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Luke: Chapter-by-Chapter Commentary

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Transcript

In the opening of Luke, chapter 1, Luke introduces himself as the latest in a line of several who had written a narrative of the events of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. Luke was someone with access to eyewitnesses and apostolic heralds of the Gospel message. He had been following everything closely for some time.

He was in a great position to write a detailed and orderly account for someone like Theophilus. In order need not refer to strict chronological order. There is chronological reordering of material in the Gospels for thematic and other purposes.

This is something we find elsewhere throughout the Scriptures. But what we see here is a similar expression to something that we encounter also in Acts chapter 11 verse 4. When Peter relates the events of his bringing the Gospel to the Gentiles in chapter 10, his words are introduced as follows, but Peter began and explained it to them in order. The point, it seems to me, is that there is a well-structured, persuasive narrative, achieving its purpose of informing and persuading people, most immediately Theophilus, in the truth of their faith.

Luke begins with parallel annunciations. There's the first one to Zechariah concerning John the Baptist, and the second to Mary concerning Jesus. The angel Gabriel appears to both of them.

Both of them respond with fear. Both of them are reassured by Gabriel, told not to be afraid, and are told that they will have a son. John will be filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb.

The Holy Spirit will come upon Mary. The future missions of both John and Jesus are foretold. Both Zechariah and Mary respond with seemingly similar questions.

How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife has advanced in years. And how will this be, since I am a virgin? There are a number of similar accounts of annunciations in the Old Testament. Genesis chapter 16 verses 11 to 12, given to Hagar.

And the angel of the Lord said to her, Behold, you are pregnant, and shall bear a son. You shall call his name Ishmael, because the Lord has listened to your affliction. He shall be a wild donkey of a man, his hand against everyone, and everyone's hand against him, and he shall dwell over against all his kinsmen.

Genesis chapter 17 verses 15 to 21. And God said to Abraham, As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. I will bless her, and moreover I will give you a son by her.

I will bless her, and she shall become nations, kings of peoples shall come from her. Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed and said to himself, Shall a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child? And Abraham said to God, O that Ishmael might live before you. God said, No, but Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac.

I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his offspring after him. As for Ishmael, I have heard you. Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful and multiply him greatly.

He shall father twelve princes, and I will make him into a great nation. But I will establish my covenant with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this time next year. And then in Judges 13 verses 2-5, there was a certain man of Zorah of the tribe of the Danites, whose name was Manoah, and his wife was barren and had no children.

And the angel of the Lord appeared to the woman and said to her, Behold, you are barren and have not born children, but you shall conceive and bear a son. Therefore be careful and drink no wine or strong drink, and eat nothing unclean. For behold, you shall conceive and bear a son.

No razor shall come upon his head, for the child shall be a Nazarite to guard from the

womb, and he shall begin to save Israel from the hand of the Philistines. The presence of two annunciations in direct succession indicates that the destinies of Jesus and John the Baptist are entwined in a single divine purpose. There are further parallels and connections between the two that emerge as we proceed through the narrative of Luke.

The presence of these two annunciations at the very beginning of Luke's Gospel also foregrounds the theme of birth. The prominence of the theme of birth can also be seen at the beginning of books such as Exodus and 1 Samuel. The story of the Exodus is the story of the deliverance from Egypt, the story of 1 Samuel the story of the establishment of the kingdom.

A similar new work of God is to be anticipated here. The theme of new birth is not just about an individual having a child, it's about something new happening in history, the birth of a new order. Like Exodus and 1 Samuel, the beginning of the story of Luke focuses upon believing and courageous women and birth.

In Exodus it's the Hebrew midwives, Jochebed and Miriam and Pharaoh's daughter. In 1 Samuel it's Hannah and here it's Mary, Elizabeth and Anna. The focus upon women at the very beginning of a great new work of God in history is noteworthy.

It follows a consistent pattern in the Old Testament. The men that surround them are either wicked, Pharaoh and his men, Hophni and Phinehas in 1 Samuel or lacking in spiritual perception, Eli and Zechariah. Eli later goes blind while Zechariah is struck dumb or they stay largely in the background.

Amram in Exodus, Elkanah in 1 Samuel and in Luke, Joseph. Many of the women are barren, widows or unmarried. The barren woman having her womb opened is a very important theme in scripture, particularly in the book of Genesis.

The story of Luke begins with believing women and a doubting man at news of birth. It ends with believing women and initially doubting men at news of resurrection. And this is one of the ways we can already start to see a symmetry developing between the birth of Christ at the beginning and his resurrection at the end, which is a new birth.

The focus upon women also goes together with a focus upon the gestation periods of God's salvation. God's salvation doesn't begin in the glare of public life but in the quiet prayers of an aging couple and in the hiddenness of a young woman's womb. 30 or more years will pass before this salvation comes to fruition but it has already begun.

It's begun in the secret place, in these contexts where people don't necessarily know what's taking place, but something is going to occur and it will have impact many years down the line. Zechariah and his wife Elizabeth are faithful people. They're both Levites and are described as being righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord.

Now such a statement makes many Protestants nervous, but it shouldn't. The framework of perfect and spotless law obedience is one that we often impose upon the text, but we often do so quite inappropriately. Flawed and fallen human beings like Zechariah and Elizabeth certainly were, can be described in such a manner.

The law always graciously provided ways for people to be in faithful and blameless relationship with God, even as sinful human beings. Zechariah shares his name with Zechariah the prophet, whose ministry centered around the rebuilding of the temple. His connection with Zechariah might also make us think of the Old Testament story and where it left off.

It also hints at a new temple building project after the defiling of an old temple and a period of exile. The muteness of the priest Zechariah could be related to the general silence of God in the period between the two testaments. God reopens the mouth of the dumb prophet and a new era of his redemption will come about.

He might be a picture of the nation as a whole as well. Zechariah initially responds with doubt, but his mouth is later opened in praise. Many of these particular connections are weak and I wouldn't put that much strength upon them, but they're worth considering.

Elishabeth was the wife of Aaron and the matriarch of the priestly line in Exodus chapter 6 verse 22. Baron Elizabeth, who shares her name, is a symbol of a priestly line in crisis, much as it was in the time of Eli, as Eli's two sons died on the same day and his priestly house was left in tatters. The later opening of the womb of Elishabeth promises the establishment of a new faithful priesthood from the ashes.

Again, not a very strong connection, but worth considering perhaps. We've already met the angel Gabriel on two previous occasions, both in the book of Daniel in chapter 8 verse 16 and chapter 9 verse 21 of the book of Daniel, where he is involved in the affairs of nations and the destinies of empires. His presence here hints at something that is stirring that will have ramifications far beyond the borders of Israel.

The setting of the scene here is important. Zechariah is in the temple at the hour of incense. Now his service here would be related to the duties outlined in Exodus chapter 30 verses 7 to 8. And Aaron shall burn fragrant incense on it.

Every morning when he dresses the lamps he shall burn it, and when Aaron sets up the lamps at twilight he shall burn it. A regular incense offering before the Lord throughout your generations. And a connection between incense and prayer can be seen in places like Psalm 141 verse 2. Let my prayer be counted as incense before you, and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice.

Interestingly, we have already seen a prayer associated with evening sacrifice in scripture. In Daniel chapter 9 verses 20 to 23, while I was speaking and praying,

confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my plea before the Lord my God for the holy hill of my God, while I was speaking in prayer, the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the first, came to me in swift flight at the time of the evening sacrifice. He made me understand, speaking with me and saying, O Daniel, I have now come out to give you insight and understanding.

At the beginning of your pleas for mercy a word went out, and I have come to tell it to you, for you are greatly loved. Therefore consider the word and understand the vision. This is followed by the prophecy concerning the 70 weeks in which the work of Christ is foretold.

And so the coming of Gabriel again at the time of the evening sacrifice may not be an accident. It may be designed in part to draw our mind back to this event. Zachariah was from the priestly division of Abijah.

Each of the 24 subdivisions of the priests would serve on a rotating two-week basis. Zachariah was served with the incense and then he was supposed to come out and bless the praying people outside. The setting in the temple recalls the story of 1 Samuel chapter 1, which also begins with a barren woman praying for a son in the temple and another priest, Eli, who lacks perception.

The temple is prominent at the beginning of Luke, also appearing in chapter 2 with the presentation of Jesus in the temple, where we also encounter a woman called Anna, reminding us of Hannah, who constantly prays there. The temple isn't just dismissed by Luke as something belonging to the old order and unimportant. A lot of events in the book of Luke and in the book of Acts present the temple in a more positive light.

It's a place where people go to interact with God, to pray. It's a place where faithful people are to be encountered. It's also a place, in this particular occasion, where God meets and reveals himself to his people.

At the end of the gospel, it also returns to the themes of its beginning, with the disciples constantly praying in the temple after Jesus has ascended to heaven. We could perhaps see this as mirroring the praying multitude at the beginning of the gospel. The theme of prayer is very prominent throughout the book of Luke.

Another thing to notice here. Jesus' action at the end, however, also recalls the beginning, as he blesses the disciples and then ascends to the heavenly temple. There is maybe a symmetry to be seen between the beginning and the end.

The book of Acts also follows the pattern of Luke in many ways. The temple, prayer and the Holy Spirit are also very prominent at its beginning, as is the failure to perceive. Here it's Zachariah's failure to perceive.

In the book of Acts, it's the people thinking that maybe they're drunk, which again

reminds us of the story of Eli, who thinks that maybe Hannah is drunk when she's praying. The focus upon the Holy Spirit at the beginning of the gospel is also noteworthy, and again is paralleled with the focus upon the Holy Spirit at the beginning of the book of Acts. At the beginning of the book of Luke, we see that association in the way that John the Baptist is to be filled with the Holy Spirit from his womb, then in the way that the Spirit comes upon Mary, then in the way that Elizabeth and Zachariah are filled with the Spirit, then in the way that Simeon is led in the Spirit into the temple, and then the way that Christ is filled with the Holy Spirit and then led in the Spirit into the wilderness.

The Spirit is very, very prominent at the beginning of Luke's gospel, and then later on in the book of Acts, of course, with the events of Pentecost, it's no less prominent. God has heard the prayers of Zachariah and Elizabeth, but these prayers are not just prayers that relate to them as individuals and their desire for a son. As in 1 Samuel, the prayer of individuals for a child is the prayer for deliverance for the entire nation.

The significance of John's name is not so straightforward. Johanan was one of the high priests after the Restoration in Nehemiah chapter 12 verses 22 to 23. Perhaps somewhat more interesting, Johanan was also a leader of the army who led a remnant of Judah out of the land to Egypt after the assassination of Gedoliah against the word of the prophet Jeremiah.

We see this in 2 Kings chapter 25 verses 22 to 26 and Jeremiah chapter 42 verse 1 to 43 verse 7. How would this relate to John? First, the names of his parents suggest that John the Baptist is connected with the formation of a new priesthood, perhaps. Second, faithful John actually does something rather similar in character to the unfaithful Johanan. He leads a remnant out of an occupied land into the wilderness where he prepares the way for Jesus, Joshua, the new ruler who will lead them back in.

However, by far the more prominent meaning, I think, is the straightforward etymological one. God is gracious. That's the meaning of his name and it's a theme in the story.

God has shown his favor to Zachariah and Elizabeth. He has shown mercy to them in giving them a son and this is a sign of his grace towards his people more generally. So while those other associations may be there, I suspect they're very much in the background if they are there at all.

John the Baptist is to be a Nazarite from birth. We have the law of the Nazarite in Numbers chapter 6 and this is similar to Samson in Judges chapter 13 and Samuel in 1 Samuel 1 verse 11. He comes in the spirit and the power of Elijah and as we go through the gospel he'll be described in ways that recall Elijah too.

His mission is associated with Elijah explicitly at other points. And the last verses of the prophet Malachi are alluded to here. Malachi chapter 4 verses 5 to 6. Behold I will send

you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes and he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers lest I come and strike the land with the decree of utter destruction.

So what do we see here putting the pieces together? With a cluster of Old Testament allusions, John the Baptist is being characterized for us. He's like Samuel, the one who's a Nazarite from birth, the one who's given in response to prayers and that's declared in the temple. He's someone who will prepare the way for and anoint the king, the Davidic king.

He's like Elijah, a desert prophet who will herald the great day of the Lord preparing the way for the Lord to come to his people. He's a sign of the restoration of a faithful priesthood born to Elishabeth, a woman who shares the name of the Aaronic matriarch. He is picking up the threads that were left off in the prophecies of Zechariah and Malachi.

The silence of Zechariah until his birth might also make us think of the silence of the prophets in the intervening period between the testaments. John the Baptist is going to continue the ministry of the prophets and in preparing the way for Christ he will bring that ministry to its climax. Zechariah's question in response to Gabriel is similar to that of Abraham.

Genesis chapter 17 verse 17. Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed and said to himself, shall a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Shall Sarah who is 90 years old bear a child? And then in chapter 15 verse 8 of Genesis, but he said, O Lord God, how am I to know that I shall possess it? Whereas in that case it doesn't seem to be a question of unbelief. In Zechariah's case it does seem to be one of unbelief.

His question is not, as Mary's will be, a question of how this thing will come to be. It's a question of will it come to be. It all seems a bit too incredible.

And so Zechariah is struck dumb until he will be most prepared to bear the praise for what God has done. A question to consider. The appearance to Zechariah isn't just an appearance to a private individual.

It's rather an appearance to a priest in the course of the administration of his duties, while a crowd is waiting outside in prayer, waiting for him to come outside to bless them. What significance might we see in the fact that God delivers this revelation, this annunciation, in such a context? For the second time in Luke chapter 1, the angel Gabriel appears to someone declaring the birth of a child. He has already appeared to Zechariah in the temple to announce the birth of John.

The angel Gabriel is known to us already from Daniel chapter 8 verse 16 and 9 verse 21, where he declares the fates of nations and empires. John is going to be the prophet like

Samuel and Jesus is going to be the Davidic king. In verse 76 John is declared to be the prophet of the Most High and here Jesus is described as the son of the Most High.

We've already seen parallels between the two annunciations. The angel Gabriel appears to both of them. Both of them respond in fear.

Both of them are reassured, told not to be afraid, and are told that they will have a son. John will be filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb and the Holy Spirit will come upon Mary. The future missions of both are described in detail and what they will do.

Both Zechariah and Mary respond with seemingly similar questions. How shall I know this? For I am an old man and my wife is advanced in years. And then in the case of Mary, how will this be since I am a virgin? Although it is not explicitly mentioned here as it is in the Gospel of Matthew, Isaiah chapter 7 verses 10 to 17 is lurking behind the text in the reference to the virgin here.

Again the Lord spoke to Ahaz, ask a sign of the Lord your God. Let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven. But Ahaz said, I will not ask and I will not put the Lord to the test.

And he said, hear then, O house of David, is it too little for you to weary men that you weary my God also? Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son and shall call his name Immanuel. He shall eat curds and honey when he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good.

For before the boy knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land whose two kings you dread will be deserted. The Lord will bring upon you and upon your people and upon your father's house such days as have not come since the day that Ephraim departed from Judah, the king of Assyria. The foretold birth of the child to the young woman or in some translations the virgin in Isaiah chapter 7 is a portentous sign to the king of Judah.

It's a sign of God bringing about a reversal in history in a short period of time. And here there's something more going on. It's a sign of new creation.

God is starting something new in history. This is not just another descendant of Adam. A new humanity is being formed in Mary's womb.

This child will be the son of the Most High. Now this looks back to 2 Samuel chapter 7 verses 12 to 14 and the covenant with David. When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you who shall come from your body and I will establish his kingdom.

He shall build a house for my name and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be to him a father and he shall be to me a son. But there is something more going

on here.

The expression son of God functions in a stronger sense here. Jesus is not just going to be the Davidic king. He will also be holy, the son of God, because of the manner of his birth.

His birth is not of man, not of a human father, but of God himself. And so his sonship seems to be referring not solely to his status as the Davidic king, but as one who has come from God himself. Here it is important that Mary is betrothed to a man of the house of David, to Joseph.

It's through Joseph that Christ's royal heritage comes. And the place of Joseph within the story is not so foregrounded within the book of Luke as it is in Matthew. But Joseph's place should not be forgotten here.

Both Mary and Joseph have crucial parts to play. It is very important for those of us who are Gentile Christians, who are accustomed to dulling ourselves to the political themes of the gospel and to the references to Israel as a nation, to see just how charged the annunciation of Christ's birth and the songs and the prophecies that follow are with references to kingship, with references to David, with references to the fulfilment of the promises to Abraham and God's blessing and visiting his people Israel. Jesus will be the Davidic king.

He will be the deliverer of his people. His birth comes in a context charged with the expectation of Israel, in the context of Zachariah and Elizabeth, in the context of Mary and her Magnificat, in the context of Simeon and Anna who are praying for the deliverance of Israel. If reading the beginning of Luke's gospel we start to feel some sense of discomfort about our spiritualised version of the Messiah and the way in which we've detached the Messiah from political themes and kingdom themes, then that's good.

That's exactly as it should be because those themes are an important part of this story and we need to be careful not to erase them. The Spirit will overshadow Mary just as it hovered over the waters of creation and how it covered the tabernacle in Exodus chapter 40. It's power from on high and this is also something that anticipates Pentecost.

Many have spoken about this as a Marian Pentecost and I think that's exactly right. There is a connection between the conception of Christ in the womb of Mary and the way in which the Spirit comes upon the church at Pentecost so that Christ is formed in his people. Perhaps we are supposed to hear themes of the reversal of the fall in the reference to the blessed fruit of Mary's womb.

The womb once mediated judgment to the woman in Genesis chapter 3 15 and now it becomes the means of blessing in the same way the tomb was the great sign of the

judgment upon Adam and now at the end of the gospel of Luke we'll see the tomb opened up as a new womb and Christ coming forth as the firstborn of the dead. The fruit of the garden which led to condemnation is replaced by the fruit of Mary's womb who brings salvation. Jesus is the seed of the woman and the woman in particular as Mary is a virgin.

This is not the seed of a woman who has had relations with a man. It's the seed of the woman in particular and he's the first of a new humanity to replace that of Adam. The description of the Spirit coming upon and overshadowing suggests the creation of a new tabernacle or temple.

Mary her womb and her child are spoken of using temple imagery and like Acts Luke begins then with the establishment of a new temple. It's a sign of things changing. Nothing will be impossible with God recalls the angels words to Sarah in Genesis chapter 18 verse 14.

Mary is told that Elizabeth her relative has also had a miraculous conception. Their stories are interwoven and the mothers of these two sons who will together deliver God's people are brought together at this point. This would serve as an assurance to Mary but also a sign to them both.

Elizabeth also as a respected woman could vouch for Mary that she was a woman of good character and that this was not a child born of unfaithfulness. She herself was given a sign of that as her infant leaped in her womb. Having asked the question of how those things would be not as a question of unbelief as in the case of Zachariah but as a question of belief Mary then speaks of herself later as the servant of the Lord.

She submits to the Lord readily accepting the vocation that's laid upon her. When she visits Elizabeth John the Baptist leaps in the womb of Elizabeth for joy. King David leapt and danced before the Ark of the Covenant as it was brought into Jerusalem in 2 Samuel chapter 6 verses 14 to 16 in the garments of a child.

As Mary the new Ark bearing God's presence comes to Elizabeth the infant forerunner John dances before Jesus God's presence just as David danced before the Ark bringing the presence of the Lord into Jerusalem. Elizabeth speaks of Mary as the mother of her Lord and the leaping of her baby is taken as a sign of the superiority of the one over the other. The language my Lord is a very powerful testimony to the importance of the child that Mary is bearing and again would be a sign to Mary an assurance to her.

Mary is blessed in much the same way as Jail is in Judges chapter 5 verse 24. Most blessed of women be Jail the wife of Heber the Kenite of tent dwelling women most blessed. Jail was famous for crushing the head of Sisera and Mary and her child will be involved in crushing the head of the serpent.

Mary's song as we shall see is also like Hannah's from 1 Samuel chapter 2 verses 1 to 10. What we're seeing here is that Mary is cut from the same cloth as the great heroines of the Old Testament. In Mary we have a charge condensation of much of the imagery and symbolism associated with women in the Old Testament of the great women of the Old Testament their characteristics meet in her and she is someone who stands for the woman that's spoken of in Genesis chapter 3 verse 15 and the promise of victory over the serpent.

Many Protestants get nervous about this they get concerned that we don't have too high a view of Mary but yet scripture has a high view of Mary. She is someone in which the destiny of God's people comes to a head. She is someone who is an archetype and an exemplar of the church and the people of faith.

Nevertheless contrary to the way that Mary is often treated in Roman Catholic circles this doesn't require exalting Mary above the ranks of mere mortals and treating her as if she was somewhere between God and humanity. Rather she is like other characters in scripture characters like Abraham or Sarah or Rebecca or Rachel. She is a character who stands for a lot more than just an individual.

There is a confluence of destinies within her so that past stories reach their climax in her actions and later realities and persons can trace the origins back to her. She is not unique in this respect. While the church can appropriately see her as a mother figure that represents the church itself and Israel itself, Sarah is also presented in a similar way as is Rachel and in the case of men Abraham is the one that sums up the history of Israel and himself playing it out in advance.

Abraham is described as the father of us all. We greatly underplay characters like Mary or Abraham if we just see them as individuals who manifest faith and are exemplars of faith yet their status is greatly overstated when there is the development of certain forms of devotion to them. Forms of greater realities that are at work in and manifested in those characters into a single individual.

Mary is one of a number of symbols of the church and of Israel and the meaning of these greater realities is neither exhausted by or fully realised in her. Mary stays with Elizabeth from the sixth to the ninth months of her pregnancy. Darkness was over the land from the sixth to the ninth hours in Luke chapter 23 verse 44.

Is there a connection? Perhaps. One of them seems to hearken back to the ninth plague which preceded the death of the firstborn and this is something that might look forward to the birth of the firstborn but I wouldn't put much weight on it. One of the first things that readers of Mary's song notice is its similarity with the prayer of Hannah in 1st Samuel chapter 2 verses 1 to 10.

And Hannah prayed and said my heart exalts in the Lord my horn is exalted in the Lord

my mouth derides my enemies because I rejoice in your salvation there is none holy like the Lord for there is none besides you there is no rock like our God talk no more so very proudly let not arrogance come from your mouth for the Lord is a God of knowledge and by his actions are weighed the bows of the mighty are broken but the feeble bind on strength those who are full have hired themselves out for bread but those who are hungry have ceased to hunger the barren has born seven but she who has many children is forlorn the Lord kills and brings to life he brings down to sheol and raises up the Lord makes poor and makes rich he brings low and he exalts he raises up the poor from the dust he lifts the needy from the ash heap to make them sit with princes and inherit a seat of honor for the pillars of the earth are the Lord's and on them he has set the world he will guard the feet of his faithful ones but the wicked shall be cut off in darkness for not by might shall a man prevail the adversaries of the Lord shall be broken to pieces against them he will thunder in heaven the Lord will judge the ends of the earth he will give strength to his king and exalt the horn of his anointed this prayer is alluded to in psalm 113 verses 7 to 9 he raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap to make them sit with princes with the princes of his people he gives the barren woman a home making her the joyous mother of children praise the Lord this is the first of the cycle of the psalm sung at the and hearing it in the background here we might recognize a new exodus style deliverance in the making Mary's Magnificat expands its focus from the Lord's attention to her particular situation to his attention to that of Israel as a whole as in the prayer of Hannah we here can see that God's attention to this young woman called Mary is his attention to the entire people his answer to her prayers is his answer to the prayers of his people God's deliverance of his people Israel does not come with dramatic fanfare it comes as in the case of first Samuel in response to a humble woman's prayers God's kingdom is one that comes like no earthly kingdom it comes not to the great and powerful of the earth first but to the meek and lowly it comes not in the thunder of chariots and the snorting of their horses but in the secrecy of a virgin's womb Mary's Magnificat ends with a reference to God's promises to Abraham and we've seen a number of allusions to Abraham within this chapter and these are not the last of the allusions to Abraham that come the descriptions of Zachariah and Elizabeth recall Sarah and Abraham in their old age the annunciations of the birth of Jesus and of John the Baptist recall the annunciations of the birth of Ishmael and of Isaac and the response of Zachariah recalls the response of Abraham and Sarah if Jesus comes as the son of David he also comes as the great son of Abraham the one who is the greater Isaac the beloved son that will later lay down his life in obedience to his father a question to consider thinking of the other places in biblical narrative where we have songs or great poems of the type that we see in Mary's Magnificat what might be the significance of its presence at this point the end of Luke chapter 1 concerns the birth and naming of John the Baptist and the celebration of his birth the prominence given to John the Baptist at the beginning of Luke is remarkable in the first chapter if we were judging by blocks of text alone we might initially think that he received more attention than Jesus himself Luke underlines the relationship between Jesus and John not just in

their public ministry but through prophecy through songs through signs through family relations and shared patterns of events in the prophetic songs or speeches Luke also interprets the ministries of John and Jesus in advance the more that we look at the parts seemingly devoted to John however it becomes clear that they are really primarily about Jesus John's ministry is clearly subordinate to and also pointing to Christ by describing the conceptions and the births of John the Baptist and Jesus Luke is also able to heighten the sense of expectation and of divinely appointed destiny in the two in addition to the old testament prophecies that are highlighted in the other gospels Luke also has prophetic testimony concerning Jesus from Elizabeth Mary Zachariah and Simeon and presents several faithful Israelites awaiting what the Lord would do with these two miraculous children who are surrounded by so many anticipatory manifestations of the work of the Spirit promising a much greater outpouring of the Spirit's work in the future by the time that this section is over everyone is wondering what will happen next the angel Gabriel had predicted rejoicing at the birth of John the Baptist and that is what we see rejoicing and praising God are constant throughout these opening chapters people and angels bursting forth in praise and singing with joy at what God is doing when Elizabeth gives birth to John her neighbors join her to rejoice and when it comes to the time of the circumcision which would have been the time of naming as with baptism in some Christian traditions the general opinion seems to be that he will receive the name of his father Zachariah however Elizabeth insists that the child shall be called John and then Zachariah confirms it perhaps we are to see Elizabeth as arriving at this name independently perhaps not he is not to be named after the father but he is to be named for the graciousness of God and once again it's important to recognize the presence of a wider audience here there are not just Elizabeth and Zachariah there's all their neighbors all these other people that have joined to celebrate with them Zachariah is a figure of note within the community and so people come around to celebrate this event with them and when they see the sign of his mouth being opened they realize that this is something auspicious there's a sign an omen of what's going to come to pass in the future as soon as Zachariah confirms the name of his son John his mouth has opened his tongue is loosed and he blesses God and we can probably see parallels to Pentecost here in Acts 2 verse 4 and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance and in verses 25 to 26 but David says concerning him I saw the Lord always before me for he is at my right hand that I may not be shaken therefore my heart was glad and my tongue rejoiced my flesh also will dwell in hope Zachariah then bursts forth in prophecy as he is filled with the Holy Spirit his bound tongue is loosed and not just the voice of Zachariah but the silenced voice of prophecy from the Old Testament bursts forth onto the scene of the new he's filled with the Holy Spirit once again the opening chapters of Luke are full of anticipatory foreshocks of the great earthquake that will occur at Pentecost lots of people being filled with the Spirit the Spirit coming upon people overshadowing people the Spirit is active here and the Spirit is foreshadowing what will later happen at Pentecost when he will be poured out on all flesh Zachariah's prophecy is packed with allusions to scripture verses

68 to 75 concern what the Lord is doing in Jesus and his benediction verses 76 to 79 speak of John's part in God's great work and functions more as a direct prophecy telling not what God will do but how he will do it these opening prophecies and songs again are programmatic for Luke they present readers and hearers with a framework to understand everything that will follow Joel Green observes the subtle connections that the song of Zachariah exhibits so for instance in verse 68 you have the language of visitation God visiting his people as he did at the exodus and then in verse 78 you have the language of the sunrise visiting from on high the language of visitation attracts different connotations in these different contexts but those different connotations are brought into relationship with each other likewise the language of salvation is used in verse 69 to refer to Davidic kingship and deliverance from enemies but later on in verse 77 is the context of forgiveness of sins those two things belong together and we're supposed to think about how they fit we also have a connection between John the Baptist as the prophet of the most high and the prophets of old who foretold these things the first half seems to present a far more politically focused vision while the latter half is more spiritual in the narrow sense that that term is often used however for Zachariah these two things very much belong together when considering the sort of salvation being declared in the first part we are in danger of jumping to one of two conclusions either we associate it primarily with the Romans as the occupying force or we relate it wholly to spiritualized things that are detached from more concrete forms of deliverance deliverance from political enemies or deliverance perhaps from poverty yet in the gospels the oppressors are often primarily false teachers or those mistreating the poor demonic powers and behind these things satan himself is the strong man holding people in captivity while Luke's concept of salvation most definitely includes the political the social and the material it is not necessarily focused upon the Romans God redeeming his people might make us think of jubilee themes it's also exodus language we find this sort of language in places like psalm 106 verse 10 so he saved them from the hand of the foe and redeemed them from the power of the enemy the song of Zachariah is saturated in the prophetic language and imagery of expectation here are several voices from the prophets that you can hear in the background behold the days are coming declares the lord when i will make a new covenant with the house of israel and the house of judah not like the covenant that i made with their fathers on the day when i took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of egypt my covenant that they broke though i was their husband declares the lord for this is the covenant that i will make with the house of israel after those days declares the lord i will put my law within them and i will write it on their hearts and i will be their god and they shall be my people and no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother saying know the lord for they shall all know me from the least of them to the greatest declares the lord for i will forgive their iniquity and i will remember their sin no more from jeremiah chapter 31 verses 31 to 34 in psalm 130 verse 7 to 8 oh israel hope in the lord for with the lord there is steadfast love and with him is plentiful redemption and he will redeem israel from all his iniquities in malachi chapter 3 verses 1 to 2 behold i send my messenger and he will prepare the way

before me and the lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight behold he is coming says the lord of hosts but who can endure the day of his coming and who can stand when he appears for he is like a refiners fire and like full of soap in isaiah chapter 60 verses 1 to 3 arise shine for your light has come and the glory of the lord has risen upon you for behold darkness shall cover the earth and thick darkness the peoples but the lord will arise upon you and his glory will be seen upon you and nations shall come to your light and kings to the brightness of your rising malachi chapter 4 but for you who fear my name the son of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings you shall go out leaping like calves from the stall just a few verses later in verses 5 to 6 of that chapter behold i will send you elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the lord comes and he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers lest i come and strike the land with the decree of utter destruction isaiah chapter 40 verse 3 a voice cries in the wilderness prepare the way of the lord make straight in the desert a highway for our god isaiah chapter 9 verses 2 to 7 the people who walked in darkness have seen a great light those who dwelt in the land of deep darkness on them has light shone you have multiplied the nation you have increased its joy they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest as they are glad when they divide the spoil for the yoke of his burden and the staff for his shoulder the rod of his oppressor you have broken as on the day of midian for every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult and every garment rolled in blood will be burned as fuel for the fire for to us a child is born to us a son is given and the government will be upon his shoulder and his name shall be called wonderful counselor mighty god everlasting father prince of peace of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end on the throne of david and over his kingdom to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore the zeal of the lord of hosts will do this as our chapter 42 verses 6 to 7 i am the lord i have called you in righteousness i will take you by the hand and keep you i will give you as a covenant for the people a light for the nations to open the eyes that are blind to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon from the prison those who sit in darkness what we hear in the song of zachariah is a glorious combination of the language of jubilee of exodus of new covenant of divine visitation and of a new dawn this rich assembly of language and imagery gives us a sense of just how charged with anticipation and hope the old testament is for the prospect of this coming one the chapter ends with a description of john the baptist growing up and once again this language recalls stories from the old testament stories of sons whose births were announced and who were divinely destined for great things in the future judges chapter 13 verse 24 and the woman bore a son and called his name samson and the young man grew and the lord blessed him genesis chapter 21 verses 20 to 21 and god was with the boy and he grew up he lived in the wilderness and became an expert with the bow he lived in the wilderness of paran and his mother took a wife for him from the land of egypt referring to ishmael in first samuel chapter 2 verse 26 now the boy samuel continued to grow both in stature and in favor with the lord and also with man the fact that john

grows up in the wilderness prepares us for the physical and the symbolically important location of his future ministry a question to consider what other biblical characters were particularly associated with the wilderness luke chapter 2 begins with a census of the whole world by caesar augustus this sets luke's story within the context of the wider empire of rome much as the later story of israel in the old testament is placed within the context of larger empires such as assyria babylon the medo-persians as the influence of israel and the lord is felt throughout the wider world that israel inhabits luke's narrative in luke and acts will conclude with paul in rome by mentioning rome at this point this wider world provides a backdrop for the gospel even though most of the action within it will be contained within israel's borders and population it also makes clear that israel is under foreign control under the shadow of roman rule an heir of david is returning to the city of david much ink has been spilled on the subject of luke's census as there immediately seems to be a number of problems first of all quirinius was not the governor of syria at the time of jesus's birth second there's no evidence that people would have to return to their ancestral town to be registered or that mary would need to accompany joseph and third judea wouldn't be included in such a census because it was a client kingdom of the romans under the rule of herod the great while i won't get into all of these issues here here are a few observations in response first of all it's likely that bethlehem was not just joseph's ancestral home that it was his family home mary's home was in nazareth where joseph had gotten betrothed to her they then moved down to bethlehem together as their initial home as a couple as joseph presumably owned property and had family there this was where he came from joseph takes mary with him because bethlehem is his family home and he intends that having been betrothed in nazareth they marry and settle in bethlehem the census provides the occasion for this but he goes back because that's where he owns property that's where he belongs later as we read in matthew chapter 2 they move back to her hometown of nazareth for the safety of the infant and there we get the impression that joseph and mary belonged in bethlehem they weren't just visiting there for a short period of time perhaps the best explanation i've found for the census is that advance by stephen carlson who argues that augustus's census was not a once-off general census but that luke is referring here to a larger census policy the reference to the first registration when quirinius was governor of syria is better translated he argues as this became a very important registration when quirinius was governing syria now why would he refer to this because the 6 a.d census under quirinius was the time and context of the rise of judas the galilean and his resistance to the roman empire he started the movement of the zealots which eventually led to the jewish war with rome in the late 60s a.d this was a hugely important event within people's memory and it's referred to elsewhere in scripture in acts chapter 5 verse 37 further evidence that luke had some idea of the relevant history in acts 5 37 he writes after him judas the galilean rose up in the days of the census and drew away some of the people after him he too perished and all who followed him were scattered other options have been suggested some have suggested two periods of office for quirinius perhaps one of the most important things to bear in mind here is the limited character of

much of the historical evidence that we're working with and how often we are in danger of jumping to conclusions on the basis of silence or very limited evidence there are a great many occasions where skepticism about the historical veracity of details in the gospels has been challenged by later emergence of evidence that directly supports them the infant is wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger because there's no room for them in the inn we've all seen nativity plays in which the innkeeper turns away mary and joseph usually the assumption is that there were such crowds of people in the town for the census that they didn't have space in all lodgings this is almost certainly mistaken joseph is just a young man returning to his family home not to his ancestral home there wouldn't be that much movement around nor should we expect that the registration was all occurring on a single day or a short succession of days these censuses could last many years they weren't just over a period of days others have imagined that there was some sort of prejudice against mary and joseph and so the innkeeper didn't let them in but there was a far simpler answer there was no inn and there was no innkeeper it doesn't even need to mean that there was no room in the family guest room so that they had to camp out with the animals although it could mean that rather the more likely explanation is that they weren't short-term visitors to bethlehem but had moved back there on account of the registration and the marriage and lived there the simplest way to understand it is that they were living with joseph's wider family they would have a smaller marital room attached to the house but that room didn't have room for her to give birth and so they had to relocate to the main room of the house where the animals would also be present in order to give birth when he's born jesus can then be placed into one of the feeding troughs of the animals while fishermen are prominent in the new testament in which the gospel goes out beyond the land to reach the gentile peoples shepherds dominate in the old testament the patriarchs were shepherds they were distinguished from the egyptians by that fact mooses was a shepherd as was david in a familiar old testament image both god and the leaders of israel were regarded as shepherds of the people with the nation as their flock see that in psalm 23 or in jeremiah chapter 3 verse 15 or 23 verse 1 to 4 and most strikingly perhaps in ezekiel chapter 34 mooses was a shepherd and he delivered israel from pharaoh as a shepherd using a shepherd's rod to strike the enemy of his people and leading israel through the wilderness like a flock this is the way it's described in isaiah chapter 63 verses 11 to 13. mooses' first encounter with the lord was while keeping watch over his father-in-law's flock he saw an angelic appearance with glory phenomena something that probably occurred at night considering the appearance of fire and he was given the further sign that he would later worship the lord on mount horeb with the people after bringing them out of egypt the shepherds and luke are watching their flocks when they are given a glorious angelic appearance accompanied with the glory of the lord and are also given a further sign and i think we should notice the parallels between exodus chapter 3 verse 12 and luke chapter 2 verse 12 in exodus and this shall be the sign for i have sent you when you have brought the people out of egypt you shall serve god on this mountain in luke chapter 2 verse 12 and this will be a sign for you you will

find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger the contrast within the parallel is striking however the sign received by luke's shepherds is that of a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths laid in a manger the sign given to mooses the pyrotechnics of israel's encounter with and worship of the lord at sinai is eclipsed by the sign of an infant in a feeding trough in both cases shepherds are led to an encounter with the lord in the first the lord is shrouded in the dread darkness of the thundering and fiery glory cloud and in the second he has come as a swaddled child in a manger the significance of the sign of the swaddled child in a bethlehem manger being given to shepherds probably arises from old testament prophecy the old testament foretold the coming of a messianic shepherd from the line and the town of david ezekiel chapter 34 verse 23 and i will set up over them one shepherd my servant david and he shall feed them he shall feed them and be their shepherd in micah chapter 5 verse 2 to 5 but you oh bethlehem of ratha who are too little to be among the clans of judah from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in israel whose coming forth is from of old from ancient days therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in labor has given birth then the rest of his brothers shall return to the people of israel and he shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the lord in the majesty of the name of the lord his god and they shall dwell secure for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth and he shall be their peace an infant in a sheep's manger in bethlehem the town of david's own birth is a sign that she who is in labor has brought forth we can hear the story of rachel in the background of micah's prophecy just before the birth of benjamin and the death of rachel jacob is told that kings will come from his loins and while journeying towards bethlehem rachel gives birth to benjamin and dies that story lies in the background of micah chapter four and five but now bethlehem has been reached and the true king is to be born the shepherds symbolizing the leaders of israel encounter the promised great shepherd however there's a surprise the one who was to feed the people as his flock is himself in the feeding trough the messiah will feed his flock but not in the way that people might have expected he will be their food mooses had a significant and foreshadowing encounter with the shepherds at a well in midian prior to his encounter with the lord at the burning bush he delivered the seven daughters of jethro from the abusive shepherds and watered their flocks the one drawn from the water became the one who gave water in the wilderness and his later ministry involved resisting false shepherds and leading and watering the people as the lord's flock in the wilderness and there's also foreshadowing in luke's account of the shepherds later in luke's gospel he describes joseph of arimathea requesting the body of jesus from pilot in luke chapter 23 verse 53 then he took it down and wrapped it in a linen shroud and laid him in a tomb cut in stone where no one had yet been lain the comparison with the description of the birth of jesus is a pronounced one and she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger because there was no place for them in the inn the child wrapped in linen cloths and laid in the manger is later wrapped in linen garments and laid in the tomb the comparisons don't end here shortly after the wrapping of the body of jesus and laying it in the manger or the tomb there is a dazzling

appearance of angels once again a sign is given but the sign is no longer the wrapped body of Jesus in a stone container that's the unwrapped linen garments and the empty tomb the women within Luke's resurrection account both receive the angelic message and serve as the angels the apostolic shepherds and in both cases the result is marvelling we see that in chapter 2 verse 18 and in chapter 24 verse 12 the conclusion of Luke's gospel also tells the story of the shepherds there the apostolic shepherds are charged as witnesses of the resurrection who will make widely known the fulfilled sign concerning the son we could compare chapter 24 verses 45 to 49 with chapter 2 verse 17 here the gospel ends with words that echo the end of the account of the shepherds visit in Luke 24 52 to 53 and they worshipped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy and were continually in the temple blessing God in Luke 2 verse 20 and the shepherds returned glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen as it had been told them Luke's account of the shepherds is the story of a wondrous and remarkable sign is reminiscent of the sign of the burning bush it's anticipatory of the sign of the empty tomb and it's revelatory of the promised arrival of the Davidic shepherd the shepherd Moses' burning bush anticipated the greater sign of the burning mountain of Sinai as the Lord's presence descended upon it appearing to the people that Moses shepherded out of Egypt the rapt child in the manger seen by the Bethlehem shepherds anticipated the greater sign of the unwrapped linen garments in the empty tomb to the apostolic shepherds the account of the shepherds as witnesses the bursting forth in praise the theme of rejoicing and people pondering things in their hearts also connects this account with that which precedes it in the account of John the Baptist's birth and Zachariah's song of praise once again the purpose of such an account is to help the reader to interpret the meaning of the events the angels are bringing good news of the birth of the Davidic messiah to shepherds some have observed that the language of Lord good news and savior were all terms that were promptly used within the imperial cult concerning the emperor with whose action in calling a census this chapter was opened if Matthew frames Jesus as a challenger to Herod as the king of the Jews Luke might be framing Jesus as one whose kingdom will eclipse that of Rome a question to consider this chapter begins with the actions of the great Roman emperor Caesar Augustus but rather than sending heavenly emissaries to give the news of the birth of this new king to Caesar God sends them to some small town shepherds on the night shift what are some of the things that we learn about the character of the kingdom of God from our passage the second half of Luke chapter 2 recounts the presentation of Jesus in the temple and his visit to the temple as a 12 year old in both cases Jesus is being associated closely with the temple which he terms his father's house in verse 49 we will also see some resemblance with the character of the child Samuel the descriptions of whose growth Luke has borrowed as his model for describing Jesus and John we are moving through landmarks of Jesus infancy and childhood here his birth circumcision his presentation in the temple and then later a visit to the temple for Passover at the age of 12 when we think about a 40-day period at the beginning of Luke's gospel we might think of Jesus 40 days in the wilderness after his baptism but there is an earlier example of a 40-day period found in this chapter

jesus was presented in the temple on the 40th day after his birth according to the law this is grounded upon the commandments of exodus chapter 13 verses 2 12 and 15 and also leuiticus chapter 12 consecrate to me all the firstborn whatever is the first to open the womb among the people of israel both of man and a beast is mine you shall set apart the lord all that first opens the womb all the firstborn of your animals that are mailed shall be the lords for when pharaoh stubbornly refused to let us go the lord killed all the firstborn in the land of egypt both the firstborn of man and the firstborn of animals therefore i sacrificed the lord all the males that first opened the womb but all the firstborn of my sons i redeem those are from exodus chapter 13 now leuiticus chapter 12 the lord spoke to moises saying speak to the people of israel saying if a woman conceives and bears a male child then she shall be unclean seven days as at the time of her menstruation she shall be unclean and on the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised then she shall continue for 33 days in the blood of her purifying she shall not touch anything holy nor come into the sanctuary until the days of her purifying are completed but if she bears a female child then she shall be unclean two weeks as in her menstruation and she shall continue in the blood of her purifying for 66 days and when the days of her purifying are completed whether for a son or for a daughter she shall bring to the priest at the entrance of the tent of meeting a lamb a year old for a burnt offering and a pigeon or a turtle dove for a sin offering and he shall offer it before the lord and make atonement for her then she shall be clean from the flow of her blood this is the law for her who bears a child either male or female and if she cannot afford a lamb then she shall take two turtle doves or two pigeons one for a burnt offering and the other for a sin offering and the priest shall make atonement for her and she shall be clean mary and joseph bring two birds for their sacrifices which seems to be an indication of their poverty both simeon and anna are elderly simeon is nearing death and anna is 84 years old there is an indication of the lengthy time spent in anticipation by israel here the new life of jesus and john and the hope and the expectation that they bring is juxtaposed with the hopes of the aged zachariah and elizabeth are also examples of this serving to accent the way that the lord is bringing new life as it were from the dead another thing to notice is the way that luke consistently highlights male and female pairings we've already had zachariah and elizabeth mary and joseph and now we have simeon and anna these are different generations there's the aged pair of simeon and anna there's the late middle-aged couple of zachariah and elizabeth and then there's the young couple of mary and joseph god's coming salvation is speaking to all generations in jesus god's salvation has already arrived holding a 40 day old infant simeon can say that he has seen god's salvation simeon has a profound experience of the spirit one that seems ahead of its redemptive historical time the holy spirit is upon him the holy spirit has revealed to him that he will not die before he sees the lord's christ and then the spirit brings him into the temple the sheer extent of the work of the spirit in the life of simeon seems to look forward to the time of pentecost this is not the sort of language that we find in the old testament that much but it's something that we see a lot in the book of acts the lord keeps his promise to simeon and now he feels able to depart we

might be reminded of jacob's response to meeting ephraim and manasseh the sons of joseph in genesis chapter 48 simeon's prophecy emphasizes the fact that jesus is a light of revelation to the gentiles but his later remarks also make apparent that jesus will be a deeply divisive figure in the nation of israel his song draws very heavily upon the prophecy of isaiah isaiah chapter 40 verse 5 and the glory of the lord shall be revealed and all flesh shall see it together for the mouth of the lord has spoken as i chapter 42 verse 6 i am the lord i have called you in righteousness i will take you by the hand and keep you i will give you as a covenant for the people a light for the nations as i chapter 46 verse 13 i bring near my righteousness it is not far off and my salvation will not delay i will put salvation in zion for israel my glory as i chapter 49 verse 6 he says it is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of jacob and to bring back the preserved of israel i will make you as a light for the nations that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth as i chapter 51 verses 4 to 5 give attention to me my people and give ear to me my nation for a law will go out from me and i will set my justice for a light to the peoples my righteousness draws near my salvation has gone out and my arms will judge the peoples the coastlands hope for me and for my arm they wait as i chapter 52 verse 10 the lord has bared his holy arm before the eyes of all the nations and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our god as our chapter 60 verses 1 to 3 arise shine for your light has come and the glory of the lord has risen upon you for behold darkness shall cover the earth and thick darkness the peoples but the lord will arise upon you and his glory will be seen upon you and nations shall come to your light and kings to the brightness of your rising simeon blesses mary and joseph and he declares that a sword will pierce through mary's soul also this seems to be a reference either to the family divisions that she will experience the fact that some of her own children and some of her relatives will be pulling against christ even while she recognizes the truth of his mission and the nature of his identity and then there's also the fact that she will experience the suffering as he suffers as she witnesses her son going through the most intense agony on the cross a sword will pierce through her own soul also she enters into the sufferings of her son simeon announces that christ is destined for the fall and rising of many in israel the order is significant it's death followed by resurrection he will also be a sign that is opposed anna comes after simeon she's a widow of 84 years old 84 years 12 by 7 two very highly significant numbers she represents the fullness of israel such details are not given to us by accident she represents the state of the nation of the faithful of the nation she's another hannah fasting and praying in the temple seeking god's salvation in simeon and anna we see faithful people exemplary israelites in anna's case a fact expressed by the symbolism of her age these people are waiting for the redemption of israel they're greeting the newborn savior as they near death they can go to their deaths in peace because they have seen that he has been born anna is continually fasting and praying in the temple and later the disciples are continually blessing and praising god in the temple there is a parallel here after this they return to the town of nazareth where jesus grows up and again the description of jesus growing up is taken from the example of samuel we don't

have the account of the flight into egypt here but that intervenes between these events presumably they go down into egypt and then they decide to move back up to her hometown of nazareth rather than settling in bethlehem as presumably had been their initial plan in the story that follows jesus is 12 years old he journeys with his family to jerusalem for the passover he is lost and then found again after three days he asks his mother and father much as he would later ask the two travelers on the road out of jerusalem to emmaus why they didn't understand his true calling why is it that you sought me did you not know that i must be about my father's business the angels later ask those at the tomb why do you seek the living among the dead jesus has to explain his vocation to those who should have understood it mary kept all of this in her heart and i can imagine that looking back upon it 20 years later she would have marveled to see christ's destiny being so clearly and powerfully prefigured in his earlier life the true significance of the strange and mysterious events that mary had pondered for over two or more decades would suddenly be revealed following christ's resurrection once again at the passover feast jesus would be lost people would seek for him and he would be found on the third day the text speaks of the parents going up to jerusalem for the feast every year just as samuel's parents went up to the temple every year samuel was left behind in the temple by his parents being lent to the lord by his parents jesus was accidentally left behind in the temple by his parents reminding them of his true father and that he was temporarily lent to them by the lord first samuel chapter 1 verses 20 28 reads and in due time hannah conceived and bore a son and she called his name samuel for she said i have asked for him from the lord the man el cana and all his house went up to offer to the lord the yearly sacrifice and to pay his vow but hannah did not go for she said to her husband as soon as the child is weaned i will bring him so that he may appear in the presence of the lord and dwell there forever al cana her husband said to her do what seems best to you wait until you have weaned him only may the lord establish his word so the woman remained and nursed her son until she weaned him and when she had weaned him she took him up with her along with a three-year-old bull an ephor of flour and a skin of wine and she brought him to the house of the lord at shiloh and the child was young then they slaughtered the bull and they brought the child to eli and she said oh my lord as you live my lord i am the woman who was standing here in your presence praying to the lord for this child i prayed and the lord has granted me my petition that i made to him therefore i have lent him to the lord as long as he lives he is lent to the lord and he worshipped the lord there the story of jesus's precocious spiritual wisdom in the temple is reminiscent of the story of samuel the description of jesus growing up in verse 52 also echoes that of samuel in first samuel chapter 2 verse 26 samuel is the prophet who ends the old order of israel he foretells judgment on the priestly house and establishes the kingdom christ declares judgment upon the temple and the priestly house of israel ends the old covenant and establishes the kingdom of god this is a passage filled with joy and rejoicing but we're also seeing ominous foreshadowing of the cross but beyond that i think we might be seeing foreshadowing of something else i wonder whether this foreshadows the events of pentecost i mentioned

in the story of simeon that there are so many references to the spirit in association with simeon that it seems like a story out of place it seems like something that we'd find in the book of acts and i don't think that's accidental 40 days after jesus's birth he goes to the temple 40 days after his resurrection he enters the heavenly temple he ascends into god's presence we may in fact wonder whether there's a connection between the sacrifices that are offered for the purification and the events of pentecost the sacrifice of purification of childbirth involved a dove as a purification offering and an ascension offering of a lamb christ is the ascended lamb that goes into god's presence and the dove of the spirit is that which cleanses the church by faith perhaps there's some connection there i'm not sure but it's worth looking into mary the mother of jesus is only mentioned once in the book of acts and that is immediately after the ascension when she joins the rest of the disciples and they are praying constantly in the upper room in the temple perhaps we are supposed to think of some connection with the event of the presentation in the temple the constancy of anna in prayer in the temple is similar to the way that the disciples will be constant in prayer after the ascension and the presence also of simeon as one who comes in in the power of the spirit and delivers this speech may make us think of the one other prominent character in the gospel that luke refers to as simeon and that is simon peter who is referred to as simeon in acts chapter 15 in luke chapter 2 simeon prophesies concerning the newborn jesus in acts chapter 2 simeon peter preaches and prophesies concerning christ the firstborn from the dead the gospel of luke has several symmetries both within itself and in its relationship to the book of acts it seems to me that this might well be one of them a question to consider what might simeon have meant by saying that jesus would be a sign that his opposed so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed once again as he does in luke chapter 1 verse 5 and luke chapter 2 verses 1 to 2 in luke chapter 3 verses 1 to 2 luke sets the scene within the context of the wider world and its rulers and empires and of jerusalem its kings and priests a new ruler is coming onto the world stage and from this time onwards the nations and their rulers must reckon with him while the other gospels don't mention pontius pilate until the time of jesus' trial luke introduces him as a character here he also speaks of the surrounding regions establishing a more cosmopolitan context for the events that will occur seven historical figures are mentioned tiberius caesar pontius pilate herod philip lysanias annas and kaiaphas this roots the narrative in a clear historical context it is very easy for us to forget that history is measured relative to persons rather than according to the more abstract metric of numbers to enter into history is to take up a position in the world of human affairs relative to all these different figures so we might speak of this particular year as the 2020th year of our the year of the pandemic and the 69th year of the reign of her majesty queen elizabeth ii donald trump being president of the united states such a way of dating as luke dates the events here tells us a great deal more than the year 2020 the word of god came to john the son of zachariah this is a familiar formula for the word of the lord coming to the prophet note the fact that many prophets books are introduced with a similar expression the formula is often further contextualized by mentioning the reign of particular kings or rulers often

foreign ones along with the name of the prophet and his father so for instance the word of the lord that came to hosea the son of birei in the days of uziah jotham ahaz and hezekiah kings of judah and in the days of jeroboam the son of king of israel or the words of amos who was among the shepherds of tukoa which he saw concerning israel in the days of uziah king of judah and in the days of jeroboam the son of joash king of israel two years before the earthquake or in the second year of derius the king in the sixth month on the first day of the month the word of the lord came by the hand of hagi the prophet to the rubber ball the son of shiel teal governor of judah and to joshua the son of jahazodak the high priest or in the eighth month in the second year of derius the word of the lord came to the prophet zachariah the son of berakhi son of iddo saying the prophets operate within an international context speaking as god's representatives to kings and rulers of nations unsurprisingly john the baptist is later imprisoned in this chapter for speaking out against herod the king john the baptist declares a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins as nt wright observes the remission of sins refers primarily to god's restoration of sinful israel the baptism was an act of national not just private repentance this baptism occurred in the wilderness on the far side of the jordan those who came to be baptized by john had symbolically to leave the land and re-enter it by washing john is one preparing the way for the returning king in the wilderness he baptizes in the wilderness as the one who is the voice in the wilderness preparing the way of the lord making his path straight he is preparing a people to be brought into the land by jesus joshua john was from a priestly family and his actions should be understood in the light of this baptism wasn't something that arose out of the blue but it's something related to the rights of the levitical system nor was john alone in developing water rights we have similar ritual washings associated with the essenes john the baptist here raises the question of who the true children of abraham are a question that is central in many other parts of the bible not least romans and galatians in using the expression brood of vipers he is effectively declaring that the multitude's coming to him are like the seed of the serpent in genesis chapter 3 verse 15 there is enmity place between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent and john is suggesting that rather than there being the children of abraham as they suppose themselves to be they are actually the children of the evil one god can raise up children to abraham from these stones god later raises up christ from the stone grave as abraham's true heir and i think that it's possible that john is alluding to isaiah chapter 51 verses 1 to 2 here listen to me you who pursue righteousness you who seek the lord look to the rock from which you were hewn and to the quarry from which you were dug look to abraham your father and to sarah who bore you for he was but one when i called him that i might bless him and multiply him israel is raised up from the rock and god can do the same thing again john declares that the axe is laid to the the trees are going to be chopped down at their very roots not just at the trunk once again the image comes from isaiah chapter 10 verses 33 to 34 behold the lord god of hosts will lop the boughs with terrifying power the great in height will be hewn down and the lofty will be brought low he will cut down the thickets of the forest with an axe and lebanon will fall by the majestic one those who know the

isaiah reference will recognize that what comes next is a rod growing from the stem of jesse the kingdom is cut down beyond even david and a new david will arise like life from the dead the image of the axe and the trees is also reminiscent of psalm 74 verses 4 to 7 where the trees are associated with the temple the nation and its temple will be cut down by the axe of the romans in ad 70 and burned your foes have roared in the midst of your meeting place they set up their own signs for signs they were like those who swing axes in a forest of trees and all its carved wood they broke down with hatchets and hammers they set your sanctuary on fire they profaned the dwelling place of your name bringing it down to the ground the imagery is also found in daniel chapter 4 verses 10 to 16 the visions of my head as i lay in bed were these i saw and behold a tree in the midst of the earth and its height was great the tree grew and became strong and its top reached to heaven and it was visible to the end of the whole earth its leaves were beautiful and its fruit abundant and in it was food for all the beasts of the field found shade under it and the birds of the heavens lived in its branches and all flesh was fed from it i saw in the visions of my head as i lay in bed and behold a watcher a holy one came down from heaven he proclaimed aloud and said thus chop down the tree and lop off its branches strip off its leaves and scatter its fruit let the beasts flee from under it and the birds from its branches but leave the stump of its roots in the earth bound with a band of iron and bronze amid the tender grass of the field let him be wet with the dew of heaven let his portion be with the beasts in the grass of the earth let his mind be changed from a man's and let a beast's mind be given to him and let seven periods of time pass over him there nebuchadnezzar the babylonian emperor is judged for his pride and it's a judgment upon the kingdom that he's associated with too perhaps we should recognize that the names of verses one and two in this chapter are also a list of trees these great trees of the earth that will be brought low with the advent of his kingdom god is bringing a great axe to the forest of the world jesus is declared to be mightier than john here jesus is presented as if a powerful warrior once again perhaps we are in the world of isaiah allusions here jesus is like the description of the lord as a mighty warrior single-handedly working salvation treading out the wine press on the day of his vengeance in isaiah chapter 63 verses one to six john the baptist isn't worthy to loose christ's sandals for this treading the references to strength are significant the hebrew meaning of gabriel's name also refers to might and strength and the scene is being set for a showdown with the strong man who holds the world in bondage our first introduction to christ in the new testament through the testimony of john the baptist is as the one who winnows at the threshing floor his winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire christ is the one who works the threshing floor much as he is the one who treads out the grapes and the wine press in isaiah chapter 63 verses one to six and revelation chapter 14 verses 14 to 20 where he also reaps the wheat and only a dull ear would miss the heavy allusion to malachi chapter 3 verses 1 to 3 behold i send my messenger and he will prepare the way before me and the lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight

behold he is coming says the lord of hosts but who can endure the day of his coming and who can stand when he appears for he is like a refiner's fire and like fuller's soap he will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver and he will purify the sons of levi and refine them like gold and silver and they will bring offerings and righteousness to the lord the temple of malachi chapter 3 is replaced with the threshing floor in luke chapter 3 and it makes sense because the temple was built upon a threshing floor and the symbolism of these two things get associated with each other not muzzling the ox as it treads out the grain is associated as a principle with the way that the priest should be able to eat from the altar the priests are the oxen that work in the temple that work in the threshing floor they're preparing the grain of israel for the bread of god christ however is the one who purges both the temple and the nation of israel he is the one who separates wheat from chaff burning the latter and gathering the former it's a time of judgment these are images of god's judgment drawn from places like psalm 1 herod the tetrarch persecutes john the baptist at the instigation of his wife herodias and the parallel to jezebel's instigation of ahab's persecution of elijah in whose spirit and power john came in verse 17 of chapter 1 that should be clear jesus is baptized when all of the people have been baptized presumably suggesting that it was not just as one of the crowd should we see a suggestion that jesus is the one who completes the full number perhaps i'm not sure whether luke intends this but you might see the flood account in the background here when all have entered the ark god closes the door then the heavens are opened the holy spirit later descends upon jesus like a dove like the dove descended on the new earth after the flood i think luke definitely intends this but i'm not completely persuaded that he intends a wider set of flood illusions in the baptism of jesus we see father son and spirit in a single event the voice of the father from heaven the descent of the spirit in the form of a dove and the sun coming up out of the water in contrast to other gospel descriptions of the baptism of christ jesus we are here told is praying at the time and this is part of luke's foregrounding of the theme of prayer more generally why is jesus baptized by john various reasons can be given and different gospels emphasize different things among other things that creates continuity between the ministry of john the baptist and jesus just as mooses and joshua in joshua chapter one and elijah and elisha in second kings chapter two passed the baton of ministry on the far side of the jordan so john passes the baton of ministry the ministry of the prophets to jesus the son at the same place jesus has the same name as joshua and a related name to elisha and he leads us into the promised land his ministry is compared to that of elisha at various points in the gospel of luke and before jesus elisha was the most prominent miracle worker in the land in being baptized with the rest of the people jesus also identifies with them and identifies them with him he is the one who will lead them into the promised land he is the new joshua who will go before the people as the leader of the people he also takes their state upon himself along with all of their history and so in being baptized he is assuming the weight of the burden of israel present in the land but not truly enjoying the fellowship with god that they should do because of their sin jesus enacts the repentance of the nation that he represents by being baptized with john's baptism at

his baptism Jesus is also being set apart as a priest he begins his ministry at about 30 years of age which is the age at which the priests began their ministry Jesus baptism was a baptism into priesthood and the fact that a genealogy follows should be related to the fact that Jesus is entering into priestly ministry at this point the genealogy marks him out as qualified for priesthood the baptism is a confirmation both to Jesus and to John of Jesus's status as the son of God in John's gospel the descent of the Spirit upon Jesus is that which manifests Jesus to John as the son of God and this marks the definitive beginning of Christ's ministry but it also demonstrates that John's ministry has achieved its purpose it is important to remember that a qualification for the 12 has been there since the baptism of John and each one of the gospels highlights the ministry of John at the very outset of their story John the Baptist is an integral part of the story of Christ Jesus's own story is a story of three baptisms his baptism where he is anointed and manifested in the Jordan the baptism of his death and the baptism of the Spirit that he performs at Pentecost and in Jesus's baptism he gathers up the story of all the great baptisms of the Old Testament things like the creation the flood the Red Sea baptism into priesthood the ritual washings Elijah crossing the Jordan and many other such events and he gathers these into his story he takes up the baton from the last great Old Testament prophet John the Baptist he identifies with a sinful people and then out of their broken history he forges a new one our baptism is how we are plugged into his baptism we are baptized into him as Israel was into Moses the one who was drawn from the water we are baptized with him in the Jordan anointed with his Spirit for ministry and declared to be God's beloved children we are baptized with him in his death dying and rising to new life we are baptized with his baptism of Pentecost clothed with the mantle of the ascended Christ Spirit and made one body with him and the story of all things is gathered together and summed up in the baptized Christ and we in him the descent of the Spirit upon Jesus at his baptism should be related to the later descent of the Spirit upon the church at Pentecost as Christ ascends into heaven his Spirit descends upon the church like the mantle of Elijah fell to Elijah and Elijah received the firstborn portion of Elijah's Spirit when Elijah ascended in Second Kings chapter 2 Elijah's ascension is Elijah's Pentecost a further connection to Luke's account of Jesus' baptism might be seen in the story of Ezekiel in chapter 1 verse 1 in the 30th year in the fourth month on the fifth day of the month as I was among the exiles by the Chibok now the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God Jesus is a new Ezekiel as we will see in what follows this is the 30th year of his life as it was the 30th year for Ezekiel he's by the river he's with the exiles the heavens are opened and he sees visions of God if John the Baptist was introduced to us like one of the Old Testament prophets the stage is now set for a new prophet a question to consider what Old Testament accounts might the words of the Father from heaven remind us of Luke chapter 3 after the baptism of Jesus ends with a genealogy and it describes Jesus entering into his ministry at the age of 30 years old this is the same age that the priests would have begun their ministry it's the same age as Joseph begins to serve Pharaoh that David becomes king and Ezekiel in the 30th year sees the heavens opened and sees visions of God so in all of these cases we're seeing an entrance into

some sort of ministry whether it's prophetic ministry in the case of ezekiel whether it's kingly ministry in the case of david whether it's the ministry of stewardship in the case of joseph or the ministry of the priests in the temple there's a different setting of the genealogy here than we find in matthew in matthew it comes at the very beginning of the book in chapter 1 and it's set out in 42 generations divided into three sets of 14 and particularly emphasizing david and abraham this doesn't introduce the gospel but rather it occurs after the baptism and before the temptation however it does frame this as a sort of beginning of sorts it's the beginning of jesus ministry and it lies between two key events the father's statement of jesus's sonship leads into this now this genealogy is also interesting in other ways it moves backwards rather than forwards most of the genealogies that we have in scripture start off with the oldest figure and then move forward to more recent times this starts off with christ and then moves backwards and it goes back to the very very beginning to abraham as the son of god there's a cosmic scope that opens up here genealogy serve a number of different purposes one of the things that they do is to gather large periods of time together and large stories are condensed within a genealogy we have a sense of the different figures who are involved and the legacy that a person might be bearing in what they're doing typically the further you go back in a genealogy the more it becomes a matter of diminishing returns if we go back far enough just about anyone can be seen as a descendant from some great ancestor because their genealogy has spread so wide and has been so mixed in with other peoples which of us is not descended from adam or from noah while this is the case however jesus in the beginning of his ministry is related to these figures in a different way he holds their destiny within himself jesus takes the destiny of the whole human race and he's going to live it out and bring it to his head so it's not just that he has the blood of adam in him all of us are descended from adam no it's the fact that jesus will achieve for the human race what adam once lost and failed to achieve when we look at this genealogy and compare it with matthew there are a number of problems though it seems as if very few names are shared in common certainly once we get past david even the numbers of names are very different matthew structures his genealogy according to 314s whereas luke is a genealogy of 77 some have suggested that matthew's is the genealogy of joseph whereas the genealogy in luke is that of mary but in both cases it's joseph that is connected with the genealogy of david in particular and there's no reason to believe that mary was descended from david for the numbers of the names we should not worry that much about that the genealogies are not necessarily comprehensive they don't necessarily include every single figure luke's could be a lot more extensive than matthew's in this regard other suggestions include the possibility that one is a sort of royal line and the other is a father son line of genealogy if for instance you were to trace the kings of the united kingdom and go all the way back and trace the genealogy you would get a different list from the list of those who sat on the throne in order and matthew seems to follow this line of royal succession whereas luke departs from it quite radically so maybe that's part of what's going on both matthew and luke seem to have some structuring device for their genealogy matthew's is very

apparent it has the three sets of 14 and it's divided according to key events and key characters abraham david the descent into babylon and luke's does not have quite so clear a pattern but yet it is 77 names and these can be broken into 11 lists of seven names and there are key names at specific points david starts the seventh list of seven names abraham starts the ninth enoch the 11th perhaps with the focus upon the number seven we're supposed to hear jubilee themes seven seven times seven 70 or 70 times seven or maybe in this case 77 are all numbers that have that sort of resonance and perhaps that's part of what luke is trying to do here to frame what jesus is doing as a jubilee type event it's also interesting that it goes back while this is a feature found in common with other genealogies at the time most of the genealogies of scripture move forward from father to son all the way down rather than from son to father that movement from son to father is most common when we see someone's pedigree set out that they are someone who has title to a particular office or role perhaps seeing as this comes at the beginning of jesus ministry we're supposed to see it in this light however although it is important for luke and elsewhere in the gospels that jesus is traced through david that he belongs to the davidic line he comes through nathan which is surprising in matthew it's solomon in seeking clues to try and understand the reason for this some have observed zachariah chapter 12 and seen there the possibility of nathan's line being set apart from the rest of the house of david and i will pour out on the house of david and the inhabitants of jerusalem a spirit of grace and please for mercy so that when they look on me on him whom they have pierced they shall mourn for him as one mourns for an only son and we bitterly over him as one weeps over a firstborn on that day the morning in jerusalem will be as great as the morning for hadad raman in the plains of megiddo the land shall mourn each family by itself the family of the house of david by itself and their wives by themselves the family of the house of nathan by itself and their wives by themselves the family of the house of levi by itself and their wives by themselves the family of the shemites by itself and their wives by themselves and all the families that are left each by itself and their wives by themselves perhaps there is a particular significance to the line of nathan but if there is i don't have an idea what it could be. A further interesting detail is the absence of the name of Jeconiah or Jehoiachin from Luke as the father of Sheolteel, whereas he is present in the Gospel of Matthew.

Luke mentions a different father for Sheolteel. Now this might be in part related to Jeremiah chapter 22 verse 30 where there's a curse upon Jeconiah. Thus says the Lord, write this man down as childless, a man who shall not succeed in his days, for none of his offspring shall succeed in sitting on the throne of David and ruling again in Judah.

Yet we do hear that in 1st Chronicles chapter 3 verses 16 to 17 he did have a son. The descendants of Jehoiachin, Jeconiah his son, Zedekiah his son, and the sons of Jeconiah the captive, Sheolteel his son. Now Sheolteel may have been adopted and the differences between the two genealogies may be explained this way.

One way or another these genealogies are complex and we have to resort to some

difficult explanation to reconcile them. We have to think in terms of levitical marriage or in terms of adoption or in terms of a royal line and a natural biological line or in terms of Mary's line and Joseph's line. There are many different options of various merits.

Jesus' genealogy and ancestry are complex, containing many stories that have not been told to us. This of course is true of most people's genealogies. The important thing is that the Son of God has taken his stand in history.

He has come in the middle of history. He's the one who takes the human race and its story upon himself and he stands as part of a line of promise running from Abraham through the patriarchs to David and down through the history of Israel and being fulfilled at that moment in history. The Christmas Carol talks about the hopes and fears of all the years being met in Bethlehem that night and one of the things that the genealogy of Luke is doing is showing us that the hopes and fears of all the years are met in the figure of Jesus Christ.

That at this juncture in history, this weight is coming upon his shoulders just as he's about to go out and start his ministry. He is the one who's bearing the weight of the world. The entire fate of humanity has come down to him.

He is parallel in this respect to This will help us to see in the account of the temptation of Christ a contrast with the temptation of Adam which he failed in the garden. Jesus succeeds in the wilderness. The genealogy ends with the words the Son of God.

Adam was the one who had God as his father in a particular way. God formed him out of the dust of the earth. But Christ in the events immediately preceding this has been declared to be the Son of God by the Father's voice speaking from heaven, you are my beloved son.

And in what follows, Jesus is being tested concerning his sonship by Satan in the wilderness. So the theme of divine sonship is another crucial part of Luke's genealogy and why he has it in this way and in this place. A question to consider, thinking about the genealogies of the Old and New Testament, can you think of some of the various purposes that they are performing in their different locations? Luke chapter 4 tells the account of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness.

Each of the accounts of the Gospels of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness differs slightly. Each account is introduced with different language for instance, language that sets up different sets of echoes. Matthew speaks of Jesus being led up to the wilderness by the Spirit.

The allusion here seems to be Israel being led up out of Egypt into the wilderness by the Spirit, the pillar of cloud and fire in the Exodus where they were there for 40 years. Mark speaks of Jesus being cast out by the Spirit into the wilderness, perhaps reminiscent of

David being driven out from Saul's court into the wilderness. While in the wilderness David lived with the wild beasts resisting the temptation to snatch the kingdom for himself before it was time.

Luke however, phrases things differently. Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, was led by the Spirit in the wilderness. This is the language of the prophet caught up and transported by the Spirit, the sort of language that we find in the book of Ezekiel.

The hand of the Lord was upon me and I was led in the Spirit. We should also note the similarities with Luke chapter 2 verse 27 where Simeon comes by the Spirit into the temple. Another interesting parallel might be seen in Revelation 17 verse 3 where the seer John is carried away in the Spirit into the wilderness where he encounters the whore of Babylon on the beast.

If Matthew's introduction to Jesus' temptation in the wilderness foregrounded themes of the Exodus and the law and Mark's foreground themes of kingship, in Luke the themes are more those of the prophet. We have already noted earlier similarities with the story of Ezekiel. The similarities seen for instance in the fact that Jesus was about 30 years old when he was baptised by John.

In Ezekiel chapter 1 verse 1 it's in the 30th year that Ezekiel sees the heavens opened and sees visions of God. And Jesus in his baptism sees the heavens opened and there is a vision of the Spirit descending upon him in the form of a dove. But the allusions seem to continue here.

The hand of the Lord came upon Ezekiel and he was carried in the Spirit into the wilderness valley of dry bones in Ezekiel chapter 37 verse 1. And then there's a continued pattern from there. He's first transported by the Spirit into the wilderness, then to a very high mountain in chapter 40 verse 2, then to various extremities of the temple in 40 verse 17, 24, 28, 32, and then in chapter 41, 42, 43 and 44 at the very beginning. This visionary journey is also mirrored in Revelation which begins in the wilderness 17 verse 3, then goes to the mountain in 21 verse 10 and then to the temple in 21 verse 22 following.

The mountain and the temple are closely related as in Ezekiel and the devil seems to be giving Jesus a sort of false apocalypse here. A twisted alternative to the visions of God's future that are received by the prophets. This is what the future could look like if Christ bows to Satan and takes his route.

There might be ways we are reminded of the Exodus story here beyond the fact that it's 40 years. There is the water crossing connected with baptism of the Red Sea. There is a period in the wilderness associated with miraculous bread, manna.

The idea of turning the stone into bread might recall both the manna and the rock in the

wilderness. There's coming to the mountain of Sinai, the high place, and then there's the temple or the tabernacle. You also see similar patterns in the story of Elijah.

Elijah is fed with miraculous bread baked on hot stones in 1 Kings chapter 19 verses 5 to 8 and that gives him strength to go without food for 40 days and nights. This is accompanied by the word of the Lord. He then goes to the mountain of Sinai where he is given a vision and a commission for the future of the kingdom.

Refusing to eat the food of the land bearing the curse, the prophet is fed with heavenly bread. The Israelites rejected the old leaven and ate manna, bread from heaven. Moses went without bread for 40 days on the mountain, receiving tablets of stone from God.

David ate the holy bread of the tabernacle in 1 Samuel chapter 21 verses 1 to 6. Elijah is fed by the ravens and then by the miraculous bowl and jar, then by the bread from the angel. The devil wants Jesus to produce bread from the curse bearing territory rather than relying by faith upon God's bread. This might be part of what's going on.

It's what James Jordan has suggested. The wilderness becomes the source of a feast both in Ezekiel chapter 39 verses 17 to 20 and in Revelation chapter 19 verses 17 to 21 after the great victory has been won. Luke has already mentioned a miraculous transformation of stones in chapter 3 verse 8. Notice that in Luke the devil calls Jesus to produce bread from a single stone rather than from many.

Christ has been connected with Adam in the verse immediately before the temptation account. He is then described as being filled with the spirit, the breath of God. Like Adam, he is tempted by the devil to eat forbidden food and to jump the gun on God's kingdom plants.

Like the serpent in the wilderness, the devil seeks to twist God's word. The last Adam resists in the hunger of the wilderness. What the first Adam failed to resist in the plenitude of the garden.

We should also recognize the importance of the statement if you are the son of God. Jesus has just been declared to be the son of God with the voice from heaven and he's also been declared the son of God at the end of the genealogy. Now he's being tested concerning that.

Is he a faithful son? Is he a son that will obey the word of his father? Where Adam, the first born man of the dust, failed. Seeing all of the kingdoms in a moment in time might be like the visions in Daniel of the different successive empires. The devil is the ruler of the wider empire, making him the direct adversary of Gabriel who has appeared earlier to announce the births of John and Jesus.

John's baptism of the mightier Jesus leads to this conflict as Jesus will fight on Gabriel's behalf against his greater adversary. Perhaps we should relate what Jesus is doing here

to the role of Michael, the heavenly prince of Israel, in supporting Gabriel against the opposing kings in Daniel chapter 10 verse 13 and 21. Michael is connected with the angel of the Lord in Zechariah chapter 3 and perhaps Jude verse 9 fills this out a bit.

The angel of the Lord or the angel of the covenant is connected with Christ in other places. Malachi 3 verse 1 is a key verse here as it relates the coming of the angel of the covenant to the ministry of John the Baptist and Christ. The Lord, the messenger of the covenant, is Christ.

Once this has been appreciated I think an interesting picture starts to emerge. Gabriel tells Daniel that Michael will stand up at some point in the future. In Daniel chapter 12 verse 1 Luke presents us with the coming of the mighty champion who will equip Gabriel to defeat the devil and his princes.

John speaks of Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon, the full grown serpent, in Revelation chapter 12 verses 7 to 9. The references to angelic rulers, the heavenly army and conflict with the devil in these early chapters of Luke should make clear that there is a battle of spiritual powers occurring throughout the gospel and that we shouldn't merely focus upon the surface events. The devil's second temptation is an invitation to Christ to rule under and with him rather than under the father. This temptation would be a way for Jesus to avoid the great battle of the cross.

When Jesus resists his second temptation the devil tempts Jesus to throw himself down from the pinnacle of the temple, to cast himself out of the realm of God's presence, assuring him that the angels will protect him, much as Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were protected in the fiery furnace. If Jesus won't rule alongside the devil on the devil's terms, the devil assures Jesus that God will protect him if he exiles himself. Rather than plundering the strongman and resisting the devil's claims over God's house, Jesus would be protected if he abandoned the house to the devil.

It would be so much easier for Jesus if he just cast himself away from Israel. All of Jesus' responses to the devil involve quotations from the book of Deuteronomy, chapter 8 verse 3, chapter 6 verse 13, chapter 10 verse 20 and chapter 6 verse 16, and all refer to the testing of Israel in the wilderness. We're supposed to think back to what happened to Israel and how Israel failed, and think about how Christ is fulfilling what Israel had failed to achieve.

The devil departs from Jesus until an opportune time, presumably Gethsemane. We should observe the emphasis upon trial, which is probably a more appropriate word than temptation, in the garden of Gethsemane. In Luke chapter 22 verses 39 to 46 we see this.

The same word for trial is used here as in chapter 4 verse 13. Perhaps we should see some relationship between the trials in the wilderness and the trials leading up to and

upon the cross. So one possibility would be that the first trial is found in the garden of Gethsemane.

Jesus must live by every word of the Father, and the Father's word takes the form of a cup that he must drink. While Jesus could reject the cup of his Father and eat the portion of the devil, he chooses to live by the word of his Father. The second trial could relate to his claims of kingship, while before Pilate and Herod.

The kingdoms of this world cast their judgement upon Christ, ridiculing and condemning him, even though the kingdoms of this world are his proper inheritance. Jesus could assert his reign in a demonic fashion, but he accepts the crown of thorns and is raised up on the cross. The third and final trial occurs while Jesus is on the cross.

Those watching the crucifixion, the rulers among them, the soldiers and even one of the criminals crucified with him, call upon him to save himself, to cast himself down from the cross, to abandon the temple and his mission. Luke's account of the temptations of Christ in the wilderness is followed by his teaching in the synagogue of Nazareth. He begins with reading from the book of Isaiah.

His reading brings together Isaiah chapter 61 verses 1 to 2 and chapter 58 verse 6. The acceptable year of the Lord might be a reference to the Jubilee. In Leviticus chapter 25 verses 8 to 17 we read about the Jubilee. It would fit well with Luke's emphasis upon economic themes.

Jesus is bringing the release of all debts. This would also relate to the Sabbath and the true fast spoken of in Isaiah chapter 58. Jesus doesn't quote the end of Isaiah chapter 61 verse 2 with its reference to the day of vengeance.

His current ministry is one of blessing and restoration. The day of vengeance comes later for Israel in AD 70 and unsurprisingly the expression occurs in that context later on in Luke chapter 21 verse 22. Jesus' proclamation of liberty should be related to his defeat of the devil's power over the land, restoring the land to its original owners.

The people of Nazareth observe that Jesus is Joseph's son. With this they're attempting to exert some sort of authoritative claim upon Jesus. Physician heal yourself.

It's the claim that Jesus owes them special treatment on the miracle front. He should recognize the greater duty that he has towards his own country, literally his fatherland in verse 23. And Jesus challenges this claim with the examples of Elijah and Elisha.

The reference to Elijah and Elisha here is significant not merely on account of the numerous allusions that have already been made to them in the book so far. Later on in the book there are healings that are reminiscent of Elijah and Elisha. The healing of the centurion's son in chapter 7 verses 1 to 10 is a miracle done at a distance for a military man of a foreign power and that can be related to Elisha's healing of Naaman the Syrian,

another foreign military man which Jesus mentioned in verse 27.

The raising of the dead son of the widow of Nain relates to Elijah's raising of the widow of Zarephath's son. The widow of Zarephath is mentioned in verse 26. There seems to be something interesting going on here when we read this passage alongside the account of the temptations.

There are some peculiar features of the text that should grab our attention. First of all the fact that the quote from Deuteronomy in response to the first temptation is not completed. Man shall not live by bread alone.

We know the words that come next they're given in Matthew but they're not given here but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God but we're not told that and yet in the story of the preaching of Nazareth we hear some reminder of those words. The people marvel at the gracious words that proceeded out of his mouth. Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord.

If you're talking about speaking it's a rather strange way to speak about speaking but this is the expression that Luke uses in this context and presumably because he wants us to think back to Jesus's response to the first temptation. In Luke chapter 4 verse 17 Jesus is handed the scroll of prophecy and then he proceeds to speak the word of prophecy as a word that he incarnates. One of the peculiar features of this text are the many references to the scroll.

It's referenced three times. He is handed the scroll, he opens the scroll, he gives the scroll back. Now if he had wanted to Luke could have said that Jesus got up and he read from the Prophet Isaiah.

Why mention the scroll? It seems to me that again this is a connection to the story of Ezekiel. In Ezekiel chapter 2 verse 9 Ezekiel is handed the scroll of prophecy, the word of God. He then eats it and as the prophet he holds that word within himself.

It comes from out of him. The prophets were fed by the word of the Lord and he eats the scroll in chapter 3 verses 1 to 3 much as John does in Revelation chapter 10 verse 8 to 11 and that word received into his mouth is then something that he can speak forth from within him. Jesus is doing the same thing.

He's handed the scroll and then the words proceed from him. They come out of him. They're not from the scroll primarily.

He's not reading from the scroll so much as reading from within. The scroll expresses something that has come true in that time. In Christ himself that scroll and its meaning is standing before them.

What does this mean? Well it helps us to understand the response to the first

temptation. Man shall not live by bread alone. How does man live? Man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God and Jesus is living by the scroll of the Lord that he has taken into himself and now he is speaking forth.

He's speaking out his mission and that mission is a mission of liberation, of deliverance to the captives. Jesus is the one by whom the true bread of God's Word is given rather than the bread of the devil. There are other things to be observed here.

At the very end of the events in Nazareth they tried to cast him down from the brow of the hill. In verse 29 this it seems to me should be related to the third temptation. Jesus' own people are seeking to cast him down from the temple, to exile him from them, to cast him off which would mean for Jesus an abandonment of his purpose and his vocation to deliver the people.

He could allow them to cast him down and he would just go off and he would no longer be associated with them and the people would perish. They would be given over into the clutches of Satan but he stands even when they are trying to cast him down and in the same way as he remains on the cross, even if he could come down and deliver himself and abandon the people to their fate, he remains faithful. He remains faithful in the experience of complete rejection by his townsfolk and he remains faithful not just in the rejection and the abandonment that he experiences at Calvary but in the deep agony that he experiences too.

He will not allow Israel to cast him away because he will be cast away for Israel. This leaves us with the question of whether there is a reference to the second temptation in this account of the preaching in Nazareth and I believe there is. Specifically Jesus rejects the attempts of his own people to get him to serve them.

He's going to serve God alone. His vocation is given to him by his father, not by his townsfolk, not by his countrymen. Rather than proudly seeking demonic mastery of the world, he chooses to minister deliverance to the Gentiles according to the will of his father as Elijah and Elisha did.

A question to consider, in what ways analogous to the specific ways in which Jesus was tempted might we be tempted as Christians in the present day? After Jesus has been rejected by his hometown of Nazareth in Luke 4, he goes to Capernaum which would be the base for his earliest mission. Accounts of this Sabbath are also found in Matthew and Mark and the rest of this chapter recounts a series of great works that Jesus performed on this Sabbath morning, afternoon and evening. He begins by teaching in the synagogue in a way that is seen as remarkable for its authority.

He isn't just delivering an opinion or expressing some viewpoint or even just teaching. He himself is bringing the truth and the claim of God to bear upon people in a way that is remarkable. He demonstrates the authority of his word of teaching but also

demonstrates his powerful word of exorcism.

He casts out the demon who testifies to his true identity as the Holy One of God. Again this probably has some priestly connotations. He has both authority and power and that power is seen in the relationship to the evil spirits.

Having faced the devil in the wilderness, he now faces demons in the synagogue. The devil's forces are occupying the heart of Israel's places of worship, threatening to render them a desolate place. We don't see demons much in the Old Testament.

They are largely associated with the wilderness and abandoned locations in places like Isaiah chapter 13 verse 21 or 34 verse 13 to 14 and then also we see this in Luke chapter 11 verse 24. Widespread demonic possession is not the norm but Jesus performs exorcisms wherever he goes. Maybe we could relate this to the story of David and Saul.

After David has been anointed by God's spirit, a distressing spirit troubles Saul and David has to minister to him. As Christ is anointed by the Spirit, he plays a similar role for Israel. He causes the distressing spirits to depart from the people and as a result of his work his fame spreads throughout the region.

But as we go through the gospel we see that the crowds don't really understand what his mission involves. The synagogue exorcism is followed by the healing of Simon's mother-in-law and it's interesting that we find a reference to Simon here without any previous introduction. Luke seems to presume that Simon will already be known to his readers and at various other points in his gospel he is presuming some prior knowledge on the part of his reader.

Simon's wife is spoken of here even if only to mention that she has a mother. As Jesus seems to have stayed in this house, she was probably one of the women who helped support his ministry. Such women were mentioned in Luke chapter 8 verses 1 to 3. Later on in 1 Corinthians 9.5 we're told that she accompanied Peter as a fellow worker.

Jesus is someone who heals both in public and in private. It's likely that Jesus stayed in the house with Simon and Andrew and their extended family and it's worth considering the sort of family structure of the society he's ministering within. It may help us better to understand the challenge that he presented at certain points.

We might have another window into the familial life of the context in the story of being lost in Jerusalem. Mary and Joseph go with Jesus but Jesus can be lost for quite a long time. They presume he's with the others.

There is presumably a large extended family and lots of friends and others traveling with them and we should presume that Jesus would have spent a lot of time with this extended network of people and also that many of his disciples seem to have been drawn from such an extended network having relations to Jesus and also to each other.

Luke speaks of Simon's mother-in-law's fever as something like a form of possession. It afflicts her.

Jesus rebukes it and it leaves her and then she begins to serve him. If Jesus as it seems made Peter's house in Capernaum a base of his operations Simon's mother-in-law would probably have been his primary hostess with all of the honor that that implied. Jesus does all these things on the Sabbath and there doesn't seem to be any conflict about this fact at this point.

Later on people come to him in the evening as the sun's going down and as the new day is beginning and he heals many. He forbids the demons to speak because they know him. Jesus often discourages people from talking about healings and deliverances and also silences demons.

However there are occasions when Jesus displays his work more openly. The purpose of the secrecy seems to exceed merely a concern to avoid excessive attention from authorities. The disciples and the demons have a knowledge about Jesus' mission and identity for which the time has not yet come for more public disclosure.

Part of the purpose of the secrecy is that it avoids the great openness to misunderstanding that a revelation of his identity before its proper time would allow for. Prior to his death and resurrection a revelation of the fact that he is the son of God, that he is the Messiah, would lead to him being made king or something like that, which would undermine the purpose of his mission, drawing him away from the path of the cross. Only when the cross and the resurrection have occurred can it truly be understood what it means that Jesus is the Christ.

This chapter ends with Jesus leaving Capernaum secretly to go to a desolate place and continue his mission elsewhere when he ends up going down to the synagogues of Judea and preaching there too. A question to consider, how might we get a clearer idea of what Jesus is doing in this passage and elsewhere from his statement in verses 18 to 19 of this chapter. Jesus begins Luke chapter 5 by teaching by the side of Lake Gennesaret.

He goes into a boat and teaches from just off the shore. Within the book of Luke it is always the lake of Gennesaret. In the other Gospels we read about the Sea of Galilee or the Sea of Tiberias, whereas it tends to be lake throughout the Gospel of Luke.

Why the difference? In Mark for instance a great deal is made of the sea stories, the way in which Christ proves his power on the seas and demonstrates his glory to his disciples. In Luke however there is a sea but the sea is found in the second volume of his work in the book of Acts. I think it's likely that Luke refers to the Sea of Galilee as the Lake of Gennesaret to hold some of that energy back until the book of Acts where we will reach the sea as Paul finally goes to Rome.

This is because the sea is associated with the Gentiles. In the Old Testament there aren't many stories of the sea at all. We have stories of the land, of shepherds and sheep.

There are only really two boat stories. The first of course is the story of the ark and Noah and the second is the story of Jonah and the big fish. Both of these stories involve a more cosmic frame.

In Noah it's the whole world that's being judged and in the case of Jonah he's sent to a Gentile people with a message from God. The boat is Simon's and the boat is moved out a bit from the land and Jesus teaches from it. After the end of his teaching he instructs Simon to put out into the deep and let down his nets for a catch and he catches such a great multitude of fish that the net almost breaks.

He needs to be assisted by people in other boats but the number of fish is so great that the boats themselves are almost sinking. Simon has others with him but the narrative throughout is closely focused upon him as an individual. Simon Peter, it's the first time in the gospel that he's called Peter, is aware that he has been part of a miracle.

Jesus is no ordinary man. Simon is instantly, acutely aware of his own sinfulness. He's responding to a theophanic event, an event in which the glory of God is displayed in physical manifestations.

The power and the holiness of God reveal our own sinfulness by contrast. Many see doctrines that highlight human sinfulness as arising from a pessimistic view of man and what they fail to see is that more often than not they find their origin in a glorious vision of God. It's as we see God's holiness that we truly perceive our own sinfulness.

The dazzling radiance of the Lord's glory reveals the grubby, grimy and ugly pollution of human sinfulness. What's taking place here is reminiscent of the commissioning of the Prophet Isaiah. When Isaiah sees the glorious vision of the Lord in the temple his response is, Woe is me for I am lost for I am a man of unclean lips and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips for my eyes have seen the King the Lord of hosts.

It's Isaiah chapter 6 verse 5 and that response to a theophany is the same sort of thing that Peter is having here. The response of God in that instance is to send a seraphim with a coal from the altar. He touches the mouth of Isaiah and says behold this has touched your lips your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for and there is an implicit forgiving of Simon's sin here.

He's aware of his sin and Christ tells him not to be afraid. His sin is forgiven his guilt is not held against him and he is going to be like Isaiah commissioned with a task to Israel. He is told that he will be a fisher of men.

The Gentiles as dwellers in the sea could be thought of as fish. Also it's a way of thinking about those who are exiled those who have been driven out of the land. Jeremiah

chapter 16 verses 15 to 16 is a previous use of the language of fishers in relationship to gathering human beings.

For I will bring them back to their own land that I gave to their fathers. Behold I am sending for many fishers declares the Lord and they shall catch them and afterward I will send for many hunters and they shall hunt them from every mountain and every hill and out of the clefts of the rock. God is going to gather his people and one of the means by which he's going to do that is sending fishermen after them.

Jesus calls his disciples much as Elijah calls Elisha in first Kings chapter 19 verses 19 to 21. In that passage Elisha is engaged in a symbolically important task and in a similar way Simon's task and the miracle that is performed is a manifestation of his later calling. First Kings chapter 19 So he departed from there and found Elisha the son of Shaphat who was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen in front of him and he was with the twelfth.

Elijah passed by him and cast his cloak upon him and he left the oxen and ran after Elijah and said let me kiss my father and my mother and then I will follow you and he said to him go back again for what have I done to you and he returned from following him and took the yoke of oxen and sacrificed them and boiled their flesh with the yokes of the oxen and gave it to the people and they ate. Then he arose and went after Elijah and assisted him. James and John are there with Peter.

These are the three core disciples. They're companions in their former profession and their former profession prefigures their spiritual calling. Simon has been told to put out into the deep to leave the land.

Simon will lead later on the boat of the church. The church is like a boat. It's part of the land that has gone out to sea.

It's a sign of his future mission. He will strike out from the land. He will go to a sea town to Joppa.

As Jonah went to Joppa before heading out to Tarshish, so Peter will be in Joppa where he receives this mission to go to Cornelius and to go to the land. When the Gentiles are brought the gospel of Christ, they will be gathered in. Peter will fulfill his calling as the fisher of men, the one who leads the church in this primary mission, going out into the deep, leaving the land behind.

He will pioneer that and just as in this occasion he is assisted by his friends James and John and his companions and colleagues, they are going to be there assisting him there too. We should also note the way that this sign is repeated in John chapter 21 when Peter is restored to his calling. Jesus' statement to Simon that from that point on he would be catching men goes to him in particular but clearly it includes James and John and presumably also Andrew who's there with them.

After this Jesus heals a leper. Leprosy in scripture is not what we usually think of as leprosy. That is the condition called Hansen's disease.

Rather, leprosy seems to be a type of skin condition and that skin condition could be seen in part as a judgment of God upon the person. While it certainly has that connotation in certain parts of the Old Testament though, we should not presume that it is the case every occasion where we meet it. Lepers would generally live away from larger bodies of population so Jesus probably met the man in a more secluded location as he's going through deserted areas.

Jesus is moved by pity at the man's plight and he touches him. It's a means by which someone would usually contract impurity but when Jesus does this he communicates wholeness. This healing doesn't merely deliver the leper from a physical ailment but also delivers him from social isolation.

He can now become part of the wider people again. Jesus instructs him not to say anything and then sends him away. He must present himself to the priest and go through the prescribed process of cleansing.

Jesus is immune from catching impurity but the man must still observe the proper procedure and this is a proof to the authorities. Perhaps there's some connotation of judgment there. However although Jesus instructs the man not to tell anyone, the story seems to be told and his fame spreads throughout the region.

As a result it's difficult for Jesus to do his work openly in towns anymore. Rather he has to go into desolate places and in these desolate places he spends time in prayer. While we might think of the desolate places as places of communion with nature, of seeing the beauty of God's creation and of enjoying solitude and communion with God, we should bear in mind the many times in which in the new and the old testament the wilderness is a place of demonic habitation.

Christ may be going to the front line as it were, going to the place where the demons dwell and engaging in the struggle of prayer. A question to consider. How might the story of Simon and his encounter with Jesus in the miraculous catch of fish provide a paradigm for Christian experience more generally? In the second half of Luke chapter 5 Jesus performs a healing followed by a series of confrontations with and questions from the religious authorities.

The same sequence of events is found in Matthew chapter 9 and also in Mark chapter 2 and here for the first time in the gospel of Luke Jesus' conflict with the religious leaders is coming to the foreground. It's the first time that we see the Pharisees and the teachers of the law in the context of Jesus' ministry. While Jesus is teaching and some men bring to him a paralytic on a bed and the crowd is so great that they cannot approach him so they have to remove the tiled roof above him and lower the man down to him.

They overcome the obstacles of the crowd and the roof to reach Jesus. Their faith in this instance is seen in their persistence and their confidence that Christ has the power and the willingness to heal and the refusal to let anything stand in the way of reaching him. Jesus responds to their faith by declaring the sins of the paralyzed man forgiven.

To this point in Luke we might have even got the impression that Jesus' ministry was primarily about healings and exorcisms but here we see an act of forgiveness and in that act of forgiveness some aspect of Jesus' ministry that goes beyond healing and exorcism is revealed. There is a far more powerful work of salvation that's taking place here. The scribes and the Pharisees however think that he's blaspheming.

He's claiming a prerogative that is God's alone. To forgive sins surely that's only something that God can do. Who can forgive sins but God alone? And Jesus recognizes what's in their hearts and his response is to demonstrate his authority by healing the man.

That healing is not the greater act. The greater act and the central act is the act of forgiveness and that is part of the surprise of this chapter. We think that the central event will be the healing of the paralyzed man but the healing of the paralyzed man takes place almost as an afterthought, as a demonstration of the deeper healing that has taken place within.

That two-stage healing is an inward then an outward healing. The outward healing as a sign of the inward healing and this helps us to understand Jesus' ministry more generally. Jesus' ministry of external healing, of exorcism and these sorts of things are signs of the coming kingdom.

A kingdom that reaches far deeper in the salvation that it brings. Jesus speaks of himself as the son of man. The son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins.

Jesus is acting in this particular capacity. The son of man is a figure of eschatological significance but he's not just a judge. He's also someone who brings forgiveness.

The son of man in Daniel chapter 7 was one given great authority, one who would judge and rule but Jesus presents the establishment of the kingdom and the authority of the son of man as being exercised in part through forgiveness. The physical healings demonstrate Christ's authority and are signs of the deeper healing that's taking place. The work that Jesus is accomplishing however is not just that of an itinerant healer, rather he is the one who is the son of man bringing the eschatological kingdom and bringing forgiveness to God's people and the response of the people is that they are filled with amazement and awe, that they glorify God for the works that he is doing, that they are witnessing.

Some time after this Jesus sees Levi sitting at the tax booth as a tax collector. In

Matthew's gospel we're told that the tax collector was Matthew and presumably Levi is another name by which he goes. The tax collectors were despised for collaborating with the Romans and also for their injustice.

They dealt closely with the Gentiles and they dealt with an imperial oppressor and they would be seen as complicit in that oppression, an oppression that had a religious significance not merely in the way that it mistreated the poor but also in the way that it held the people of God in bondage and so for Jesus to eat not just with Levi but with a great company of tax collectors would be seen as a matter of considerable scandal. One of the themes that will become apparent as we go through the book of Luke is the importance of meals and the events that happen at tables. Jesus is redefining Israel around the meal table.

The meal table is among other things an anticipation of that great wedding feast and as in the story of the paralytic we need to see some of the deeper themes of Jesus' ministry come to the surface here. In the story of the paralytic is the importance of forgiveness and the way in which the healings are pointing towards a deeper healing that Christ is accomplishing. Here we need to see the way that Christ is gathering the lost sheep of the house of Israel, those who need a physician, those who are sinners and sick and he is bringing restoration and forgiveness to them.

Following this Jesus is questioned concerning fasting. Fasting would be a standard religious practice of Jewish groups and the fact that Jesus' disciples abstain from it is surprising. Surely a great rabbi like Jesus would teach his disciples to fast regularly but fasting is a matter of timing.

You fast in preparation for the feast and when the bridegroom is on the scene fasting would be a great failure to realize what time you're in. Christ did the bridegroom. God has visited his people in Christ and those who appreciate this visitation will feast and celebrate.

The time however will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them and then they will fast. While there were anticipations of Christ's death in the statement of Simeon in his presentation in the temple and also on the occasion when his parents lost him in Jerusalem at the time of the Passover, here however it is turning up in Jesus' own teaching. Jesus' teaching concerning the new and the old garments and the new wine and the old wineskins expresses something of the insufficiency of the old structures containing the new work that he is bringing about.

Jesus' teaching is not that the old is bad or to be rejected but rather that it cannot contain the new thing that he is bringing. Christ fulfills the law but in a way that goes beyond the constraining structures of the law. If you tried to contain the new wine of Jesus' ministry in the old wine of the practices of the disciples of John the Baptist or the Pharisees and the other practices of the law it would birth those old wineskins.

Likewise if you took the fabric of the kingdom and used it to patch the old reality of Israel it would tear and both would be the worst for it. No, Jesus is bringing something new that cannot be reduced to, contained by or constrained by the reality that has gone beforehand. It fulfills it but it cannot be circumscribed by it.

The final statement of this passage, and no one after drinking old wine desires new for he says the old is good, is probably an ironic statement. In this statement Jesus is probably commenting upon the way that people are rejecting him and the new wine of the kingdom because of their failure to see beyond the old wine of the old covenant. A question to consider, how might Jesus' miraculous turning of the water into wine in the wedding cana in John chapter 2 shed light upon this particular passage and vice versa? Luke chapter 6 begins with a couple of controversies concerning the Sabbath.

The disciples were permitted by the law to eat of the grain as they passed through a field. This was a form of gleaning so they weren't stealing. The issue however was that they were doing so on the Sabbath and that what they were doing countered to some of the Pharisees' work.

Jesus' disciples are challenged by the Pharisees for their behavior and Jesus gives a response. In his response Jesus focuses upon the example of David. In 1st Samuel chapter 21 verses 1 to 6 David and his hungry men were permitted to eat of the showbread which was usually restricted to the priests.

Ahimelech the priest rather than strictly applying the law recognized that this was an exceptional case and it was legitimate to give the bread to David. In that instance the hunger of David and his men took precedence. Jesus of course is a greater David.

He has the prerogative to determine in this instance. His men are like David's men. They're on a mission for God.

As those committed to a divine ministry it takes priority and it is not a violation of the Sabbath. This is something that Jesus fleshes out more in the parallel passage in Matthew chapter 12. The work of the priest is not counted as Sabbath breaking work because it is in service of the temple.

But as Jesus argues there is something greater than the temple here. Jesus himself. The Sabbath was meant to give rest to man not to subject man to bondage and the son of man is the Lord of the Sabbath.

He is the one who gives the true rest that the Sabbath bears witness to. In Jesus' response to the challenge to the actions of the disciples in the grain fields he makes an analogy with David and his followers. On one level this might be seen as an example of hunger taking priority over the law of the temple but it seems to be something more than that.

He's aligning himself with David. David's eating of the showbread in 1st Samuel chapter 21 does not seem to have been an instance of great hunger and needing bread as an emergency. It's not described in that way.

Rather there seems to be something about David himself and the mission that he's on that gives some warrant for the exception. And Jesus it seems to me is making a similar claim about himself and his disciples. This I believe becomes more apparent in Jesus' final claim.

The son of man is the Lord of the Sabbath. He presents himself as the eschatological son of man again, as the Lord of the Sabbath as such. As the Lord of the Sabbath Jesus is the one bringing in the great Sabbath.

His whole ministry began with a statement concerning the Jubilee, the year of the Lord's favour. He's the one who's bringing rest and deliverance and all these other things that belong to the reality of the Sabbath. His entire movement is a Sabbath bringing movement and so it is not inappropriate for his servants and followers to enjoy exceptional prerogatives on the Sabbath day.

We should also here recall that this comes after Jesus' teaching concerning the old wineskins and the new wine. Jesus' ministry exceeds the old structures as it fulfills them. Jesus then heals a man with a withered hand on the Sabbath.

It's on another Sabbath. This is a different day but it's connecting the two stories together so that we recognise there's a Sabbath theme going through this part of the chapter. Although the man isn't in urgent need, Jesus gives rest on the Sabbath which fulfills the intent and the commandment of the Sabbath and he poses a question to the people who would challenge him in a very stark way to do good or to do harm.

Now it would seem that this man does not urgently need to be healed. He could hang around for a few days and then be healed later on. Jesus is presenting such healing not just as permissible but as something that is part of the meaning and the purpose of the Sabbath itself.

Sabbath keeping is about giving life and healing. It's not designed just to be a means of laying heavy burdens upon people. Perhaps in this story we're also supposed to see something of the healing and restoration of Jeroboam's hand in 1st Kings chapter 13 being alluded to.

The account of the choice of the twelve that follows begins with Jesus going up on the mountain and praying all night. Luke is the only gospel that recalls the prayer of Jesus prior to the choice of the disciples and perhaps in the situation on the mountain we should recall some of the events of Exodus. Not just the choice of the elders but also the way there were different groups of people that had different degrees of access to the

mountain.

The choice of twelve seems to be naturally connected with the patriarchs in Israel. They aren't just the number twelve by accident. Indeed they are commonly called the twelve from that point onwards and when Judas betrayed Christ and was dropped from their number they had to choose a replacement to keep the number.

The twelve are listed beginning with Simon and Andrew and James and John. And Simon and Andrew, brothers, James and John are brothers but Simon, James and John are three core disciples. Elsewhere we often see these disciples listed in their order of priority.

So Simon, James and John and then Andrew comes next because of his association with Simon but here his association with Simon as his brother leads him to be second in the list. Simon in each of these lists is the first. He is the primary disciple.

He's the one who speaks for the others. He's the one who leads the others. He's the one who represents the others.

Here we're told that he was named Peter by Jesus and just a chapter earlier when he was called he's called Simon Peter for the first time after he responds with a sense of fear and awe to the manifestation of the authority of Jesus' word in the miraculous catch of fish. This I would suggest is an important signal that Luke is giving his readers that at this point Peter is assuming something of his new identity that Jesus is going to give him as the first of the apostles. The order of the disciples is fairly consistent across the gospels with some variations.

The ordering of Andrew or the ordering of Judas who's also called Thaddeus, that varies but everything else is pretty much the same. Each list begins with Simon Peter and ends with Judas Iscariot. The twelve will function as a sort of band of brothers with Jesus.

They can perhaps be compared with David's mighty men. Jesus is the divinic king and the man of action and he's surrounded by his mighty men. Like David he has a larger group of mighty men and a core group of three and we see that in 2 Samuel chapter 23 verses 8 to 12.

Although Jesus had a great many female followers including many prominent ones, some who were more prominent in the narrative than certain members of the twelve, the twelve are all male. They're like a military company and they're prepared for doing battle against the demons, for scoping out the land, for proclaiming the message of the kingdom and later on for being the foundation and the leaders of the church. Having chosen the twelve Jesus then goes down the mountain with them and he's surrounded by a great company of his disciples and then a larger multitude.

We see these different groups at various points in the gospel. There are various degrees of proximity to Jesus. There is perhaps in the furthest circle the whole nation of Israel.

Then there's the multitude that listen to him and then in the circle within that there are his disciples who follow him around. Of those disciples some are closer than others. You can think of people like Mary Magdalene, characters like Mary and Martha and Lazarus.

Then there are the twelve and the twelve are not merely following him around wherever he goes but they have closer proximity to him. Of the twelve there are three who are particularly close, Peter, James and John. Of those three Peter is especially close in terms of the mission whereas the disciple that Jesus loves, who we might presume is John, is closer in other ways.

Jesus gathers people around him in this way for a number of reasons but one of these is that he wants to form a new people and if you're forming a new people just dealing with individuals one by one is not enough. You need to form a sort of leadership structure in which your teaching can be disseminated by others and spread throughout a larger multitude. You need to be able to delegate certain parts of your mission to others as well so that they can assist you in your task and the twelve will certainly be performing this role in the rest of Luke's work.

A question to consider. Jesus has referred to the scriptures on a number of occasions in his ministry so far. What are those particular occasions and what can we learn from them about the way that Jesus relates to the scriptures? In Luke chapter 6 in a passage described as the Sermon on the Plain we find Luke's version of the material that we find in Matthew's Sermon on the Mount.

This presumably was a message given on several occasions. A number of people have suggested that Matthew and Luke are in tension with each other at this point but as Jesus is a teacher who's travelling from place to place within Israel it should not surprise us in the least that he gives the same material in various sermons on various occasions. There are however a few differences.

Luke has four beatitudes corresponding with the first, the fourth, the second and the eighth of Matthew chapter 5. He also parallels them with four woes. In the case of Matthew there are woes that correspond with the beatitudes in chapter 5 but those woes are found in chapter 23, the woes that are declared to the scribes and the Pharisees. Various biblical books are structured in a way that highlights the blessing-woe opposition.

We can think about it at the end of Deuteronomy. In the book of Psalms it begins with, blessed is the man who does not walk etc. The book of Proverbs has this sort of juxtaposition in its first few chapters, particularly in chapter 9. Leviticus has blessings and woes in chapter 26.

Such oppositions are common throughout the material of the law, the material of the wisdom literature and also in the material of the prophets and they take on a different

flavour in each. In the case of the law there's an emphasis upon divine sanctions. In the case of wisdom there's an emphasis more upon the different natural outcomes of wisdom and folly and in the case of prophecy the emphasis is upon what God is going to bring about upon people who are rebellious as opposed to those who are faithful.

Luke more strongly emphasises the theme of reversal in the beatitudes and woes, even than Matthew does. The blessings and the woes in Luke are symmetrical and paralleled. The theme of the reversal of fortunes is also present here.

We've seen this already in the Magnificat and we see it later in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus and it's found at various other occasions within the gospel. The beatitudes and the woes particularly do recall the Magnificat in chapter 1 verses 46 to 53. We're seeing many of these themes returning at this point in the beatitudes and the woes.

The point of the message is very surprising. It goes against what we might expect. It seems as we read through much of scripture that the blessed are those who are rich and prosperous and rejoicing but here it's quite the opposite.

Those who are rich are not the ones who are blessed. Note that unlike Matthew's beatitudes these are also directly addressed to the disciples. Not blessed are those but blessed are you.

The beatitudes are paradoxical and there's a danger of de-eschatologizing them, of forgetting that these statements only make sense if God is imminently going to act in history. The people are blessed because God is going to act in their favour. This is not just an implicit set of imperatives.

It's less about ethics than about what God is about to do. For instance we should not pursue being persecuted. Persecution comes to the righteous but they don't pursue it.

God is about to visit his people and those who have hungered for his advent will be given cause to rejoice. Their objective condition will change. And Luke has poor rather than poor in spirit and we might feel a bit uncomfortable about the fact that he doesn't invite spiritualizing here.

We might want to be assured that he doesn't mean the poor literally. He means the poor in this spiritual sense. But we should be made to feel uncomfortable.

The poor are the marginalized, the rejected, those who do not fit into the system of this world in some way or other. And there's something fitting between the material conditions of the poor and the spiritual condition of being poor in spirit. Jesus elsewhere talks about it being easier for a camel to go through the eye of the needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.

The poor then cannot just be spiritualized. On the other hand however we should be aware of simply suggesting that the poor in spirit and the poor materially are one and the same group of people. There are rich people who are poor in spirit and there are materially poor people who are outside of the kingdom.

The epistle of James highlights the way that poverty and riches in a very literal sense played into the early church's understanding of its relations. There James captures something of the paradoxical way in which Christians should relate to physical poverty and riches. James warns the Christians he is writing to against giving excessive regard to those who have riches.

And if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, you sit here in a good place, while you say to the poor man, you stand over there or sit down at my feet. Have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? Listen my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which he has promised to those who love him? But you have dishonored the poor man. Are not the rich the ones who oppress you and the ones who drag you into court? And then in chapter 5 verses 1 to 5, this great statement of judgment against the rich.

Come now you rich, weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you. Your riches have rotted and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver have corroded and their corrosion will be evidence against you and will eat your flesh like fire.

You have laid up treasure in the last days. Behold the wages of the laborers who mow your fields, which you kept back by fraud, are crying out against you. And the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts.

You have lived on the earth in luxury and in self-indulgence. You have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. While we often want to soft-pedal the teaching of the New Testament relating to riches and poverty, we should not do so.

Its teaching is all the more important because of how much it unsettles us. A further thing that comes out in Luke's Beatitudes and Woes is this emphasis upon division and judgment in society. There is going to be a reversal of fortunes in the future and there's also going to be a great division, a great divergence of these two groups.

Some are going to weep, some are going to laugh, some are going to have all their riches taken from them, others are going to inherit all. The disciples of Jesus are supposed to rejoice in the face of persecution. In persecution, Jesus and his disciples are aligned with the prophets that went before them.

And of course, after Christ, the disciples are aligned with him in their persecution. Jesus charges his disciples to love their enemies. This, while a teaching that's often ascribed to

Christ as a radical break with what went before, is a teaching that we can find grounded in the Old Testament.

Leviticus chapter 19 verses 17 to 18 presents the great golden rule in the context of loving your enemy. You shall not hate your brother in your heart, but you shall reason frankly with your neighbor, lest you incur sin because of him. You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself.

I am the Lord. Where is love for neighbor most clearly tested? When your neighbor is your enemy. This is one area where the universalism of a liberal approach, which sees the duty of love as this universal posture towards all mankind, can often go awry.

Because the greatest test is not in our relationship to the person who's in the far distance. It's the person who is nearest to us. That is where we find the greatest challenge of love.

The greatest challenge of love is not our posture towards people in far distant continents. It's how we relate to those people under our own roof, those people in our own neighborhood, the people in our own families, the people who are close to us in a way that irritates us. Those are the people we are most likely to hold a grudge against, to hold anger and harbor hate against in our hearts.

And speaking with Leviticus, those are the people that Christ calls us to love. We must resist starting the cycle of vengeance. We turn the other cheek.

If someone takes our cloak, we do not withhold our tunic. We are not acting as people who are preoccupied with our own rights. Rather, we look to the Lord as the one who defends us, who provides for us, the one who will avenge us if we are mistreated.

Generally, as human beings, we have a desire for reciprocity. If we do things, we expect something back in return. But as Christians, we are supposed to do things expecting nothing in return.

And there is a paradox here again, because as we do that, our reward will be great. The principle in the Old Testament, he who gives to the poor lends to the Lord, applies here. As God guarantees our reward, we are freed to act in a non-calculating way.

We can cast our bread on the waters, not knowing how they would ever return to us, but trusting that in God's providence they will. Not only will our reward be great though, we'll also be sons of the Most High. We will have those characteristics that reflect God's own character.

There is a sort of reciprocity here, but the reciprocity is one secured by divine action, not our claim upon our neighbour. The principle of not judging is one that we find in various

occasions in Scripture. We see it in the hypocrite of Romans chapter 2 verse 1. Therefore you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges, for in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same things.

There's the principle in Deuteronomy chapter 19 verses 18 to 21, concerning hostile false witnesses. The point of Jesus' statement about not judging is that it's not a matter of not making moral judgments. There are many occasions in Scripture we are called to do just that.

Rather it's not playing the judge, not putting ourselves in the position of God, exalting ourselves as the righteous arbiter over all others. And the emphasis here is upon condemnation in particular. Again looking at the epistle of James chapter 2 verses 12 to 13.

We are those who will face judgment ourselves, and the judgment in view is primarily eschatological judgment. And there's a suspension of judgment on our part, which occurs as we submit to the judgment of the Lord. It's the same thing with vengeance.

We do not seek to avenge ourselves, nor do we seek to realise the full reality of future judgment in the present, because we recognise that vengeance is God's, and ultimately it will be secured by Him. The principle of not judging also highlights hypocrisy. We might think here of the parable of Nathan given to David, and David's judgment, which is very fierce, and then Nathan responds, you are the man.

We can be caught in our own judgments. Rather than being people defined by judgment and condemnation of others however, we should be people who are primarily defined by forgiveness. As we forgive others, so we will be forgiven.

There's also the importance of sorting out our own lives first. This accusatory you is often a way in which we deflect attention from our own issues. Condemnation of others can be a way in which we secure our self-righteousness.

A question to consider, how does Jesus model his own teaching that he gives in this passage? The end of Luke chapter 6 continues Luke's version of the material we find in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew. There are a number of seemingly disparate sayings on the surface of things which don't obviously seem to fit with the opening description of a parable, as it isn't what we would usually associate with that term. However that term can be used more broadly, and it can include under it proverbial sayings.

Part of our challenge will be to recognise the connection between these statements. In these verses Jesus seems to concern to distinguish between different kinds of people. In verses 39 to 40 Jesus highlights the importance of discerning the difference between teachers.

In Matthew chapter 15 verse 14 Jesus is saying here about the blind leading the blind is used in reference to the scribes and the pharisees in the context of the controversy concerning ritual hand-washing. People who follow blind guides will come to ruin. Also blindness in this sort of sense is contagious.

If you follow someone who is spiritually blind that blindness will affect you. We must pay attention to the character of our teachers. Our teachers' characters will tend to be reproduced in us.

You can think about Jesus teaching about the leaven of the scribes and the pharisees. The way sourdough works is similar to the way that teaching works. Something of your teachers is placed within you and is a principle of growth and development for you, and if you are not very careful in the teachers that you listen to you will take on some very negative characteristics.

From this Jesus moves to the subject of hypocrisy in teaching. People who seek to correct the faults of others have to be very sure that they have dealt with the problems in themselves. If we do not deal with the log in our own eye, if we do not teach ourselves first, then we have no business teaching others.

We are in a position of hypocrisy where we have not internalized the lessons that we claim to apply to others. Jesus teaching about teaching here as elsewhere is very shrewd. He recognizes the way in which teachers will often use their teaching as a way of getting power for themselves, as a way of actually avoiding addressing their own problems.

Indeed teaching others can be a means of deflecting attention from the issues within ourselves. We must put our own house in order first. How do you know if someone is a good teacher? You test them by the fruit that they produce.

This can be seen in their actions, it can be seen in their more general character, it can be seen in the sort of people that they create around them. If you want to know if the teaching of a church is good, pay attention to the people who have been there for several years. See what character it has produced in them.

In discerning whether someone is going to be a good leader of people, look at their relationships, look at their families, look at the people who have come under the realm of their influence. Are they thriving? Are they growing? Are they people who are maturing into good character? Or are they people who are stagnating or perhaps growing in forms of wickedness? Are they marked by an unhealthy fear towards that teacher or authority figure? Or are they marked by joy in relationship to them? Are they liberated by that teacher or are they held in bondage by that teacher? When you're a student you are not an expert but there are ways even if you are not an expert to discern whether someone is a good teacher and this is the primary way. Pay attention to their fruit.

What do they produce around them? Do they have a track record of good judgment? Do they have a good reputation with their surrounding society? Are they at peace with people or are they constantly causing conflict? Are they producing maturity in the people under their teaching? What about themselves? Are they living righteous lives? Are their families in good order? Do their actions testify to their righteous character? Where these things are lacking we should be wary. We may not know exactly where they are going wrong but we have a good indication that somewhere they are going wrong. Out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.

If you can discern the fruit of people you have an indication of their character and if you have an indication of their character you have an indication of the source from which their teaching is coming. If that source is a good one they are people to listen to. If that source is a bad one keep your distance.

The importance of testing teachers is found throughout scripture. We can see this in the testing of false prophets in Deuteronomy. You see false prophets by the failure of their prophecies or by the fact that they lead people away from God.

Deuteronomy chapter 13 describes this in detail. Also chapter 18 verses 21 to 22. And if you say in your heart how may we know the word that the Lord has not spoken? When a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord if the word does not come to pass or come true that is a word that the Lord has not spoken.

The prophet has spoken it presumptuously. You need not be afraid of him. Test your teachers.

Test their teaching. Test their manner of life. Consider the longer term effects of their teaching in their lives and in the lives of people around them.

In the lives of the people who listen to them. Having discussed the character of teachers Jesus moves to the character of disciples. There are many who might give lip service to him.

Lord Lord. Now these are not words that we've really heard to this point in the gospel. They seemingly express a great recognition of the authority of Christ and submission to his rule.

But yet many people who have these words in their tongue do not live according to them. They declare him to be Lord but they do not live according to his word. What foundation are we building upon? Our lives are like houses and if we're not careful we'll build them on something other than solid rock.

To hear Christ's word and to obey it is to have an integrity of life that will hold us firm in times of testing. And it's in the time of testing that the difference between wisdom and folly is revealed. The foolish person is revealed in that moment of testing.

As the storm comes in their life or their world they collapse. However the person who has true integrity, the person who hears and obeys, the person who declares Lord Lord and submits in their actions, that person will find security and strength. As we see in the wisdom literature, time and crisis tend to be the things that divide between the wise and the foolish, between the righteous and the unrighteous, between those who have integrity of life and those who do not.

In those moments of crisis or in the longer term harvest that we reap over time, our character is seen. There are periods in our lives which will be mostly those of sowing. We'll be making decisions that have long-term effects but we won't be reaping those effects just yet.

There will be other periods in our life that are mostly times of reaping, times when we're experiencing the consequences of decisions that we have made long before. And for many people these are the times of crisis. Midlife crisis for instance comes when people reflect upon their decisions in marriage, their decisions in their friendships, in the vocations that they chose, all these other things and they experience the consequences and there's no easy way out of them.

They feel trapped in their folly and they don't know what to do. And for many people such times involve falling into new and greater folly. The wise however, those who follow Christ's words, will be prepared for such periods of crisis.

They will have sown good seed and they will reap a harvest of righteousness. Chapter 7 begins with a centurion sending messengers to Jesus asking for the healing of his servant. It is not unlikely that this centurion would have been the highest ranking military officer in Jesus's base town of Capernaum.

Jesus doesn't actually meet the centurion. Others approach Jesus on the behalf of the centurion and they approach Jesus on the basis of an honour and patronage culture. They are beholden to this man.

He's a good man. He has given them a great gift. He's helped to build their synagogue.

And so they can speak on his behalf to Jesus saying he's a merits your attention. However, a surprise soon arises. Jesus goes with the original delegation of the Jews that have gone on behalf of the centurion.

But while on the way, a new delegation comes. Some of the friends of the centurion and they directly contradict the earlier delegation. The earlier delegation said he is worthy to have you do this for him.

But then the second delegation says I am not worthy to have you come under my roof. The centurion here has an insight into the nature of the kingdom. The kingdom does not operate like an honour or patronage culture.

He cannot have a claim or entitlement to the blessing of Christ. Rather, he must appeal to Christ as one who has no claim. Behind this story, we can probably hear echoes of the story of 2nd Kings chapter 5, the story of Naaman the Syrian.

The story of Naaman the Syrian and his healing by Elisha has already been alluded to in Luke chapter 4, where Jesus talks about the healings and the actions of Elijah and Elisha and their relationships to Gentiles. In both cases, we have a Gentile military leader. We have a servant.

Again, it's a story of delegations being sent between parties and the prophet never actually meets the person who is healed. Recognising these parallels, however, also helps us to recognise the contrast. For Naaman, the lack of contact with the prophet and the smallness of the action that he is called to perform is a cause for protest.

In 2nd Kings chapter 5 verses 10 to 13, and Elisha sent a messenger to him saying, go and wash in the Jordan seven times and your flesh shall be restored and you shall be clean. But Naaman was angry and went away saying, behold, I thought that he would surely come out to me and stand and call upon the name of the Lord, his God and wave his hand over the place and cure the leper. Are not Habana and Tharpath, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them and be clean? So he turned and went away in a rage.

But his servants came near and said to him, my father, it is a great word the prophet has spoken to you. Will you not do it? Has he actually said to you, wash and be clean? By contrast with Naaman, the centurion believes in the power of Jesus' bare word from a distance without any spectacle at all, so much that he's prepared to say, don't come into my house. The power of Christ's word and the authority of Christ's word and his power to heal from a distance is also similar to Jesus' second sign in John's gospel.

It also serves as a sign of the future of the kingdom, of the bringing in of Gentiles. This is a Gentile who has faith that puts people in Israel to shame. Jesus has not encountered such faith among his own people and the way in which this story plays off the story of Naaman the Syrian and the way it recalls the sermon in Nazareth in chapter 4 helps to alert the hearer or reader of Luke's gospel that something is afoot, that the kingdom is going to be blessing Gentiles.

A question to consider, the centurion in his second delegation to Jesus discusses the nature of authority, comparing his position as a leader of men with Jesus' own position. What can we learn about the nature of authority from what the centurion says? In Luke 7, following the healing of the centurion's servant, Jesus raises the son of the widow of Nain. Jesus in his sermon in Nazareth in chapter 4 verses 25 to 27 compares his ministry to that of Elijah and Elisha, but in truth I tell you there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah when the heavens were shut up three years and six months and a great famine came over all the land and Elijah was sent to none of them but only to Zarephath

in the land of Sidon to a woman who was a widow and there were many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha and none of them was cleansed but only Naaman the Syrian.

We've already seen parallels between Naaman the Syrian and the healing of the centurion's servant. We might notice a further parallel between the widow of Zarephath and the widow of Nain. In both cases their sons are raised by a prophet.

In 1 Kings chapter 17 verses 8 to 24 we read of the widow of Zarephath. It seems to me that Luke wants us to remember this story, to connect this with the sermon at Nazareth and to see that Jesus' ministry is proceeding after the pattern of these great prophets Elijah and Elisha. In the centurion and the widow of Nain we have a male-female pairing as we see in many other occasions in Luke where Luke will often bring forward a man and a woman to express something of the scope and the comprehensive nature of the kingdom ministry of Christ.

Just as the healing of the centurion's servant is particularly done on behalf of the centurion so this raising of the widow's son is done for the widow. The healing is performed not primarily for the dead man but for his mother upon whom Jesus takes compassion. The bereaved mother is restored in the gift of her son.

John has heard accounts of Jesus' ministry but he is himself now in prison. He preached an imminent judgment but Jesus is healing and restoring people. You might be uncertain whether Jesus is in fact the one that he awaited.

You might be wondering where the promised fire is. While John's messengers are with him Jesus performs a number of miracles which serve as signs. They confirm the nature of his identity and the character of his mission.

Are you the one who is to come? Jesus is judging by showing mercy. You can see allusions back to Isaiah chapter 61 verses 1 to 3 for instance. The spirit of the Lord God is upon me because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor.

He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted to proclaim liberty to the captives and the opening of the prison to those who are bound. To proclaim the year of the Lord's favor and the day of vengeance of our God. To comfort all who mourn.

To grant to those who mourn in Zion to give them a beautiful headdress instead of ashes. The oil of gladness instead of mourning. The garment of praise instead of a faint spirit.

That they may be called oaks of righteousness. The planting of the Lord that he may be glorified. Then in Isaiah chapter 35 verses 3 to 8. Strengthen the weak hands and make firm the feeble knees.

Say to those who have an anxious heart be strong fear not. Behold your God will come with vengeance. With the recompense of God he will come and save you.

Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap like a deer and the tongue of the mute sing for joy. For waters break forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert.

The burning sand shall become a pool and the thirsty ground springs of water. In the haunt of jackals where they lie down the grass shall become reeds and rushes and a highway shall be there and it shall be called the way of holiness. The unclean shall not pass over it.

These passages talk about the vengeance of God. They talk about the fire as it were but they speak much more about this restoration of the people. About healing the sick, opening the eyes of the blind, unstopping the ears of the deaf and enabling the lame to leap.

Blessed is he who does not stumble because of me. I don't believe Jesus is rebuking John the Baptist here. John the Baptist may be confused and uncertain but that doesn't seem to be the same thing as stumbling.

Indeed Jesus goes on to praise John the Baptist in some of the highest possible terms. He takes the occasion provided by the messengers from John to discuss the character of John's ministry with the crowd. Who was John? A reed shaken by the wind? Someone who's weak, easily moved or pressured? The Lord will strike Israel as a reed is shaken in the water and root up Israel out of this good land that he gave to their fathers.

1st Kings chapter 14 verse 15 may be an example of this imagery being used elsewhere in scripture. John the Baptist wasn't that sort of person. He was a man of strong character, a man who stood firm as a prophetic witness.

See a man dressed in soft clothing, a dignitary such as you might find in king's houses. No, he's a prophet and more than a prophet. As we know from elsewhere he is the Elijah who is to come.

John the Baptist and Elijah are connected in a great many ways not just in their clothing. He's prophesied in Malachi, he's a man associated with the wilderness, a forerunner of a man who's a prophet in the land. He's a man clothed in camel skin with a leather belt.

He fulfills the words of Malachi chapter 3 verse 1. Behold I send my messenger and he will prepare the way before me and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight behold he is coming says the Lord of hosts. Something that is connected to Exodus chapter 23 verse 20. Behold I send an angel before you to guard you on the way and to bring you to the place that I have prepared.

The common people and the tax collectors recognize the justice of God but the Pharisees and the lawyers reject God's saving justice. John the Baptist and Jesus as the son of man come in contrasting ways and the Pharisees and the scribes reject both for different and perhaps contradictory reasons. They do not know the times, they're so out of sync with God's justice that they want to dance when they should be mourning and to mourn when they should be rejoicing.

We've seen this already earlier in the context of Jesus' teaching concerning fasting. Why fast when the bridegroom is with you? They describe Jesus the faithful son as a glutton and a drunkard and to understand the meaning of this reference we should look back to Deuteronomy chapter 21 verses 18 to 20. If a man has a stubborn and rebellious son who will not obey the voice of his father or the voice of his mother and though they discipline him will not listen to them then his father and his mother shall take hold of him and bring him out to the elders of his city at the gate of the place where he lives and they shall say to the elders of his city this our son is stubborn and rebellious he will not obey our voice he is a glutton and a drunkard.

Of course Israel is actually the rebellious son, the son that rejects the word of the father but Jesus will suffer the fate of the rebellious son taking the judgment of the nation upon himself. Our passage ends with a peculiar statement that wisdom is justified by all of her children. The meaning of this statement most likely becomes plain as we look back to verse 29.

When all the people heard this and the tax collectors too they declared God just having been baptized with the baptism of John. Wisdom is justified by all her children is then paralleled with that statement that the tax collectors and the people declare God just. The children of wisdom recognize her ways they affirm her ways and align with her purposes.

While the ministries of John the Baptist and Jesus are misunderstood and subject to great slander by the Pharisees and the scribes the common people and the tax collectors recognize what's going on. They see the signs, they recognize the times and they act accordingly. Wisdom is justified by her children.

A question to consider how does this discussion of John's mission further underline the importance of John the Baptist within the theology of Luke? In Luke chapter 7 Jesus has been accused of eating with tax collectors and sinners and in the next and final scene of the chapter he's eating with a Pharisee. There's some humor and irony here I suspect. This passage juxtaposes Simon the Pharisee and the woman.

Perhaps we should see another of Luke's male-female pairs here again. It's similar to an event recorded in Matthew, Mark and John in the final couple of weeks of Jesus's life. There it is Mary of Bethany who seems to be a member of the dinner party rather than a sinful woman who's seemingly intruding upon the feast.

In those passages the focus is upon preparing Jesus for his burial. That's the significance of the event. The outrage is caused by the costliness of the ointment not by the character of the woman and the story is there closely connected with the passion narrative in each account.

It seems to me then that in addition to the fact that this is found at a very different part of the story we are justified in saying it is not the same event as that recorded in Matthew, Mark and John. Simon, Jesus's host, is a Pharisee. We often see Pharisees simply as the bad guys but their identity is rather more complicated and nuanced.

Some Pharisees were faithful. In Acts chapter 15 verse 5 we discover that there were some early Christians who also belonged to the Pharisees even as Christians. The apostle Paul calls himself a Pharisee before the council even after his conversion.

Now when Paul perceived that one part was Sadducees and the other Pharisees he cried out in the council, Brothers I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees. It is with respect to the hope and the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial. That's Acts chapter 23 verse 6. Now Paul, to use a modern term, is clearly trolling the council here, trying to excite differences among them.

But there is no reason to believe that his statement is not true on this account. Simon could have been a fair-minded person who still had to make his mind up on Jesus and he seems in part to be inviting Jesus to this feast for this reason, to discover his true character. Jesus seems to address him as someone who is at least to some degree open to what he's saying.

Identity as a Pharisee does seem to be an important part of the framing of the story though. The Pharisees challenged Jesus as a party for the most part for a reason as Jesus unsettled a number of their distinctive emphases and concerns. The Pharisee concern for ritual purity for instance is an important part of this story as it is unsettled by Jesus' teaching of radical forgiveness and what that means in the treatment of the woman.

Simon the Pharisee invites Jesus for a meal and he seems, as we read the beginning of this account, to be a generous host, an upstanding religious man of the city. But then a woman of the city, a known sinner, comes into the group. It would seem that she has not been invited.

She is described in a way that would suggest that she is a prostitute. And what happens next is nothing short of scandalous, not just to the Pharisees but to practically anyone within that society. She lets down her hair, she wets his feet with her tears, she wipes them with her hair, and anoints them with her ointment.

This is a familiar story but we should recognise how scandalous this is. This action, and even more so when performed by a known prostitute, has a distinctively erotic flavour to

it. A woman letting down her hair in that society would clearly offend sexual propriety.

On the surface of things the scene seems shamelessly sexual. Simon seeing this thinks it must be proof that Jesus isn't a prophet. He's not acting as a righteous man, intolerating such practice and contact, and he clearly lacks insight into the character of the woman.

Everyone else knows that she's a notorious sinner and prostitute, and this prophet seemed to be oblivious to the fact. Jesus recognises this and speaks directly to Simon's thinking, showing that he can in fact understand the nature of human beings, indeed that he has far greater perception than Simon might have attributed to him. He tells a story to Simon, inviting his judgment.

A story of the cancellation of debts. And the cancellation of debts is a theme of the Kingdom Message. It's a model for understanding forgiveness.

The extravagant cancellation of debts is something that opens up the possibility of a new way of relating. A way driven by liberated love rather than by indebtedness. Forgiven a great debt, the released party is freed to respond in love.

However, those who feel that they have been forgiven little can still implicitly operate in the framework of debt and its bonds and obligations. Jesus gets Simon to cast judgment on his question, and then he turns to the woman to reveal the true nature of the situation, one that turns the picture that the reader of the passage has and that Simon might have on his head. Simon, who seemed like the grand and honorable host, turns out to have been rather negligent in his hospitality.

As a guest of a good host, Jesus might have expected water for his feet, a kiss of greeting, an anointing of his head with oil. Simon performed none of these acts of hospitality. However, the sinful woman performed the most extravagant acts of hospitality imaginable, performing far and above anything that Simon failed to perform.

She goes to scandalous cultural extremes, and we really shouldn't miss this. She looses her hair, she touches Jesus, she anoints and kisses his feet, actions which were far more sexually weighted than they are today. She weeps openly.

No respectable woman would do any of these things. However, she loves Jesus too much to behave in a restrained fashion. She also performs these actions on Jesus' feet, the most humble part of the body, connected directly with the dust, honoring him in the very highest way that she can.

Jesus here provides everyone with a very different way of looking at things. No longer does Simon appear as the honorable host, and the woman as the sinful intruder, performing an unseemly and sinful act, compromising the supposed prophet. Now Simon appears to be the negligent host, while the woman is the forgiven sinner, extravagantly making up Simon's neglected acts of hospitality out of her profound love.

She is covering his debt, while Jesus is the prophet who brings forgiveness and healing to those outside the camp of the righteous, in a way that shows up the unrecognized sins of the righteous themselves, revealing how little they love. Jesus declares that the woman is forgiven. We should presume that Jesus has already interacted with her prior to this, as she seems to be responding to having been forgiven already.

But Jesus' declaration of her forgiveness is not merely or primarily for her own sake, although it does reassure her. Rather it's for the sake of everyone else. She is being publicly affirmed as one of the righteous.

The challenge now is for everyone else to recognize and affirm this. We noted earlier the sexual connotations of the woman's action. While Jesus' explanation challenges the interpretation that something inappropriate and sinful is occurring, and it becomes clear that this is extravagant hospitality and love rather than a sexual advance, her actions still have a somewhat sexual character.

And it's hard to escape this. What are we to make of it? She behaves towards Jesus in a way that one could only ever really imagine a wife behaving towards a husband, for instance. She recognizes in this that the bridegroom has come to the feast.

Simon, who completely fails to honor Jesus, does not. She makes up for Simon's failures by treating Jesus in a way befitting the bridegroom of Israel. We might here think of David's dancing before the Ark of the Covenant in 2 Samuel chapter 6 when it was brought into Jerusalem.

The passage ends with the woman being commended for her faith. What does faith mean in this context? We've seen elsewhere in the Gospels that it can involve persistent or pronounced confidence in Jesus' capacity and willingness to save. In the case of the centurion, it's confidence in Christ's authority, his word.

And here it seems to be these things, but also an extravagant act of hospitality, by which Jesus is received and recognized as the one that he truly is. This is a woman who perhaps hurt by the dishonor given to Jesus by a negligent host, makes up all that is lacking within his hospitality with her extravagant love. She acts towards him in a way that displays who he truly is, in an act of such intimate attachment and love that could only ever be proper within the context of marriage or in the context of a relationship with someone who delivered you from all of your sins.

A question to consider, what are some of the ways in which a form of behavior arising out of love, flowing from the release of unpayable and unimaginable debt, differs from a form of behavior based upon honor and what one owes to others? In Luke chapter 8, we learn that Jesus' ministry was supported by faithful women, in much the same way as the of people like Elisha. In 2nd Kings chapter 4 verses 8 to 10, we read of Elisha, These women also seem to have accompanied Jesus and his disciples as they travelled around.

While the focus is usually upon the twelve, Luke wants us to know that they were only some of a larger group and that the women played an indispensable role, and not just as witnesses to the death and resurrection, in the earlier part of Jesus' ministry too.

We see many women in the life of the early church involved in aspects of its ministry, as patronesses of churches, as those who hosted churches, as those who performed works of service. Within the cultural context, having women accompanying around a peripatetic teacher like Jesus would have been very surprising and maybe even scandalous to some. Jesus delivered these women from evil spirits and illnesses and they ministered to his material needs.

Joel Green observes, His graciousness toward these women is not repaid by their benefactions, rather his graciousness is mirrored in theirs. In the twelve and these women, we also get a sense of the type of group that is forming around Jesus. One of the features of the gospel portrayal of women is their concern for the presence and the body of Jesus.

Here they minister to his needs. In the preceding chapter we have a woman who washes his feet with her tears and dries them with her hair. Mary bears the body of Christ in her womb.

Women are the ones who follow Christ to the cross, to the tomb and then are the first to visit on the day of resurrection. Their recognition of the importance of Christ's body and his presence is something that seems to be far more pronounced in them than in the male disciples. Jesus here delivers the parable of the sower.

There are four types of soil with different responses to the seed that is sown in them. Seed along the path, consumed by the birds. Seed on rocky ground without much soil and scorched by the sun.

Seed among thorns, choked by those thorns. And then finally seed on good ground yielding a hundredfold crop. Following this Jesus explains his use of parables.

Parables are found at various occasions in the Old Testament. They are often used by prophets as a form of prophetic discourse, symbolic stories that open up something about a reality while also hiding it from many people. The kingdom of God is a secret.

It is known only by those to whom it has been given to know it. Jesus is following in the footsteps of the Old Testament prophets who are cryptically revealing God's purposes. Parables are not illustrations but they're more like cryptic riddles designed to hide prophetic mysteries from the unfaithful yet reveal them to the remnant.

Speaking in parables and riddles was a form of judgment upon a people without spiritual perception and this is in part to fulfill the judgment spoken of by Isaiah in a passage that is very prominent in the New Testament, Isaiah chapter 6. It's where Isaiah sees the

vision of God and he has given his calling, his mission to a people that will not hear, who will not understand and who will be judged. The passage speaks of a catastrophic judgment upon the people but there will be a remnant. A holy seed will be the stump and the quotation of Isaiah chapter 6 verse 9 in is a very significant gesture towards what is a central theme in the Lukan material.

In Acts chapter 28 verse 26 to 28 that verse concludes and sums up Luke's entire narrative. Jeremiah chapter 31 verse 27 and in that day I will answer declares the Lord I will answer the heavens and they shall answer the earth and the earth shall answer the grain the wine and the oil and they shall answer Jezreel and I will sow her for myself in the land and I will have mercy on no mercy and I will say to not my people you are my people and he shall say you are my God. Jesus is describing what the restoration looks like.

This is a sowing that occurs by the word. Isaiah chapter 55 verses 10 to 13 For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth. It shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.

For you shall go out in joy and be led forth in peace The mountains and the hills before you shall break forth into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress, instead of the briar shall come up the myrtle, and it shall make a name for the Lord, an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off. N.T. Wright suggests that the parable of the sower should be read as the climax and recapitulation of Israel's story.

In the sense of a climax, it presents the history of Israel as a story of successive sowings, of differing success and duration, leading up to the great kingdom sowing, which Christ is undertaking in his own day. In the sense of a recapitulation, it presents all of these different responses to the word of God sowing a restored people as occurring within Jesus' own ministry. Jesus' ministry won't meet with a universally positive response, but the word of the kingdom that re-sows a restored Israel will receive mixed responses.

A lamp is not brought in to be hidden. Things secret are to be brought to light, and things hidden to be revealed. Jesus is speaking in a hidden way at the moment, but ultimately things will be brought to light.

It will be made known what he is saying. We must act accordingly. Our actions right now, the measure that we use with others, will have consequences.

Our passage ends with a visit from Jesus' family, and it raises the question of who the insiders are, who are the outsiders. Jesus isn't just an independent teacher and exorcist, but he's forming a people around him. Jesus challenges the supposed claims of his

natural family upon him.

Just as the temple was his father's house back in chapter 2, so his true family are those who hear and obey God's word. A question to consider, how might Jesus' statement about his mother and his brothers, and Luke's reference to the twelve and his description of the women who provided for Jesus' material needs, be brought into fruitful conversation? What might we learn from the connection between the two? In Luke chapter 8, Jesus gets into a boat with his disciples and goes out to sea. This is a story that might, to some degree, remind us of the story of Jonah.

Jesus is asleep in the boat, like Jonah was asleep in the boat. He's going to a realm associated with Gentiles. A great storm arises.

Frightened sailors wake the sleeping character. There's a miraculous stilling of the storm as a result of some action by the main character, and then the sailors marvel. Here, however, Jesus is not thrown like Jonah into the water.

Rather, he is the one who calms the storm through his word. There's a reversal as well. Jesus rises and the storm sleeps.

He rebukes the wind and the waves, much as he rebukes demons on other occasions. Perhaps we should see some connection between this story and the story of the resurrection. Jesus is asleep in death.

Jesus rises up and stills the power of death itself. Jesus is in control of the situation, even though he seems to be completely out of control and disconnected in sleep. In this story, then, we probably have a sign of what is yet to come.

They go to the realm of the Gerasenes. It's a Gentile region. There, Jesus encounters things associated with great impurity, demonic possession, tombs, and pigs.

And there's an extensive description of the demon-possessed man. They try to bind this man, and they can't bind him. Jesus is the one who ultimately will bind the strong man, Satan himself, one whose power is manifested in this demon-possessed man.

The demons address Jesus as the eschatological judge. He's the son of God who will condemn them to their ultimate fate. They do not want to be sent into the abyss.

And perhaps this is an attempt to counter Jesus' power by naming him in some magical way. Jesus then counters by asking the demon what its name is. It declares itself to be Legion, referring to a number, a huge demonic force.

Legion also reminds us of the Roman military forces that would be associated with their legions. Another interesting detail that might help us to read this passage better is to recognise that the wild boar was the symbol of the Roman legion in Palestine. The

demons beg him to send them into the pigs.

And entering the pigs, the demons don't seem to be able to prevent the pigs from rushing down, careering towards destruction in the waters. The herd is drowned in the waters, the legion is drowned in the waters, like Pharaoh's army was drowned at the Red Sea. Jesus is the son of God who binds the strong man here.

When news of this great exorcism reaches the people of the region, they beg Jesus to depart from them. The begging of the demons and the begging of the Gerasenes seem to be connected with each other. There is most likely something else going on here, and it seems to be the reversal of the scapegoat motif.

When you usually have a scapegoat, it's one or two people that are cast out from a city in order to establish peace by projecting conflict onto a single or a small group of enemies. Here, however, it is the multitude of the demons that go into the sea, and the one man who is saved. Jesus, however, is then called to go away.

He is the one who has unsettled the social order. And the association of the begging multitude of the demons with the begging multitude of the people of the Gerasenes suggests maybe something more of what's going on here. As long as all the demons were entering this demoniac, the Gerasenes were dealing with their demons.

But as soon as the demoniac is freed, they lose the lightning rod for their demons. Similar patterns can be seen in many societies. It is not uncommon to see in a family that there is one member onto which all the dysfunctions of the family are projected.

And if that member is ever released from their dysfunctions, the whole family is thrown into chaos. When they no longer have a particular member onto which to project their demons, they each have to deal with their demons themselves. And that is a crisis.

Perhaps something similar is happening with the Gerasenes. They also seem to be afraid of Christ. Christ has bound the strongman.

But they do not want this power near at hand. They felt that they could manage the power of the demons, but they cannot manage the power of Christ. Many people would prefer to manage evil powers than be subject to a good power.

However, the demoniac is filled with thankfulness and he wants to go and join Jesus on his mission. Jesus, however, sends him back to his people to tell them how much God has done for him. And he goes around telling them how much Jesus has done for him.

The shift there should not go unnoticed. After returning from the land of the Gerasenes, Jesus performs two entangled acts of healing. Both of the people being healed are women and both of them are connected with the number 12.

The woman with the discharge of blood has suffered from it for 12 years and the daughter of Geras was 12 years of age. Geras was one of the rulers of the synagogue. He would have led services and other things like that.

That Geras was the ruler of the synagogue, illumines the fact that opposition to Jesus among the religious leaders of Israel was far from total and complete. Jesus is requested to lay his hand on Geras' daughter and to heal her. And he goes with Geras.

But on the way he is thronged by the crowd and the woman with the discharge of blood comes up and touches his garment. What she has is presumably a chronic hemorrhaging of blood rather than just abnormally severe menstruation. She has spent all of her living upon physicians and we should bear in mind that Luke is the one who is writing this, a physician himself.

The effect of this would have been to render her permanently unclean. It is probably one of the reasons why she approaches Jesus in the way that she did. If she had been more open in her approach she would probably not have been able to approach him at all.

Many doctors had tried to help her and they had just increased her suffering and consumed her resources. And Jesus' healing then contrasts with the failure of all of the experts. She had heard about Jesus and we should consider the fact that she was probably confined to the margins of society by her condition.

She was in many respects someone from an utterly different station in life from Geras. She believes that if she were just to touch Jesus' garments she would be healed. There are similar beliefs in Acts 5.15 and 19.12. Such a touch would be defiling even if it would not be as defiling as touching someone's flesh.

A defiled person would have to wash themselves and also wash their clothes. But here the transmission goes in the other direction. Rather than impurity being transmitted, cleansing is transmitted.

There is a life that overcomes impurity. And the woman with the issue of blood is healed by the man with the issue of life. To his disciple's amazement, Jesus inquires who touched him.

Jesus recognises what has happened. And in calling for the person who touched him to make herself known, the stage is set for an act of recognition, blessing and inclusion that completes the healing. She has been excluded on account of her condition.

And in publicly bringing her to light, Jesus is including her once again. We can see a similar thing in the story of the woman who washes his feet. Her exclusion is challenged by Jesus' statement concerning her that she is forgiven.

The intent then is not only that she should be healed of her physical condition, but that

she should be included once more. When the woman reveals herself, she comes in fear and trembling and falls down before him. This is a response not unlike that which we see when God appears to people in Scripture.

She tells him everything. And Jesus blesses her and addresses her as daughter, telling her that her faith has made her well. Faith here is not intellectual belief so much as confident and daring trust.

The prominence of faith in this story, as in that of Jairus that continues after it, should also be related to the language of salvation that occurs in both. The salvation seems to refer to physical healing. The language of faith could be interpreted narrowly too.

But Jesus routinely connects physical and spiritual senses of these things. Faith is a practical confidence to look to Jesus for deliverance, not just in spiritual matters. And our tidy divisions between physical and spiritual can prevent us from understanding this point.

As in the story of Jairus' daughter that follows this, early Christian readers probably place themselves in the position of the woman with the discharge of blood, recognising her experience as a model of Christian experience more generally. And we should do this too. Her being addressed as daughter at the end might also remind the reader of the new family that Jesus is forming around himself.

But all of this creates a delay. And by the time that Jesus reaches the house of Jairus, Jairus' daughter is dead. The feared crisis has hit and there might seem to be nothing more to be done.

Jesus, however, calls Jairus to keep his confidence in his sufficiency for the situation. There are many similarities to be observed between this story and the story of Lazarus in John chapter 11. Encountering the mourners, telling them that the dead person is sleeping, delaying until the person is dead.

Jesus performs this miracle with only Peter, James and John of his disciples present. They are privileged witnesses to his power, his power over death itself. And saying that the daughter was sleeping would make people think of the resurrection, when those sleeping in the graves would be awakened.

But this was a long distant hope for the end of all things. It wasn't really something that could address the immediacy of the grief that they felt right now. But Jesus can refer to death this way, as sleeping, because in him the resurrection and the life had entered into Jairus' house.

He is the one who can awake people from death itself. Jesus takes the girl by the hand and addresses her, telling her to arise. The reference to arising naturally and appropriately I think makes us think of resurrection.

Perhaps giving her something to eat is also in part to make us think of the later proofs of Jesus' own resurrection given in taking food. It's not merely for the girl's recovery of strength. Jesus once again strictly instructs those present to keep the raising of the girl a secret.

Although the fact that he takes Peter, James and John with him makes clear that he wanted the event to be witnessed and later spoken of openly. However to tell it yet, before Jesus' own resurrection had disclosed his true power over death, would be premature. A question to consider.

How might we fill out further the connection between the woman with the issue of blood and Jairus' daughter and Israel as a nation? In Luke chapter 9 Jesus calls the twelve together, gives them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases and sends them out to proclaim the kingdom. They are sent out in many respects like spies preparing for a later conquest. They'll be those who prepare the way for the later mission of the church.

And they're sent without provisions. They're dependent upon the people to whom they are sent for their sustenance and their supplies. Among other things this is a test of hospitality as we see in the story of Sodom or the story of Rahab and Jericho.

In the story of Sodom for instance there is a juxtaposition between the story of Abraham in the preceding chapter, in chapter 18, and the story of chapter 19. Where the hospitality of Abraham is seen in sharp contrast with the inhospitality of the city of Sodom. If they are not welcomed they will shake the dust off their feet.

It marks the place out for judgment in the future. And as they go they extend the message of the kingdom. They're calling people to repent in preparation for the coming reign of the Lord.

It's a message that will be confirmed by the signs that they perform, the miracles and the casting out of demons. And news of all of this comes to Herod. Herod hears that some think that Jesus is John the Baptist resurrected and he wants to hear him.

There's clearly a resemblance between the two characters. As John the Baptist performed no mighty signs we must presume that the resemblance was chiefly in the content of their teaching and the manner of their teaching. They're both people who teach with boldness and authority.

The apostles return from their mission and they have the news of their success. And with Jesus they go to a deserted location near Bethsaida to rest for a while. They need time to refresh themselves, to regain their strength.

They are followed by crowds and Jesus teaches them concerning the kingdom and then heals. However as the day goes on they need to get food. They are in a desolate place

and they need to go to the surrounding villages to buy something to eat.

But Jesus challenges his disciples to give the crowd something to eat. All they have however is five loaves and two fish. In the five loaves we might recall the five loaves of 1 Samuel chapter 21 which David received when he was fleeing from Saul.

On that occasion in 1 Samuel chapter 21 verse 3 David asked Himelech, Now then, what do you have on hand? Give me five loaves of bread or whatever is here. Jesus is a new David who is going to provide for his people. Jesus instructs his disciples to get the crowd to sit down.

And they sit down in groups of fifty. They're numbered as men only as well. This suggests that they are like a military company.

Israel left Egypt and entered Canaan in fifties in Exodus chapter 13 verse 18 and Joshua chapter 1 verse 14. And in that occasion as well they were numbered apart from women and children in Exodus chapter 12 verse 37. We might perhaps consider the way that there are themes of Exodus at play here.

They're being given bread in the wilderness as Israel was fed by manna in Exodus chapter 16. In Exodus chapter 18 Israel was divided into thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens under appointed leaders. And this chapter is very much concerned with the twelve apostles.

Jesus among other things is instructing his disciples to take leadership in his name over the crowd. He is here then preparing them for their later ministry. He is highlighting their role as ministers acting on his behalf towards the flock of which he is the chief shepherd.

And his action with the loaves highlights Eucharistic themes. This is like the Lord's Supper. He takes, he blesses, he breaks and he gives it to his disciples to distribute to the crowd.

The same sort of language is found in Luke chapter 22 verse 19 as the supper is instituted. And he took bread and when he had given thanks he broke it and gave it to them saying this is my body which is given for you do this in remembrance of me. We've seen ways in which Jesus could be compared to David here.

Also ways in which he could be compared to Moses. There are also ways in which he could be compared with Elisha. Elisha performed a multiplication of loaves in 2nd Kings chapter 4 verses 42-44.

A man came from Baal-shelisha bringing the man of God bread of the first fruits, twenty loaves of barley and fresh ears of grain in his sack. And Elisha said give to the men that they may eat. But his servant said how can I set this before a hundred men? So he repeated give them to the men that they may eat.

For thus says the Lord they shall eat and have some left. So he set it before them and they ate and had some left according to the word of the Lord. Jesus here performs a similar miracle and the parallels are very easy to hear.

But it's performed in a much larger scale. Instead of 100 men you have 100 groups of 50 men. Elisha's company has, as it were, grown into a great army.

Also as we just read about John the Baptist and the speculation that Jesus was John the Baptist raised from the dead, we might think about the connection between the ministry of John the Baptist and Elijah and the way that the relationship between the ministry of John the Baptist and Christ is similar to that between Elijah and Elisha. Jesus performing of an Elisha-like miracle at this point may cast the succession of Jesus from the Elijah-like John in sharper relief. The story of the feeding of the 5000 is told in each of the four gospels.

It is obviously a very significant event. Prior to the Passion Week there are very few events that are found in each one of the gospels. But yet this one is.

It suggests that we should meditate upon its significance. Each gospel also includes the detail of the 12 baskets of fragments gathered up afterwards. We are not merely told that many fragments were gathered up.

It is important that there were 12 baskets of fragments gathered up. Why 12? We could maybe think of an association with the fullness of Israel. Under the leadership of the 12 apostles here we have a great company, a military-like company.

And maybe they are associated with a new Israel being formed at this point. Perhaps we should also see that each one of the 12 has a basket apiece. In keeping with the themes of this chapter as Jesus has sent out the 12 and also commissioned them to feed the multitude in his name, we might think about the way in which this is a lesson to them about their partaking in the ministry of Christ.

This is also something that happens as they have returned from their mission. They were sent out at the beginning of the chapter, then they returned, and now perhaps they are being given a sign about a different stage of their mission. The initial stage was one of proclamation.

They are, as it were, heralds sent out with a message concerning the coming kingdom. However, their ministry will extend beyond that. Their ministry will also be that of shepherds.

They will have to feed a flock. And Jesus, I believe, is preparing them for that ministry at this point here. A question to consider.

Within this passage we have seen the way that the ministry of John the Baptist and the

ministry of Jesus are connected. We have seen the way Christ has commissioned and empowered his disciples for the ministry of proclamation. And we have also seen how as chief shepherd he prepares and equips the shepherds under him to provide for the flock.

In each of these things we are seeing the ministry of Christ connected with the ministry of other persons. How can we understand our own vocations as Christians as connected with the ministry of Christ? How might this passage illumine our understanding of this? After the feeding of the 5,000 in Luke chapter 9, Jesus asks his disciples who people say that he is. The crowd seem to identify him with John the Baptist, with Elijah, or one of the prophets.

Jesus' ministry very naturally follows from that of John the Baptist. And it is not surprising that there will be seen to be some resemblances. Herod the Tetrarch was already speculating about that connection.

Like Elijah and John, Jesus spends much of his time at the moment in the wilderness. Peter, however, confesses that Jesus is the Christ. He is the anointed one.

He is the awaited Messiah. The disciples are strictly charged not to tell this to anyone. The time will come when they will do so.

But that time is not yet. And here we reach a turning point in the narrative. The first phase of Jesus' ministry began with the testimony of John the Baptist and then his baptism in which the Father testified to him and the Spirit descended upon him.

That phase ended with a cluster of events. It ended with the death of John the Baptist and speculation about Jesus being John the Baptist raised from the dead. Also with a commissioning of the disciples.

Now this second phase of Jesus' ministry as he moves towards Jerusalem begins with the testimony of Peter that he is the Christ of God. Then the testimony of the Father in the Transfiguration which corresponds to the baptism. And then that leads up to his own death and resurrection and a second sending out of the Twelve.

And here Jesus announces the fact of his forthcoming death. A great shadow is coming over the story at this point. There have been veiled foreshadowings of Christ's death before this but now it is being made more explicit.

Jesus teaches his disciples about his forthcoming death in considerable detail. Not only will he be raised, he will be raised on the third day. Jesus doesn't explicitly seem to mention the manner of his death here.

But immediately afterwards it's followed by a statement concerning those who would follow that they must take up their crosses and follow him. It can be very easy for us to forget the force of the symbol of the cross. The cross was not just a generic form of

execution.

It was a gruesome instrument of torture and public humiliation. And to take up your cross was to mark yourself out as a condemned man or woman. An outcast of society to be scorned and humiliated.

Willingly to take up such a thing would be to deny and resist every screaming instinct of self-preservation. Not merely our desire to avoid pain but our desire to avoid being ashamed. The humiliation of being made a public display in your agony and nakedness.

We all want to save our lives but Christ says that those who want to save their lives must lose them. Taking up the cross is not an optional thing to do. Our very lives must be held with an open hand as we live like those condemned to death.

There is a stark underlying choice. Who are we ashamed of? Are we ashamed of the person that we are called to follow? The one who calls us to follow after him in bearing the shame. The one who calls us to take up our cross as he has taken up his cross.

Or are we ashamed of the world that rejects him? Ashamed of our sin. Ashamed of the things that tether us to this order. This order of shameful rebellion.

Shame stands opposed to the concept of glory. And there is going to be a revelation of glory. The glory of Christ as he comes with the holy angels.

And Jesus teaches his disciples that those who are ashamed of him in that day will find themselves put to shame when his glory appears. Jesus says to them that some of them will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God. And the various forms of this statement in the Gospels are each followed by the event of the Transfiguration.

There seems to be some connection between that statement and the event of the Transfiguration. However, I don't believe that the Transfiguration is the fulfilment of this statement. For one, it might seem rather strange to talk about some people not dying before an event that takes place only eight days later.

Rather, I believe that it refers to the events of AD 70 and the revelation of Christ's kingdom and power at that point. Part of the background here could be seen in passages such as Daniel chapter 7. However, the Transfiguration is an anticipation of the later coming of Christ. It's a trailer, as it were, for a later feature presentation.

The Transfiguration is a privileged preview of the reality of the resurrected Christ, the ascended Christ, and also the glory of the later coming of Christ. In 2 Peter chapter 1 verses 16 to 18, the Apostle Peter speaks about this. In the event of the Transfiguration, we're seeing a number of different themes coming together.

Christ is the glorious last Adam and the second man. There are themes of Sinai, the

Theophany of Sinai as God's glory appeared on the mountain to Moses and his face shone. Here Moses again appears on the mountain, as does Elijah, two people who witness glorious theophanic appearances of God in the Old Testament.

Here Christ's face, unlike that of Moses, shines with a light of its own, not merely a reflected light. Sinai was also the place where they built the tabernacle, and Peter here wants to build three tabernacles for Elijah, for Jesus and for Moses, not realising that Jesus himself is God tabernacled among his people. Finally the law was given at Sinai, and here, instead of giving the law, God declares that his Son is the one to listen to.

As Hebrews chapter 1 verses 1-2 puts it, Long ago at many times and in many ways God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. Beyond these connections and the presence of Moses, we might also think about what they're talking about. Jesus is talking about the departure, or very literally, the exodus that he's about to accomplish at Jerusalem.

In using the word exodus here, Luke makes clear to his reader that the events that are about to take place fulfil the meaning of the Passover and all the other events of the exodus. Christ is accomplishing a new deliverance for his people. I don't believe we should think of this exodus purely in terms of Christ's death either.

The exodus is achieved in his death, his resurrection, his ascension, and in the gift of his spirit at Pentecost. Indeed, these are events that can be mapped onto the Old Testament story of the exodus, the story of the Passover, the story of the crossing of the Red Sea, the story of the arrival at Sinai, and the gift of the law. All of these things are fulfilled in Christ's work.

Moses and Elijah appear alongside Christ, representing perhaps the law and the prophets, or the great witnesses, the wilderness forerunners. Jesus only takes three of his disciples, the three core disciples, Peter, James, and John, with him up the mountain. They will witness things here that the others will not witness.

However, what they witness will help them to understand what comes next. The transfiguration will help them better to understand the cross. When they see the power and the glory of the heavenly high priest and his glorious robes, they will know that the events of the cross do not befall him unwillingly.

Rather, he has taken up his cross. He has willingly walked towards this fate. He has purposefully determined this as his path.

From the vantage point of the Mount of Transfiguration, we see a glimpse of the future, of the glorious King who will one day display his glory in the coming of the Kingdom. There is also an unveiling of the past. Moses and Elijah appear with him as two

witnesses.

They are people whose ministry pointed forward to his. And in their appearance, we learn something more about the way that Christ relates to the Old Testament and the events within it. In the glorious transfiguration of his face, we see something about the character of the appearances of God to his people in the Old Testament.

In the Gospel of John, for instance, on a number of occasions, the glory of Christ is connected with Old Testament appearances of God's glory to his people. Isaiah 12, verse 41 connects the vision of Isaiah in the temple with a vision of Christ's glory. John 1, verse 51 speaks of angels ascending and descending upon the Son of Man, connecting Christ with the vision of Jacob in Jacob's ladder.

In verses 14 to 18 of chapter 1 of John, we're seeing a contrast and comparison between the glory of Christ and the glory witnessed by Moses on Mount Sinai and the glory of the law. What we see on the Mount of Transfiguration then is an unveiling of the identity of the one who had appeared to Israel throughout its history. Moses saw his back on Mount Sinai.

Isaiah saw the train of his robe filling the temple. Ezekiel in chapter 1 of his prophecy described in the most elliptical way the lower parts of his appearance in bodily form. But now, on the Mount of Transfiguration, we see the face, and the face is that of Jesus Christ.

The glory of Christ on the Mount of Transfiguration then is a revelation that opens up history and its meaning, both the meaning of Israel's past and its anticipation of Christ's work, and in Christ's work in veiled form in the Old Testament, and the meaning of the future of Israel and the world, as the glorious King is seen in all of his splendour. Following the majesty of the mountain appearance, there is a return to earth with a bump. Jesus had left the nine other disciples at the foot of the mountain, giving them the duty of looking after the people, and they had failed miserably in his absence.

We might think here of the example of Moses. Moses descends from Mount Sinai where he has received the law, and he goes down to the people who he had left in the charge of Aaron, and he sees that they've gone wild, and they've built a golden calf, and they're worshipping it. He casts the tablets of stone to the ground and shatters them, and the people are judged on that occasion.

Here I think we're seeing much of the same thing. Jesus has left his disciples behind, as Aaron was left behind. The disciples, just like Aaron, have failed miserably.

And I wonder whether we're supposed to hear some allusion to the story of Exodus chapter 32, as the demon casts the child to the ground and shatters him. In calling the people a faithless and twisted generation, Jesus is taking up the language of Moses.

Deuteronomy chapter 32 verse 5, Jesus then demonstrates his power over the demon by casting it out.

And at this point, as everyone's marvelling about his power, and Peter, James and John are in wonder at what they saw on the top of the mountain, Jesus tells them, and says that the words must stick in their ears, he is about to be delivered into the hands of man, and they still do not understand what he's saying. At this point, of all the things to be preoccupied with, the disciples start to get into an argument about who is the greatest. This is the typical human desire for exaltation over others, and Jesus' response to it is to show them a child.

The kingdom of God does not work in the same way as earthly kingdoms. The example of the child challenges us to humble ourselves, not to be people who vaunt ourselves over others with a sense of superiority. We are not players of the competitive game of honour that utterly consumes other people's attention and concern.

We must recognise our dependence, our unworthiness, and to resist the pursuit to exalt ourselves over others. Greatness, true greatness, comes through loving service of others. Greatness also requires welcoming and receiving the weak, receiving them as we would receive Christ.

In this respect, children are representative of a wider group of weak and dependent people, but important in their own right. Receiving children means paying attention to and honouring the people who cannot give you anything in return, the people who might threaten your status rather than raising it up. In receiving such persons, we follow Jesus' own example.

Jesus surrenders his rights for the sake of people who have nothing to offer him, nothing to commend themselves to his attention. This incident is followed by another failure of recognition on the part of the disciples. There is a man casting out demons in Jesus' name, and the disciples seek to rebuke him because he is not one of their band.

This is reminiscent of Numbers 11, verses 26-29. Now two men remained in the camp, one named Eldad and the other named Medad, and the spirit rested on them. They were among those registered, but they had not gone out to the tent, and so they prophesied in the camp.

And a young man ran and told Moses, Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp. And Joshua the son of Nun, the assistant to Moses from his youth, said, My lord Moses, stop them. But Moses said to him, Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the Lord's people were prophets, that the Lord would put his spirit on them.

Jesus here challenges any sort of sectarianism. His disciples are called to build his kingdom, not to build their own kingdoms. And learning to rejoice when they see other

people doing the work of God, even though they are not of their camp, is one of the ways that they will grow into this calling.

A question to consider. Why is there a cloud and a voice on the Mount of Transfiguration? At the end of Luke chapter 9 we enter a new phase of the Gospel. The Gospel of Luke can be divided into three sections.

There is the section up to Luke chapter 9 verse 50, which concerns the ministry in Galilee, which sets the scene for the beginning of Christ's vocation. In chapters 9 verse 51 to 19 verse 28, there is the travel and the journey towards Jerusalem. And then from chapter 19 verse 28 onwards, there is the final week in Jerusalem and the events of the crucifixion and the resurrection.

The journey narrative in Luke is greatly drawn out. At many points we might forget that we are on a journey, but the journey is very important for understanding what's taking place. Jesus is on the way.

He's on the way towards his destiny. He has set his face towards Jerusalem and he is about to arrive there. And all these things that are taking place are taking place in the shadow of that destination.

Travel is a theme within the work of Luke and Acts more generally. There are larger journey narratives and smaller journey narratives. Some of the smaller journey narratives include the Emmaus Road, the story of the Ethiopian eunuch Saul on the road to Damascus.

And these journey narratives serve a purpose narratively. In each of those stories, a physical journey is accompanied by a movement in understanding that ultimately leads to eyes being opened. It leads to the celebration of baptism or the Lord's Supper.

These are movements in understanding that Luke is using a travel narrative to frame. There are also larger journey narratives. Paul's missionary journeys, the journey to Jerusalem of Christ, but then also of Paul in the book of Acts.

Paul also journeys towards Rome and the shipwreck narrative is a very important part of the structure of the book of Acts. Jesus in the Gospel of Luke, to a far greater extent than the other Gospels, is presented as a travelling prophet. Luke is one of the synoptic Gospels, so there are lots of commonalities with Matthew and Mark, but there are some very arresting differences in this section.

Jesus' journey to Jerusalem in this section takes 35% of Luke's Gospel narrative, in contrast to Matthew where it only has 6% and Mark where it only has 8%. If Matthew accents Jesus as the teacher, the one who's teaching the law, the new Moses perhaps, and Mark represents Jesus as the new David, the king, the one who does everything straightway, who's the man of action, the man who defeats the demons. Luke presents

Jesus as the prophet, the man of prayer, the man who wanders from place to place like the prophets did.

The days drew near for him to be taken up. Jesus is looking beyond the cross to the ascension. The cross is facing him, but there's something beyond the cross.

He's going to accomplish his exodus in Jerusalem, as he spoke about on the Mount of Transfiguration with Elijah and Moses. The description of looking forward to that time when he's going to be taken up also draws our mind back to 2 Kings 2 perhaps, and the description of Elijah on the way to be taken up in the chariots of fire into heaven. Jesus makes a determined move towards Jerusalem.

There is a decisive shift here. He sets his face and he is not going to be turned aside. He also sends disciples ahead of him, messengers ahead of him.

In Malachi 3, verse 1, Earlier on in the Gospel, these words are applied to John the Baptist. And here we see the disciples playing a similar role to John the Baptist as Jesus moves towards Jerusalem. James and John ask whether they should call for fire to come down from heaven as Christ is rejected on the way.

In this, they imagine themselves to be like the prophet Elijah. Elijah called down fire from heaven to judge people in 2 Kings 1. Elsewhere in the Gospels, James and John are described as the sons of thunder. And it seems this is a fitting request for the sons of thunder to make, for fire to come down from heaven.

Peter's failure is that of being a stumbling stone. Peter is the rock, but he can turn into a stumbling stone if he is not careful. In the same way, James and John's calling, the way in which they have been set apart by the Lord and renamed by him, is one that comes with dangers.

Their very strength holds possibilities of weakness. Like John the Baptist, they seem to be wondering where the promised fire is going to come from. He is going to baptise you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.

When is the judgement coming? What we should be beginning to recognise here though, is that Jesus, though he has similarities to Elijah, is not Elijah. The travel material of this Gospel is interspersed with discipleship material, which is quite fitting. Others must join Jesus on the way.

The movement towards Jerusalem is connected with taking up the cross and following Christ. Christ makes a number of statements here to different people who want to join along the way. Foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.

Foxes have holes may be a reference perhaps to people like Herod, the birds of the air,

to the Gentiles within the land. Herod is referred to as a fox in Luke chapter 13 verse 32. And he said to them, Go and tell that fox, Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my course.

Jesus uses the term Son of Man of himself. This terminology is used from time to time for people outside of the immediate discipleship group. It would draw people's mind back to Daniel.

It would reference suffering. It would also suggest heavenly authority. It's an enigmatic term, and maybe it's a challenge not to slot Jesus into an existing category.

Jesus' statement to the man who wants to bury his father first is a surprising and arresting one. Let the dead bury their own dead is a very radical statement. We need not presume that the man's father has just died.

However, he might want to do his filial duty first, and then follow Jesus to a later point, waiting around for a few years perhaps. However, Jesus speaks of that situation as one that is like serving an ongoing cycle of death. Let the dead bury their own dead.

If you're just going to bury your father and then your son's going to bury you, nothing's going to change. He's going to bring resurrection, a change, a bringing of life into a cycle of death. And those who will follow him will be part of breaking that cycle of the dead burying their dead.

The final statement is from someone who wants to go back and say farewell to the people at his home. Once again, Jesus' response is radical. That the man who has put his hand to the plough should not look back.

The story of Elijah is once more in the background, in 1 Kings 19, verses 19-21. So he departed from there and found Elisha the son of Shaphat, who was ploughing with twelve yoke of oxen in front of him, and he was with the twelfth. Elijah passed by him and cast his cloak upon him, and he left the oxen, and ran after Elijah and said, Let me kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow you.

And he said to him, Go back again, but what have I done to you? And he returned from following him and took the yoke of oxen and sacrificed them and boiled their flesh with the yokes of oxen and gave it to the people and they ate. Then he arose and went after Elijah and assisted him. Once again, there is a distinction being drawn between Jesus and Elijah.

Jesus' ministry has a much greater urgency than the ministry of Elijah. A question to consider, how does the sending on of people ahead and the calling of people to follow behind help us to better understand the character of Jesus' movement to Jerusalem here? In Luke chapter 10, Jesus sends out the 72, much as the 12 were sent out at the beginning of chapter 9. Here, however, they function as a sort of an advance party. They

go before him into all of the towns that he is going to visit on his way towards Jerusalem.

Jesus is very slowly advancing towards Jerusalem, and like an army gradually moving down through the land, he sends disciples in twos ahead of him. In some texts, the number of disciples is 70. In other texts, such as the ESV which we are using, there are 72.

What are we to make of the numbers? First of all, if it is 70, we can think of the 70 nations of the world in Genesis chapter 10, representing all of humanity. 70 people go down with Jacob into Egypt in Genesis chapter 46 verses 26 to 27. Jesus, the new Jacob, has 12 disciples as Jacob had 12 sons, and 70 more in the wider body of his family.

There were 70 elders of Israel who received Moses' spirit in Numbers chapter 11. It could also relate to the number of people in the Great Sanhedrin. The choosing and empowering of the 70 represents Christ's formation of a new Israel and a new polity.

But then, there seem to be two more, which presents some problems for those connections, if it is indeed correct. So what to make of this? First, you might argue that some of the connections with 70 would still pertain, but much more loosely. Yet it is curious to notice that on a couple of occasions where there is this connection with the number 70, you also have the number 72 connected in some traditions.

So first of all, there are two extra people in Numbers 11. There are the 70 elders, but there are these two, Eldad and Medad, who are in the camp, who are separate from them. A number of people using slightly different criteria have counted the number of the nations in Genesis chapter 10 slightly differently, making 72 by some reckonings.

Also, 70 nations plus Edom and Israel makes 72. By some traditions, 70 scholars produced the Septuagint. By other traditions, it was 72.

So a curious uncertainty about whether a number is 70 or 72 is common to a number of important instances. Perhaps there is something more to be explored here. Of course, 72 is 6 times 12.

They could be seen as an expansion of the 12, but they could also be seen as, with the 12, forming a group of 84. Now, Luke has already used the number 84 in reference to the age of Anna, and 84 is 7 times 12. There is a sort of fullness represented here.

Note also that the number of disciples prior to the Day of Pentecost is 120, again an expansion upon the number 12. The reference here to the harvest might look back to the seed sowing mentioned a few chapters earlier. Maybe we should see the 12 sent out earlier in chapter 9 verses 1 to 6 as sowers, and the 70 functioning more as reapers.

There is a much greater emphasis upon judgment associated with the ministry of the 70, which might relate to this. They gather the wheat, but bring down judgment upon the

chaff. They are sent out in a very similar way to the 12.

They are sent out with instructions that suggest both the urgency of their mission and also their dependence upon the people that they are being sent to to provide for them. The sending of the 12 and the 70 might also recall the spying out of the Promised Land under Moses and Joshua. There are hints there that they are sent out in pairs too.

12 spies were sent to spy out the Promised Land, representing the whole of Israel. Now the sending out of the 12 followed by 72 suggests another representation of Israel as they spy out the land. But these spies bring back a good report.

A connection is drawn between the reception of the 70 disciples and the final judgment. We can maybe think about Matthew chapter 25 verses 31 to 46 and the sheep and the goats. The division there occurs on the basis of their reception of the brothers of Christ.

The brothers are the disciples, the emissaries that are sent out representing their Lord. It isn't merely about a general attitude towards people in need. This isn't what that passage is about.

The passage is rather about the reception of the prophet. However, the disciples are sent without great provisions. They depend upon the hospitality of the places to which they go.

And the test that is being provided to these places is a test of hospitality. The way that these places will or will not receive the prophet is very similar to the way that they will or will not receive the poor. Such inspections of cities remind us perhaps of the story of Sodom in chapter 19 of Genesis.

Also of the story of the two spies going to Jericho in the story of Rahab in the book of Joshua. The way that the towns received Jesus' 72 brethren would weigh in their final fate. You can think about the way Sodom is described in Ezekiel chapter 16 verses 48 to 50.

As I live, declares the Lord God, your sister Sodom and her daughters have not done as you and your daughters have done. Behold, this was the guilt of your sister Sodom. She and her daughters had pride, excessive food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy.

They were haughty and did an abomination before me, so I removed them when I saw it. In the story of Sodom there is a great juxtaposition between chapters 18 and 19. The hospitality of Abraham to the angels and the Lord unawares in chapter 18.

And the way that that is juxtaposed with the story of Lot's hospitality to the angels and the inhospitality of the people of Sodom. A failure to receive the messengers of the Lord is connected with a failure to receive the poor and the needy more generally. So it

should come as no surprise to us that the 72 are sent as people who are dependent upon the hospitality of the cities and the towns that they are visiting.

Jesus challenges the cities that he has performed most of his works in to that point. On account of God's great work within their midst and their rejection of it, they are preparing themselves for a far greater judgement. Capernaum, for instance, sought to be lifted up to heaven, but it will be brought down to Sheol.

Jesus' statement here is playing off the background of Isaiah chapter 14 verses 12-15. Once again in verses 17-20, the theme of heavenly conflict comes to the foreground. The disciples are engaged in a battle with demonic forces which are being driven back by their work.

Jesus' vision probably refers to something that has not yet occurred. It's an anticipation of what will occur through his death, resurrection, ascension and the ministry of the church following Pentecost. We might consider Revelation chapter 12 in light of this.

The greater defeat of Satan would result from events that are being put in motion with the spying out of the land here. The emphasis upon conflict with Satan and his demons makes clear that Israel is his occupied territory. The primary enemy is not Rome.

It's Satan. This all sets things up for Jesus' prayer to his Father. Verse 21 is a profoundly Trinitarian verse.

The Son rejoices in the Holy Spirit and addresses the Father. The Father as the Lord of heaven and earth is the one who reveals and hides. He hides truth from the proud who imagine themselves to be wise, and he reveals things to the weakest and the humblest.

All authority has already been given to Christ. He is the one who passes on all that the Father has given him, and apart from him there is no access to it. A question to consider.

The eschatological and spiritual horizons of reality are very prominent in this passage. Behind the ministry of the 72, Jesus shows the horizon of this great battle with Satan himself, and shows the horizon of the last day looming over these cities. How might we better recognise the interrelation between the horizons that are most immediate to us, and the horizons of the age to come, and the horizon of conflict with spiritual forces? The parable of the Good Samaritan found at the end of Luke chapter 10 is perhaps one of the most famous in Christian imagination.

In response to a lawyer's question about what he must do to inherit eternal life, Jesus asks him what his understanding of the law is. The implication here is that observing the law is the means to inherit eternal life. The lawyer gives a good answer to Jesus' question, focusing upon the fulfilment of the first and the second great commandments, to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, and your neighbour as yourself.

Jesus is not setting up the lawyer for a Protestant gotcha at this point. Observing the law really is the means to inherit eternal life. Note the word inherit, it's not earn.

Eternal life comes as a gift, even if it is a gift that must be received. And when the lawyer presents a follow-up question designed to absolve himself from the responsibility of love for neighbour, Jesus does not suggest that the law requires perfect absolute obedience. Rather he challenges the man's limited understanding of love and neighbour.

None of this should threaten Protestants who rightly recognise that the law was always fulfilled with faith. The law was never a matter of earning salvation through sinless obedience. It made ample provision for sin, and it was designed for a sinful people to come near to God and know forgiveness and cleansing for their sin.

One of the things that Jesus is doing here is challenging a false conception of the law that diverts the law from its true end and purpose, and displacing such things as justice, mercy, faith, forgiveness and righteousness becomes a system of self-exculpation, of self-justification, that actually avoids duty to neighbour. The Levite and the priest were men associated with serving in the temple. They probably avoided the half-dead man in part because they feared being rendered unclean by touching a corpse and having to suspend their temple duties for a time.

Ritual purity was far more important to them than the imperative of love. The religiously compromised Samaritan, by contrast, had compassion upon the half-dead man. His act of mercy is a truer sacrifice than the compassionless ceremonial purity of the other two men.

And the lawyer wants to present himself as being in the right relation to the law. He wants to limit the scope of its definition of neighbour. Jesus answers him by pointing to an act of neighbour-making, an act that does not constrain its moral concern to a very carefully defined scope, but which goes out of its way to form new bonds.

This is only possible for people who are not trying to justify themselves. This expansion of moral concern for anyone trying to justify themselves will only produce guilt. And Jesus turns the lawyer's question around.

The real question is not, who is my neighbour? But, implicitly, am I a neighbour? When we read this passage, there are a number of things that call out for attention, not least the fact that there seems to be a superfluity of information and details that seem to detract from the force of the parable rather than add to it, seemingly distracting us from the central point. Why does Jesus give us all this detail if it is irrelevant? Is Jesus just telling a story merely as an example of how we should show love for neighbour? If he were doing so, why did he put in all these extra details? Why mention a road from a specific place to a specific place, Jerusalem to Jericho? Why that particular road? Why those particular places? Why mention that it was a Samaritan? What role does that play

in the story? Why mention the Levite and the priest? Why, for instance, mention the innkeeper, the oil and wine? Why not just say that the man himself, the Samaritan, took care of the man who had been caught among thieves? The innkeeper seems to be an interruption, an unnecessary detail in the story, that distracts us from what should be the centre of the attention. There seems to be more going on here, then, and I suggest we should pay attention to the details, because they open things up.

First of all, there are structural details to note in Luke. They can help us to understand what's going on here. This is not the only account of a question about how to inherit eternal life.

We find another one in chapter 18. It's a question raised by a rich person, which Jesus answers by listing certain elements of the law, and then saying what else the rich man must do. Reading those accounts together, you can see that they function as bookends.

They correspond to each other. The other thing we might notice is that the next time we have this question about inheriting eternal life, we encounter the road from Jericho to Jerusalem shortly afterwards. Jesus is heading towards Jerusalem at this time, and on the way, near the beginning, he tells the story of the good Samaritan who goes from Jerusalem to Jericho.

And at the other end, we have Jesus coming towards Jericho on the way to Jerusalem, so that he's travelling the same road that he speaks about in this parable. As he nears Jericho, he meets a man by the side of the road, a man who calls for mercy. While all the other people are passing by, Jesus takes compassion on him.

The fact that Jesus is going in the opposite direction is fitting within this bookend pattern. It suggests that Jesus' journey to Jerusalem will somehow complete the interrupted journey undertaken by the man of the parable. So there's a symmetry here, and it helps us to read the story better.

It's also worth recognising that in the previous chapter, Jesus had not been welcomed by the Samaritans, because they saw that he had set his face towards Jerusalem. Samaritans also appear at other points. There is another good Samaritan within the Gospel of Luke.

There is a leper who returns to give thanks, and he is a Samaritan. So the Samaritans are part of the story that Luke is telling. They're not just a generic outside group that is particularly unloved.

In the Book of Acts, Luke places a lot of importance upon the conversion of the Samaritans. The Gospel goes to Jerusalem, to Samaria, to the ends of the earth. Samaria is a part of the story that is often not given enough attention.

What's so significant about it? Samaria represents the fallen northern kingdom of Israel,

to some extent. The Samaritan is not just a generic outsider, but the closest outsider. He has some relationship to the Jews, and is connected with false worship.

There's a sort of breach in the family and corruption through intermarriage and syncretism. Between the Jews and the Samaritans is some tension that has a character of brotherly rivalry. The Samaritans are the corrupted brothers.

And this, I believe, helps us to understand some of the background to this story. When we go back to 2 Chronicles, chapter 28, we find a story that lies behind this parable. In that account, the king of Judah has proved unfaithful.

He's an idolater. He's brought Judah into false worship. And he has handed over into the power of the king of Syria, and also the king of Israel.

And in the context of this great defeat, something very significant happens. In 2 Chronicles, chapter 28, verses 5 to 15, we read, Therefore the Lord his God gave him into the hand of the king of Syria, who defeated him and took captive a great number of his people and brought them to Damascus. He was also given into the hand of the king of Israel, who struck him with great force.

For Pezah the son of Ramaliah killed 120,000 from Judah in one day, all of them men of valor, because they had forsaken the Lord, the God of their fathers. And Zichri, a mighty man of Ephraim, killed Masiah, the king's son, and Azraqam, the commander of the palace, and Elkanah, the next in authority to the king. The men of Israel took captive 200,000 of their relatives, women, sons, and daughters.

They also took much spoil from them and brought the spoil to Samaria. But a prophet of the Lord was there, whose name was Oded. And he went out to meet the army that came to Samaria and said to them, Behold, because the Lord, the God of your fathers, was angry with Judah, he gave them into your hand, but you have killed them in a rage that has reached up to heaven.

And now you intend to subjugate the people of Judah and Jerusalem, male and female, as your slaves. Have you not sins of your own against the Lord your God? Now hear me, and send back the captives from your relatives whom you have taken, for the fierce wrath of the Lord is upon you. Certain chiefs also of the men of Ephraim, Azariah the son of Johanan, Berechiah the son of Meshillamoth, Jehiskiah the son of Shalem, and Amasa the son of Hadlai, stood up against those who were coming from the war, and said to them, You shall not bring the captives in here, for you propose to bring upon us guilt against the Lord in addition to our present sins and guilt, for our guilt is already great, and there is fierce wrath against Israel.

So the armed men left the captives and the spoil before the princes and all the assembly. And the men who have been mentioned by name rose and took the captives,

and with the spoil they clothed all who were naked among them. They clothed them, gave them sandals, provided them with food and drink, and anointed them, and carrying all the feeble among them on donkeys, they brought them to their kinsfolk at Jericho, the city of palm trees.

Then they returned to Samaria. Having just read the parable of the Good Samaritan, there are a number of details in this passage in 2 Chronicles that should spark our attention. There are people who, as it were, are caught among thieves.

There are Good Samaritans, an intervention by Oded, the prophet of the Lord, that leads to the Good Samaritans, clothing the men of Judah, giving them sandals, providing them food and drink, anointing them, carrying the feeble among them on donkeys, just as the Good Samaritan in Jesus' parable carried the man caught among thieves on his beast. Then they bring them back to Jericho, the city of palm trees, and they return to Samaria. The places are significant in the story too.

In Jesus' parable, the man goes from Jerusalem to Jericho. In 2 Chronicles 28, the army goes up from Jerusalem and ends up in Jericho. When we see such details that connect two stories together, or two events, we should think about what they mean.

By themselves, they may seem just rather odd. Is there some way in which this connection helps us to understand what's taking place in the parable? As I've noted, the Samaritan is not just a generic outsider. He's a member of a group that represents, in part, the Northern Kingdom that had fallen into idolatry and captivity, and become admixed with other unfaithful people through intermarriage and false worship.

There's going to be a union in the story of the Good Samaritan, and we see a hint of this in the Old Testament, as God works in that broken nation and gives them an understanding of their brotherhood. As we look through the story of the later kings, in both Kings and Chronicles, so many of the stories play out in the shadow of the great breach in the kingdom. In this one short story, however, towards the end of the final book of the history of Israel and Judah, we find an episode where the two are brought together, where for a brief period of time they realise that they are brothers, that they exist within the same family, and where, through a remarkable act of mercy, they understand for a brief moment what it means to be a united people.

This is a glimpse of what it means for Israel to be restored, for the Northern Kingdom to show mercy and compassion to the Southern Kingdom, and for there to be a blessing and a healthy neighbourliness between two parts of a broken heritage. So then, looking at the parable of the Good Samaritan, you can see the work of God restoring Israel and Judah, bringing together this broken kingdom through the work of Christ. In this act of mercy, in this act of neighbour-making, there's a new people being formed, just as for a short period of time there was appreciation of the brotherhood between the Northern and the Southern Kingdom in 2 Chronicles 28.

The inclusion of the Samaritans within the blessing of the new covenant, then, is an important part of the restoration of Israel as one true nation. This is something promised in the Prophets. The attention that Luke will later give to the coming of the Spirit upon the Samaritans in Acts chapter 8 is not accidental, nor is the presence of Samaritans in the story of Luke.

Luke is setting us up for the place of the Samaritans within the larger picture of the coming of the Kingdom. The Church is formed with Judeans and Samaritans being brought together. It's a restoration of the people of God, a bringing together of the divided people.

And this is part of what's taking place in the parable of the Good Samaritan. What does this have to do with the point of the parable, about being a neighbour? The question raised at the end of the parable is not, who is my neighbour, but who was a neighbour? And the question is heightened by the further question, with whom do I identify in the story? With the man caught among thieves? He's a Judean. With the law-observant priest and Levite? Or do I identify with the Good Samaritan? The question is, how am I going to be part of the restoration of the people of God? This restoration that is taking place in the relationship between the Good Samaritan and the Judean, these two groups that had formerly been at enmity being brought together.

Now there are a great many things taking place here. Some have observed the parable of the Good Samaritan is in part a commentary upon Hosea chapter 6 verse 6, for I desire mercy and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings. The pouring on of oil and wine is a sacrificial action.

It's something that you might do in acting towards a sacrifice. The priest and the Levite are characters associated with the cultic worship of Israel. These are people who would be serving in the temple.

And in their refusal to come close to the man who has fallen among thieves, going by on the other side of the road, they may be trying to keep ritual purity. The Good Samaritan, on the other hand, is acting with mercy and compassion. And in his compassion, a sacrificial pattern is being played out.

He's treating the man to whom he is showing mercy as if he were a sacrifice. There are other odd details in this parable though. Perhaps the most surprising is the attention given to the character of the innkeeper.

If you were telling the story, perhaps if you were asked to retell the story of the Good Samaritan, you might forget the character of the innkeeper. He's like the older brother in the parable of the lost son. He tends to get missed out because we focus on the welcome that the father gives to the son who has returned from exile in the far country.

But the parable ends on a strange note, with the attention focused on the older brother who does not welcome the returning brother. Similarly, this parable ends not with attention given to the character of the Good Samaritan, or even to the man caught among thieves, but to a different character. The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, Take care of him, and whatever more you spend I will repay you when I come back.

For many understandings of the parable of the Good Samaritan, the parable would be stronger if we omitted this character altogether. That is probably a sign that they're missing something very important. We should read with the grain of scripture and ask questions about why certain things are included, why tell a story in this particular way, why include this detail rather than that, why use this expression rather than that one.

We're often inclined to read Jesus' stories as moral fables, focusing upon isolated details or one single moral thrust. That's not often how they work. Generally they're giving us something far more than this.

They have a number of different figures or elements, and they're placed in a symbolic matrix that helps us to make sense of many different characters in concert with each other. We've already considered that God is restoring Israel by bringing together Samaritans and Jews, he's restoring that breach. And the question the parable poses in part is where are you going to fit into that project? Are you going to be one of the people that shows compassion to your neighbour and finds yourself part of this restored people, a people formed in the true obedience to the law, in acts of compassion and mercy, or are you going to align yourself with the Levite and the priest? But there's more going on here, and the innkeeper I think clues us into that.

The innkeeper is a figure that might be viewed with some distrust in that time, much as a Samaritan might have been. The innkeeper might trick people out of money, which makes us wonder why the Samaritan is showing such trust in him. The good Samaritan makes the innkeeper a participant in his act of showing mercy.

He gives him money, he entrusts the innkeeper with the injured man. The innkeeper could just take the money and leave the man on the street. But it is expected that the innkeeper, even though he may be a figure that's not trusted in that society, shows mercy to the one he's expected to.

Perhaps we're supposed to see some significance in the fact that he performs a sort of sacrificial action upon the man, and then he brings the man to an innkeeper. Maybe the innkeeper is being contrasted and compared with the priest, so that the inn is a sort of true temple, a place of provision for the person in need, and all of that might be beneath the surface. St. Augustine suggested some connection between the innkeeper and the church, and maybe between the coins and the sacraments.

That's not, in principle, a crazy interpretation, even though the second part I think goes too far. Elsewhere in the Gospel of Luke, we have Jesus as a king who goes away and gives money to his people, tells them to do business until he returns. Here we have something similar.

There is money given to someone who is told to act faithfully until the giver returns, at which time there will be repayment and blessing for faithfulness. Maybe this should help us to see that the character of the innkeeper connects with the character of the Good Samaritan, so that the Good Samaritan and the innkeeper are one unit, much as Christ is connected with his church. Christ gives these responsibilities and these gifts to the church, in order that it might continue and might carry on his act of mercy.

Go and do likewise is, in part, go and take up that role of the innkeeper. Go and take up the money, the resources, the gifts, the talents that have been given to you, and continue Christ's act of mercy. That might be part of what's taking place here.

And one way or another, the character of the innkeeper should be part of our interpretation. The story does not end in verse 34. It ends at the end of verse 35.

And in that verse, there is a continuation of the Good Samaritan's act. And so the details that many would see as extraneous or superfluous, the details of the donkey, the oil and the wine, the reference to Jerusalem and Jericho, the fact that the story is focused upon a Samaritan, all of these are important to the story. Along with the sacrificial details, the detail of the innkeeper, etc., they are not, in fact, extraneous.

They help us to understand that there is more here taking place than we might originally have thought. And there's a deep Old Testament and theological background for what's occurring that helps us to see what God is doing in Christ in this moment in history. God is restoring his people.

He's overcoming the breaches. And the true fulfillment of the law, the true sacrifice that the Lord is looking for, is found in acts of compassion and love for neighbour. Luke 10 ends with a discussion of Mary and Martha.

Mary takes the place of learning before Christ, a place that would more typically be restricted to men in that culture. Mary and Martha can easily be read in terms of the typical double bind that's placed upon women, the expectation to serve, accompanied by the judgment that they should be more like Mary. But I don't think this is the point of the story.

The story should be read with the parable that precedes it. Both are shaped by the theme of inheritance. The lawyer wants to know what to do to inherit.

While Mary has chosen the good portion. Like the priest and the Levite, Martha is preoccupied with offering bread. The Samaritan appreciates that compassion is more

important than sacrifice, and Mary that the one who dwells in the temple is greater than the service of that temple.

Martha, like many in the Gospels, judges Jesus' followers for failure of expected service, while missing the fact that God has visited his people and that he must take priority. A question to consider, how might the parable of the Good Samaritan's emphasis upon love for neighbour differ from liberal society's emphasis upon universal love for humanity? Jesus' teaching on prayer, with which Luke chapter 11 begins, is relatively brief but exceedingly important. Of the synoptic Gospels, it is Luke in particular that places an emphasis upon Jesus as a man of prayer.

Notice, for instance, that Jesus prays before the heavens are opened in his baptism. He prays before he is transfigured. He prays as he chooses the twelve disciples.

These things aren't recorded in the other Gospels. Seeing the importance and the power that prayer had for Jesus, it is understandable that the disciples would want to learn how to pray from him. And the Lord's Prayer is not just a worked example of a good prayer, although it is that.

It is a gift of specific words that we ourselves can pray. The address is to Father. One of the things that comes into very clear focus in this chapter and elsewhere is the fact that God is our Father and we approach him as such.

Recognition that God is our Father is found in the Old Testament too, but it comes into much clearer focus in the New, particularly through Christ's own relationship with his Father. And it comes into the foreground at times of redemption too. We should beware of over-intimatizing this language.

It's not the language of Daddy. However, we should also beware, on the other hand, of removing the intimacy from it. The fact that we address God as our Father is truly remarkable.

Also, Father language speaks of a relationship between the speaker and the person being addressed. Father language is calling upon God, among other things, to recognize us as his children and to act on our behalf. Isaiah chapter 63 verse 16 expresses this.

In Exodus chapter 4, Israel is said to be God's firstborn son and God's recognition of his son and how he stands as father relative to that son is one of the reasons for his redemption of Israel and his people. When we address God as Father, among other things, we are calling upon God to act on account of the way that he stands relative to us, as our Father, and we as his children. Hallowed be your name is also a statement of fact and a calling to act.

It expresses the desire of the person who is praying that God's name be hallowed, that it be made holy. God's concern for the holiness of his name is seen in such places as

Ezekiel chapter 36 verses 19 to 23. which you have profaned among the nations to which you came.

And I will vindicate the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations and which you have profaned among them. And the nations will know that I am the Lord, declares the Lord God, when through you I vindicate my holiness before their eyes. The concern that God's name be hallowed is the concern of the third commandment.

We do not want to bear the name of the Lord in vain. We do not want God's name to be profaned. Indeed, there are ways in which the expanded version of the Lord's Prayer in particular could be seen as a transformation of the Ten Commandments into prayer.

In declaring, Our Father, we are appealing to the one God beyond which there is no other. In saying, Hallowed be your name, we are calling for the fulfillment of the third commandment. In the petition, Your Kingdom come, we are calling for the great Sabbath rest of the day of the Lord.

The petition, Hallowed be your name then, is not merely a statement of fact. It's a desire that God would act to display the holiness of his name through action in the world. God is ultimately the one who will hallow his own name.

The next petition calls for God's eschatological kingdom, for his reign to come, for God's rule to be seen in the situations of history. In these statements, we're being taught the posture of longing for God's action in history, for hungering and thirsting after his righteousness. All of this is a way of conforming us to God's will, teaching us to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness over all other things.

And the next petition turns to our need for bread. Maybe we could see this as an allusion to manna, the manna that's provided each day for the people's need. This is a recognition of our utter dependence upon God for our sustenance and our immediate provision.

We receive all the good things of the world as a constant gift from his hand, and there's a recognition of a hand behind all of our own human providence. The next petition is about the forgiveness of sins. The new covenant involved a general release from Israel's sins, its debt, as the nation was forgiven its sins.

Christ declares the year of the Lord's favour. In Isaiah 61 that is foretold, the chapter that he reads out in the context of the Nazareth sermon. And there is a reciprocal element here.

For we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us. Indeed, if we do not forgive others, we ourselves will not enjoy forgiveness. We must remit all the debts that people owe to us.

We must live as those who have relinquished their claims upon others, who put ourselves in the hands of God and neighbour. In the requirement that we forgive others, we are being called to participate in God's own act of forgiveness. God has declared this great release of the year of Jubilee, and now we're supposed to extend that to all the people around us, to give them the forgiveness that God has given to us.

The final petition of the prayer is a prayer for deliverance from the time of testing and the evil one. We can think of Christ's own experience in the wilderness as he led into temptation. The temptation is that time when your faith might be tested to breaking point, that time of difficulty and trial, where your mettle is tested and you may find yourself wanting.

From the Lord's Prayer, Jesus goes into some more general teaching about prayer. He emphasises the importance of forgiveness, and we've already seen this as a theme in his healings. Often people have to persist.

It's their stubborn faith that Christ will hear them and will answer them, that gets rewarded with healing. And the illustration that Jesus gives of the man at night requesting food from his neighbour, highlights two ways in which we can expect the efficacy of our prayers. First of all, on the basis of relationship, that if you approach your friendly neighbour, you expect him to give things on the basis of your friendship.

And then beyond that, on the basis of honour, that if he doesn't respond to friendship, your impudence and the fact that he must respond on the basis of his own honour to that, is good reason to expect that you will get what you have requested. God will give what we need. Prayer is about presenting genuine need to the Lord.

And God does not withhold from us what we need. This is the request of a son or a daughter to their father. And on the basis of the love that he bears for us, and the need that we have, we can expect a favourable response.

Indeed, we'll be given more than we expect. Our Heavenly Father will give the Spirit to those who ask him. Prayer preceded Jesus' reception of the Spirit at his baptism, and it will also precede the Church's reception of the Spirit at Pentecost.

After casting out a spirit of muteness from a man, some of the people speculate that Jesus is doing so by the power of Satan himself, by Beelzebul. And others are trying to test him, asking for a sign. Jesus' response shows that the kingdom of Satan is in trouble, a kingdom divided against itself cannot stand, and if Satan's is such a kingdom, then its days are numbered.

However, if Jesus is casting out demons by the power of God, then something more is happening. The kingdom of God has come upon them. The reference to the finger of God here looks back to Exodus 8, verse 19, with the conflict between Moses and Aaron, and

Pharaoh and his magicians.

Then the magicians said to Pharaoh, In this statement, Jesus is implicitly comparing those testing him with Pharaoh's magicians in the Exodus account. Jesus presents this situation in terms of the Exodus. He is delivering an enslaved people from Pharaoh, Beelzebul, by the finger of God.

Jesus casts himself as if a heavenly strongman, fighting against the demonic forces of Satan. Satan is the strongman, and Christ is the stronger. Just as Jesus spoke of Satan falling like lightning after the return of the 72, here he talks about him being overcome, his armor being removed, and his spoil being divided.

The people have been held hostage by Satan, and now people like this mute man are being released, the spoil is being taken from the strongman, people who had been in his clutches are being snatched loose. But this is no time for presumption or complacency. While Israel is being set free by the ministry of Christ, it cannot presume upon that fact.

If they do not deal with the root issues within their hearts, they will merely be occupied once again by these demonic forces, in a way far more severe than their original condition. Jesus has just spoken about the way that you are either for him or against him. There's no not against, middle ground.

And here cleansing that leads to just leaving the place empty is not enough either. It just leaves people open to be overtaken by worse sins and demons. They must be filled rather with the Holy Spirit.

This passage ends with a woman crying out from the crowd to Jesus, talking about how blessed his mother is that he is her son. And Jesus responds in a way that does not disagree with her, but corrects her and shows that there is more to the picture. The true blessedness comes to the people who hear the word of God and keep it.

The sense of Jesus' response is more than that, blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it. It is lesser denial of the woman's statement, than it is a what is more response. And here we can understand better what the blessing of Mary the mother of Jesus is.

The blessing of Mary is not on account of the mere physical bearing of Jesus. Her blessing is on account of the fact that she believed the word of God. Luke chapter 1 verse 45 And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.

She heard the word of God and she kept it, and was blessed on that account. Indeed we could argue that Mary is the first and the paradigmatic new covenant believer. A question to consider, how might the practice of prayer have changed for the average member of the people of God, from the old covenant to the new? In the second half of

Luke chapter 11, Jesus is called by the crowds to give them a sign.

And Jesus gives them nothing but the sign of the prophet Jonah. Now why are they given the sign of Jonah? Jesus, among other things, is declaring in advance what he is going to do in his death and resurrection, so that when it happens it will be clear what was intended. The Israel of Jonah's day was adulterous as a people, and Jonah was sent to the people of Nineveh in part as a sign of God's judgment of leaving Israel and going to the nations, provoking Israel to jealousy by showing them mercy.

The Israel of Jesus' day would experience the same thing. It is also a sign to Israel of its own judgment of exile, but deliverance. The unfaithful prophet Jonah is thrown into the sea, as his nation will be thrown into the sea of exile.

However, if Israel in exile, like Jonah in the belly of the big fish, calls out to the Lord for deliverance, they may find rescue. Christ as Israel is cast into the sea of the Gentiles and into the exile of death itself. Yet he will rise up, like Jonah.

Jesus' whole mission is a sign. He is the sign to Israel, and the resurrection most particularly. Jesus here particularly speaks about Jonah as a sign to Nineveh, and presumably as a sign to Nineveh he is especially a sign of the Lord's power and judgment.

The Ninevites of Jonah's day responded to Jonah as the sign and to his preaching, but Israel will not respond to Christ. Christ is the greater than Jonah. He is also the greater than Solomon.

The Queen of Sheba travelled to see Solomon, but yet Jesus is God's wisdom in person. So you have the northern city of Nineveh and the Queen of the South. Both of them will rise up in judgment on the last day against Israel.

I do not believe it is accidental that both of these groups that rise up in judgment against Israel are Gentiles. The faithful response of the Gentiles to Christ will be a cause of Israel's own condemnation. A lamp is used to illumine, and here Jesus uses the idea of the lamp to describe the eye.

We can talk about the apple of the eye for instance. It's that thing that we are focused upon. It's that thing that we cherish above all else.

The eye orients the body. It turns the head. It moves the entire body as a result.

If your eye has light as its focus, then your entire body will be affected by that, filled with light. Your eye will take on the character of those things that you give it to looking at, and your body will take on the character of your eye. The eye here is not just a receptive organ, in Jesus' understanding.

The eye is not just taking in light, it's giving out light. The person with a healthy eye views the entire world in a way that brings light to it. They bring light through their wisdom.

They bring light through their generosity. They bring light through their faith. We must train ourselves to use our eye in a way that brings light to the world, to view the world in a way that illumines it.

Jesus is invited to eat with a Pharisee, and before eating, the Pharisee is astonished that Jesus does not cleanse himself. The point of this washing is not hygiene, but ritual purity. But Jesus teaches that true purity or impurity lies within and flows from within.

Ritual is not a substitute for or a source of purity. It's a symbolic expression of purity. A true purity is manifested in a giving disposition of heart.

And as the heart is pure, everything else becomes pure. Jesus then launches into some woes upon the Pharisees. They fixate upon the minutiae of the law, and they utterly neglect the big picture.

The law is about justice and the love of God. The law is not just a lot of different commandments that we must observe, these separate laws. It's a unified body of material, a unified body of material in the principles of loving God and neighbor.

The things that really matter, the things that really have weight are justice and the love of God. And a way of practicing the law that detaches the law from these core principles of loving God and neighbor, and makes it merely about legalistic observance, is a perversion of what the law stands for. And Jesus declares a woe upon the Pharisees on this account.

The Pharisees are also those who desire the praise of men over that of God. They want to be praised in the towns and in the squares. They want to be recognized in the synagogues.

They want the honor of men, and yet they do not care about the honor of God who sees the heart. They want the external honor of society. They are unmarked graves.

They spread impurity to others without the other people even knowing it. There is a humorous shift in Jesus' discourse at this point, as a lawyer suggests that Jesus' statements are whistling past their ears, and he wants to warn Jesus to be careful lest he catch them in friendly fire, at which Jesus turns his sights upon the lawyers and lets rip. They place heavy burdens upon people, but they will not touch them at all.

They teach, but they do not do. They do not lead by example, but simply crush the people in legalism. The scribes build up the tombs of the prophets that their fathers killed, while continuing the tradition of persecution and rejection of God's messengers

that have been sent to them.

Indeed, Jesus says that the blood of Abel, the first martyr in Genesis chapter 4, to the blood of Zechariah, the last in 2 Chronicles chapter 24 verses 20-22, will come upon them. That generation will suffer the full weight of God's judgment upon those who unrighteously shed the blood of the martyrs. In addition to all their other sins, the scribes remove the means of knowledge from the people.

They are entrusted with teaching the scriptures, but they lock it up in their traditions and false teaching. They themselves don't enter into the kingdom, but they prevent others from doing so too. A question to consider.

There is a lot of treatment of internal and external things within this chapter. What are some of the ways in which the external practice of ritual can spring up from a reality within? In Luke chapter 12, Jesus warns against the leaven of the Pharisees. This is the hypocrisy that they have within themselves.

They pass on from generation to generation, just as the mixture of the leaven is put into a new loaf, and then that is placed to a new loaf still. So the leaven of the Pharisees is the hypocrisy that generation after generation they pass down. With the result that all affected by it are corrupted.

But the time is coming when things in secret will be revealed openly. Open proclamation will take the place of private teaching. And the disciples of Christ must not be fearful.

They must declare openly what Christ has declared in private, declaring from the rooftops what His word is. Such open proclamation would be the first thing to fall by the wayside in the case of fear. And the point here is not merely that of not being afraid.

It's a calling to be bold, to go forward, and to face all the challenges. You should not fear being persecuted, because persecution associates us with our Master, and our Master is greater than any persecutor. They cannot kill the soul, only the body.

If He notices even the sparrows fall, how much more will God notice His children, who lay down their lives in His service? Every hair on our heads is numbered. If we confess Christ before men, He will confess us before His Father in Heaven. Success in this mission will look different from what success in missions usually looks like.

Disciples will find themselves brought before rulers and authorities and synagogues, and having to defend themselves in such contexts. But the Holy Spirit will give them the words on the day that they need them. Whoever speaks against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Son of Man will not be forgiven.

There are two ages and two visitations. In the story of Joseph, there's that first visitation to his brothers, as he tells them his dreams, and they reject him. And then he comes

again when he delivers them in Egypt and gives them food.

Moses visits the first time and he tries to act as the judge for his brothers, the Israelites, and they reject him. And then he comes again and delivers them from Egypt. Jesus, in the same way, He comes the first time in His earthly ministry and He's rejected.

Then He comes the second time in the message of the Church, as He gives His Spirit to the Church, and if that message is rejected, final destruction awaits. Jesus at this point is surrounded by thousands of people who are almost trampling each other. And a man calls from this crowd, calling Jesus to act as an arbiter between him and his brother in a quarrel concerning inheritance.

But Jesus refuses to adjudicate. Rather, He talks about the danger of covetousness and preoccupation with possessions. And He tells a story of a rich fool.

This rich fool seems to be a skilled farmer, someone who's so skillful and effective that he needs to build bigger barns. And he has everything mapped out, but he has not considered the way that he stands relative to God. He seeks to plan his life without any reference to God, and with little awareness of the precariousness of human life and wealth.

And when his life is required of him, his bigger barns are of no use. All his wealth that he has built up while on earth is of no service. He had laid up treasure for himself, and he was not rich toward God.

Like Solomon, Jesus draws attention to the creatures and God's concern and provision for them. Once again, the issue is our attitude to material possessions and provisions. We are to adopt a posture of dependency upon God for our daily needs.

Worry and anxiety is far more likely to diminish our life than to extend it. And there is some assurance to be found in this reminder of the limits of our power. This isn't a denial of the value of prudence and provision for ourselves, but rather a spiritual posture to be adopted, with anxiety being the alternative.

This connects with Jesus' teaching concerning daily bread, that we look to God for provision for these things. There's a contrast between worry and faith. To whom are we looking? In the parable of the sower, it is the worries of this world and the deceit of wealth that act like thorns that choke the seed.

And we must beware that this does not befall us. What is our priority? It should be seeking the kingdom. Everything else is second.

That is where we will ultimately find security, as we lay up riches towards God, rather than towards ourselves. Ultimately, Jesus' disciples should not need to fear on this front. Although they are only a little flock, the Father desires to give them the kingdom, and he

will give them the kingdom.

He is a good Father, and they can look to him to provide. Jesus recognises that motives don't float free, but they can be nudged and pulled by material situations and conditions. The problem is the loss of material wealth, and the alternative is to invest your resources in spiritual things.

The heart will tend to follow your resources. Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Put your money where you want your heart to be, and where it is not vulnerable to loss, and where it won't place your heart in the same jeopardy.

Selling possessions and giving to the needy is a means by which to dislodge your heart from its false attachments. It also builds up riches where they cannot be lost or destroyed, building up riches towards God. The one who gives to the poor lends to the Lord.

A question to consider, what in Jesus' teaching can we truly possess, and how can we come to possess it? In the latter half of Luke 12, Jesus is bracing his disciples for coming judgement. They must be dressed for action, lamps must be burning, they must be waiting for the master to come. Perhaps we should see Passover themes here.

A meal at night, dressed and ready for action. It's also similar to material that we find in Matthew 24 and 25, in the Olivet Discourse, the ten virgins with the lamps for instance. Faithful servants must be braced and ready for their master to return, and the faithful servant will be served by the master.

This is a startling image, something which Luke underlines for his readers just a few chapters later. In chapter 17 verses 7-10, Will any of you who has a servant ploughing or keeping sheep say to him when he has come in from the field, Come at once and recline at table? Will he not rather say to him, Prepare supper for me, and dress properly, and serve me while I eat and drink, and afterward you will eat and drink? Does he thank the servant because he did what was commanded? So you also, when you have done all that you were commanded, say, We are unworthy servants, we have only done what was our duty. So here the master serving his servant subverts the relationship as commonly expressed completely.

There's a subtle mixing of metaphors here. Jesus is like the returning master of the house, whose coming is expected, although the time of it is unknown. However the Son of Man is also compared to a thief.

People don't expect the thief, but they need to be prepared for him. A thief strips the unprepared of their property. This ties in very much with the themes of the preceding section.

Like the rich fool whose life and all its possessions were taken away from him by death,

so the servants must be alert lest they lose all the contents of their house to the coming of the Son of Man. To faithful disciples, Jesus' coming will be like that of a returning good master. To the unfaithful, his coming will be like that of a thief.

How do you prepare for the coming of the Son of Man as a thief? You build up your treasure in the heavens, where thief cannot approach and moth cannot destroy. Peter then asks Jesus whether he is addressing the wider group or his close disciples. And Jesus goes on to tell a version of the earlier parable with three different developments.

Now the focus is not on the servants more generally, but on the servant placed over other servants, the appointed steward. This is very much the role of the apostles and the shepherds of the church. They will have to face a severe judgment for any unfaithfulness that they show.

Throughout his ministry, Jesus challenges the leaders of Israel with a force that he does not challenge the crowds with. The appointed stewards over his house will face a similarly severe judgment if they are unfaithful. Faithful stewards will be given much greater responsibility.

The unfaithful will be judged most severely. And ignorant stewards will receive punishment but of a lesser form. Judgment becomes a much more prominent theme in Jesus' teaching as he moves towards Jerusalem.

Here he stresses that his purpose is to bring judgment upon the earth. That is why he has come. This section harkens back to the teaching of John the Baptist in Luke 3, verses 16-17.

John answered them all saying, John had previously wondered about the nature of Jesus' ministry in chapter 7, presumably because it didn't show the fire that he was expecting. But Jesus here teaches that the fire is on its way. The judgment is associated with the baptism of Jesus' own death, after which fire will be cast on the earth and division that is already beginning will become most pronounced.

Jesus' description of his death as a baptism is quite remarkable. In many ways we could tell the story of Christ as the story of three baptisms. The story of the baptism of Christ in the Jordan, the baptism of his death and his baptism of the church at Pentecost.

The coming crisis will cut right through family relations. People can often try to ground family values within the gospel. And in many ways the gospel does affirm such values.

However, such values will never be completely underwritten by the kingdom. While families can be made new in the kingdom, the family must be subjected to a greater master and the claims of Christ will cause division within many previously close-knit households. Indeed, we see at various points in the gospels that it caused such division in Jesus' own family.

A question to consider. In what way was Jesus' death like a baptism? In the concluding verses of Luke chapter 12, Jesus observes that people can read meteorological signs, but they can't recognise the times in which they are living. It's imperative that they learn to interpret the present time, to see the signs.

The immediate signs in that context are those of the divisions of families mentioned in verses 52-53. These foreshadow what's going to happen in the future, this great division of judgement. The Son of Man is going to come and they won't be prepared for his advent.

From speaking of interpreting the signs, Jesus moves to speaking of judging what is right. The theme of judgement is important here. Recognising the signs, they should appreciate that they are hastening towards the time of reckoning.

A similar image to the one that Jesus uses here is found in Matthew chapter 5 verses 21-26, when it is related to the commandment not to murder. But here it seems to have a different purpose. In speaking about settling with the accuser, Jesus is making a different claim in this context.

Jesus calls his hearers to make every attempt to settle with their adversary before being brought to judgement. They should recognise the signs of imminent judgement in Jesus' ministry and get right with God before his judgement falls. As in the case of previous interruptions, such as the man from the crowd in chapter 12 verse 13, or Peter in verse 41 of that chapter, Jesus takes the statements of those bringing up the actions of Pilate as a springboard for developing his discourse.

The people whose blood was mingled with the sacrifices were Galileans, a fact that is repeated three times. This brutal act on Pilate's part isn't recorded elsewhere, but it is in keeping with other things that history records of Pilate. Jesus, of course, is another Galilean whose blood will be shed as a sacrifice by Pilate, so maybe there's something going on there.

The warning that they will all likewise perish is probably looking forward to the events of literal judgement that will come upon Jerusalem in AD 70, where the blood of the slain will fill the temple and where there will also be falling masonry. In discussing these two events then, Jesus is highlighting some of the signs of their own times, signs that point to a judgement that is far more serious to come, a judgement that will fall upon the nation more generally, not just upon a few individuals within it. Jesus speaks of the 18 people who died in the collapse of the Tower of Siloam, which is an interesting detail because the woman in verses 11 and 16 had 18 years of an infirmity.

While I am unsure of the significance of this particular unusual number, at the very least it might serve to connect these two stories together. When we see disaster befalling some other person, self-righteousness and our temptation to explain events neatly

tempts us to attribute negative outcomes to things that people did wrong and positive outcomes to things that people did right. But Jesus stresses that the Galileans and the 18 in the Tower of Siloam couldn't be distinguished from others in such a manner.

Others in Galilee and others in Jerusalem are every bit as worthy of perishing in such a manner. Elsewhere in the Gospels, the fig tree serves more explicitly as a symbol for the nation of Israel. Jesus here seems to be the patient keeper of the vineyard, seeking to delay judgement upon the nation and its temple.

Here the fig tree faces imminent destruction, but it is only the mercy of the vine dresser that allows it to remain, and only for a few years longer. If it doesn't bear proper fruit, it will be destroyed. The parable, of course, would remind people of Isaiah chapter 5 and the song of the vineyard.

Isaiah chapter 5 verses 1-7 When I looked for it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes? And now I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard. I will remove its hedge, and it shall be devoured. I will break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down.

I will make it a waste. It shall not be pruned or hoed, and briars and thorns shall grow up. I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it.

For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are his pleasant planting. And he looked for justice, but behold bloodshed, for righteousness, but behold an outcry. God's mercy allows Israel to hold on for now, but if they do not produce fruit soon, destruction is imminent.

A question to consider. What are some notable signs of cultural decline and imminent judgement to which we should be alert? Our section of Luke chapter 13 begins with a healing on the Sabbath. Jesus seems to make a point of healing upon the Sabbath.

He brings in the true Sabbath rest of the kingdom to Israel. Most typically people have to come to Jesus to be healed, often even persisting for some time. However, Jesus sees this woman, has compassion on her, calls her over, and heals her.

Perhaps part of the point of this is intentionally and purposefully to heal on the Sabbath. Her situation doesn't seem to be urgent. She has been that way for 18 years.

Note the earlier reference to the number 18 in verse 4. And the synagogue leader is appalled by this. He doesn't address Jesus, but addresses the crowd, directly opposing Jesus' authority to them. The Sabbath healing here should probably be read alongside the Sabbath healing of chapter 14 verses 1-6.

They have a lot in common. In that other account we read, And they could not reply to these things. In both of these cases there is a healing on the Sabbath.

And in both cases Jesus uses an illustration of showing compassion to an ox or a donkey. Why reference the ox or the donkey? Perhaps because the ox and the donkey are explicitly mentioned in the Sabbath commandment in Deuteronomy chapter 5 verses 12-15. But the seventh day is the Sabbath to the Lord your God.

On it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter or your male servant or your female servant, or your ox or your donkey or any of your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates, that your male servant and your female servant may rest as well as you. You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.

Jesus' teaching stresses that the Sabbath is not just about refraining from work, but about giving rest to those in your care. Healing on the Sabbath is most fitting. And if the ox and the donkey are included in the Sabbath commandment, and you would untie your ox or donkey to give them water, why would you not untie or release a daughter of Abraham who has been held captive by Satan for 18 years? If you would give relief to your animals any day of the week, but are especially bound to do so on the Sabbath, how much more is it the case for the woman that Jesus healed? Jesus gives now two twin parables.

The parable of the mustard seed is one in which Jesus is working with Old Testament background, most specifically the parable of Ezekiel in Ezekiel chapter 17. In verses 22 to 24 we see part of that that can parallel with this. Thus says the Lord God, I bring low the high tree, and make high the low tree, dry up the green tree, and make the dry tree flourish.

I am the Lord, I have spoken, and I will do it. What Jesus says about the mustard seed defies all botanical reality, and this is because it is not an illustration taken from nature. Rather it is playing off against the image of the seeder.

We are to recognise that what is happening with the mustard seed is not natural. The jarring contrast between reality and the parable is part of the point. The image of the tree in which birds take refuge is found elsewhere in scripture, and is used of great kingdoms, empires and their rulers.

Daniel chapter 4 verses 10 to 12 The visions of my head as I lay in bed were these. I saw, and behold, a tree in the midst of the earth, and its height was great. The tree grew and became strong, and its top reached to heaven, and it was visible to the end of the whole earth.

Its leaves were beautiful, and its fruit abundant, and in it was food for all. The beasts of the field found shade under it, and the birds of the heavens lived in its branches, and all flesh was fed from it. Against all appearances it is going to be the mustard seed of Israel,

the small nation that outgrows the great trees of the nations.

There is a similar image of surprising growth in Daniel chapter 2 verse 35. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver and the gold, all together were broken in pieces, and became like the chaff of the summer threshing floors, and the wind carried them away, so that not a trace of them could be found. But the stone that struck the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth.

God sowed the mustard seed in his field, and it will become the greatest tree of all. The parable of the leaven that follows, leaven hidden in three measures of flour, is one that corresponds to this in certain respects. Israel is hidden among the nations, causing the nations gradually to rise up.

Perhaps we could connect the three measures of flour with the three sons of Noah. I don't know. It's not a dramatic, but it's a gradual process, and it's not glorious.

Indeed it uses something that might be seen as negative or unclean. Leaven often has negative symbolism attached to it. The mustard seed and the leaven are twin parables.

They can more readily be understood when related to each other. They're not identical twins. They represent different aspects of Israel's ministry in relationship to the nations, small in both cases, but making an outsized effect.

And hiddenness is an important theme. They have insignificant and inglorious origins, but a great purpose and destiny. One of the parables involves a man sowing seed, and its twin involves a woman hiding leaven.

There's a sort of marriage here. Both involve an intentional action towards a goal with significant results, but imperceptible processes. As Jesus gradually works his way towards Jerusalem, someone asks him the question whether those who are saved will be few.

Jesus responds with the illustration of a narrow door. This is similar to Matthew 7, verses 13-14. Enter by the narrow gate, for the gate is wide, and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many.

For the gate is narrow, and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few. However, there isn't the same contrastive framing of the point here. It's not the contrast between the wide gate and the narrow gate.

And as we'll see, Jesus has a more subtle point to make here in his response to the question. The door will only be open for a limited period of time, and many who will want to enter will not be able to do so. The verse that Jesus quotes about those being told to go away comes from Psalm 6, verse 8. Jesus' implication that only few will find the door need not be read as a timeless statement that in each and every age only a few people

will be saved.

It's given into a specific context, and although it does have more general application, we really must remember the context into which it is first spoken. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are going to be in the kingdom at the Messianic feast with Gentiles, while numerous sons of the kingdom find themselves outside. This imagery of an eschatological feast comes from the Old Testament itself.

In Isaiah, chapter 25, verses 6-9, and the covering that is cast over all peoples, the north and the south, there is going to be a great turning of tables. And this all presents an answer to the question that might have surprised the questioner. The questioner was most likely thinking of the size of the remnant of Israel.

But Jesus' answer, while half suggesting that the remnant of Israel might indeed be few, speaks of many people coming from the four corners of the world to join Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and the prophets in the eschatological banquet. The numbers at the feast won't be small, but the identity of the honoured guests might be surprising. Jesus is moving towards Jerusalem.

However, he still seems to be in the territory of Herod Antipas. There are three contrasting desires within this section. Herod's desire to kill Jesus, Jesus' desire to gather Jerusalem together, and Jerusalem's desire to resist this.

Jesus is warned by some Pharisees, and again we should remember that the Pharisees are not always bad guys in the Gospels and Acts. They fear he is going to get caught in the trap and want him to travel away from the region so that he will not be destroyed by Herod. Herod is a genuine threat.

He has already killed John the Baptist, and he has speculated that Jesus might be John the Baptist raised from the dead. He is described like a fox by Jesus. He is a pest.

He is a minor player. In Judges 15 verses 4 following, Samson seems to associate the Philistines with foxes. Jesus is indeed going to leave Herod's region of Galilee, but not to save his life, rather in order to die in Jerusalem, being killed in the chief city, which stands for the entire nation.

In verses 32-33, Jesus describes his work in a three day pattern, corresponding to patterns of death and resurrection. He will finish his course on the third day. Jesus is a new Jeremiah.

He declares judgment upon the house and then laments over Jerusalem. Jerusalem is the site where the prophet's blood must be gathered, the house, the temple, and by extension the whole nation is to be left desolate. Jesus wants to gather Israel under his wings.

This is a biblical image of God's protection and the provision of refuge for his people. The fact that Jesus compares himself to a hen immediately after speaking of Herod as a fox may not be a coincidence. A question to consider.

How might Jesus' Sabbath practice inform our understanding of the purpose of the law more generally? Luke chapter 14 is set at the meal table. The kingdom is like a great supper and the way of the kingdom is seen in its table manners. Jesus heals on the Sabbath again and we should observe the parallels with chapter 13 verses 10-17.

There is a reference here to a sun or an ox, but in other textual versions it's the donkey or the ox. This is referring back to Deuteronomy chapter 5 and the law of the Sabbath in that place. Jesus is the one who is bringing in the Sabbath rest and his feast.

The man is suffering from dropsy, a condition involving fluid retention and a dangerous thirst. Jesus heals him and thereby addresses his thirst, perhaps something that could be seen as a symbol of longing for deliverance. In his famous work *The Civilizing Process*, Norbert Elias explores the transformation of manners between the Middle Ages and the 18th century.

He observes the way that our animality and things associated with it were gradually removed from public sight through instilling embarrassment, shame and aversion surrounding contact with other bodies, the display of excessive passions and sexuality or behaviours that foreground our physicality, things like nose-blowing or spitting, urinating or nudity. Elias identified a political impulse behind much of this. It had its root in the rise of a new courtly class and observing the new rigorous etiquette of the court became necessary for inclusion and advancement in polite society and social jockeying in the realm of the refinement of tastes and manners and civility steadily displaced the martial values of previous ages.

Now the meal table was ground zero for this training and expression of this new regime of conduct. It spread from courtiers to the higher classes of society and beyond and these new virtues of self-control, dignity and concealment of and distancing from animality was taught and manifested at meal tables until what originated as a social compulsion became a part of people's very psychology, a second nature. The rise of civility in the West then was a social development of the manners of the meal table that undergirded and spread a new political order privileging cultivated courtly elites.

The political importance of the meal table within this development was manifold. The meal table was and remains a reflection of the relations between people and of their place within a broader social and material world. Each meal was and still remains an opportunity to secure or advance one's place within this social order.

What on earth does any of this have to do with Luke chapter 14? Well, as our passage shows, the same was true in Jesus' day. The meal table and the throwing of banquets

were arenas within which people negotiated and competed for social status. It was also a site of intense social scrutiny and Jesus was being closely examined by the Pharisees who wanted to see what his table manners would reveal about him.

Jesus, however, was engaging in a sort of sociological study of his own. He perceived and remarked upon some distinguishing features of meal-time behaviour in first-century Jewish honour society. Dinner guests pressing for the best seats, hosts inviting the sort of people from whom they could hope for repayment or improve social status.

And Jesus in these verses addresses both groups. He teaches an alternative model of table etiquette. This model of table etiquette is not entirely new.

Much of Jesus' teaching in this passage comes from the Old Testament and elsewhere. In Proverbs chapter 25 verses 6 to 7, Do not put yourself forward in the king's presence, or stand in the place of the great. For it is better to be told, Come up here, than to be put lower in the presence of a noble.

Richard Hayes has remarked, In the Luke and narrative context, this teaching becomes more than a pragmatic hint about court etiquette. It is implicitly a directive about how the coming kingdom should impinge already on the present, producing a reversal of values and status. In the eschatological kingdom of God, the last will be first and the first last.

Therefore, those who are Jesus' followers should begin already to assume roles of lowliness. Jesus' teaching involves then, as Hayes recognises, a rehearsal for the manners of the in-breaking kingdom. Rather than trying to curry favour with their rich neighbours and adopting the manners of the regional rulers, the people of God are to cultivate the etiquette of a different kingdom.

They are to behave as prospective members of a different court. Jesus instructs his hearers to act against their apparent social interests, in the sure faith that God's order will prevail over all others. The table manners that Jesus called for involved the rejection of the sort of honour culture practised in many first-century Mediterranean societies.

Instead of grasping for honour, Jesus' followers should be characterised by humility and self-effacement, while seating arrangements and dinner invitations were means for social climbers to accrue honour and status in their society. Jesus challenges his disciples to reject the way of honour-seekers, and like their master, to seek the praise of God over that of man. Abstaining from social jockeying in a society where so much depended upon one's honour and status is a very costly act of faith.

The necessity of a new form of practice grounded in radical faith in the coming kingdom is perhaps even more pronounced in Jesus' challenge to hosts in the later verses of this passage. Rather than inviting people who can be relied upon to give a generous return

upon their social investment, Jesus' followers must throw their feasts for people with no power to repay. In a society where the exchange of gifts and invitations to feasts was the basic currency by which you secured your social standing, Jesus' radical practice would be seen to be reckless.

One's political, legal and social position could become precarious if one was not prepared to throw one's weight into maintaining circles of reciprocal gift. If one did not give gifts and invitations to the right people, one wouldn't receive the return of social honour or any assurance of social security. Consistently giving gifts and invitations to the wrong people might be an even riskier course of action.

It would offend and dissociate you from people with social power. Greco-Roman thinkers who have reflected upon the significance of gifts, such as Cicero, commonly stress the moral importance of giving judiciously. To give freely to the poor who lack the means to give a worthy return, being regarded not only economically but typically also as morally withoutstanding, might reflect poorly upon the prudence and the character of the giver.

Jesus doesn't utterly reject the underlying logic of the gift society, but rather completely transforms its functioning by revealing that God is the guarantor of all gifts and debts. If we give in faith to the poor and to those without the capacity to repay, we will receive a bountiful reward at the resurrection. Conversely, we need not be placed in others' debt when we receive their gifts, because God has promised to repay them on our behalf.

Jesus tells us to invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind to our suppers, rather than people who can repay us. God is the one who will reward us with a place at his table in the resurrection of the just. And here the connection between Jesus' teaching in these verses and the teaching of the parable of the great supper that immediately follows should be recognised.

It is the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind, precisely the same people as his disciples are called to invite to their feasts in verse 13, who are the people who sit at God's great supper, while the rich reject their invitation. In associating themselves with those without social status, then, the disciples of Christ would be associating themselves with those who would one day sit at the great eschatological banquet. Inviting people to this great banquet, the man finds one guest after another turning down his invitation for various weak excuses.

We should note the similarity of the situation to the one in which Jesus presently finds himself. It is a meal with a ruler of the Pharisees, with presumably many people of high status and social standing in attendance. The feast of the parable proceeds in a typical way.

It begins with invitations being sent out to socially respectable people. But things go awry. They are all too committed to their possessions and relationships to accept the

invitation.

As his invitation has been spurned by the well-to-do, the man then turns to the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame, and then goes out beyond that still to find even more destitute persons outside of the city. This has often been related to marginal Jews and Gentiles. These people must be compelled into the feast, presumably because they knew that they couldn't offer anything in return, and there was an apparent social gulf between them and their host.

However, their host wasn't playing the old dynamics of a patronage culture anymore. A complete social reordering had occurred for him, and he now cut off association with the original invitees. A question to consider.

How does the celebration of the Eucharist or Lord's Supper provide us with training in the table manners of the Kingdom? At the end of Luke chapter 14, Jesus expresses the cost of discipleship in the most arresting possible terms. People must hate their own father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters in order to follow him. They must hate their own life.

Indeed, if they do not do these things, they cannot be his disciples. Now Jesus is clearly not telling us literally to hate others, as if the feeling of hatred towards our family members and our own lives were essential to discipleship. That is not the case.

Rather, hatred here refers to the merciless cutting off of loyalties that would supersede our commitment to Christ and following him. Faced with the claim of Christ, nothing else can take priority. The fact that Jesus makes such claims upon people for himself is a sign of his authority.

No mere man could rightfully make such claims upon the loyalties of others without falling into idolatry. Disciples must take up their crosses and follow Jesus. The cross that Jesus was talking about was a symbol that had power.

When Jesus hearers heard him use this word, they would be thinking about a gruesome means of execution. A person must count the cost if he wants to be a disciple of Christ. We can often present being a disciple in the most positive of terms, suggesting that it will make people's lives wonderful.

By contrast, Jesus presents discipleship as deeply demanding and alerts us to how hard it is. We try to sell discipleship like a product, while Jesus challenges prospective disciples to demonstrate their level of commitment to him. If anyone, Jesus is in the position of the buyer in the transaction.

Seems to me we haven't really reflected half enough upon the significance of these verses when it comes to Christian evangelism. We peddle a vision of what Jesus can do for us, rather than summoning people to the costly commitment of discipleship. True

discipleship requires a renunciation of all these different things that would stand in the way of Christ, family, one's own life, all your possessions.

You must lose all in order to follow Christ, and ultimately to gain your life and have riches in heaven. The chapter ends with a warning. Salt gives savour.

It's a sort of solid fire. But if it loses its savour, then what use is it? Salt can't salt itself. Salt is always salt for something else.

Disciples that cease to bring a savour to the world are of no use, and they'll end up being thrown out and destroyed, trampled underfoot in the other gospel account. Chapter 15 contains a triplet of parables. These parables need to be read together.

They each develop a single theme in a different way, and the contrast and the progression between them matters. As we read the parables, it's important to keep in mind that they are addressed to the Pharisees and to the scribes. They respond to their objection that Jesus is eating with sinners.

The first parable is about a shepherd. Jesus, of course, is the good shepherd, and he is addressing the false shepherds of Israel. This sort of symbolism has a background in the Old Testament.

Jeremiah 23, verses 1-4 And they shall be fruitful and multiply. I will set shepherds over them who will care for them, and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, neither shall any be missing, declares the Lord. And then in Ezekiel, chapter 34, verses 10-16 For thus says the Lord God, I will feed them with good pasture, and on the mountain heights of Israel shall be their grazing land.

There they shall lie down in good grazing land, and on rich pasture they shall feed on the mountains of Israel. I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I myself will make them lie down, declares the Lord God. I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, and the fat and the strong I will destroy, I will feed them in justice.

It seems to me that the shepherd here is not necessarily God, but the ideal leader and teacher of Israel, who reflects God's own character. The parable reveals the sin of the scribes and the Pharisees. They have destroyed, scattered, and fleeced the flock of Israel.

They did not seek the lost. The finding of the lost sheep leads to a feast of celebration, the joy of which reflects the joy of heaven itself. Jesus' meals with tax collectors and sinners enact this celebration of the discovery of the lost.

Not only are the Pharisees and scribes failing to seek the lost sheep of Israel, they also lock themselves out of the joyful feast of celebration. The recovery of the lost sheep

might also remind us of the idea of the Lord's restoring the soul of the psalmist in Psalm 23, verse 3. The parable of the lost coin is the second parable in the cycle. The woman has ten coins, of which she is last one.

Now, the ten coins might be her personal savings, which would be very valuable to her if she were poor. Alternatively, the ten coins might be part of a bridal garland or dowry, and she is last one of those, which would be a very serious thing to lose. The coin would be part of the mark of her marital status.

Who is the woman? It seems to me that the woman might be Israel. The implication is that the recovered lost sinners of the house of Israel are akin to the marks of Israel's status as God's bride. I wouldn't put too much weight upon that reading, but it's worth considering.

The other thing to notice here is that these two parables follow Luke's common pattern of having a character in a story or a figure in the narrative that is a man, followed by one who is a woman. This is one of the ways that Luke expresses the extent of the gospel, that it is addressed to both men and to women. The house imagery might also be worth reflecting upon.

We've already read of the swept house in chapter 11, verse 25, in relation to the casting out of Satan. We have also already seen a number of references to lamps, chapter 11, verses 33 to 36, and chapter 12, verse 35, and there might be some allusion to the temple here. Jesus is a true son of the bride, sweeping out Satan from the house, relighting the lamp of Israel, and recovering the marks of Israel's marital status by recovering lost sinners.

He makes the unswept and dark house of Israel the site of a joyous feast. By contrast, the scribes and the Pharisees are leaving the house dark, unswept of Satan, and are losing the marks of marriage. Once again, the focus is upon the celebration that follows.

If there is joy and celebration in heaven, how much more is it justified on earth? A question to consider. The conclusion of both these parables is an invitation to rejoice with the person who has found the last item. Within this chapter, and the chapter that precedes it, the theme of invitation in the context of meals is prominent.

What can we learn from reflecting upon this theme as Luke portrays it within these two chapters? The final part of Luke, chapter 15, is devoted to the parable of the lost son. We ought to read this alongside the preceding two parables, the parable of the lost sheep and the parable of the lost coin. In verse 3, these things are introduced with the statement, So he told them this parable.

What this chapter contains is like three parables in one. The final parable in the cycle is that of the lost son, and there's an escalating movement as we go through. There's a

movement from one out of a hundred sheep lost to one out of ten coins lost to one out of two sons lost.

What might have been brushed off as an acceptable loss in the first case is seen to be far more severe in the third. These parables are also, together, a response to the scribes and the Pharisees, and their objection to the way that Jesus eats with sinners. In the older brother figure, at the end of this parable, something that has been in the background of all of the parables to this point suddenly is thrust into the foreground and made explicit.

Once again, Jesus is showing his rhetorical mastery and his ability to tell a story with greatest effect. The parable of the lost son raises a number of questions, not least that of who its central character is. Is it about the lost son? Is it about the father that welcomes him? Or is it about the brother who refuses to accept him upon his return? A case could be made for any of these, which might perhaps be an indication that the parable is rather more complicated than such a question supposes.

The parable might be making several points at once. The actions of the youngest son with which the parable begins are truly scandalous within that society. First of all, he asks the father to divide the inheritance between him and his brother while the father is still alive.

Then he presumably liquidates all that his father has given to him and then takes that and goes into a far country. He has disowned his parents, he has disowned his family and dishonoured them. And then, if that was not bad enough, he squanders all that has been entrusted into his hand by his father.

It's important to see the themes of kinship that are playing out within the story. As the place of such themes within this parable represents a considerable and significant move beyond the two parables that preceded. Part of the point of this parable is to show that the stakes of what's taking place are the stakes of a family, of kinship, of the mutual recognition that should occur in a family between father and son, son and father, brother and brother.

And for this reason it is important that the parable begins with a despicable spurning of kinship. The youngest son ends up in a very poor state indeed. He's in a far country and he ends up working with the pigs and even desiring their food.

This is someone who has gone from the land of Israel, presumably, to a land of the Gentiles where they eat pigs and now he wants to eat the pigs' food. Having turned his back upon his father and his family, he has now fallen as low as he could fall. The youngest son is in a sort of exile, in a far country among the unclean swine.

A number of people have identified the youngest son as Jacob. I don't think that's quite

correct, even though the story does play off the Jacob story. Jacob is the youngest son and he does go into a far country, but he is a righteous son who flees on account of the threat of his older brother.

While here the youngest son seems to be Israel the nation, who are a poor parody of their forefather. They've willfully chosen the way of exile, rebelling against the Lord and squandering the blessings of the covenant. Finally, in the state of exile, the son comes to his senses.

He realises that even if he were only a hired servant in his father's house, he would be better off than he is in his current condition. And so he decides to go back, rehearsing along the way this speech that he is going to deliver to his father. A speech which, when the time comes, he is not given the time to deliver in its entirety.

Most people reading this parable presume that the father is God. A case can be made from this looking at other passages within the book of Luke. Luke chapter 11 verses 11 to 13 What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him? Or Luke chapter 12 verses 30 to 32 For all the nations of the world seek after these things, and your father knows that you need them.

Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you. Fear not, little flock, for it is your father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. But there is another way to read this parable and the identity of the father within it.

And that is to pay attention to the many times that father language has been used with reference to Abraham in the book of Luke. As he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever. In chapter 1 verse 55 The oath that he swore to our father Abraham to grant us.

In chapter 1 verse 73 Bear fruits in keeping with repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves, We have Abraham as our father. For I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. Chapter 3 verse 8 And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan bound for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath day? Chapter 13 verse 16 Or in chapter 13 verse 28 In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but you yourselves cast out.

Chapter 19 verse 9 Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. And perhaps the greatest example of all, in the chapter that follows this, where Lazarus is taken to the bosom of father Abraham. Considering that this is within the same cycle of parables, it is strong evidence that the father in this parable is Abraham.

As the two sons recall characters in the book of Genesis, the father could fairly naturally be associated with their patriarchal father. Perhaps stronger evidence still is the fact that the action of the father is that which is characteristic of Abraham. Abraham's very entry into fatherhood was related to his hospitality extended to the angels, in Genesis chapter 18.

In verses 2 to 8 of that chapter Abraham went quickly into the tent to Sarah and said, Quick, three seers of fine flour, knead it and make cakes. And Abraham ran to the herd and took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to a young man who prepared it quickly. Then he took curds and milk and the calf that he had prepared, and set it before them, and he stood by them under the tree while they ate.

Abraham's action of running to greet the visitors, and also his preparation of the fattened calf, are things that stand out in this passage, much as they are elements that stand out in the parable of the lost son. The younger son returns, expecting and hoping to be treated like a servant, but rather than being welcomed like a hired servant, he is welcomed as a loved son. There are ways in which this story would remind the hearer of the story of Jacob and Esau, particularly the story of two sons, and the older and the younger, and other details of the story point to that Old Testament narrative, but the details are all topsy-turvy.

Israel hasn't followed the script. Notice the greeting of the father in verse 20 is precisely the same as the greeting given by Esau to the returning Jacob in Genesis chapter 33 verses 3-4. He went on before them, bowing himself to the ground seven times, until he came near to his brother.

But Esau ran to meet him and embraced him and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept. The parable plays off the story of Esau and Jacob in other ways. Genesis chapter 27 verse 30 is something that comes earlier.

As soon as Isaac had finished blessing Jacob, when Jacob had scarcely gone out from the presence of Isaac his father, Esau his brother came in from his hunting. In this case, there seems to be a close parallel between Esau and the older brother. The older brother comes in from the field and sees that his father has, to his mind, wrongfully blessed his younger brother, and he's angry, utterly disowning his younger brother.

So on the one hand, we have the positive action of Esau, when he restored his relationship with Jacob, when he greeted him as Jacob returned to the land. But we also have the negative action of Esau hanging in the background, when he sought to kill his brother after he came in from the field to find that his father had blessed his brother instead of him. This characterization is subtle but important, because the character that the Pharisees and the scribes would naturally associate with would be the older brother.

They'd be scandalized by the action of the younger brother. And yet there are these

troubling indications in the characterization of the different figures in the narrative that the older brother is not the good guy. Just as the younger son has to come to his senses to come to himself, so the older brother has to come to himself to become like Esau in welcoming back the younger brother, who he feels has wronged him.

But he has not yet done so. The older brother in this story shuts himself out of the feast, rather than welcoming his returning brother. Note how he rhetorically disowns his brother.

Your son. Now in the beginning of the parable it was the younger brother who disowned his family by his actions. Now the older brother is disowning his brother, and implicitly disowning his father in the process.

All these years I have served you. He thinks of himself as a servant. The younger brother sought to be welcomed back as a servant.

And now the older brother has been thinking about himself as a servant all the way along. We might be led to ask who indeed is the last son in this parable. We should also notice the father's insistent recognition of both of the sons as his sons, and his refusal to reduce them to the status of servants.

Just as there is an inversion of the role of Jacob and Esau, there might be an inversion of the role of Moses too. Like Moses, the older brother returns to hear the sound of music and dancing, wondering what is taking place. There is also a calf involved.

Exodus 32, verses 17-19 When Joshua heard the noise of the people as they shouted, he said to Moses, There is a noise of war in the camp. But he said, It is not the sound of shouting for victory, or the sound of the cry of defeat, but the sound of singing that I hear. And as soon as he came near the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, Moses' anger burned hot, and he threw the tablets out of his hands and broke them at the foot of the mountain.

The Pharisees and the scribes might feel anger that they would imagine makes them like Moses. They see themselves as the guardians of the covenant that these people, these sinners, have broken. However, even in his anger, Moses sought to intercede for the people, to ensure that the lost son of Israel not be cast away by the father, but that he be restored and know the presence and fellowship of the father in his midst.

By stark contrast, the anger of the scribes and the Pharisees is at the scandal of God's grace in restoring such an idolatrous nation. These three parables speak of the value of those who have been lost, the need to go to lengths to find them, the incredible joy at their return, and the tragedy and loss in locking oneself out of this joy on account of one's resentment. The climax of this story, like the previous ones, is not the act of finding itself, but the joy of the feast that follows.

And the key concern is that everyone join in this joy, that it be a common joy that people share in. The previous two parables have given this expectation of sharing in the joy, rejoice with me, for I have found what is lost. And then that expectation is broken in this final case, and we see the tragedy of the son who will not recognize his brother, will not join in the joy of his father.

The end of this parable leaves things hanging and unresolved. Think about the end of the Book of Jonah as a similar example of this. The resolution must take place within the actions and the response of the hearers of the parable.

A question to consider, how do the themes of kinship that are at the heart of this parable help us to think better about the original situation that prompted Jesus' teaching in these parables, in his eating with sinners? The parables of chapter 16 of Luke are some of the trickiest of all. There's a lot here to reward closer attention though. Jesus is still speaking in the context set by chapter 15 verses 1-2, where the scribes and the Pharisees grumbled about the fact that he was eating with sinners.

And he will continue to speak in that sort of context until chapter 17 verse 10. While he's more directly addressing his disciples, as we see in verse 1, the Pharisees are also listening in, as becomes apparent in verse 14. In the parable of the unjust steward, it's important to keep in mind that Jesus is praising his shrewdness, not his morality.

This steward would have been responsible for managing his master's estate in his absence, sorting out rents and the like. Reference to squandering might suggest some connection with the parable of the last son that's proceeding. The steward hasn't been faithful to his master, and now he faces the crisis time, imminent removal from his position.

What is he to do? And the steward comes up with quite an ingenious scheme. While he is about to lose his position, apart from his master, no one else knows this yet. So he goes around all his master's debtors and reduces their debts.

This would make him a hero in the neighborhood, and his master would appear to be generous and good. The master is also now put in something of a bind. He can't easily remove the steward from his position or recover full debts without appearing grasping or courting public disfavor.

Even if he removed the steward from his position, the steward would be welcomed by people in the neighborhood, who appreciated that he had taken a concern for their interests in their debts with his master. The steward was accused of wasting his master's goods, so there's a distinct possibility that he was raising the rents. Perhaps the reduced rents were largely taken from his unjust cut.

He had been placing heavy burdens upon the people. What is the point of this parable? I

believe the Pharisees and the scribes are in view here. The Pharisees and the scribes are unjust stewards.

They've been squandering God's riches, not managing his house well, laying heavy burdens upon the people, and the time for their accounting to their master is just about to come. They are now faced with a choice similar to that of the unjust steward. Will they double down on their injustice, or will they use that brief remaining window of opportunity of their stewardship to take emergency action to prepare for their future? And the action that Jesus implies that they should take is that of getting on the right side of their master's servants and debtors before it is too late.

Using the remaining time and authority that they have to give to the poor and take concern for the burdens that are placed upon the poor and the vulnerable of Israel. In this parable, as in the parable that comes later in this chapter, the rich man and Lazarus, the relationship between rich and powerful religious leaders and the poor and indebted of the population is really highlighted. Of course, unlike the shrewd steward, the Pharisees, scribes and lawyers were oblivious to their predicament and they remained unjust.

The scribes and the Pharisees have not been faithful with the old covenant least, and so God will not entrust them with the new covenant riches. He will remove them from their office. Jesus is clearly accusing the money-serving Pharisees of abusing their power for the sake of dishonest gain from the poor.

There is a change in the world order afoot, and people are pressing into the kingdom, and the Pharisees must hurry or be left out. And the use of money is especially important as a theme here. If, as a matter of urgency, they gave to the poor, they would be lending to the Lord and building up treasure in heaven before they are to be finally removed from their position and their power.

Investing their money in such a manner would make it possible for them to be welcomed into eternal dwellings. And Jesus draws our attention to the importance of money in this picture. Money has become a master to these people.

It's a sort of idolatry that they have committed themselves to. Our powers place us under their power. Our liberties take liberties with us.

Our technologies can often render us subject to them. We can think that the economy makes us rich, while enslaving ourselves to the cause of its continual growth. It preoccupies our attention.

We become fixated upon it. Jesus wants his disciples to see the danger of money, the way that money can become a master of people, and the way that ultimately that master can lead people to destruction. Jesus directly rebukes the Pharisees.

They present themselves as righteous before men, but God knows their hearts. And the testimony of the law and the prophets led up to John the Baptist. But since John the Baptist, the gospel is being proclaimed and people are pressing into the kingdom.

The Pharisees need to recognize what is happening. The law is not going to be overridden by the kingdom, but will be validated, confirmed and fulfilled. Why is there a reference to divorce here? It seems to me that the implication is that the religious leaders were abusing their role as guardians of the law, to exploit the poor and to gain wealth, but also to loosen God's standards of marital faithfulness and sexual sin in their favor.

As we see elsewhere in Jesus' challenging of the scribes and the Pharisees, they used technicalities to undermine the intent of the law. For instance, people divorcing in order to marry someone else. That is quite manifestly a form of adultery.

But yet, being able to do it under the guise of legality dulls people's sense of the sin that is taking place. In contrast to the Pharisees' nullification of the law by their tradition and their practice, Jesus is going to fulfill and confirm the law. The parable of the rich man and Lazarus, with which this chapter ends, should probably not be read as a literal account of the postmortem state.

Rather, it's using a particular picture of the postmortem state as a parable of something else. The rich man in the parable is clothed in purple and fine linen. This clothing should probably remind us of the priesthood, as we see in Exodus chapter 28 and elsewhere.

Lazarus, on the other hand, is like the leprous outcast. Lazarus and the rich man are sharply contrasted in their dress, in their food, and in the place where they live. And the deaths of the rich man and Lazarus possibly refer to the end of the old order and the bringing in of the kingdom, or at least they anticipated on the near horizon.

Lazarus is now welcomed, and the rich man finds himself excluded and seeking the mercy of the poor man. Lazarus, however, is not the center of this parable. He's someone who doesn't really do anything at all.

He's passive for most of the story. Whereas Abraham and the rich man are the active parties. Lazarus mostly serves as a foil against which the reversal that the rich man experiences and the utter finality of the state that he ends up in can be described more aptly.

He also addresses Abraham directly, asking Abraham to send Lazarus to do something for him. Some have suggested that this gives a clue as to the importance of Lazarus as a figure. Lazarus is a form of the name Eliezer, and Eliezer was the chief servant of Abraham.

And the rich man addresses Abraham as if Eliezer was his servant, to be sent to do

particular tasks, whether to quench the fire of his tongue or whether to bring the message to his brothers. If this reading were accurate, the son of Abraham, the one who addresses Abraham's father, finds himself excluded from paradise, whereas the servant of Abraham finds himself in Abraham's bosom as one inheriting the blessing. When the rich man finally realizes that there is no hope for him, he begs for Lazarus to be resurrected to warn his brothers.

But Abraham makes clear that that is not going to help the situation. They already have Moses and the prophets. The word is not far from them.

It doesn't require someone to come back from the dead to bring it to them. It's in their mouths and it should be in their hearts. And indeed, if they don't accept what they already have, someone coming back from the dead won't change anything.

Why does the rich man have five brothers? Why are we given a close description of the clothes that he wears? I believe it's because he's the high priest. He represents Caiaphas. Caiaphas, the son-in-law of Annas, has five brothers, all of whom became high priests.

The high priesthood of Caiaphas and his five brothers would lead all the way up to the destruction of Jerusalem. In fact, they did receive the witness of one come back from the dead, and they rejected that witness, and as a result, they faced destruction. This fits in with the parables that we've had to this point.

The parables of the preceding chapter in chapter 15 are about the religious leader's failure to welcome in the lost sheep, to welcome the returning lost sons, and the way that they are excluding themselves from the father's table, and the renewed fellowship of the family as a result. The parable of the unjust steward with which this chapter begins is about the need for dishonest managers to be removed from their office, and the urgency of them overcoming their love of money and using their money to give to the poor in a last-ditch attempt to secure a future for themselves when they are removed from their post. The parable of the rich man of Lazarus, then, presents us with a stark image that culminates this larger body of teaching, challenging the religious leaders for their failure to welcome and serve the poor.

The rich man, symbolizing the priesthood, will be cast out into torment, while Abraham, the father of Israel, welcomes the poor Lazarus as his child. The lines of the family of Abraham are being redrawn in surprising ways. A question to consider.

This chapter presents us with images of the very rich relating to the very poor, and of people with power relating to those with debt. Jesus' teaching around these parables makes clear that the riches cannot just be spiritualized, nor can the poverty. The relationship between rich and poor, between the indebted and those who have the power over their debts, is a matter of spiritual consequence.

How might Jesus' teaching here on these points relate to teaching elsewhere in the Gospel of Luke? Moving into Luke chapter 17, we still see Jesus moving between teaching and addressing the Pharisees and the scribes, and then teaching and addressing his disciples and the apostles. Temptations will come. Part of the reality of a sinful world is that people will be caused to stumble by various things.

However, to be the cause of this is a very serious matter. We must be uncompromising in dealing with anything that might be an obstacle to the weak. Dealing radically with sin in order to protect not just ourselves, but others from stumbling.

They must not follow the example of the scribes and the Pharisees, and put obstacles in the way of little ones trying to enter the kingdom. Jesus refers to stumbling blocks, or fences, in this chapter. Jesus has just been challenging the unfaithfulness of the religious teachers.

And the importance of faithfulness in teachers is especially important, because teachers can so easily cause people who are vulnerable and weak, and people who can easily be led astray, to sin. The consequences of this are most severe. Jesus uses an image that is later on used in Revelation chapter 18 verse 21, with reference to Babylon the Great.

We must be vigilant. We must pay attention to ourselves. When someone sins against us, we must deal with it in the light of brotherhood.

We have to deal with our brothers. If a brother sins against us, we can't just let it fester. In families we have to relate to each other, and the body of Christ should be the same.

There is an imperative to uphold peace between us, and to heal wounds. We confront each other so that we will sort out things swiftly. And forgiveness does not rule out confrontation and rebuke.

Rather, it requires a certain sort of confrontation. Some people have the false impression that forgiveness is pretending that nothing happened, just smoothing over something and not saying anything about it. But forgiveness requires telling the truth about what has been done.

Implicit, and often explicit, in receiving forgiveness, is acknowledging what you have done, the wrong that you have committed. And someone who will not admit the wrong that they have committed, cannot accept forgiveness. However, forgiveness should be ready, and not grudging.

Nor is there a three strikes and you're out policy as regards our forgiveness. We should always be swift and ready to forgive. Much as God has forgiven us, so we should extend forgiveness to others.

Cain may have been avenged sevenfold, but we forgive sevenfold. Jesus saying about

the mustard seed and moving the mulberry tree, contrasts the small seed, the smallest of all seeds, and the great tree, the mulberry tree that would be incredibly difficult to remove. Jesus has already used the mustard tree and the mustard seed as a symbol for the kingdom.

Here he seems to be drawing attention once more to the smallness of the seed, but working with different aspects of the imagery. The fig mulberry tree could perhaps be seen as an image of Israel. It's to be planted in the sea, like the millstone.

Once again, it might be a reference to Jerusalem being thrown into the realm of the Gentiles. If Jesus' disciples have the smallest seed of kingdom faith, the mustard seed, they could bring about God's judgment upon Israel. That is not a reading I'll put much weight upon, but it's a possibility.

In verses 7 to 10, Jesus speaks of the duty of the servant and the impossibility of gaining merit with God by our actions. This saying must be read against the background of Jesus' statement in chapter 12, verse 37. There God does the unexpected action, the thing that's unthinkable in this context, but it's not something that has been merited by the faithfulness of the servants.

The point that's being made here is that our obedience is simply our duty, not something that will win us any merit or reward. What we receive is purely an expression of God's unmerited goodness. Our passage ends with a discussion of the leper being healed.

The lepers were prevented from entering into the community of worshippers, and Jesus heals ten lepers. The one Samaritan leper who returns to Jesus seems to recognize Jesus as the one to return to to thank and as the site of the presence and worship of God. His faith is commended, and he alone seems to have a faith that appreciates what God is doing in Jesus.

Luke sometimes repeats elements, recalling details of the story earlier on, and maybe encouraging us to juxtapose certain things or compare or relate things. We've already seen this a few verses earlier in the description of the master and the servants, recalling chapter 12 verse 37. Here we have a good Samaritan.

We also have the one in ten that returns, perhaps reminiscent of the one in ten coins. A foreign leper being healed might also remind us of Naaman the Syrian, who has already been referenced in chapter 4. The Samaritan leper's response is not merely to praise God, but to recognize the role that Jesus plays as an agent of God's kingdom. Not just in the Gospels, Luke pays a lot of attention to Samaritans in ways that outside of John chapter 4 the other Gospels generally don't.

Among other things, I think this leads us up to the book of Acts and the mission to the Samaritans, as the Gospel goes from Jerusalem to Samaria to the ends of the earth.

Samaria and Israel being joined together, it's the joining together of a divided kingdom, in a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. A question to consider, can you see a connection between the teaching regarding temptations to sin and the teaching regarding forgiveness? Luke chapter 17 ends with a discussion of the coming of the kingdom, and the two big questions, when and where.

Jesus is asked by the Pharisees about when the kingdom of God is coming. They presume that it is arriving at some point in the future, yet the kingdom is already dawning and present in Jesus. The Pharisees are also expecting to be able readily to notice when the kingdom arrives.

However, the coming of the kingdom is in many respects secret and imperceptible, like the leaven working in loaves. The kingdom doesn't come as something whose arrival we can closely monitor and pinpoint. The kingdom is already in their midst.

It's hidden like the leaven. The Pharisees can't see what is taking place in Jesus' ministry. It's right under their nose, but they cannot perceive it.

Jesus then turns to address his disciples after this, as they also have difficulties recognizing the coming of the kingdom and the manner it occurs. When the Son of Man is revealed, it will be sudden, dramatic, unmistakable, and public. The time will come when they will long for a manifestation of the Son of Man, but not see it, and people will point them in various directions, but they should not be misled.

When the Son of Man is truly revealed, they will know it. References to the Son of Man's day should also remind us of Daniel 7, verses 13-14, when the Son of Man comes on the clouds of heaven to the Ancient of Days and is given the kingdom. Jesus' coming and judgment will be sudden and catastrophic, and the rejection by and suffering at the hands of the current generation must happen first, a then-catastrophic judgment described in verse 25.

Jesus compares the judgment to come upon Jerusalem to the judgment that befell the pre-flood world and Sodom. In each of these cases, things were continuing as usual, until unexpected, catastrophic, and final judgment hit, and everything changed. The day of the Son of Man, the days of Noah, and the days of Lot are held alongside each other and paralleled.

Jesus, the Son of Man, is the one who leads a new group of people escaping final judgment, who are saved with him. The story of Lot is one in which there is final judgment upon the cities of the plain. The angels come to inspect the city of Sodom, and they deliver Lot and his family from it and its downfall.

The story of the flood is the story of an end of an old world too. The world before the flood is drowned, and Noah and his family are delivered through it. The days of Noah and

the days of Lot refer to the days of peace and seeming normality before judgment hits.

The days of the Son of Man are the days of his personal presence and his ministry with his disciples, the days they are currently enjoying. As the judgment looms, the day of the Son of Man, I can imagine the disciples looking back upon the days by Galilee and wishing that they could return to that time. The Son of Man will be revealed, and all else will be laid bare.

Final judgment on Jerusalem is coming, and all riches must be left behind. Without looking back, the disciples must flee. They must recognize that anything that ties them down is a liability.

Anything that attaches them to that present order is a threat in that day when they need to escape. They must not run back into the burning building. This, it seems to me, is one of the reasons why the early church in Jerusalem sold its property, its land, and shared the money among them for their needs.

Not only was the value of real estate in Jerusalem going to crater as the city was destroyed, it was also a danger to own property that would overly attach you to a place that was doomed. And finally, liquidating their property and using that money to minister to those in need and to build up the body of Christ was laying up treasures in heaven. Condemned property was thus translated into something that would yield eternal dividends.

One would be taken, another would be left. Taken here does not refer to the rapture of the left-behind series or anything like that. Rather, it refers to being taken by the sword.

Where will they be taken? The body, the carcass of Israel, is where the eagles, the unclean foreign force of the Romans, will be gathered together. Jerusalem and her people, overthrown Babylon, will become Rome's carrion. See this described in Revelation chapter 19, verses 17 to 18.

Then I saw an angel standing in the sun, and with a loud voice he called to all the birds that fly directly overhead, Come, gather for the great supper of God to eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all men, both free and slave, both small and great. A question to consider, what is the lesson of Lot's wife? Why is her example underlined here? The persistent widow at the beginning of Luke chapter 18 represents the oppressed righteous in Israel, waiting for salvation. The parable argues from the weaker to the stronger.

If even an unjust judge will respond, how much more the righteous God? The woman is calling out to be avenged by the representative of the law against her adversary or oppressor. This is compared to the prayers of God's people for judgment against their

oppressors. Her faith provides a model for the people of God to follow, and such prayers for vengeance are found at various points in the Psalms, but also in such places as Revelation chapter 6 verse 10.

They cried out with a loud voice, O sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth? Handled appropriately, it is not wrong to pray in such a manner. As in Romans chapter 12 verse 19, we are not to avenge ourselves, but to give place to God's vengeance. And it can be helpful when we're thinking about these prayers for vengeance, to consider David's imprecatory Psalms that were written while he was fleeing from Saul.

And we read those alongside 1 Samuel's description of his actions, to see how not avenging ourselves and praying for God to avenge us need not conflict. The coming of the Son of Man, then, is here associated with his coming to avenge his persecuted people, and in part in response to their prayers. Prayer is central in both of the opening parables in this chapter.

We pray as those deserving nothing from God's hand, who trust his mercy. And the images of the people of the kingdom are striking here, a widow, a tax collector, infants, the poor. If the second half of Luke chapter 17 is concerned with the manner of the coming of the kingdom of God, the when and the where, much of the chapter that follows addresses the manner in which people will receive its blessings.

In a series of parables and teachings, Jesus presents this in terms of a number of different categories. In verses 1 to 8, vengeance. In verses 9 to 14, vindication.

In verses 15 to 17, reception. In verses 18 to 23, inheritance. And in verses 24 to 30, entrance.

While it might be easy to read the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector merely as a teaching concerning contrasting private relationships individuals can have with God, when we situate the parable upon the broader canvas of Jesus' teaching regarding the coming kingdom, there are further dimensions that emerge. In particular, it underlines the fact that the actions of the various characters in this parable and the teachings that surround it, the persistent widow, the rich young ruler, the tax collector and the Pharisee, the disciples, are all oriented towards the horizon of a future and public action of God within Israel and the world's history. That day would bring both vindication and judgment.

It would be a deliverance and reward for some and exclusion and shame for others. It would publicly reveal where everyone stood relative to God in his purposes for history. For the Pharisee, that future was awaited with a blithe assurance that he would be vindicated within it.

When he looked at his life, all the signs were propitious that he was in the right. He was a fine specimen of a true and faithful Israelite. He guarded the nation's holiness.

And as a result, he was free to engage in a sort of self-congratulation under the guise of a prayer of thanksgiving. His self-confidence was also powerfully bolstered by how favourably he appeared against the foil of others, the extortionists, the unjust, the adulterers and the tax collector. His high self-regard was inseparable from his habitual judgment of others.

If the Pharisee was confident in his righteousness, the tax collector openly addressed God from a position of moral destitution and injustice. He threw himself upon the divine mercy. Facing the prospect of God's coming just kingdom, the tax collector is well aware of where he stands relative to it.

The Pharisee's self-righteous presumption of his own standing, his assumption that he was on the right side of history, one who would receive future praise and vindication, manifested a deep perversion of what it meant to relate to the Lord. In Jesus' teaching, the kingdom of God is one in which we are all found to be on the wrong side of history. If the blessings of God's justice are to be received, they must be received as pure mercy and grace, from a position of weakness, dependence, lack and confessed injustice.

As we find ourselves in such a position, justification no longer provides us with the grounds for condemning others in self-assured righteousness. The tax collector goes home justified, because although unworthy, as he is one who appreciates his utter lack, he is able to receive the divine gift of the kingdom's fullness. To the degree that we resist perceiving ourselves as radically unjust, morally insufficient, subject to condemnation, and as willfully and extensively complicit in forms of evil, we disqualify ourselves from entry into the justice of the kingdom.

The justice of the kingdom comes in the form of forgiveness, and to receive forgiveness you must acknowledge your wrong, and your insufficiency and your failure and your need to receive the kingdom, as a gracious act of God in mercy towards you. None of us stands securely on the right side of history. Rather, like the tax collector, we must reach out in humility from our moral destitution, seeking divine mercy like humble and needy beggars.

After this, the disciples seek to prevent children from being brought to Jesus to be blessed, but Jesus tells them not to do so. While the disciples presumably thought that the young children were distractions from the business of men, they lacked honour and status and they should not be given so much attention, for Jesus they were quite the opposite. They were models of the way that the kingdom is to be received.

Our section of this chapter is concluded with a description of a ruler coming to Jesus, asking what he must do to inherit eternal life. Many read this passage thinking that Jesus

is highlighting the futility of seeking righteousness according to the law, driving the man to despair of his righteousness. That's not actually how the story goes.

Jesus teaches that the commandments are necessary for entering into life. The twist is in how this is understood. He highlights the commandments that relate to our relationship with our neighbours in particular.

Although he does not mention the tenth commandment, you shall not covet, that commandment will be fulfilled as the ruler sells what he has and gives to the poor. And the commandments are kept on a deeper level still by following Christ himself. When he lists the commandments to the ruler, Jesus only lists from those commandments that concern loving your neighbour.

How is the ruler to obey the command to love God? By giving up the thing that he is most attached to, money, and following Jesus. Jesus implicitly asks for the loyalty that belongs to God here. And we can see the parable of the unjust steward in the background.

The rich ruler should sell what he has, make friends with the poor with his money, and then he will have great riches in heaven. This exchange highlights once again the danger of riches as things that weigh us down and prevent us from serving and following our true master. This should also make us uncomfortable.

We want to be assured that Christ would never ask such a thing of us. However, while there is no general requirement to sell all that we have and to give to the poor, Christ does call us to that same sort of loyalty. Wealth is a power that can prevent us from entering the kingdom.

Wealth is something that can master us. We think that we possess wealth, but often it is our wealth that possesses us, and we should be very, very fearful. This is why Jesus gives the most incredible warnings against riches, that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.

However, those who give up things for the kingdom are promised a return, not just in the age to come, but also in the present age. And we should be prepared to renounce our riches and follow Christ. To give up whatever it is that tethers our hearts to this age, to commit ourselves to the kingdom, and we will find that we are richer for it.

In laying down our lives, we will finally secure them. The disciples have shown their loyalty to Christ and their faith in Jesus by their actions. They have left everything to follow him, and they will be richly blessed both in this present time and in the age to come.

We gain much as we follow Jesus, even in this present life. The need to receive God's kingdom from a position of lack or destitution is a recurring theme within Luke 18. The

widow addresses the unjust judge from a position of social powerlessness.

In receiving the kingdom as a little child, we do so as those who are weak and dependent. In light of the kingdom, the rich ruler's paradoxical lack is his abundance, something that he must surrender in order to inherit the kingdom aright. Finally, the disciples are promised a reward in the age to come as they have left houses, parents, brothers, wives and children.

The tax collector who seeks God's mercy from a position of moral unworthiness is the true heir, rather than the Pharisee who presumes his entitlement. If the coming of the kingdom is not as people would have expected it, the receiving of it is not either. A question to consider.

Why do the righteous need to be persistent in their prayers for justice? If God is a just judge? Towards the end of Luke 18, Jesus gives the third prediction of his death. It is important that Jesus declares his death to the twelve beforehand. Jesus is going up to Jerusalem.

He is ascending to the place where he will be condemned and crucified. This is not an accident. It is not someone caught in circumstance beyond his control.

Jesus predicts in clear and explicit detail what will happen, who will the participants be, and what exactly they will do. And furthermore, all of this is happening in fulfilment of what the prophets declared would happen to the Son of Man. God is in control, and Jesus as the Son of Man is in control of his fate.

Jesus nears Jericho with the crowd, and he is surrounded with a great many people excited by this potential Messiah, this prophet and teacher. And a blind man calls out to him as the Son of David. This is the first time that Jesus has been addressed in this way during his ministry in the Gospel.

The Messianic secret perhaps has slipped, and the time is nearing for open revelation of Jesus' identity. This blind man is the first person beyond the disciples to speak of Jesus openly in this way. Once again there is someone socially marginal, without status, who wishes to get close to Jesus, but is rebuked by others.

Once again, Jesus insists that the person be allowed access to him, and explicitly calls for him. Jesus declares that his faith has made him well. His faith here seems to be shown in his persistence, on the basis of his confidence that Jesus has the capacity and the willingness to heal him.

He also perceives, even in his blindness, who Jesus really is, before almost anyone else. The man by the side of the road from Jerusalem to Jericho needing assistance, with everyone passing by, might also remind us of the parable of the Good Samaritan. While others ask what they must do to receive the kingdom, and other things like that, the

blind man begs for mercy and is asked by Jesus what he should do for him.

There is perhaps some irony here. Our fixation can often be upon what we must do, when all we had to do was ask for mercy. It's like pulling a door that says push.

The city is Jericho, which has a history. Jericho is the only city mentioned on the itinerary of the travel narrative that takes up a third of the Gospel of Luke. I've already mentioned the possible connection of the road from Jerusalem to Jericho in the parable of the Good Samaritan, now mirrored in the road from Jericho to Jerusalem.

The city of Jericho had previously been visited by a namesake of Jesus, Joshua. When Joshua had visited, back in the book of Joshua, a prostitute was saved, but the city was destroyed. And now a tax collector is saved, as a new Joshua visits the city.

We are told the species of the tree that Zacchaeus climbed is a fig mulberry, like the tree symbolizing Israel, potentially, in chapter 17 verse 6. It is likely that we're supposed to make something of this fact, although I'm not sure exactly what we should make of it. Zacchaeus gets right with the poor, and he restores fourfold of what he owes. This degree of restitution is mentioned in Exodus chapter 22 verse 1, and in 2 Samuel chapter 12 verse 6, when David responds to the parable of Nathan the prophet.

Exodus chapter 22 verse 1 reads, If a man steals an ox or a sheep, and kills it or sells it, he shall repay five oxen for an ox, and four sheep for a sheep. There are ways in which this story draws together a great many of the themes that have been at play in the travel narrative of the last few chapters. Zacchaeus is a tax collector that Jesus eats with.

Eating with the tax collectors was the cause of the controversy in chapter 15, at the very beginning. The people are grumbling about this fact, much as they did back then. Zacchaeus is also a rich man who is saved, and who sells his possessions and gifts to the poor, unlike the rich ruler in the preceding chapter.

Jesus also describes him as a son of Abraham. This continues the theme of the redefinition of the family of Abraham, but also the theme of the recovery of his lost children. Zacchaeus is a restored son, and he offers restitution for a stolen sheep.

Maybe both of these things call back to the parables in chapter 15. A question to consider. Zacchaeus' repentance and salvation is manifested and demonstrated in his new way of treating his wealth.

How does this fit in with broader themes of Luke's gospel? What lessons might it hold for us? Jesus' parable of the miners in Luke chapter 19 is similar to the parable of the talents in Matthew chapter 25, albeit with some variations. Matthew's talents parable is given in the context of the Olivet discourse, whereas this parable is seemingly delivered in the preceding week, as they are nearing Jerusalem. It is a response to the belief that the

kingdom is going to appear imminently.

Rather, Jesus teaches there will be an interval of time, and it won't appear in the form that some expect. Jesus speaks of a nobleman who must first go away and receive a kingdom. Matthew's parable lacks this entire subplot of the nobleman going to receive a kingdom and his relationship with his rebellious citizens.

The departing nobleman would remind the Jews of Archelaus, Herod the Great's son, who had gone to Rome to petition Caesar Augustus for the kingdom of his father in 4 BC, followed by a deputation of Jews who protested against his rule. These resonances would have come to many hearers' minds. In this parable, it's miners instead of talents.

Matthew emphasises difference in the initial distribution of his talents, whereas Luke has equal initial distribution, but sharply different outcomes. Matthew's talents are truly immense sums of money, whereas Luke's miners are just a few months' wages. In both cases, however, they're to be used for trade, and the importance is to be found ready for judgement, having been proved faithful in what has been committed to your charge.

The time of testing will reveal the work of people. Those who are faithful are given immense rewards in proportion to their success in managing very small sums. This might harken back to Jesus' teaching in the context of the parable of the shrewd manager in Luke 16, verses 9-12.

And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth, so that when it fails, they may receive you into the eternal dwellings. One who is faithful in very little is also faithful in much, and one who is dishonest in very little is also dishonest in much. If then you have not been faithful in the unrighteous wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches? And if you have not been faithful in that which is another's, who will give you that which is your own? The contrast between the small sum that is managed and the great reward that is given for managing it is far more sharply drawn in Luke's miners' parable than it is in Matthew's talents' parable.

Here, for faithfully managing a few months' wages, they get the rule of whole cities. The parable, it seems to me, is referring to AD 70, not to the end of all things. The nobleman who has received his father's kingdom, returning and judging his servants and his rebellious subjects, is Christ, returning to judge his people and the land in AD 70.

The fact that the judgment of Christ is not going to happen immediately does not mean it is referring to some point in the very long distant future, thousands of years hence. The first two servants are rewarded with different levels of responsibility. The final servant, however, is lazy and indolent.

He doesn't think that he has anything personally to gain from acting as a faithful steward of his master. He ventured nothing, he just sought to avoid losing it. And importantly, his

behaviour was based upon a perception of his master that was uncharitable and false.

We could maybe think of this in terms of a form of faith that is merely concerned with preserving what we have for our own sake, rather than actually doing something with the gifts and the other things that have been entrusted to us. The wealth entrusted to the sterile service of the unfaithful servant is then handed over to the most fruitful and faithful servant. And the parable ends with the destruction of the wicked and rebellious subjects.

This is similar to the parable of the wicked vinedressers in various ways. Here the citizens who rebel are the Israelites who will not receive Christ, who has gone away and received his kingdom, and they reject him, persecuting his servants in the church and seeking to destroy them. The consequence of this is that they are brought before this new king and destroyed themselves.

This parable is in some respects a surprising response to the expectation of the disciples that the kingdom would appear immediately. They are going to Jerusalem, and yet this is not going to be the time when the kingdom appears. Christ, the nobleman in the passage, is going to have to go away and receive his kingdom from his father.

And then he is going to come back, and then he is going to judge the people who have rejected him. The destruction of the rebellious citizens will be the sign of the Son of Man in heaven, the sign that he has received his kingdom. It will also involve judgment and blessing for his servants.

Those who are faithful will expand in their responsibilities, and those who have been unfaithful will be condemned. A question to consider. The minor is taken from the wicked servant and given to the servant with the ten minors.

What is the significance of this detail of the parable? At the end of Luke chapter 19 we begin the third phase of Luke's gospel. The first phase runs from the start of the gospel to the turn towards Jerusalem. The second phase is the long drawn out journey to Jerusalem.

And now with the triumphal entry we enter Jerusalem in the final week. Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem echoes passages such as 1 Kings chapter 1 verses 33-44, where Solomon's riding on the king's mule is a demonstration that he is the true heir and successor to David. This also fulfills the prophecy of Zechariah chapter 9 verses 9-10.

O daughter of Jerusalem, behold your king is coming to you, righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the war horse from Jerusalem, and the battle bow shall be cut off, and he shall speak peace to the nations. His rule shall be from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth.

Donkeys and mules were associated with judges and royalty in scripture. The kingdom began with a quest to find donkeys in 1 Samuel chapter 9. And it seems to me that that story is being recalled here in various ways. The judges and Saul were associated with donkeys.

Judges chapter 5 verse 10, chapter 10 verse 4, chapter 12 verse 14, and 1 Samuel chapter 9 verse 3. The instructions given to the disciples are also similar to the sorts of signs given to Saul at the dawn of the kingdom. In 1 Samuel chapter 10. And indeed this is the first of three signs, I believe, that present the coming of the kingdom with Christ as parallel with the first dawn of the kingdom in the book of 1 Samuel.

No one has ever sat on the animal before. It's dedicated for a special purpose. And the casting of garments is reminiscent of the welcome of Jehu to Jerusalem in 2 Kings chapter 9 verses 11 to 13, where he came to destroy the worship of Baal.

When Jehu came out to the servants of his master, they said to him, Is all well? Why did this mad fellow come to you? And he said to them, You know the fellow and his talk. And they said, That is not true. Tell us now.

And he said, Thus and so he spoke to me, saying, Thus says the Lord, I anoint you king over Israel. Then in haste every man of them took his garment and put it under him on the bare steps, and they blew the trumpet and proclaimed, Jehu is king. This might also remind us of David's removal of his outer garments in the triumphal entry of the ark into Jerusalem.

The Pharisees then would be like Michael who sought to rebuke David in 2 Samuel chapter 6 and was judged for it. It's important to notice that Jesus moves from the Mount of Olives to Jerusalem and back again several times in the chapters that follow. In chapter 19 verse 37, chapter 21 verse 37, chapter 22 verse 39, chapter 23 verse 33 and chapter 24 verse 50.

This geographical to and fro is significant. The reference to the stones crying out might also recall John the Baptist's claim of chapter 3 verse 8 of God creating children for Abraham from the stones. It should also be related probably to the claim in the immediately following verses that the stones of Jerusalem would be levelled.

Jesus weeps over Jerusalem. Jerusalem does not know the day of its visitation. It was not aware.

It was not prepared. And his weeping over Jerusalem might recall the weeping of the prophet Jeremiah in the book of Lamentations. Jehu's triumphal entry into Jerusalem was followed by the destruction of the temple of Baal and its priests.

Unsurprisingly then, Jesus goes to the temple and drives people out. His statement about the temple being a den of thieves needs to be read against the background of Jeremiah

chapter 7 to which he alludes. Jeremiah chapter 7 verse 11 is the verse he quotes.

The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord. You do not oppress the sojourner, the fatherless, or the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place. And if you do not go after other gods to your own harm, then I will let you dwell in this place, in the land that I gave of old to your fathers forever.

Behold, you trust in deceptive words to no avail. Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, make offerings to Baal, and go after other gods that you have not known? And then come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, We are delivered. Only to go on doing all these abominations.

Has this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, I myself have seen it, declares the Lord. The Jews of Jeremiah's day treated the temple as a sort of talisman. It protected them from God's judgment.

Because God was present there, they could get away with what they wanted. They thought that it enabled them to continue in oppression and lawlessness. They could, like brigands fleeing to a den, flee to the temple and find refuge there, their worship providing them with cover for all their iniquity.

Jesus is making the same point of his generation. They have treated the temple and its worship as a way to excuse themselves from the actual service of the Lord, as a way to cover up their crimes, and not to deal with the truth of what they have done. I don't believe that the point of driving out those buying and selling in the temple was primarily to do with an objection to the money changers, and the dove sellers in particular, or with any principled objection to the performance of such activities within the broader temple precincts.

The chief point was to put a temporary halt to the sacrifices, which couldn't proceed without these activities. Now there is an allusion, I think, to Zechariah 14, verse 21. Jesus, then, having driven out all these people, makes the temple a site of his teaching.

It's worth noting the language of exorcism that is used to describe the removal of those who are buying and selling in the temple in verse 45. A question to consider, in the triumphal entry, as the people are praising God, they quote Psalm 118. Why might the quotation from this psalm at this particular juncture be significant? Luke chapter 20 comes after Jesus has entered the city of Jerusalem like a king, and declared judgment upon the temple.

There are people gathering around him and behind him, he's the head of a movement. And we have the privilege of knowing how the story ends, and so we anticipate the direction it's taking. But imagine what it was like for people there at that time.

They're thinking that the kingdom's about to come imminently. They're asking Jesus

about this. Jesus has to teach them concerning it.

Teaching them things they do not yet understand. That like a nobleman, he will have to go away and receive a kingdom, and then come back. Seeing the growing popularity of Jesus and the movement around him, the leaders of the people are threatened.

And they immediately try and trap him. They do this by asking the source of his authority. If his authority is from man, it can be dismissed.

If he claims it is from God, they have other grounds by which they could move against him. And Jesus answers their question with a question. Yet the answer to the question that Jesus asks is the answer to the question that the chief priests and the elders have asked him.

John the Baptist was sent by God, and his prophetic ministry was one through which God authorised and bore witness to his son. Jesus traps those seeking to trap him, as he does on several occasions. The parable of the tenants that follows is important to read in the light of Israel's identity as the vineyard.

Jesus introduces the parable in a way that highlights the background of Isaiah chapter 5 and Psalm 80. Isaiah chapter 5 verses 1-7 read, When I looked for it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes? And now I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard. I will remove its hedge, and it shall be devoured.

I will break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down. I will make it a waste. It shall not be pruned or hoed, and briars and thorns shall grow up.

I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it. For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are his pleasant planting. And he looked for justice, but behold bloodshed, for righteousness, but behold an outcry.

Isaiah's parable focused upon the failure of the vineyard to produce good fruit. Jesus' focuses upon the wickedness of those working within it. The fruit seems to be there, but the workers are rebellious.

In his ministry Jesus talks about the fields white to harvest, and the desire that labourers would go out and harvest it. And yet the workers in God's field are not faithful. Likewise, there is a flock, and the shepherds are abusing the flock.

The distinction between Israel and its leaders is important here. It's part of the meaning of the parable. The master sends his servants, the prophets, and finally his own son, and all are being rejected.

Jesus is foretelling his own death within this parable, and people who are involved in his death are hearing it. In Genesis chapter 37 verses 18 to 20, I think we see part of the

background that Jesus is alluding to here. They saw him from afar, and before he came near to them they conspired against him to kill him.

They said to one another, Here comes this dreamer. Come now, let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits. Then we will say that a fierce animal has devoured him, and we will see what will become of his dreams.

Joseph, in that case, is the threat to his brothers. They believe he's the one that's going to inherit, and they want to destroy him. Likewise, driven by envy, the wicked tenants seek to destroy the son.

The tenants will be deprived of their position. This isn't a claim about Israel itself being dispossessed, but about the wicked tenants of the chief priests and the scribes. Their places will be taken by the Twelve and others, who are the true tenants now of the vineyard of Israel.

This looks forward to fruit from Israel. The vineyard isn't abandoned, it's given into different hands. Jesus quotes as an interpretation of much of his teaching in this parable, Psalm 118, verse 22.

The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. And this quotation interprets the parable. It shows something of the necessity that Christ must die, that he must be rejected by the wicked tenants.

This was also a verse used for apologetic purposes by the early church. We see it in 1 Peter 2, verses 4 and 7, and also in Acts 4, verse 11. This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone.

This is one of the texts that looks forward to Christ's rejection by his people and his resurrection. The parable reveals that the Davidic Messiah had to die, and the verse confirms this. The rejected son is the rejected stone, and the builders are associated with the religious leaders.

As they were associated with the wicked tenants. Note also the way that this brings temple themes to the forefront. There is a cornerstone being set up.

A new building is going to be erected. Christ is the rejected stone, but becomes the cornerstone of a new temple that the Lord is building. There are also allusions here to Isaiah chapter 8, verses 14 to 15, and Daniel chapter 2, verses 44 to 45.

Isaiah chapter 8, And then in Daniel chapter 2, A great God has made known to the king what shall be after this. The dream is certain, and its interpretation sure. The chief priests and the scribes now send spies to try and trap Jesus.

Tax to Caesar was a deeply fraught political and religious question. To pay the tax was a

seeming acknowledgement of its legitimacy, and the legitimacy of the Roman's authority in the Holy Land. The Denarius itself likely had blasphemous statements of Caesar's being the son of God.

One way or another, Jesus is caught, it seems. Either he aligns himself with the tax rebels and the revolutions against Rome, and can easily be handed over to the governor and put to death for that, or he will seem to be like a compromiser with Rome, and he will lose credibility with the crowd. And his answer is a profoundly shrewd one.

First of all, he asks them to produce a coin. They must reveal that they have one of the coins in their possession. The Jews could have their own coinage, the temple coin for instance, but they clearly had such coins in their possession.

The answer, rent to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's, is an ambiguous one. To some it might be saying, give Caesar what is coming to him, and to others it might be seeming to say, pay your taxes. But there is a logic to it.

If you have this blasphemous object in your possession, why not give it back to Rome? There's a willingness to be dispossessed of such an item. That's part of it. There are also Jews to be paid, both to Caesar and to God.

The claims of God put limits upon the claims of Caesar. The reasoning of Jesus is that the coin is Caesar's, and so the tax isn't just an arbitrary imposition, but something for services given. All the different ways in which Caesar provides security for the land, and resources and services within the land.

Those things do give a reason to pay taxes to him. Also, God has established him as the ruler, and for that reason they must acknowledge that he is the bearer of the sword. Even an occupying force could be a legitimate authority under certain conditions.

Jesus makes an important point here. He's not just escaping a trap. He treads a line between compliance and resistance.

Rendering to God what is God's limits what Caesar gets. Caesar can't be given worship, for instance. A question to consider.

Can you think of any ways in which Jesus' teaching concerning paying taxes to Caesar, and the way to treat authorities like Caesar, is developed in other parts of the New Testament concerning the authority of rulers? Moving into the second half of Luke chapter 20, Jesus continues his challenge with the leaders of the people. Now he's challenged with the Sadducees, who deny the resurrection. They give the example of a man who dies, and then his wife marries his brother, and then he dies, and then his brother, and then he dies, and so on, with a number of brothers.

The question being, whose wife is she in the resurrection? This depends, of course, upon

the Levirate Law in Deuteronomy chapter 25, verses 5-6. If brothers dwell together, and one of them dies and has no son, the wife of the dead man shall not be married outside the family to a stranger. Her husband's brother shall go into her, and take her as his wife, and perform the duty of a husband's brother to her.

And the first son whom she bears shall succeed to the name of his dead brother, that his name may not be blotted out of Israel. The purpose of this commandment is in large measure to deal with the threat of death. Death can condemn people to futility.

It can mean that someone's name is lost and cut off, and so the brother is there to come in and to raise up seed for his brother who has died. Acting on his brother's behalf, he ensures that his brother's name is not blotted out. There are two forms of death here.

There's the physical death, and then there's also the death of one's legacy. And the brother steps in to ensure that that second form of death does not befall his brother. Jesus answers the Sadducees by drawing a contrast between the sons of this age and the sons of the resurrection.

Jesus' argument operates on the basis of the belief that marriage exists in this age to fill and replenish the earth, to fulfil humanity's calling and blessing to be fruitful and multiply, and also to deal with the threat of death which would cut off humanity. The practice of levirate marriage is a very pronounced way of dealing with that second issue, marriage in the face of death. So that life is continued.

However, in the resurrection, there is a new principle of generation. Humanity is no longer founded in the event of birth, as the human race descends one generation from another, being born and dying in the context of marriage. No.

The new principle is that of resurrection, regeneration. Humanity in this situation would be like the angels. The angels don't marry, they're a numb procreating living host.

The resurrection isn't just revivification and return to our existing form of life. It's the start of something new. And it also has an eschatological character.

I believe that this might be partly in view when he talks about the angels. The angels are a complete host. They do not bear offspring.

However, the full complement of humanity has yet to be born. Humanity, unlike the angels, is a growing number. However, in the new heavens and the new earth, humanity will be a fixed number of persons, having reached their final state.

And just as the angels are stewards of the heavenly temple, rulers under God and messengers under him, so humanity will achieve its full maturity. We will no longer be under the rule and the guidance of the angels, but will have risen into the full maturity of sons. We will be sons of God because we are sons of the resurrection.

The language of sons of God is used of the angels in a number of parts of scripture, in Job chapter 1, in Genesis chapter 6, and in some of the Psalms. It presents the angels as representatives of God, as those who reflect God's character and act in his name. And humanity will rise to that stage.

We might also add on the side here that humanity will be the bride of Christ. The angels are always spoken of as males. Zechariah 5 is not an exception.

The angels are a band of brothers, but humanity differs from the angels in having women. Women are the glory of the human race, as Paul can talk about in 1 Corinthians chapter 11. And just as the king in taking a bride will raise her up over all the noblemen, so humanity will be raised up over all of the angels as the bride of Christ.

Because we don't die anymore after the resurrection, and because the chief purpose of marriage has been achieved, now that there is no longer any need for birth, there is no longer marriage or giving in marriage in the resurrection. I certainly do not believe that this means that we cease to be male and female in the resurrection. Nor do I believe that this means that the goods of marriage associated with companionship and things like that simply cease.

Rather, the point is that an institution that existed for the purpose primarily of procreation is no longer needed, because resurrection has taken its place. To prove the resurrection, Jesus refers to the story of the Exodus. I am the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Israel is being raised up from slavery, and this is a raising up of the seed of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The action of the Exodus is being done in large measure on their behalf. This implies future resurrection of them, that their part in history has not ceased.

Why would it speak of God being their God? God is not the God of the dead. God is not the God of those who are in the past. God is the living God.

And so for God to be defined by those who are dead and never going to come back again does not make sense. Rather, if the living God refers to himself in terms of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, then they are not ultimately dead. Having answered the question of the Sadducees so effectively, Jesus is congratulated by some of the scribes, and then he poses them a question.

The question that he poses them concerns Psalm 110. It is a Davidic Psalm in which David refers to the Christ, the Messiah, as his Lord. And this makes no sense if the Christ is merely his son.

The Christ seems to be more than merely the son of David according to the flesh. How can we make sense of this? It is difficult to provide an answer without an understanding of the divinity of Christ. Jesus addresses his disciples and warns them concerning the

scribes, but ensuring that the rest of the crowds can overhear.

He warns them of their love of the praise of men. He warns them of their spiritually abusive character, and the way in which they do not truly seek the face of God. They merely make long prayers as a pretense.

It is precisely such teachers upon which the greatest condemnation will fall. Jesus speaks to the crowds as sheep without a shepherd, showing great compassion and care. But he reserves some of his strongest and harshest language for the leaders of the people, who take advantage of them and mistreat them.

The scribes are predatory leaders. They consume the sheep, especially the most vulnerable. They are also hypocrites.

They are fixated on getting honour from men. And the story of the widow's two small coins needs to be read alongside this material. People so often abstract material like this from its context, and read it just as a nice story about how we should be engaged in sacrificial giving.

But that is to miss the tragedy of what's taking place here. We've just been told that the scribes devour widows' houses. And then we're told that this widow is investing all of her livelihood in the temple.

A temple that is about to be destroyed on account of the sin of the people and their rulers. This is not a story about healthy sacrificial giving. It's about the way that corrupt religious leaders prey upon the weakest of all, and heap up judgement for themselves.

The prophecy of the destruction of the temple that follows should be directly related to the oppression of such persons as the widow. The leaders of the people devour the houses of widows, so their great house will be devoured also. A question to consider.

What are some of the principles of Jesus' account of marriage that emerge from attention to his arguments with the Sadducees? What implications do these aspects of Jesus' account of marriage have for our broader understanding of marriage as Christians? In Luke chapter 21, the Olivet Discourse begins with some of Jesus' disciples admiring the temple buildings. Jesus makes clear that these buildings are not going to survive, that one stone will not be left upon another. Jesus begins by listing a number of things that would occur before his coming, but which would not themselves be signs of his coming.

He ensures that his disciples don't jump at false positives. A number of potentially unsettling world events would occur before his coming. Jesus mentions famines, earthquakes, pestilences, other natural disasters.

The disciples will also face persecution, they'll be thrust out of synagogues. They'll be

brought before rulers. This will serve as an occasion for their witness before the rulers.

The witness of the disciples to governors and kings is important, particularly in the book of Acts. Paul, like Jesus, faces four trials, and in these trials he bears witness to the gospel before kings and rulers. Jesus is a king and a ruler, and the disciples are his emissaries to the rulers of this world.

They will face treachery and betrayal, even from their own families, their closest relatives will turn them over. They will be hated, but if they persevere they will be saved. Not a hair of their heads will perish, Jesus says.

By their endurance they will gain their lives. There is something of a paradox here. When you're suffering the sort of persecution that Jesus describes, how can it be said that not a hair of your head will perish? The solution to the paradox is found in the next statement, that you will gain your life through your endurance.

This is what it means. Those who lose their lives for Christ's sake will gain them. This is not the way that human reason would suggest to stay safe.

You keep silent, you don't cause trouble, you don't rock the boat, you don't upset family members and people in authority who might turn you over. However, to take that way is to lose your life, to forfeit your very soul. Jesus instructs his disciples to flee when they see Jerusalem surrounded by armies.

At this point the Jerusalem Christians did indeed flee to the mountains as they were instructed by Christ to Pella in the Transjordan. Eusebius in his Ecclesiastical History, Book 3, Chapter 5 in the early 4th century writes about this. Here Jesus is alluding to Isaiah Chapter 61, verses 1 and 2. Now the interesting thing is we've had that verse before, that's been quoted in Luke Chapter 4, verses 18 to 19.

There's something missing there. What's missing is the reference to the day of vengeance of our God. For many modern theologians this has suggested that Jesus was just bringing a message of complete peace, no judgement whatsoever.

For John the Baptist the question was where is the fire? Where is the judgement that I was expecting this one coming after me to bring? Well here we see that element that was left out of the original quotation surfacing again many chapters later. Now in reference to that event in which Christ's wrath would truly be seen. The fire is going to come and it's going to come in AD 70.

The time will be painful and difficult for all who must live through it, particularly for pregnant women or women who are nursing children. Israel will suffer the wrath of God and Jerusalem will be occupied by the Gentiles until the time of the Gentiles are fulfilled. The Jews will go into captivity.

Reading such passages many struggle with their language. It seems cosmic and extreme. Surely the only thing it could seemingly refer to is a complete meltdown of the physical order.

But that's not necessarily the case if we look in Isaiah Chapter 13, verse 10. Chapter 34, verse 4 of Isaiah. Ezekiel Chapter 32, verses 7-8.

And put darkness on your land declares the Lord God. All of this language is being used to describe the fall of Babylon and Egypt. These are historical events.

This is not the meltdown of the physical order. But it is the end of a world order. The same is true of the destruction of Jerusalem.

The whole world order will change. When we read the reference to seeing the Son of Man coming on the cloud, we think that this is a downward movement from heaven to earth. But it is the coming of the Son of Man into heaven itself that is in view here.

The background of all of this is found in Daniel Chapter 7, verses 9-14. As I looked, thrones were placed, and the ancient days took his seat. His clothing was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool.

His throne was fiery flames, its wheels were burning fire. A stream of fire issued and came out from before him. A thousand thousands served him, and ten thousand times ten thousands stood before him.

The court sat in judgment, and the books were opened. I looked then because of the sound of the great words that the horn was speaking. And as I looked, the beast was killed, and its body destroyed and given over to be burned with fire.

As for the rest of the beasts, their dominion was taken away, but their lives were prolonged for a season and a time. I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven, there came one like a Son of Man, and he came to the ancient days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him.

His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed. Seeing the Son of Man coming in a cloud is seeing the reality of this, seeing the kingdoms of the world becoming the kingdoms of our Lord and Christ, which all begins with judgment falling upon Jerusalem. And when they see this, they should lift themselves up, they should be alert, they should recognize that the days of the Lord have come.

This is the vindication of the exalted Son of Man by the dispossession of the wicked tenants. Jesus gives the parable of the fig tree, the fig tree being a symbol connected with Israel. Just as they are able to read the signs of the seasons in a tree, they shall see

the signs of these times and recognize that the time has come.

And that generation will not pass away until everything occurred, not just some of it, all of it. This makes it very hard to argue that this is referring to anything other than the events of AD 70. In the statement about heaven and earth passing away but Christ's words not passing away, Jesus is probably alluding to Isaiah chapter 51 verse 6. Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look at the earth beneath, for the heavens vanish like smoke, the earth will wear out like a garment, and they who dwell in it will die in like manner.

But my salvation will be forever, and my righteousness will never be dismayed. The fact that Jesus says that all these things would occur within that generation, and then immediately declares how certain his words are, has proved an embarrassment for many Christians. It might seem that Jesus' words did not come to pass after all, that Jesus' claims about the sure nature of his word are not in fact true.

But yet, all of these things did come to pass. They came to pass in the destruction of Jerusalem and the events surrounding that. And if we know how to read Old Testament prophecy, none of this should be surprising to us.

Jesus is using the language of the Old Testament prophets. Jesus was not a false prophet then, rather he faithfully foretold the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple. He ends the discourse with a charge to watchfulness and wakefulness.

For everyone else, life will be going on as normal, but they must keep awake, so that the day does not trap them. Everything seems to be going on as it always has, and then suddenly everything changes in a moment. Your entire world order, which you thought so absolutely rock-solid and certain, can collapse.

How do you avoid getting destroyed with this? You keep awake. You watch. You ensure that you do not get trapped in the cares of this life, in dissipation and drunkenness.

You pray fervently that you might have the strength to stand before the Son of Man, to escape all of the fate that is coming upon the world, and to prove to be faithful in that day of testing. A question to consider, how in Jesus' description of these coming days would his disciples be progressively distinguished from the people around them? Luke chapter 22 opens by telling us that the Feast of Unleavened Bread is coming. The timing here is important.

The Passover was the 14th of the month, and followed by the seven-day Feast of Unleavened Bread. This recalls the deliverance from Egypt, the Passover lamb, the death of the firstborn, and all these other events that were so important within Israel's history. It's important to consider that this was one of the pilgrim feasts.

In a few days' time, Jerusalem would be packed with pilgrims coming up for it, perhaps

even a couple of hundred thousand. All of Israel's attention would be drawn towards Jerusalem for this week, and Jesus' death and resurrection then were occurring at a key time, when the attention of Israel and the gathering of Israel converged upon its capital. The chief priests and the scribes were seeking to arrest Jesus and kill him.

Jesus is clearly by this point a genuine threat to their power and their influence. He has a lot of support in the crowd, and he outwits them at every turn. They don't want to capture and kill him during the feast, precisely because it would draw so much attention.

At this point, Satan enters into Judas. I believe this is the only time we read of Satan himself entering into anyone. In Acts 5, we're told that Satan has filled Ananias to sin against the Holy Spirit, but Judas seems to give a greater example of satanic possession.

Satan's reappearance after a long absence is significant. Luke 4, verse 13 tells us that Satan departed until an opportune time. And Judas, or Judah, is one of the twelve who sells Jesus into the hands of his enemies.

Judah was one of the twelve sons of Jacob who sold Joseph to the Ishmaelites, also motivated by a desire for money. The role of money in the transaction between Judas and the high priest should also remind us of all that Jesus has taught about money. The chief priests need to get Jesus away from the multitude.

The multitudes have a kind of herd-like quality. They act as a unit, and they protect Jesus from assault. If we connect the description of the man with the water pitcher with the previous description of the triumphal entry and the finding of the cult, I think we can see that there is a connection.

They're both described in a similar way. Disciples are sent on a mission, an errand to a particular location. They are told what will befall them, who they will meet, and what the reaction will be.

In 1 Samuel, chapter 9, two men, Saul and his servant, go looking for donkeys. They then encounter women, presumably with pitchers, going out to draw water. The women direct them to the site of a meal with the prophet, in the high place.

When Saul eats with the prophet Samuel in the high place, the kingdom is entrusted into his hands. Maybe there's something similar taking place here. Indeed, in chapter 10 of 1 Samuel, there are three signs given to Saul.

There's a sign where he meets men that tell him that the donkeys have been found. There's a sign where he meets men with goats, a skin of wine, and bread. And then there's a sign when he meets the prophets, and the spirit comes upon him, and he becomes a new man.

Arguably, all three of these signs are found at the end of the book of Luke. The first one,

the finding of the donkeys, is fulfilled in the errand before the triumphal entry. The second one, meeting the men with the goats, the skin of wine, and the bread, is fulfilled in the man bearing the water pitcher.

He leads them to the site where they'll celebrate the Passover, which will be celebrated with a lamb or a goat, and where Christ gives them bread and wine. And then finally, they are told to wait in Jerusalem until they are clothed with power from on high. That will be the spirit coming upon them so that they become new men, so that like Saul, they will be equipped to rule.

Why is it a man carrying a water pitcher? First of all, this would stand out. It's not typical a man would be carrying a water pitcher. It's interesting that this is not the first occasion in Scripture where there is a sign given involving someone carrying a water pitcher.

This is the sign given to the servant of Abraham when he meets Rebekah. The relationship between the king and his people was often described as a sort of marriage, and perhaps meeting a man with a water pitcher, presumably going out to the well, plays upon these themes. Remember again that the story of Saul in 1 Samuel chapter 9 began with him meeting women bearing water pitchers.

However, whereas Saul was like the bridegroom meeting the bride for the first time, the disciples are like the bride meeting the bridegroom. The man bearing the water pitcher will lead them to the place where they will celebrate the meal with the one who is the true bridegroom of Israel. Perhaps we should think here that Jesus is the new royal husband of Israel, and the Last Supper has subtle wedding feast overtones.

There's a rising tension in this chapter. The feast drew near in verse 1, then came the day in verse 7, and when the hour had come in verse 14. It's a rising tension.

And the Passover meal with the disciples is connected with the Exodus. In chapter 9 verse 31, Jesus had already spoken of his act in Jerusalem as his Exodus. Jesus is about to accomplish an Exodus, and he is about to establish a covenant, as a covenant was established at Sinai.

Jesus and his disciples are eating a Passover meal, or at least a Passover associated meal. It is essential that we notice that Jesus isn't just taking up physical food and drink, just regular bread and wine. He's taking elements that already bear great meaning.

The meal is freighted with meaning and symbolism already, and Jesus takes up that pre-existing symbolism and relates it to himself. In this case, that symbolism is that of the unleavened bread associated with the Messiah. It's a broken and distributed and participated body.

It's a self-communication in symbol. It's interesting that the description of the meal here has two shared cups. We see one in verses 17 to 18, and then another in verse 20.

There would have been four cups for the Passover meal. And Jesus expresses an abstinence from eating the Passover and drinking the wine until they are fulfilled. The wine anticipates the kingdom, and maybe he's making some sort of Nazarite vow of abstinence here.

The description of the wine as the new covenant in Christ's blood recalls the story of Exodus chapter 24, where the Sinai covenant had its blood of the covenant. In verse 8 of that chapter, And Moses took the blood and threw it on the people and said, Whereas Moses threw the blood upon the people, Jesus communicates the blood through a different symbol, which is the drinking of wine. He instructs them to do this in remembrance of him, or we could say, as his memorial.

The purpose of a memorial like this is not primarily to remind us, but to present to God, to bring to his mind, as it were, the sacrifice of Jesus, to declare his death. And the fact that they are instructed to perform this again and again in the future, in remembrance of Christ, recalls the Passover at the first Exodus. The Passover there was instituted as an ongoing practice for Israel.

So Christ is instituting an ongoing practice here. Just as Old Testament deliverances were always accompanied with memorials to recall them in feast, in celebration, in signs, or in some other way, so Jesus associates his death with an explanatory symbol, a symbol that continues the meaning and the force of the event as well, so that people can participate in the reality of his sacrifice. The meal is a covenant sealing meal.

It gives a share in the kingdom to those who participate in it. The twelve will sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel, in verse 30. This might make us think back to the judgment upon the wicked vine-dressers.

They will be replaced by the faithful servants, the twelve apostles. However, one of the people at the table will betray Christ. This looks back to Psalm 41, verse 9. The kingdom that Jesus is giving to his disciples, however, operates quite differently from those of the Gentiles.

The disciples still don't get this. There is authority in the church. The ministers of the church are the ministers of Christ, representing his authority to his body.

But that is exercised in the form of service, not for self-aggrandizement. Jesus' reference to being among his disciples as one who serves, as distinct from being one who sits at the table, might imply his washing of their feet in this scene. Incidentally, Jesus serving his disciples by washing their feet, not explicitly mentioned here, but implied, casts light back upon the washing of his own feet in chapter 7, verse 36 and following.

The sinful woman does for Jesus what he will later do for his disciples. Satan will tempt Peter three times to deny Jesus, and Peter will fail three times. Yet Jesus prays for him,

and he will be restored.

There is a contrast between Judas and Peter here. Judas utterly apostatizes, but Peter is going to be restored. Jesus also acts as a mediator here, interceding for Peter, so that Satan will not destroy him.

After this point, the nature of their mission will change. They will need a money bag, sack and sword. They will face a hostile reception.

They can no longer rely upon hospitality being extended to them, and they won't have assurance of their safety. This need not be read as a statement that they had to buy actual swords at this point, but having swords would help them to fulfil biblical prophecy, as we see in verse 37. Jesus would be numbered with the transgressors.

A question to consider, what are some of the details of Luke's account of the Last Supper that stand out from the other Gospels? Moving into the latter part of Luke, chapter 22, Jesus goes out to the Mount of Olives. Once again, this continues Jesus' pattern of movement between the Temple Mount of the City and the Mount of Olives. This recalls also David leaving Jerusalem during the coup of Absalom in 2 Samuel, chapter 15-16.

Now Jesus is departing Jerusalem like David. In 2 Samuel, chapter 15-16, we can see some of these verses that remind us of the story of Christ. Then David said to all his servants who were with him at Jerusalem, Arise and let us flee, or else there will be no escape for us from Absalom.

Go quickly, lest he overtake us quickly, and bring down ruin on us, and strike the city with the edge of the sword. And the king went out, and all the people after him, and they halted at the last house. And all the land wept aloud, as all the people passed by.

And the king crossed the brook Kidron, and all the people passed on toward the wilderness. But David went up the ascent of the Mount of Olives, weeping as he went, barefoot and with his head covered. And all the people who were with him covered their heads, and they went up, weeping as they went.

And it was told David, Ahithophel is among the conspirators with Absalom. And David said, O Lord, please turn the council of Ahithophel into foolishness. As it was for David his father, the Mount of Olives is a place of mourning, weeping, and agony for Jesus.

His trusted friend Judas is conspiring with his enemies, as David's friend Ahithophel conspired with his. When David had passed a little beyond the summit, Ziba the servant of Mephibosheth met him with a couple of donkeys saddled, bearing two hundred loaves of bread, a hundred bunches of raisins, a hundred of summer fruits, and a skin of wine. And the king said to Ziba, Why have you brought these? Ziba answered, The donkeys are for the king's household to ride on, the bread and summer fruit for the young men to eat, and the wine for those who faint in the wilderness to drink.

Like David was ministered to by Ziba, Jesus is ministered to by the angel. When King David came to Behorim, there came out a man of the family of the house of Saul, whose name was Shimei, the son of Gerar. And as he came he cursed continually, and he threw stones at David and at all the servants of King David, and all the people and all the mighty men were on his right hand and on his left.

David was assaulted by Shimei, and a crowd led by the traitor Judas comes out to assault Jesus. Shimei throws stones, and Jesus prays at a stone's throw away from the disciples. Then Abishai, the son of Zeruiah, said to the king, Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? Let me go over and take off his head.

But the king said, What have I to do with you, you sons of Zeruiah? If he is cursing because the lord has said to him, Curse David, who then shall say, Why have you done so? And David said to Abishai and to all his servants, Behold, my own son seeks my life. How much more may this benjaminite? Leave him alone, and let him curse, for the lord has told him to. David's right hand man Abishai wants to strike Shimei, but David prevents him.

Like David, Jesus prevents his disciples from striking out at the crowd. In John's Gospel we learn that the one who strikes out at the ear of the high priest's servant was Peter. Jesus warns the disciples to pray that they might not enter into temptation.

This is one of the petitions of the Lord's Prayer. In Luke chapter 4 Jesus was led by the spirit into temptation, into the testing of the wilderness. Temptation is the place where people are tested to their limits, and may be beyond.

The time of temptation is the time when Satan, for instance, will try to sift Peter like wheat. Jesus has not long before delivered the Olivet Discourse, where he warned the disciples of a time of great testing that was coming in that generation, and of the imperative of keeping awake. In this story the expected time of testing is coming in a more immediate and concentrated form, with Jesus taking the time of testing upon himself, so that his disciples do not.

This is one of the ways in which the story of the Gospels can be seen as a story of substitutionary atonement. Jesus is the shepherd who takes the blows upon himself, while the sheep are scattered, but saved from destruction. The time of temptation is coming, but Jesus bears it instead of the disciples, while interceding for them that they be protected from it.

He warns them that they would be delivered up by friends and relatives in the coming testing that would come upon the land, and he is about to be delivered up by his close friend. He prays for the removal of the cup, that if possible there be some way that he should be saved his fate. However, he submits to the will of the Lord.

The cup is an image of divine judgment that we encounter on several occasions in the Old Testament. Isaiah 51, verse 17 Wake yourself, wake yourself, stand up, O Jerusalem! You who have drunk from the hand of the Lord the cup of his wrath, who have drunk to the dregs the bowl, the cup of staggering. Jeremiah 25, verses 15-18 Thus the Lord, the God of Israel, said to me, Take from my hand this cup of the wine of wrath, and make all the nations to whom I send you drink it.

They shall drink and stagger and be crazed because of the sword that I am sending among them. So I took the cup from the Lord's hand, and made all the nations to whom the Lord sent me drink it, Jerusalem and the cities of Judah, its kings and officials, to make them a desolation and a waste, a hissing and a curse, as at this day. Ezekiel 23, verses 31-34 You have gone the way of your sister, therefore I will give her cup into your hand.

Thus says the Lord God, You shall drink your sister's cup that is deep and large. You shall be laughed at and held in derision, for it contains much. You will be filled with drunkenness and sorrow, a cup of horror and desolation, the cup of your sister Samaria.

You shall drink it and drain it out, and gnaw its shards, and tear your breasts, for I have spoken, declares the Lord God. Habakkuk 2, verses 16 You will have your fill of shame instead of glory. Drink yourself, and show your uncircumcision.

The cup in the Lord's right hand will come around to you, and utter shame will come upon your glory. Zechariah 12, verses 2 Behold, I am about to make Jerusalem a cup of staggering to all the surrounding peoples. The siege of Jerusalem will also be against Judah.

In the book of Revelation, cup imagery reappears. Jerusalem and the worshippers of the beast will be made to drink the cup for their sins. Revelation chapter 14, verses 9-11 And another angel, a third, followed them, saying with a loud voice, If anyone worships the beast and its image, and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, he also will drink the wine of God's wrath, poured full strength into the cup of his anger, and he will be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb, and the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever.

And they have no rest, day or night, these worshippers of the beast and its image, and whoever receives the mark of its name. Chapter 16, verses 19 The great city was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell, and God remembered Babylon the great, to make her drain the cup of the wine of the fury of his wrath. And chapter 18, verses 6 Pay her back as she herself has paid back others, and repay her double for her deeds.

Mix a double portion for her in the cup she mixed. At the very beginning of his ministry, Jesus was tempted in the wilderness, being presented with the decision to stick to the

course that his father had set for him, and to which he had committed himself, the course all his human instinct would recall from, or to abandon it for the easy route that Satan placed before him. Here again he submits himself to the will of his father, rather than the inclinations of his human nature.

Here he provides an example of faithful prayer for those who face such temptation. He is ministered to by an angel, as he was after his temptation in Mark's account. He struggles in prayer, in great agony.

It might be worth observing that Luke describes much more the agony of Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane than he does the agony of the crucifixion. This in many ways is the heart of the struggle, the place where the battle is most pitched. This is where the power of Satan's case is being pressed upon him, and where he must wrestle against it with every single sinew of his being.

His sweat becomes like great drops of blood, the agony of one in the most extreme exertion, one wrestling in the darkness, and faithfully submitting himself to the terrible will of God. By contrast, the disciples have fallen asleep, failing in the basic charge of wakefulness that he gave in the Olivet Discourse. Soon after, Judas arrives with the mob.

Judas is one of the twelve, a fact that is stressed, even though we already knew it, we are to feel the sting of betrayal once more. Judas betrays Jesus with a kiss, much as Joab, the son of Zeruah, did in 2 Samuel 20, verses 9-10. And Joab said to Amasa, Is it well with you, my brother? And Joab took Amasa by the beard with his right hand to kiss him.

But Amasa did not observe the sword that was in Joab's hand, so Joab struck him with it in the stomach, and spilt his entrails to the ground, without striking a second blow, and he died. Then Joab and Abishai his brother pursued Sheba the son of Bichri. If Peter is like Abishai the son of Zeruah, Judas is like Joab the son of Zeruah, one of those who was with Jesus, identified as Peter elsewhere, strikes the high priest's servant's ear.

But Jesus heals the servant. Even when Jesus is most under assault, he expresses his grace and his compassion. Jesus points out to those who take him that they could have taken him any time in the temple, but this serves their need to arrest him by stealth, to ensure that the crowds don't get worked up.

The scriptures also must be fulfilled in this way. Remember the reference to Isaiah chapter 53 verse 12, in the instruction that Jesus gave to his disciples to bring swords with them. That verse declares, Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death, and was numbered with the transgressors.

Yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors. Being taken by a mob, as if he were with a group of bandits, Jesus is numbered with the

transgressors. A question to consider.

Luke's gospel foregrounds the theme of prayer, and presents us, in an especially pronounced way, with Jesus as a man of prayer. How does Jesus' prayer in the garden connect with his earlier teaching upon prayer, and how does it develop from it? Luke chapter 22 ends with Peter's denial and Jesus' trial. Peter's testing and denial is paralleled with, and contrasts with, Jesus' trial.

This isn't as pronounced in Luke as it is in some of the other gospels, but it is still present. Both of the two are questioned, and one is faithful and the other unfaithful. And in the story of Peter's testing, there is a gradual escalation.

First, he is challenged by one of the servant girls, when he is sitting at the fire in the courtyard, and she sees him in its light. She says that he was with Christ, but he denies it. Later, he is accused again, someone claiming that he was one of the followers of Jesus.

Finally, he is accused one more time, by someone claiming that, as a Galilean, he was with Jesus. Note the way Jesus is seen as an outsider from the north. He is a Galilean prophet come down to Jerusalem.

He is an outsider. Peter denies it even more forcefully still, and he is tempted by the desire to fit in around the fire, to avoid ostracisation for the name of Jesus. We can face similar temptations to dissociate ourselves from Christ and his people, in order to fit in around the fires of our society, not to be left out in the cold.

The cock then crows, and Jesus turns and looks at Peter, a detail recorded in this gospel, but not others. Peter then remembers Jesus' saying, and the horrified realisation of what he has done hits him. The crowing cock illustrates Peter's own pride, the pride that has now failed at three-fold testing.

Whereas Jesus has been sorely tested, and succeeded, Peter has miserably failed. He now completely removes himself and weeps. Jesus' prophecy concerning Peter is fulfilled at the very time that Jesus is marked and beaten as a false prophet.

Jesus has also prophetically predicted that he would be marked and insulted in such a manner, in chapter 18, verses 32-33. Perhaps we could see some sort of parallel between Jesus and Samson. Samson is blinded, his eyes are removed, and the Philistines make mockery of him.

Here Jesus has a blindfold put over him, and he is marked. However, just as Samson's greatest victory was won in the hour of his death, so Jesus' greatest victory will be won under similar circumstances. The chief priests and scribes seek to get Jesus to claim to be the Christ, the Son of God, in order to have cause to hand him over to Pilate as a false messiah.

The assembly asks him if he is the Christ. Jesus, we should remember, has been performing messianic-style actions for the last few days. He had entered into Jerusalem in the manner of a messiah.

His triumphal entry, followed by the action in the temple, pointed towards a particular status that he might be claiming for himself. Jesus responds to the questioning by declaring the futility of any answer, but identifies himself once more with the Son of Man in Daniel's vision, in Daniel 7, verses 13-14. In time they will have demonstration of Jesus' presence at the right hand of the Father.

As he destroys the city and the wicked bind-dressers and the rebellious subjects, clearly demonstrating his authority and rule. The assembly declare Jesus to be guilty of blasphemy. They do not have the jurisdiction to carry out any sentence, though, so they must deliver him over to Pilate.

This trial was probably not a trial in any fuller sense of the word. It is better thought of as a hearing designed to establish charges to be presented to Pilate, the one with the authority to cast a death sentence. A question to consider.

How might the claim that Jesus is the Christ interplay with his claim to be the Son of Man in a way that fulfils Daniel 7? How might the understanding of Jesus as the Christ and Jesus as the Son of Man fill each other out? Luke 23 begins with the assembly of the elders, after their hearing, delivering Jesus over to Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor. They accuse Jesus of forbidding paying tribute to Caesar and of calling himself the Christ, or a king. Pilate questions Jesus concerning the charges against him.

The charge that he claims that he is the king of the Jews is the messianic claim seen from a Gentile perspective. Perhaps we should understand Pilate's question to Jesus as one that has a sarcastic tone. You are the king of the Jews? And Jesus' response to the question is also an edgy one.

You are saying it. One could imagine such an answer antagonising Pilate. But Pilate seems to know what's going on, and he openly declares that he finds no guilt in Jesus.

But the leaders of the people are even more insistent in response. They claim that he stirs up the people throughout the land, which is ironic because that's exactly what they have been doing. When Pilate discovers that Jesus is a Galilean, he sends him to Herod, who was in Jerusalem at the time.

This isn't because Pilate is suggesting that Jesus isn't in his jurisdiction. Rather, he sends him to Herod because Herod, governing in Galilee, might have more insight into the Galilean aspect of the case. It would also relieve Pilate of some of the pressure and responsibility of judgement in the matter.

It is quite clear to Pilate that there is more to the situation than the leaders of the people

are saying. So he's probably very glad to relieve himself of some of the responsibility of the judgement. Herod, for his part, was very eager to meet Jesus.

He had been speculating who Jesus was back in chapter 9, verse 7-9. Now Herod the Tetrarch heard about all that was happening, and he was perplexed, because it was said by some that John had been raised from the dead, by some that Elijah had appeared, and by others that one of the prophets of old had risen. Herod said, John I beheaded, but who is this about whom I hear such things? And he sought to see him.

Herod questions Jesus at great length, but Jesus gives Herod no reply. As a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth. However, the chief priests and the scribes are all the time loudly accusing him throughout the hearing.

Herod and his men end up mocking Jesus, the impression being given that they were influenced by the religious leaders. Jesus is dressed in a gorgeous or shining robe, maybe an ironic parody of the Transfiguration or some other sort of kingly enthronement. Herod is caught up in the spirit of the mob.

He ridicules Jesus with his own soldiers. And Luke makes a passing statement here that Herod and Pilate became friends that day, whereas formerly they had been at odds with each other. The rulers of this earth are united by their opposition to the Lord's Christ, as the apostles declare in their prayer in Acts chapter 4, verses 26-28.

The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers were gathered together, against the Lord and against his anointed. For truly in this city they were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place. There is something further going on here, I think, about human psychology that is important, something explored in great detail in the work of René Girard.

Scapegoating unites people by a common enemy, and as a result can relieve or dissolve old antagonisms. Christ forms not just the unity of his people, but a sort of shadowy satanic unity in opposition to him. All the kings of the earth are gathered together with the rulers against Christ.

That's what gives them their new unity. When Jesus is sent back to him, Pilate gathers the chief priests, the rulers and the people, and declares that neither he nor Herod found anything deserving of death in Jesus. He expresses his intention merely to punish, and then to release Jesus.

But the priests, the rulers and the people all cry out to do away with Jesus, and to release Barabbas to them. Throughout the trial it is clear that the chief priests and the leaders of the Jews are the instigators and the drivers of everything. They are the ones

that are pushing things ahead, the ones that take the great responsibility for what has happened.

Were it not for them, Jesus would not have been crucified. However, they successfully get the crowd on their side, and end up cowering Pilate into submission. The reference to Barabbas seems to assume what is mentioned in the other Gospels about the custom of Pilate at the time of the feast, and Pilate is clearly rolling the dice here.

He sees that he has an angry crowd, and the Jewish leaders against him, and doesn't want unrest. Barabbas serves as a foil for Jesus. He's a murderous insurrectionist, yet they prefer him over Jesus.

And this is revealing, because if they truly cared about the sedition that they claimed to be delivering Jesus to Pilate for, Barabbas is precisely the sort of person they wouldn't want to go free. And so in choosing Barabbas, the people choose the violent revolutionary over the true Messiah and Prince of Peace. This choice in embryo was the larger choice that Israel made, a choice that ultimately led to its destruction in AD 70.

Pilate tries again to calm them down, and to release Jesus, but now they insist that he be crucified, and he tries a third and last time, stating that he found nothing in him deserving of death. But the crowd gets even more vehement. The actions and the description of the crowd here is similar to the descriptions that we find elsewhere used of demon-possessed persons, they're in a sort of demonic frenzy at this point.

And the driving force within much of the narrative is the power and the violence of the mob, and the leaders who whip them up. Nothing proves capable of withstanding this power. Even Pilate, who desires to release Jesus, is unable to resist it, and ultimately surrenders to it, and is absorbed into it.

The mob will not be pacified without a victim, and Pilate is prepared to use someone such as Barabbas as a conveniently guilty scapegoat, upon which the fury of the crowd could be expended. But for the crowd, only Jesus would do. More than any other writer, René Girard has explored the dynamics whereby a victim can act as a sort of lightning rod for the violence of society.

The energy of the mob is like a social avalanche. It catches people up into it, and it crushes all that would stand in its way. And those who are caught up in it are in the grip of a greater power.

They are unaware of what they're truly doing. The behaviour of the crowd in the period of the betrayals, the trials, and the crucifixion of Christ is akin to that of a possessed person. The many individuals within the crowd fuse into a sort of single entity and actor, driven by a violent frenzy that none within it could truly withstand or understand.

That sort of social contagion is an intoxicating and a powerful force. It gives a sense of

unity, purpose, and an intoxicating sense of morality. And all ends up bowing before its impulses.

Principles of justice are abandoned. They fall by the wayside. The governor entirely capitulates.

He tries to reason and then to bargain with the mob, but he completely fails. And the result is that Jesus is put to death with the full sanction of Rome, but a sanction that has been wrested from Pilate on account of his fear of the crowd. Pilate ends up underwriting mob justice, instigated by the religious leaders, who are envious of Jesus.

It might be worth contrasting the unity of the mob with the unity of the church. The unity of the church is of a completely different spirit, literally, to the unity of the mob. And the unity of the mob is characterised by violence, but the unity of the spirit is characterised by a witness to peace.

A question to consider. What are some of the roles played by the crowd in the Gospel of Luke and in the Book of Acts? In Luke chapter 23, as Jesus is led out to his crucifixion, Simon of Cyrene takes up his cross and follows Jesus. Notably, he's a Gentile.

Simon of Bethsaida denies Jesus, but Simon of Cyrene follows him. At this point, when the twelve have largely abandoned Jesus, it is the unlikely disciples, converts and figures, along with the women, that come to the foreground, people like Simon of Cyrene, the centurion, Joseph of Arimathea. What is happening to Jesus is just the harbinger of more terrible things to come in Jerusalem, when its leaders have favoured the way of insurrection over the way of Jesus.

Jesus is followed by a multitude and many women mourning and lamenting for him. We might perhaps hear the voice of Zechariah chapter 12 verses 10-14 here. Jesus addresses the women as daughters of Jerusalem.

Jerusalem, or Zion, is often spoken of as a daughter in the prophets, and the city is represented by its women. Jesus presents his death as a foreshadowing of Israel's own fate. The people following may weep for him, but they should recognise that Jerusalem as a whole will suffer the same fate in its time.

He quotes Hosea chapter 10 verse 8. Jesus is led away to be crucified with two criminals. Luke has a much lighter narrative brush stroke than Matthew, for instance, but he wants us to note his prophecy being fulfilled in the background. Isaiah chapter 53 verse 12, for instance.

One criminal is on his right and another on his left. Jesus is like an enthroned king, flanked by others. If Simon of Cyrene illustrated discipleship in carrying the cross after Jesus, the criminals illustrate those positions that disciples that wish to be exalted must occupy.

Jesus responds to the situation by prayer for the very people who are crucifying him. He intercedes for the transgressors. He appeals to the fact that their sin is unwitting.

And this unwitting character of the people's sin is also asserted by the apostles in Acts chapter 3 verses 13 to 19. And his name, by faith in his name, has made this man strong, whom you see and know. And the faith that is through Jesus has given the man this perfect health in the presence of you all.

And now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. But what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ would suffer, he thus fulfilled. Repent, therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out.

They will have another chance. However, if they reject the message of the church, only certain judgment will await them. Jesus is here fulfilling his own teaching, given near the beginning of his ministry in Luke chapter 6 verses 27 to 29.

But I say to you who hear, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you, to one who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also, and from one who takes away your cloak, do not withhold your tunic either. In the dividing of his garments by lot, we again hear the voice of scripture, this time from Psalm 22 verse 18. They divide my garments among them, and from my clothing they cast lots.

Jesus is then mocked by the rulers, the soldiers, and even one of the criminals crucified alongside him. The mockers decrease in their social status, manifesting how humiliating Jesus' position is. The mockery focuses upon Jesus' claim to be the Christ, and his supposed identity as a failed saviour.

We might remember the challenge of Satan back in chapter 4, if you are the son of God, and hear that same challenge in the words of the scoffers here. Jesus is being mocked as a king, he's served sour wine by cupbearers, he's placed with someone at his right hand and his left, he's given a royal superscription above his head. Once again, the prophetic words of scripture are lying in the background.

In the mockery, we might hear the words of Psalm 22 being fulfilled again, this time from verses 7 to 8. All who see me mock me, they make mouths at me, they wag their heads. He trusts in the Lord, let him deliver him, let him rescue him, for he delights in him. The soldiers' mockery also fulfills Psalm 69 verse 21.

They gave me poison for food, and for my thirst they gave me sour wine to drink. The soldiers refer to Jesus as the king of the Jews, as they are Gentiles and would have thought in that category, rather than the category of Messiah. The division between the two criminals, one to be raised up and the other facing an even greater judgement, might invite comparisons between Jesus and Joseph, who is also associated with two

criminals with different faiths.

However, whereas Joseph asked the cupbearer to remember him when he was elevated, the criminal here asked Jesus to remember him when he comes into his kingdom. A truly startling claim in the context, when you think about it. Here's a man being crucified, dying on a cross, and the person next to him asking to be remembered when he comes into his kingdom.

All of the appearances are against this condemned, seeming false Messiah entering into any kingdom whatsoever. But Jesus is still saving at this point. The penitent criminal is also an example of the divisions emerging in the responses to the death of Jesus.

There is darkness from the sixth to the ninth hour, it's like the penultimate plague on Egypt, when darkness lay over the whole land. All that remains is the death of the firstborn. And these are also akin to the signs of Christ's coming and judgement, they're signs of de-creation.

The curtain of the temple is torn in two, a division between God and his people is removed, and a way into God's presence is made open. Jesus alludes to the Psalms in a number of his sayings on the cross, recorded in the Gospels. Verse 46 alludes to Psalm 31, verse 5. In the crucifixion accounts, the words of the Psalms are very prominent on Jesus' lips.

Reading the words of the wider context of the Psalms that Jesus quotes is also illuminating. These are not the words of someone in the grip of despair, they're the words of someone confident in the Lord, even in the severest moment of distress. These words anticipate resurrection.

Our passage ends with the description of three different witnesses. The centurion, the assembled crowds, and his acquaintances were the women who had followed him from Galilee. They're watching at a distance.

And the reactions of the first two witnesses, the centurion and the assembled crowds, are described in parallel. Both are responding when they saw what had taken place. The centurion declares the innocence of Christ.

Herod, Pilate and the centurion who carried out the sentence all concur in recognising Jesus' innocence. However, the centurion goes further. He praises God.

He recognises the hand of God in Jesus' death, something that was presumably apparent from the signs accompanying the death, and also the manner in which Christ died. The assembled crowds also react to what they have seen. They react in mourning, and perhaps even contrition for what has happened.

They beat their breasts and returned. Already, perhaps, we have a sign of remorse

paving the way for Pentecost. The death of Jesus, then, is immediately followed by signs of new life and promise.

Jesus' acquaintances and the women who had followed him from Galilee are at a greater distance. And perhaps we should hear Psalm 38 verse 11 in the background here. My friends and companions stand aloof from my plague, and my nearest kin stand far off.

The role of the women as witnesses will also prove important in the rest of the narrative that follows. A question to consider. Why is it that it is the words of the Psalms that are most prominent in the context of the crucifixion, especially on Jesus' lips? What might we learn from this about the importance of the Psalms more generally? At the end of Luke chapter 23, we are introduced to Joseph of Arimathea.

He is a character we have never heard of before, but he is a member of the council, which is surprising, considering the part that the council had just played in the condemnation of Jesus to his death. However, Joseph had not consented to the council's decision. He is described as a good and righteous man who was looking for the kingdom of God.

This might recall the characterization of figures such as Simeon at the beginning of the book of Luke. In chapter 2 verse 25, Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. Joseph requests the body of Jesus, which he takes down and wraps in linen garments and lays in the tomb.

We might perhaps think about the clothes of the high priest on the Day of Atonement, where he wears linen garments for the ritual. But we might also think about the very beginning of the Gospel, where Jesus was wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger. There we also had a Joseph and a Mary.

The death and resurrection of Christ is a new birth event. There the sign given to the shepherds was that they would see the baby wrapped in swaddling clothes laying in a manger. Now the sign given to new shepherds will be seeing the linen garments laid to one side and the body removed.

There is also another fulfilment of Isaiah chapter 53 here. More specifically, verse 9, He makes his grave with a rich man at his death. Jesus is buried in a way that shows honour to his body, not in a common criminal's grave.

It is cut into the rock like stones taken from a quarry. Maybe we should think of Isaiah chapter 51, verse 1. Listen to me, you who pursue righteousness, you who seek the Lord, look to the rock from which you were hewn, and to the quarry from which you were dug. Jesus is the great stone that will become the chief cornerstone of the new temple, quarried from the rock as it were.

The women were present at the cross. They are present to see the burial, they know where the body has been placed, and they are present on the morning of resurrection. They are in many ways the heart of the faithful community at this point.

While we can often focus upon the male disciples as the appointed leaders and guardians of the people of Christ, Luke gives a lot of attention to the women in the narrative, most notably Elizabeth and Mary, but even beyond that we can see the characters of the women coming to the foreground in the gospel of Luke to a greater degree than in some of the other gospels. Luke will often have male-female pairings, such as Simeon and Anna in the temple. So it seems that Luke wants us to pay attention to the women as examples of faith, and perhaps one of the ways that we can learn from them is that even when faith seems to fail, there can remain the commitment of love, and that is the thing that really ties them to Christ at this point more than anything else.

The resting of the women on the Sabbath parallels Jesus resting in the tomb on the Sabbath, while the start of the new chapter introduces the first day of a new creation. Perhaps we might see the women bringing spices and oils to the tomb and encountering angels as something of a parallel to Zacharias performing the rite of incense in the temple and encountering an angel at the beginning of the gospel. The stone is rolled away and Jesus' body is nowhere to be found.

Two angels appear. Why do you seek the living among the dead? The angels remind the women that Jesus had told them that he would rise way back in Galilee, in Luke 9, verses 21-22, and he strictly charged and commanded them to tell this to no one, saying, The Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. For the disciples, the period after the resurrection is going to be, in large measure, one of remembering what Jesus had taught them earlier, but which they had failed to grasp.

It's like the end of a detective novel, where the mystery has been solved and suddenly the reader looks back and all of the clues fall into place and they realise that it had to be this way, that the truth was there all the way along and they just hadn't had the eyes to see it. Had it occurred just by itself, the empty tomb would just have been a weird and random event. The resurrection is not a random miracle.

The resurrection makes sense when it's read against the background of the Old Testament prophecies, when it's read against the background of Jesus' earlier statements. It's that background that gives the resurrection its meaning. Yet the women arrive on the site of a mystery, an empty tomb and a rolled away stone, and then the two men appear and give them clues to start to figure it out.

When this is seen against the backdrop of Jesus' ministry and his foretelling of it, it will start to make sense. And importantly, understanding arises from memory. The women return to tell the eleven what has occurred.

They have faith, but the men do not believe them, thinking that they are giving an unreliable account. The names of the women are given to us at this point, Mary Magdalene, Joanna and Mary the mother of James, and there are other women with them. They are paralleled with the eleven apostles, it would seem that Peter was among them at this point, and the rest who were with them.

The names of the women matter, not least because their personal eyewitness would support Luke's narrative. For many years after these events, after the time of the writing of the gospel as well, people who read it could go and find people who are mentioned within it, who bore witness to specific events recorded within it. This would be of course nowhere more important than in reference to the resurrection accounts.

Peter alone seems to take the message of the women with more seriousness, and he goes to the tomb and stoops and looks inside. The linen cloths are lying by themselves. Perhaps this is like the high priest on the day of atonement.

Jesus is leaving the linen garments behind and is clothed with the glorious garments of the resurrection. A question to consider, what further connections can we see between the nativity and childhood accounts in the gospel of Luke and the accounts of the death and resurrection of Christ? In Luke chapter 24 we encounter two people travelling from Jerusalem, returning from the feast, having lost Jesus three days ago, not realising that Jesus had to be about his father's business. Of course, we've heard a version of this story before, back in chapter 2 verses 41-50.

Jesus feigns complete ignorance of the events that have just occurred. As this prompts them to share the events, he will reveal that they are the ones who are unaware of what has happened. The restraining of their eyes is associated with their slowness to believe, much as the restraining of Zacharias mouth.

Jesus declares himself in all of the scriptures, from the Pentateuch to the prophets, and they still don't recognise him. Jesus finally reveals himself in the act of taking, blessing, breaking and distributing the bread, in the ritual of the supper. The story of the road to Emmaus takes a liturgical shape then.

The word is opened up, and then Christ is recognised in the sacrament. The pattern here is the pattern of Christian worship. Christ draws near to us on the first day of the week, he opens the scripture to us, he makes himself known in the breaking of bread, and then sends us forth with joyful tidings.

The moment that their eyes are opened to him, he disappears from their sight. The eyes of the disciples open upon his absence, but now it's an absence filled with life, hope and promise. Their hearts burned within them upon the road, and the fire in their hearts might be in anticipation of the fire of Pentecost.

The opening of the eyes of the disciples is reminiscent of the opening of the eyes of Adam and Eve at the fall, but on this occasion it's blessed. There is a threefold opening in this chapter, the opening of the tomb, the opening of the scriptures and the opening of the eyes, and all of these are related. Before the risen Christ revealed himself, the scriptures were a closed letter, and the perception of the disciples was limited.

As Christ opened the tomb, he also opened closed eyes to perceive his presence and his purpose throughout the events that had occurred. He opened the Old Testament scriptures, revealing his presence on every page. The resurrection transforms our reading of the Old Testament.

Luke has been enacting this fact throughout his gospel. Texts whose meaning appeared closed are suddenly opened up to reveal a greater person within them. As our eyes are opened to see the risen Christ, we suddenly recognize the identity of the one who has been travelling and speaking to us all along in the words of the Old Testament, words concerning himself.

Jesus, the Lord, is the mysterious traveller who has been with Israel all the way throughout its journey. He is the one who appeared in the burning bush. He is the one who appeared to Abraham at the Oaks of Mamre.

He is the one who appeared to Moses on the mountain. He is the one who appeared to Isaiah in the temple vision. As Christ opens up the scriptures, the story of the Exodus is seen to be about him.

The story of the creation is seen to be about him. The story of David is seen to be about him. The whole of the Old Testament is Christian scripture.

The story of Emmaus follows a pattern seen in two other Lukean stories, the story of Saul the persecutor on the road to Damascus and the story of the Ethiopian eunuch. In both of these stories we have the movement of a journey. We have the opening of understanding in an encounter with Christ.

And then we have a movement to the celebration of a sacrament, in those cases baptism. Jesus' body is glorified and it's not like a normal body. It can move from place to place, it can evade recognition, it masters both space and other people's perception.

But it's still very much a body. It can be handled and it can eat. Much of the Gospel of Luke has been about meals, about eating practices, about dinner companions, about who belongs at the table.

And it's thoroughly appropriate that the fact of the resurrection should be made known through a food ritual and through an act of eating. Following 1 Corinthians 11 our understanding of the Lord's Supper is often focused narrowly upon the context of the Last Supper and the relationship with Jesus' death. However the Lord's Supper is also

based on the events in which the risen Christ revealed himself to his disciples in the very breaking of bread that we celebrate.

As we celebrate the supper we are enjoying the reality of the joyful resurrection meals as we perform the breaking bread ritual through which Jesus made known his presence to his disciples. The fact that Jesus eats fish when he appears to his disciples demonstrates his resurrection body but it also might have some symbolic import. Animals symbolise people.

God only ate five animals for most of the Old Testament. Cattle, sheep, goats, turtle doves and pigeons. Perhaps we could see some symbol of the inclusion of Gentiles here, although I wouldn't put much weight on it.

Jesus declares to his disciples, He explains how the entire scriptures, the law, the prophets and the Psalms or the writings had to be fulfilled in his suffering and resurrection from the dead. But it's not just in Christ's death and resurrection that these things are fulfilled. They're also fulfilled in the ministry of the church that follows.

The Old Testament narrative crackles with anticipation of Christ and Christ opens our eyes to understand the Old Testament text. There is an event of illumination going in both directions. The scripture enables us truly to see the Christ and the Christ enables us truly to see the scriptures.

Christ brings light to the entire preceding narrative while also being in direct continuity with it. Jesus is the key to understanding the Old Testament. However, the Old Testament is also the key to understanding Jesus.

Jesus is like the match and the Old Testament is like the striking surface. Bring the two together and light and fire results. Without the Old Testament we would not truly recognise Jesus.

And without Jesus we cannot truly recognise the meaning of the Old Testament. We should consider the way that Luke is using the scripture. He isn't primarily presenting us with direct prediction and fulfilment but rather with the way that Christ both clarifies and brings to resolution the themes of the Old Testament.

The whole world of the scripture comes into focus in Christ. Once we see Christ the rest makes new sense. He is David's greater son who must suffer like his father.

This is one of the reasons why the Psalms are especially prominent in Luke's understanding. The Psalms present us with the voice of the suffering Davidic king. Luke is also drawing heavily upon the background of Isaiah, especially chapters 40-66.

The suffering Messiah of the Psalms is also the suffering servant of Isaiah's prophecy. He is also the spirit anointed one who brings the acceptable year of the Lord and brings

ministry to the Gentiles. The church and its ministry also figure into the picture.

Its witness to all nations beginning with Jerusalem is an essential part of the picture anticipated by the Old Testament. The second volume of Luke's writings, the Book of Acts, is also a book that fulfills Old Testament prophecy. Such themes of fulfillment are very important in the ministry of the early church, not least in places like Peter's sermon in Acts chapter 2 on the day of Pentecost.

Christ is the one who will send the Spirit, the promise of the Father. We should note the explicit presence of all of the persons of the Trinity here. The Spirit is the one sent, the Spirit is the promise of the Father, and the Spirit is sent by the Son.

The Spirit is power from on high, power for ministry and mission. It is the power that is the power of Christ himself. They are instructed that they must wait in Jerusalem.

Jerusalem is the place from which the word of the Lord will go out. We could perhaps think of Jesus as a new Elijah here. His ascension and there being clothed with power from on high are two sides of the same coin.

Just as Elijah's ascension was Elisha's Pentecost, so it is for Jesus and his disciples. This might also be the third of three instructions that Jesus gives to his disciples towards the end of his ministry. The first being to find the cult that's tied up and to bring it to Jesus for his triumphal entry.

The second to find the man carrying the water picture in the town. And then this as the third, to wait in Jerusalem until the Spirit comes upon them from on high. These might be related to the three signs that are given to Saul at the beginning of the kingdom.

A message concerning his father's donkeys that they have been found, encountering men bearing goats, bread and wine, and then meeting with prophets coming down from the high place at which time the Spirit of the Lord will rush upon him and he will become a new man. This is what happens with the disciples. As the story of the signs given to Saul were at the beginning of the first kingdom of Israel, these signs are the beginning of a new kingdom.

And just as Saul was prepared by the Spirit coming upon him, so they will be prepared for rule as the Spirit comes upon them. Jesus leads his disciples out of the city to Bethany and there he blesses them. Bethany was the site where Christ's triumphal entry had originated and he departs then as he is blessing them.

His blessing of his disciples might make us think of Jesus as a priest at this point as well. He is taken up into heaven to God's right hand to act and to intercede on their behalf. Luke has already alluded to Daniel 7 verses 13-14, the Son of Man coming on the clouds.

This is the Son of Man ascending into heaven on the cloud where he will rule at God's

right hand until all his enemies are put under his feet. The ascension is a departure but it is also a new arrival. It is a new triumphal entry.

Furthermore it returns us to the themes at the beginning of the book. The book began with people praying at the temple as Zachariah went in at the time of incense. Jesus ascends to God's presence like the incense and blesses his disciples as the priest would bless the crowd outside.

We might also recall the shepherds. The shepherds are described having seen the sign of the baby wrapped in swaddling clothes laid in a manger. And the shepherds returned glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen as it had been told them.

Luke chapter 2 verse 20. The disciples might also be compared to Anna who was constantly in prayer in the temple. So a book that began with rejoicing, with the temple, with prayer and blessing and with the theme of the spirit ends where it began.

But as it arrives at the point where it started once more we notice that everything has changed. This sets things up for the book of Acts. In the book of Acts the story of the ascension is largely repeated.

The story of the ascension both closes the story of Christ's earthly ministry and it also bursts out into the ministry of the church as it leads into the story of Pentecost. A question to consider. Can you think of some examples in the gospel of Luke where Luke exemplifies the form of reading scripture that Jesus here teaches?