Old Testament prophets and John the Baptist. The wicked vine-dressers represent those who *mocked the messengers of God, despised his words, and scoffed at his prophets* (cp. 2 Chronicles 36:16).

The owner of the vineyard then decided, '*I will send my beloved son. Probably they will respect him when they see him*' but the wicked vine-dressers had no respect for him and they killed him (13–15). The Lord Jesus was revealing what was to happen to him that very week. The Jewish leaders did not respect the Son of God. They were plotting the most terrible crime of all – the murder of the sinless Saviour. Just as the owner of the vineyard destroyed the wicked vine-dressers, so the Jewish nation would be rejected and the kingdom given to another nation (i.e. the church – cp. Matthew 21:43).

The Lord Jesus challenged his hearers with words from the Old Testament Scriptures, '*What then is this that is written: "The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone"?*' (16–17; cp. Psalm 118:22). Jesus, the stone which the builders rejected, has become the chief cornerstone (cp. Acts 4:11; 1 Peter 2:6–8). The chief priests and the Pharisees recognised that Jesus was speaking of them. They had rejected God's chosen Messiah. They would be crushed by the 'stone' that they had rejected when the day of judgment came. They wanted to lay hands on him, but refrained for fear of the people who recognised Jesus as a prophet (19; cp. Matthew 21:46).

Do you respect the Son of God by obeying him, by giving him first place in your life? One day everyone will bow to him (Philippians 2:9–11). **Far better to submit to him now (and what joy that brings), than be punished by him in the day of judgment.**

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

The religious leaders were now determined to set a trap for Jesus and they sent spies to watch him. These men pretended to be sincere enquirers but they attempted to make Jesus incriminate himself so that he could be accused of treason against Rome (20). These smooth-talking hypocrites said that Jesus taught *the way of God truly* but they persistently rejected his claims. They then asked him whether it was lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not (21–22). On a different occasion, Jesus quoted the Old Testament to describe the Pharisees, *'These people ... honour me with their lips, but their heart is far from me'* (Matthew 15:8). We will never deceive God with lip-service.

The Jews resented paying taxes to Caesar and if Jesus had said directly, 'Yes, pay your taxes,' the Pharisees would have branded him as a traitor who had no love for the Jewish nation. If he had told them that it was wrong to pay these taxes, they would have accused him of treachery against Rome. The wicked Jewish leadership later accused him of this very thing before Pilate (23:2).

The Lord Jesus saw through their craftiness and asked them to show him a denarius. This was a small silver coin which was worth the average wage for a day's work. He asked them whose image and inscription was on the coin and they admitted that it was that of Caesar (23–24). He then told them, *'Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's'* (25). His superb answer to their trick-question caused them to marvel (26).

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

And the Lord turned and looked at Peter

After they had arrested Jesus, Peter followed at a distance and sat among a crowd gathered round a fire in the courtyard of the high priest's house. He loved his Lord, and no doubt wanted to see what would become of him. As he waited, he was accused on three occasions of being a follower of Jesus. Peter's courage deserted him. He denied that he had anything to do with Jesus and pretended not to know what they were saying (54–60). Before Peter had finished speaking, he heard the crowing of a cock, *and the Lord turned and looked at Peter* (61). Jesus had been betrayed by Judas and he was now disowned by one of his closest friends. That look would have conveyed grief and disappointment, but also love and yearning for the fearful apostle. That look melted Peter and he dissolved into bitter weeping as he remembered the words of Jesus, *'I tell you, Peter, the cock will not crow this day before you will deny three times that you know me'* (34).

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

Peter's denial is a warning for us to beware of self-confidence. We may think that we could never deny our precious Saviour but we must never forget that though we want to please him, we are capable of any sin. We have already seen that Jesus prayed for Peter (22:31–32) and it is encouraging to know that he also prays for us (Hebrews 7:25). If you are beset by guilt because of some sin in your life, come to the Lord Jesus and ask him to forgive you. He will accept you and freely forgive you when you repent of your sin and trust in him.

Nevertheless not my will, but yours, be done

At the first Communion service, the Lord Jesus took the cup and after giving thanks, gave it to the disciples (17–20). That cup is for us ‘*the cup of blessing*’ (1 Corinthians 10:16). Jesus, however, had to drink a ‘cup’ of terrible suffering and sorrow in order to save us. In Gethsemane he was overwhelmed with anguish as he contemplated this cup which he had to drink. He said to Peter, James and John, ‘*My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death*’ (Matthew 26:36–39). He was in such agony that an angel appeared from heaven, strengthening him. His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground (43–44). His love for us is so great that he submitted to the Father’s will to be punished for our sin. He said, ‘*Father, if it is your will, remove this cup from me; nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done*’ (42). Jesus drank that terrible cup in order to give us a cup of blessing, a cup of salvation. **When we think of what it cost him to save us, we should shudder at even the thought of sinning.**

As the Lord Jesus roused his disciples who were sleeping from sorrow, Judas arrived with a great multitude who were armed with swords and with clubs (45; cp. Matthew 26:47). They arrested Jesus after Judas had betrayed him with a kiss. Peter, in an act of bravado, cut off the right ear of Malchus, a servant of the high priest. Jesus told Peter to put away his sword. He could call upon God and have twelve legions of angels to protect him from his enemies but he had to drink the cup given to him by the Father. The Lord, full of grace, healed Malchus (48–51; cp. Matthew 26:52–53; John 18:10–11).

The cowardly chief priests and elders had sent the armed crowd out to Jesus as if they were to arrest a robber. They had not touched him while he taught in the temple but this was the hour when they would have their own way with him, subject to the overruling providence of God (52–53). Jesus willingly went to death to save us from our sin. What amazing love! Let us respond with joyful obedience to his will, whatever the cost.

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

The Sadducees were very influential in Jewish religious affairs but they were materialistic and they denied true godliness. The high priests were drawn from their ranks and they controlled the temple which Jesus had cleansed. They had a score to settle with Jesus and their trick question was designed to ridicule the resurrection of the dead. Like many modern heretical church leaders they denied this truth. Such people often resort to ridicule in discussion because their own position is very weak.

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

The Sadducees related their far-fetched story about a woman who married seven brothers in turn, surviving them all. They asked to which brother the widow would be married in the resurrection. His answer exposed their ignorance of Scripture. There is no marriage in heaven (35–36). He showed from an incident in one of the books of Moses (Exodus) that the dead are raised. He referred to the incident at the burning bush where God told Moses that he was ‘*the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob*’. The great patriarchs, though dead, were alive with God in heaven – *for he is not the God of the dead but of the living* (37–38).

The Bible does not give a detailed description of heaven, but we do know that it will be wonderful beyond our wildest dreams (Philippians 1:21,23; 1 John 3:2–3; Revelation 21:4; 22:3–4). Let us be encouraged and praise God for giving us such a glorious future.

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

The Lord Jesus asked a question while he taught in the temple. The scribes taught that the Christ is David's Son but how could he be so when David by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit called Christ, 'Lord'. (41–44; cp. Mark 12:35–37; Psalm 110:1)? In other words the Messiah is more than a descendant (Son) of David. He is God! The scribes and Pharisees refused to recognise Jesus as the Messiah and they would not submit to his lordship.

Jesus went on to warn his disciples in the hearing of the people, 'Beware of the scribes.' They loved all the pomp and the outward trappings of religion so that people would notice them and admire them ('that they may be seen by men' – Matthew 6:5). They appeared so dignified in their long, flowing robes and in their formal greetings when they addressed each other as 'Rabbi' (Matthew 23:7–10). They loved to have the best seats in the synagogues and the place of honour in feasts. They appeared to be holy by reciting long prayers but they were wicked. They extorted money from weak and vulnerable people such as widows. They would not escape the judgment of God and would receive the greater condemnation because of their hypocrisy (45–47).

The Lord Jesus warns us of hypocrisy when he says, 'Beware of the scribes' (cp. Matthew 6:2,5,16). We may say all 'the right things' to other believers when we recite our prayers to God. If our lives do not match our lips, however, and if we have little practical godliness, we are no better than the hypocrites of New Testament times.

Jesus looked up to observe the rich putting their gifts into the temple treasury box. He also saw a poor widow putting in two mites. These small coins were hardly worth a penny of modern currency but the Lord commended this poor woman as he spoke to his disciples. He said, '*She out of her poverty has put in all the livelihood that she had,*' whereas many gave from their considerable wealth and still had much left for themselves (21:1–4). **What is important in the sight of God is not how much we give but how much we keep back for ourselves.**

But I have prayed for you

Jesus had most solemnly spoken of his death as he ate the Passover with the disciples and had warned that one of them would betray him (15–23). It is almost beyond belief that the disciples began to argue *as to which of them should be considered the greatest* (24). This was not the first time that they had argued about greatness (9:46–48). He told them that they were not to imitate the ways of the world but to follow his example. True greatness lies in humble service. This lesson still needs to be learned because pride and power-seeking have ruined many a church. The Lord Jesus is so gracious and he commended his disciples for being faithful to him in his trials. He made the disciples see things in their true perspective; they were needlessly arguing when he was bestowing upon them a kingdom (25–30).

Jesus went on to say to Peter, '*Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail*' (31–32). **It is a great comfort to know that when Satan attacks us, we are not alone. Jesus is praying for us.** Peter protested that he was ready to go with his Lord to prison and to death but Jesus told him that before the cock crowed he would deny him three times (33–34). Peter was full of self-confidence but he did not know his own heart (cp. 1 Corinthians 10:12). Though Satan wanted to have Peter, he was not allowed his evil desire. The devil is subject to God and he cannot touch us without divine permission (cp. Job 1:12).

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

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

When the Lord Jesus sat down for the Passover meal, he said to his disciples, ‘*With fervent desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer*’ (14–15). He greatly loved them (John 13:1) and wanted them to be with him before he suffered. He indicated that this was his last Passover with them. There will be a greater feast, at which he will preside in the kingdom of God, in glory, and every Christian will be there (16; cp. Revelation 19:9).

The Feast of Unleavened Bread began with the Passover meal when lamb, unleavened bread and bitter herbs were eaten and three cups of wine were taken. The bitter herbs were a reminder of the slavery and suffering of the Israelites in Egypt. The lamb commemorated the protection of Israel’s first-born, and the unleavened bread was a reminder of the haste in which the Jews escaped from Egypt. As Jesus celebrated the Passover meal with the twelve disciples, he warned them that one of them would betray him and said, ‘*This has been determined, but woe to that man by whom he is betrayed*’ (21–23). Judas was on the slippery slope to hell.

Jesus gave bread and wine to his disciples which were symbols of his body and blood to be given for us at Calvary. He said to them, ‘Do this in remembrance of me’ (17–20; cp. 1 Corinthians 11:24–25). He is ‘*our Passover*’ (1 Corinthians 5:7). He has delivered us from a far greater tyranny than that suffered by Israel in Egypt. He has saved us from our sin and from the power of Satan (John 8:34–36; 1 John 3:8).

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

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

The disciples were admiring the beauty and the grandeur of the temple and were shocked to hear Jesus say that it would be destroyed (5–6). They later asked him two questions (7):

1. ‘*When will these things be?*’ (i.e. the destruction of Jerusalem).
2. ‘*What sign will there be when these things are about to take place?*’

Today’s reading is mainly concerned with the destruction of Jerusalem. In AD 66 the Jews revolted against the Romans who then besieged Jerusalem, destroying the city and the temple in AD 70. These were days of vengeance on the city which had rejected and crucified God’s holy Son (22; cp. 11:50–51). Many Christians remembered the warning of Jesus (20–24) and escaped from Jerusalem at the approach of the Romans and thus they were saved from the massacre.

The conditions which preceded AD 70 are not a sign of the end of the world. They are to be found in any age. There are false teachers, wars, rumours of wars, earthquakes, famines and troubles (8–11) and persecution of God’s people (12–19). **How are we to react in uncertain, turbulent times or when there is persecution?**

- We must be on our guard against deceivers. Jesus said, ‘*Take heed that you be not deceived*’ (8). Many are ‘taken in’ by false teachers today because they do not ‘take heed’ to God’s word.
- We are not to be terrified (9). God is sovereign and he is in control of all these things, even the persecution of his people. Jesus warned that some Christians would be hated by their own families, betrayed and even put to death, ‘*but not a hair of your head shall be lost*’ (16–18). This is not a contradiction but means ‘that nothing, not even our hair, is excluded from the domain of God’s tender care’ (Hendriksen). Let us persevere whatever suffering comes our way (‘*patience*’ in verse 19 = ‘endurance’). Our enemies may be allowed to destroy our bodies but they cannot destroy our souls (Matthew 10:28).
- Let us remember that God uses persecution for the furtherance of his kingdom and as an opportunity to bear gospel witness. ‘*But it will turn out for you as an occasion for testimony*’ (13).

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

There will be frightening cosmic disturbances immediately before the return of Christ (25–28). Everyone living will see the Lord Jesus return, *coming in a cloud with power and great glory* (27). Every true Christian will be gathered by the angels to meet the Lord in the air, together with every believer from previous ages. It will be the day of resurrection and redemption for our bodies (28; cp. Matthew 24:31; John 5:29; Romans 8:23; 1 Corinthians 15:51–55).

Jesus used the fig tree and all the other trees as an illustration to prepare people in the first century for the destruction of Jerusalem which was to happen in their lifetime (29–33). When the trees come into leaf, it indicates the coming of summer. We were reminded yesterday that when the Roman armies approached Jerusalem, Christians who remembered these words of Jesus would know that the destruction of the city was at hand. When believers see the final Antichrist at work (cp. 2 Thessalonians 2:3–8), they will know that Christ's return is near.

Verse 32 is one of those Scripture verses which are not easy to understand. It would appear that Jesus is saying that the people of that time would still be alive when he comes again. They have long since died and this explanation is obviously wrong. Hendriksen points out that the word '*generation*' can be translated 'race.' His suggestion that the verse means that the Jewish race will not pass away until all the things concerning the return of Christ are fulfilled is quite convincing, especially when we see that Jesus had also been speaking about the destruction of Jerusalem. In that context the future of the Jews appeared to be very uncertain (20–24).

No one knows when Jesus will return but he warns, '*Take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life*' (34). We may soon become burdened with worldly cares and sinful pursuits if we do not walk with the Lord each day. **We must be watchful and prayerful and lead holy lives if we are to be ready for his coming (34–36; cp. 1 John 3:2–3).**

Then Satan entered Judas

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

The treacherous disciple plotted with the chief priests and captains of the temple guard to betray Jesus to them for thirty pieces of silver. Jesus had to be arrested when alone with his disciples and Judas knew that such an opportunity would come when the Lord Jesus went to the Mount of Olives as was his custom (4–6, 39; cp. Matthew 26:14–15). **To be tempted by Satan or to be attacked by him is bad enough, but when the devil enters into a man, he is doomed to hell.** The devil cannot enter a true believer who is able to resist him in the strength of the Lord (1 Peter 5:8–9). Judas had failed to heed the warning of Jesus concerning covetousness and he betrayed his Master for money (12:15). The love of money led to his ruin.

The first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Thursday) arrived and Jesus sent Peter and John to prepare the Passover. They would have to take their sacrificial lamb to the temple forecourt to be killed. They had also to purchase unleavened bread, wine and bitter herbs and prepare the room and the feast. Peter and John did not know where they were to celebrate the Passover. The Lord Jesus told them that a man carrying a pitcher of water would be going to the house and that they were to follow him (7–13). This Passover meal was to have great significance. Jesus was to point the disciples to his own death when he instituted the Lord's Supper. This has been left to us as a precious ordinance when we remember all that he has done for us.