

COMMENTARY ON LUKE - 11

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SECTION 6 continued (15.1-19.28).

The Parable of the Unrighteous Judge (18.1-8).

As verse 8b makes clear, this parable looks directly back to Jesus' prophecy which describes Himself as coming as the Son of Man in 17.24. It is a call to His disciples, and to all Christians, to continue in praying that God will maintain the cause of His people until that Day. However, the question in 8b makes clear that the way is not necessarily going to be easy. It demonstrates that His people will have to face up to many faith-challenging experiences.

In the chiasmatic analysis of the Section (see introduction to the Section) this parable parallels the healing of the ten skin-diseased men. That healing was proof of what God was going to accomplish in His people, and the skin-diseased man who returned full of gratitude and faith was like these described here who must pray through to the end with the same gratitude and faith, constantly returning to give thanks and praise to the One Who has made them whole. They will be the few among the many whose faith shines through.

In considering this parable we might well ask, why did Jesus not use the illustration of a righteous judge? And the answer is that Jesus wanted to build into the parable the notions of delay and the need for persistence. Neither should occur with a righteous judge. They might occur if he was overwhelmed with work but Jesus would hardly want us to see God as overwhelmed with work. This then brings out what is the stress in the parable, delay and the need for persistence. But the reason for the delay in God's case is that He has a large purpose to carry out that necessitates delay, your salvation and mine, for instance, so that He could not bring about the consummation immediately. The overall point, apart from the need for us to be persistent in prayer, is therefore that God will give His people justice, and will answer their cry at the most suitable time. This may sometimes be locally, but whatever happens there, in the end it will be true at the final consummation. So their future is guaranteed, but as regularly in Scripture, it is to go hand in hand with their persistence in prayer and their faithfulness in life. We pray knowing that we will receive what we ask for, because our praying is a part of how He brings it about.

Analysis.

- a He spoke a parable to them to the end that they ought always to pray, and not to faint (1).
- b Saying, "There was in a city a judge, who feared not God, and regarded not man," (2).
- c "And there was a widow in that city, and she came to him often, saying, 'Avenge me of my adversary'" (3).
- d "And he would not for a while, but afterwards he said within himself" (4-5).
- e " 'Though I fear not God, nor regard man, yet because this widow troubles me, I will avenge her, lest she wear me out by her continual coming'" (5).
- d 'And the Lord said, "Hear what the unrighteous judge says" (6).
- c "And shall not God avenge His elect, who cry to Him day and night, and even though He wait a long time over them?" (7).
- b "I say to you, that He will avenge them speedily" (8a).
- a "Nevertheless, when the Son of man comes, will He find faith on the earth?" (8b).

Note that in 'a' His people are to believe on, praying in all circumstances, and in the parallel the question is as to whether they will believe on. In 'b' we have the resolute judge and in the

parable the resolute God. In 'c' we have the request for justice, and in the parallel the promise of justice for His people. In 'd' the judge speaks to himself, and in the parallel we are to hear what he says. Centrally in 'e' is the assurance of a guaranteed answer to the plea.

18.1 'And he spoke a parable to them to the end that they ought always to pray, and not to faint,'

This parable is so important that an explanation of its meaning and significance is given at its commencement. It is given as an encouragement and incentive to pray, and to go on praying without wilting. And as with the Lord's prayer, the prayer is to be concerning the going forward of God's purposes. It is to be always with an eye on the coming of the Son of Man. The prayer is to be that God will act on behalf of His people, will watch over them, will vindicate them ('hallowed be Your name'), and will bring them through safely believing until the end ('lead us not into testing'). Jesus' final question in 8b is not really an expression of doubt, but an encouragement to faith.

'Always to pray.' Compare Paul's 'pray without ceasing' (1 Thessalonians 5.17). This is a reminder that our lives should be firmly based on having fellowship with Him in prayer, and on an attitude of constant prayerful trust as we live our lives day by day, emphasising especially the need for God's people to come together regularly to pray. From it we recognise the importance that Jesus placed on constant communion with God, and on praying regularly concerning the things of God.

Sadly a lot of Christians see prayer as coming with a shopping list to God and then saying, 'Gimme, gimme, gimme (give to me)', or as a noble attempt to keep all their relatives well. But neither of these are seen to be what should be the Christian's prime concern. For as we saw in 11.1-4 Jesus said that our main emphasis in prayer should be on the carrying forward of His will, and the establishment of His Kingly Rule. It should only be children who spend all their time talking about themselves.

In context the emphasis is on praying continually until the second coming of Jesus Christ in view of the constraints that will be on His people. His people should be concerned in one long chain of prayer that never ceases, in which all of us should continually partake, and should be centred on the fulfilment of His purposes, for this will play an important part in His purposes coming about.

The conflict between this attitude and that of the Jews is striking. They prayed formally three times a day, and limited it to that lest God get sick of them, but this goes far beyond that. This was looking for prayer to become the very breath of life. It was an indication that God looks for our companionship continually.

18.2 'Saying, "There was in a city a judge, who feared not God, and regarded not man," '

The parable opens with the description of a city judge who is absolutely resolute. He fears neither God nor man. He is seemingly unaffected by anything. He does precisely what he pleases. In this he is like God Who is over all and acts completely on His own without any restriction. The only distinction is that in the case of God, He does only what is right. That is a principle of Scripture from the very beginning (Genesis 18.25). He is not restricted by any outside law. He is restricted by what He Himself is.

The fact that the judge 'feared not God nor regarded man' may suggest that this was a non-Jewish judge, and that the widow had gone outside the religious system in order to obtain justice from the highest source, in her case from the civil power. Such judges were famed for their partiality and dishonesty, and usually the only way to gain their ear was by heavy bribes. However the phrase occurs elsewhere in Josephus and others and may therefore simply indicate one who is totally independent and makes up his own mind, one who is strong-minded and does not allow himself to be influenced by outside influences (such as, in normal

circumstances, by a widow).

18.3 “And there was a widow in that city, and she came to him often, saying, ‘Give me justice against my adversary.’ ”

In contrast with the judge was a widow. She was at the opposite extreme, powerless, helpless, with no one to act on her behalf and with few weapons in her armoury. All she had was her persistence. We too are in the same position with God, except that we have One in Whose name we can come, which makes a huge difference.

In the Scriptures widows are always mentioned (along with orphans) as among the neediest, the weakest and the most dependent of people (see Exodus 22.22-24; Psalm 68.5; Isaiah 10.2; Jeremiah 49.11; Lamentations 5.3; James 1.27). They often have no one directly to look to but God. It is significant that Luke mentions widows nine times compared with Matthew’s one mention and Mark’s three. This confirms his greater emphasis on and concern about women. But Jesus’ use of the idea of a widow possibly has in mind Lamentations 1.1. There Israel in her need is likened to a lonely widow who weeps bitterly in the night, thus here it is a suitable picture of the people of God, especially when they are in periods of distress.

This woman, in her need, came to the judge pleading for justice, and using the only weapon that she had, persistence. The verb is sometimes translated ‘avenge me’, but it does not necessarily signify a desire for revenge. It is more concerned with obtaining justice. It is on this case a demand for her legal rights. She is probably wanting what is due to her, or to be protected from interference. We could possibly better translate as ‘give me justice against my adversary’ (compare Acts 7.24; Romans 12.19; 2 Corinthians 10.6). But she knew that she had only one weapon, persistence. With her lack of influence that was the only way that she could hope to get a hearing.

If in fact he was a Jewish judge she should have been first in his list, for the Old Testament makes quite clear that judges judge in the place of God (Deuteronomy 16.18-20; Psalm 82.2-4) and that special care that should be taken of widows and orphans (see Exodus 22.22-24; Deuteronomy 10.18; Psalm 68.5; Isaiah 1.17; Jeremiah 22.3). But whether he was or not he does not take her widowhood into account. He is more concerned for an easy life.

18.4-5 “And he would not for a while, but afterwards he said within himself,”

For a while the judge ignored her pleas, putting off her case and hoping that she would go away. But when she kept coming to him continually he gave in. He recognised that she was not just going to go away and that the best thing to do in order to obtain a quiet life was to deal with her request. Her persistence had won through.

18.5 “ ‘Though I fear not God, nor regard man, yet because this widow troubles me, I will avenge her, lest she wear me out by her continual coming.’ ”

In the parable the judge’s motives were not good ones. It was not his concern for justice that brought him to his decision, but his concern that he might simply be worn out by her constant pleas. The verbs used are strong ones. So he decided that in spite of the fact that he was usually unmoved by anything outside himself he would give her justice. One thing that he could not hold out against was an unwearying persistence. We can compare the principle described here with that in mind in the parable of the importunate neighbour where the same principles applied (11.5-8). We are, however, told in both cases that we are not to see God as like this. That is why the judge is differentiated from God by being called unjust. God does delay, but His delays are caused by other factors which He has to keep in mind, such as the making up of the number of the elect, and His compassion for those of lost mankind still awaiting salvation. We are thus to see it as saying, if men will act like this from a bad motive, how much more will God act like it from a good motive.

‘Lest she wear me out.’ The verb originally mean ‘to blacken the eye’ so that it is fairly strong.

But there is evidence for the lesser meaning of ‘wearing out’ as having become attached to it. He is not afraid of being assaulted. He is much more concerned about having his life continually disturbed.

18.6 ‘And the Lord said, “Hear what the unrighteous judge says,”

Jesus then said to His disciples, ‘listen well to what this unrighteous judge says’. We can compare here the use of ‘unrighteous’ with regard to the estate manager in 16.8. In both cases it indicates that they were unscrupulous and did their own thing. They looked at things from a worldly viewpoint. They were not God-like. So in order to get over a powerful point Jesus was not averse to using such people as illustrations, for it often made the point that He was seeking to get over clear cut, while at the same time the reference to ‘unrighteous’ is a warning against applying it too literally to God.

The point being made here is that the widow’s constant pleas can be compared in some ways with genuine intercessory prayers to God, because they were effective in obtaining from the object of those pleas a ready and complete answer. The underlying lesson is that of persistence. But because he was ‘unrighteous’ we are to recognise that his reasons for giving way were totally unlike those of God. God does not respond to our prayers because He is weary of them. Nor will we get our own way by wearing Him down. In fact elsewhere He has stressed that He does not answer people’s prayers just because of their ‘much speaking’ (Matthew 6.7). What He does guarantee to hear are genuine prayers concerning matters which are His concern, which because they matter a great deal to the suppliant, are persistent. And what Jesus is urging here is that we continue constantly with such prayers. This is not speaking of prayers just for ourselves. It has in mind prayers for what is right, prayers concerning the wellbeing, and spiritual growth and protection of His people.

18.7 “And shall not God give justice to (avenge, deal justly with the case of) his elect, who cry to him day and night, and he is longsuffering over them (or ‘even though he wait a long time over them?’) ”

Thus, says Jesus, ‘if even an unrighteous judge gives way before continual pleading, how much more we can be certain that God, the supremely righteous Judge, will listen to the voice, not of one who is just an unknown woman, but of those whom He has chosen Who are personally known to Him, when they cry to Him day and night.’ He may seem to delay, like the judge did. He may indeed wait for what seems to us a long time (another hint that the end will not come as soon as many expected). But of one thing we can be sure, justice will come. God’s way, which is what should be the great desire of His people, will triumph, and His people will prosper and be blessed.

Note that Jesus’ description of God’s people as His elect comes regularly in relation to the second coming (Mark 13.20, 22, 27; Matthew 22.14; 24.31). The direction of our prayers as ‘the elect’ are therefore to be seen as having that in mind.

‘Day and night.’ Compare 2.37. It is a picture of persistent prayer.

‘And He is longsuffering over them’, or ‘even though He wait a long time over them.’ Either is a possible translation. The verb can mean ‘to wait patiently’ (James 5.7), ‘to be dilatory or slow’, or ‘to be forbearing/longsuffering’ (Matthew 18.26, 29; 1 Corinthians 13.4; 1 Thessalonians 5.14; 2 Peter 3.9). We may see in it here a combination of the first and the third senses. It includes the thought of delaying in order to give people time to repent because He is longsuffering, and delaying in order finally to complete what He has purposed, because nothing short of what He has purposed will do. He will not be satisfied until every one of His own is gathered in. The Shepherd is still busy. Other suggested translations are, ‘Is He slow to help them?’ (signifying, of course, that He is not), or, ‘Is He not patient with them?’ (signifying that He never gets tired of hearing the prayers of His children).

18.8a “I say to you, that he will avenge them speedily.”

This could mean that when it finally comes it will come with speed, it will occur suddenly, unexpectedly and without delay. And then all will be put right. And as He then makes clear, this refers to the Second Coming. Alternatively it could mean ‘soon’. But in that case it is to be seen as ‘soon’ from God’s perspective. Delay will occur no longer than is necessary. (See 2 Peter 3.8-10).

In local situations deliverance may occur almost at once, and certainly after not too long a time, but overall it will occur in God’s time. Things will never get out of hand. The second part of the verse might be seen as favouring speed of fulfilment when the time comes. Once the time does come for God to act nothing will delay its accomplishment. It will be swift and sure. Thus He makes clear that all for which we pray should be prayed for, and seen, in the light of that Day. Our main thoughts in praying should therefore be set on things above, and on the fulfilment of His purposes, as in the Lord’s prayer. And as we pray we can then be absolutely confident that it will come about. But why then pray? It is not in order to change God’s mind about things. It is to be because we are cooperating with God in the family business, and because we are often applying the general to our local situation. It is in order that we might remember that God is in it with us, and so that we might recognise and acknowledge continually our dependence on Him.

18.8b “Nevertheless, when the Son of man comes, will he find faith on the earth?”

And then comes the challenge, the open question, that in one way or another regularly comes at the end of what Jesus has to say. And that question is as to whether when the end comes, and Jesus comes in His glory, He will find persevering faith on earth. Whether He will find persistent and continuing prayer. It is a challenge to His listeners. It is not said, however, in order to instil doubt, but in order to encourage persistence in prayer in the face of whatever comes on them. Elsewhere it is made perfectly plain that in the last days there will be faith on earth (e.g. 1 Thessalonians 4.17-18; Revelation 11.1-13). There will be many who, like the skin-diseased Samaritan who was healed, will persistently return to give glory and thanksgiving to God. And this will be so in spite of any tribulation that they might face. This is especially exemplified in the Book of Revelation where the most dreadful events are intermingled with the thought of the endurance of God’s true people.

Alternately ‘ten pistin’ (thus with the article) could signify ‘those who are trusting’, so placing more emphasis on the believing people rather than their faith, or it could signify ‘the faith’, indicating what had been taught and is believed.

The Parable Of The One Who Trusted In Himself That He Was Supremely Acceptable to God, And Was Not, And The One Who Was Doubtful About His Acceptability With God Who Was Made Fully Acceptable (18.9-14).

The parable that we have just considered demonstrated how God’s people were to await the coming of the Son of Man in glory in continual prayer. In the parable that follows we will learn how to distinguish between those who will in that Day be taken, and those who will be left, those who are accounted righteous, and those who are not.

Indeed this theme will continue on for some time. For the failure of the Pharisee to come to God because he was so taken up with himself, and the humble and contrite approach of the public servant (18.9-14), will be followed by the open-hearted response of little believing children who willingly and open-heartedly come (18.15-17), which will again be followed by the story of one whose riches prevented him from coming (18.18-30). All are given the opportunity of coming, but not all will take it.

In this parable now we have a twofold picture drawn of one who trusted in himself that he was supremely acceptable to God, and was not, and the one who was doubtful about his

acceptability with God, and who nevertheless was made fully acceptable because he repented and called for mercy. It is often called 'the Parable of the Pharisee and the Public Servant'.

In the Section chiasmus it is paralleled very aptly with Jesus' words about the fact that whatever we do for God can never be brought up as evidence that we are deserving before Him, as justification for our position before Him. Even if we are perfect in all that we do we are simply achieving what it is our duty that we should do. Should we therefore come short in any one thing we will have failed in the fulfilment of our duty and can no longer claim merit (compare James 2.10).

This was what the Pharisee failed to recognise. He thought that he could start with a clean sheet and build up righteousness before God. He thought that he could earn God's favour and build up merit. What he failed to see were all the ways in which he had come short, which more than cancelled out what he had achieved (which was what he should have done anyway). In contrast the public servant came recognising his shortcomings, and claiming no merit of his own. And because of that he was received with forgiveness, and was put in the right with God. He would be ready when the Son of Man came. He was the evidence of faith on earth.

In a day when public servants were held in such hatred, and Pharisees in such high regard, Jesus' words here would have a salutary and important effect in changing people's views, and making them think again, both about the prominence of Pharisaic teaching, and about the open door that the arrival of the Kingly Rule of God opened for sinners of all kinds. All would know that if a public servant could be saved, anyone could!

- a He spoke also this parable to certain who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and set all others at nought' (9).
- b "Two men went up into the temple to pray, the one a Pharisee, and the other a public servant" (10).
- c "The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank you, that I am not as the rest of men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this public servant' " (11).
- d "I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I get" (12).
- c "But the public servant, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes to heaven, but smote his breast, saying, 'God, be you merciful to me a sinner' " (13).
- b "I say to you, This man went down to his house accounted as righteous rather than the other" (14a).
- a "For every one who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted" (14b).

Note that 'a' speaks of one who sees himself as righteous and sets others at nought, while in the parallel the one who so exalts himself will be abased, while the humble, who had been set at nought, will be exalted. In 'b' we have the contrast of two men who went to the Temple to pray and in the parallel we learn the contrasting results. In 'c' we have the Pharisees prayer, and in the parallel the public servant's prayer. In 'd' centrally we have the basis for the Pharisee's self-righteousness (possibly the last part of 'c' should also come in here). This expands on the fact that he trusted in himself that he was righteous.

18.9 'And he spoke also this parable to certain who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and set all others at nought,'

The people described here are in direct contrast with those who will have faith on earth, or who will be the believing ones, when He comes (verse 8). They were confident in their own righteousness, and considered all others as less righteous than they. They based that belief on their fulfilment of the requirements of the Law in accordance with their own traditions, which placed an emphasis on the outward aspects of it. They overlooked what was central to the Law, the love of God and neighbour. But worse still they set at nought and treated with

contempt those who did not follow their ways. And so that none might be in any doubt who were mainly in mind He told a parable in order to illustrate His comment.

18.10 “Two men went up into the temple to pray, the one a Pharisee, and the other a public servant.”

The contrast is between a Pharisee and a public servant. Now let us be quite clear about this, outwardly the Pharisee lived the better and more religious life. He would be highly respected, and probably a little feared. And in comparison with the public servant (before he had come to the attitude that resulted in his prayer), the Pharisee would have been seen by all as so superior to him in God’s eyes that any comparison in the goodness stakes would have been no contest. It is not, however, that that we are called on to look at. For what Jesus wants us to see is that both were equally sinful in the sight of God. Both had ‘come short of the glory of God (Romans 3.23). What Jesus looked at was the attitude of heart.

This must not, of course be seen as Jesus’ view of all Pharisees and public servants. There were humble and godly Pharisees, and there were all too many evil and hard hearted public servants. What Jesus was concerned to bring out was that while man looks at the outward appearance, God looks at the heart. And here were two concerning whom a superficial verdict would bring one conclusion, while a close examination would bring another. Jesus refused to write off public servants as being unable to repent and come to God.

‘Went up.’ Going to the Temple was always described as going up, for it was on the Temple mount. Going there to pray at the time of the morning and evening sacrifices was a regular feature of life for pious Jews, but it was always open for prayer at all times. It was partly because the noise caused by the trading in the Temple hindered prayer in the court of the Gentiles that Jesus would later evict the traders from the Temple (19.45-46).

18.11 “The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, ‘God, I thank you, that I am not as the rest of men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this public servant.’ ”

‘Stood and prayed thus with himself.’ It was normal to pray standing, thus it would not need to be mentioned. The mention of it is probably therefore in order to bring out his pompous attitude. He wanted to be seen and admired. He would probably pray aloud, which was normal, but he did it quietly (‘with himself’). This too was normal practise. Rabbis who prayed loudly were criticised.

The Pharisee was full of pride at the wonder of his own life and achievements. Surely God must see that he stood out from all others. He had never tried to cheat people out of their possessions, or extort money from them, he had never behaved unjustly towards anyone, he had never committed adultery, and he had certainly not betrayed his people like ‘this public servant’ had. And it was probably all true. But what he did not realise was that the thing that stood out as separating him from the rest of men was above all his arrogant pride. What was not there in his life was any sign of repentance or awareness of need for forgiveness. He was self-satisfied and His heart was hardened against his own sin.

A further glance at his prayer will bring out its main emphasis, ‘Look God -- I -- I -- I -- I -- I.’ He was like a bullfrog puffing out its chest to attract attention to itself. It was all about himself. He had no wider vision.

We must not assume that all Pharisees were like this. We may think of Nicodemus in John 3.1-8, and of Gamaliel, to name but two. But a good many certainly were, and all too regularly they echoed the popular prayer, ‘I thank you that you have not made me a Gentile --- I thank you that you have not made me a woman’. And they not only prayed it, they thought it. Some went even further. One Pharisee once said, ‘If there are only two righteous men in the world, I and my son are those two. If there is only one, I am he.’ The Pharisee praying in the Temple would not have stood a chance against him.

18.12 “I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I get.”

It was customary among the Pharisees to tithe even the smallest thing that they received ‘from God’, even when it was not required by the Law (11.42; Matthew 23.23). Furthermore they fasted every Monday and Thursday, as well as on special days. The purpose of this latter was in order to make them humble, but always the danger was, as in this example, that it could make them inordinately proud (compare Matthew 6.1, 16-18). Not all prayer is holy.

So all in all God obtained from his prayers a good picture of his pride, his self-conceit and his total self-righteousness. He had justified himself to his own satisfaction, but had revealed all too much to God. For God, who looked at his heart and could only condemn him for the sin that He found within it, would mark him off as another failure.

18.13 “But the public servant, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes to heaven, but smote his breast, saying, ‘God, be you merciful to me (literally ‘be propitiated towards me’) a sinner.’ ”

The public servant was another matter. He really was a sinner, and he knew it and regretted it. He did not approach as close as he could to the Sanctuary, where all would see him. He stood afar off. Possibly he had seen the Pharisee and thought himself not worthy to be near him. The last thing that he wanted was for God to be contrasting him with the noble Pharisee! And he did not look upwards and raise his hands in prayer, he bowed his head and beat his breast, and cried out, ‘God, be you merciful to me a sinner’.

Anyone standing nearby would have had no doubt in whom God was well pleased, because they could not hear their prayers, or see their hearts. Their vote would have gone to the Pharisee, a splendid figure as he stood there before God bearing all the signs of his ‘piety’. But God’s view was different from theirs. In the case of the public servant He accepted his change of heart and his cry for forgiveness, and he was forgiven and accounted as righteous in God’s sight. But the Pharisee was left in the same condition as he was when he came in, self-satisfied and content, and unforgiven, for he really had in essence prayed to himself.

18.14a “I say to you, This man went down to his house accounted as righteous rather than the other.’

Then Jesus pointed out to His listeners that it was the public servant rather than the Pharisee who went away accounted as righteous in God’s sight, for the Pharisee had justified himself, and his plea had been rejected. The public servant had been justified by God’s mercy to a repentant sinner seeking forgiveness, and was therefore accepted before Him. The proviso, of course, was that it was his intention to go away and seek to live a changed life. But that is assumed.

18.14b “For every one who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

Jesus then summed up the conclusion to be drawn from the parable. Those who exalt themselves will be humbled. Those who humble themselves will be exalted. For God scatters the proud in the imagination of their hearts (1.51) and exalts those of low degree (1.52). He draws near to those with a humble and contrite heart, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite (Isaiah 57.15).

A further example of this will now be given in the person of young children who are brought to Jesus. It is at this point that Luke again takes up and uses the Marcan narrative, which he had ceased using at 9.50.

Young Children Are Welcomed By Jesus (18.15-17).

A special example of the humble who will be exalted, and of those who will be ready for the coming of the Son of Man, is now given in the little children who because of their humility and

innocence as children are welcomed into the presence of the King, at which He points out that all who would enter under the Kingly Rule of God must come in the same way as little children, in humble and accepting trust.

These children are described as ‘infants’, and then as ‘little children’. The description ‘from infancy’ was used elsewhere as showing the point from which Timothy learned the Scriptures (2 Timothy 3.15), and thus ‘infancy’ included the first years of understanding. And as here the little children are used as an example of how to receive the Kingly Rule of God they were clearly not babes in arms. They were infants such as go to infant school.

In those days children were very much to be seen and not heard. Few teachers would have welcomed such children. But Jesus saw their readiness to receive truth and welcomed them. He did not feel they were a waste of His time. Rather He saw them as ripe for receiving the truth about God, and that the opportunity should be taken while it was there. And besides He loved them and knew that they loved Him.

The analysis is simple:

- a They were bringing to him also their infants, that he should touch them, but when the disciples saw it, they rebuked them (15).
- b Jesus called them to him, saying, “Allow the little children to come to me, and forbid them not, for to such belongs the Kingly Rule of God” (16).
- a “Truly I say to you, Whoever shall not receive the Kingly Rule of God in the same way as a little child, he shall in no way enter into it” (17).

Note that in ‘a’ the infants are brought to Him for Him to touch, thus being brought under His sway, and in the parallel this is how all must enter the Kingly Rule of God, by coming simply and humbly to the King. Central is the principle that the way into the Kingly Rule of God is to respond openly and honestly like a small child does.

18.15 ‘And they were bringing to him also their infants, that he should touch them, but when the disciples saw it, they rebuked them.’

The scene is a very simple one. The believing mothers, who would have told the young children all about Jesus, now brought them, eager faced and willing, to be received and touched by Him. The use of the term ‘infants’ by Luke, which he alters from *paidion* in Mark, is not in order to indicate babes in arms, but in order to bring out the contrast with adults which, by means of words of Jesus, he will use as an object lesson. For it is this aspect of things which makes him bring in the story in the context of similar stories which describe how God can be approached.

A practise had in fact grown up of bringing children to be blessed by the Elders and Scribes on the evening of the Day of Atonement. Thus to bring them to the great Prophet for the same purpose, while He was passing through their territory, would seem to the mothers a right and pious thing to do.

But the disciples, probably concerned at how tired Jesus was, sternly tried to keep them away. Their view was that Jesus had much more important things on His mind than children. Children were generally viewed in those days as needing to keep their place.

18.16 ‘But Jesus called them to him, saying, “Allow the little children to come to me, and forbid them not, for to such belongs the Kingly Rule of God.” ’

Jesus, however, saw things differently. He told His disciples to let the children come to Him. Indeed, He says, none have more right to the Kingly Rule of God than they, for they are so open to it. It belongs to them more than anyone else. They have no barriers built up within their hearts which prevent their open-hearted response to God.

18.17 “Truly I say to you, Whoever shall not receive the Kingly Rule of God in the same way

as a little child, he shall in no wise enter into it.”

And then He adds a solemn saying, as evidenced by its opening words, the solemn ‘truly I say to you’ which occur only seven times in Luke. And the point of His saying is that anyone who receives the Kingly Rule of God must do so in the ready and willing way in which a little child does. For there is no other way to receive it. These children would have no hang ups about obeying God, they would see it as the right thing to do (even though they might sometimes forget it on the spur of the moment). It is only adults (over eevens) whose hearts, like that of the rich young ruler in the next story and the Pharisee in the previous story, become hardened against obedience to Him.

Arguments about whether receiving the Kingly Rule of God refers to the present Kingly Rule, present in Jesus, or the future heavenly Kingly Rule are unnecessary. It is the whole concept of the responsiveness of hearts towards God that is in mind, and that includes both this world and the next.

The Wealthy Young Ruler And The Use of Possessions (18.18-30).

Following on the delightful response of these children we have a classic example of one who was not ready to receive the Kingly Rule of God as a little child. For he had become tangled up in his riches. This was in complete contrast with little children, and with the blind beggar in the story that follows. Most would have envied him his riches, but here we are to learn that they were his downfall.

In the chiasitic analysis of this whole section this passage parallels that of the rich man and Lazarus (16.19-31). There too wealth was the rich man’s downfall, while Lazarus, like the Apostles, benefited by the fact that riches, of which he had none, were not around to prevent him from coming to God.

Analysis.

- a A certain ruler asked Him, saying, “Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?”, and Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me good? none is good, save one, even God” (18-19).
- b “You know the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honour your father and mother.” And he said, “All these things have I observed from my youth up” When Jesus heard it, he said to him, “One thing you yet lack, sell all that you have, and distribute it to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven, and come, follow me” (20-22).
- c But when he heard these things, he became exceedingly sorrowful, for he was very rich’ (23).
- d And Jesus seeing him said, “How hard it will be for those who have riches to enter into the Kingly Rule of God!” (24).
- e “For it is easier for a camel to enter in through a needle’s eye, than for a rich man to enter into the Kingly Rule of God” (25).
- d And those who heard it said, “Then who can be saved?” But He said, “The things which are impossible with men are possible with God” (26-27).
- c And Peter said, “Lo, we have left our own, and followed you” (28).
- b ‘And He said to them, “Truly I say to you, There is no man who has left house, or wife, or brethren, or parents, or children, for the Kingly Rule of God’s sake” (29).
- a “Who will not receive a great deal more in this time, and in the world to come eternal life” (30).

Note that in ‘a’ the question was concerning how to receive eternal life, and the parallel describes who will receive eternal life. In ‘b’ we have the posing of the commandments and the one thing lacking, and in the parallel the contrast with those who did forsake all. In ‘c’ the ruler is sorrowful at the thought of losing his riches, while in the parallel Peter rejoices in it.

In 'd' Jesus confirms how hard it is for a rich man to enter under the Kingly Rule of God, and in the parallel He explains that it is possible with God. In 'e' is the central point stressing the difficulty for the rich in entering under the Kingly Rule of God. Here was direct evidence of the truth at which the Pharisees had laughed (16.14). Of course, they would never have dreamed of selling all and giving it to the poor. But the failure to be willing to do this was keeping this ruler back from his dream. And the whole point of what Jesus had said was that their obedience to God, and especially their compassion, was similarly lacking.

18.18 'And a certain ruler asked him, saying, "Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"

Luke tells us that the man was a ruler, either a ruler of the synagogue or someone in authority locally. He may even have been a member of the Sanhedrin (compare John 3.1). But he neither tells us that he was rich nor that he was young. The stress is all on his being a man of status faced up with the possibility of greater status, and missing out because he was rich.

'Good teacher' was an unusual way of addressing a Rabbi. The adjective 'good' was usually retained for speaking about God, although there are a number of examples in the Old Testament of men being called 'good'. Never, however, as having been addressed as such. So either this man was very discerning, or he was using flattery. Or perhaps he was simply impressed by Jesus' pure goodness which shone out from Him in a way that made Him different from all others, and thus could not help what he said.

'What shall I do to inherit eternal life?' This was the burning question of the day among pious Jews, how to ensure that they partook of the life of the age to come by being reckoned as good Israelites. He wanted to know what the standard was by which he could judge his and their acceptance.

18.19 'And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? None is good, save one, even God." '

Jesus challenges his use of 'good' in this way, asking him to consider what he means by it. He does not deny that it is true, but points out that its usual usage at that time was as something reserved to God. The question therefore is as to whether the man has used it carelessly, or whether he intends by it some deeper meaning. However else we interpret it, Jesus was clearly intending to make the young man think, not repudiating the idea out of hand. He in no way denies its application to Himself. Had He not acknowledged its justice He would have rejected it out of hand, openly and clearly, reacting in horror. But the question that He was asking was, does the man himself realise what he is saying? He will certainly need to recognise something special about Jesus in view of the challenge about to be brought to him. But Jesus will not make the claim for Himself. He is the very opposite of the Pharisee that we left behind earlier. He leaves others to make that decision. He will not boast about Himself. (Although elsewhere He can say, 'which of you convicts Me of sin?' (John 8.46). Again as here He brings out the fact by a question, not by a claim. Pure goodness makes itself known in action and life not by claims).

Note on 'Why Do You Call Me Good?'

Various alternatives have been suggested for what Jesus meant by this question. They are of varying quality.

- 1). Jesus meant, "You must not call me good unless you recognise me as God. If you can see my goodness, learn your lesson from it as to Who and What I am.'
- 2). Jesus is indicating that His goodness is dependent on the Father's goodness, (see John 5.19) so that the title of absolute goodness belongs only to the Father.
- 3). Jesus was not prepared to accept the title of good until His probation was past. Until His life was complete He would not have earned the honour.
- 4). Jesus is taking the attitude of a man towards God, as He always did. He was here as

a man among men pointing them to God. They were not to look to honour Him, however good He was, but to honour His Father.

- 5). He is stating a recognised truth and rebuking the man for his casual attitude towards goodness, revealed by his using the term ‘good’ without thinking it through.
- 6). He recognises that the man sees Him as uniquely good and is seeking to imitate Him in order to receive eternal life (compare in Matthew, ‘what good thing must I do’). He realises that the man is therefore aiming to be like Him, and really thinks that he can be. But He does not want him to try to imitate Him in this way. He wants him to look to God as his standard. So He is seeking to turn his thoughts away from Himself as the standard of goodness to God.

Certain conclusions must be drawn. Firstly that only God Himself can be seen as truly ‘good’. Secondly that Jesus does not vociferously deny the appellation, which He would have done had He seen it as totally unfitting, but wants the man to think through what he has said. When a Rabbi asked questions of his hearers it was in order to expand on the idea under discussion. Thirdly that He is unhappy about the way that the man is using the idea of goodness, and wants him to be more careful in his use of the term.

A further thing that must ever be borne in mind is that Jesus, while constantly drawing attention to the sin of others, never Himself shows any consciousness of sin. In someone of His moral sensitivity that is a clear indication that He saw Himself as without sin. Thus the solution we come to must take that into account.

End of note.

18.20 “You know the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honour your father and mother.”

Jesus then takes up the question with what was probably a stock reply, so that he can search out the man’s thinking. He cites the main part of the covenant of Sinai that applies to attitude towards others (Exodus 20.1-17), omitting those which refer to God. Perhaps He acknowledges thereby that no man can determine whether he is treating God rightly. He can only test it by considering his behaviour towards men and women. Or perhaps He could see what this man’s god was, and was waiting to apply that later. But He certainly does intend the man to see His words in the context of the whole Law, and in the light of His own teaching on the matter (see Matthew 5).

Outwardly the commandments mentioned would not be difficult for a man in the ruler’s position to keep if they were just taken as they were stated. What would be more difficult would be keeping the underlying implications as later expounded by Moses, and as expanded by Himself in Matthew 5, implications relating to thoughts and desires. But He must also have been aware that the ruler would not be contented with this reply. It was a deliberately standard reply that anyone could have given him This was not why he had sought out a prophet. It really did not solve his dilemma. The point was that he knew that his life was not satisfactory.

Perhaps Jesus’ aim was also to make the ruler ask himself, ‘Why has He not told me that I must worship only God’, ‘why has He not said that I must not covet? (The commandments that He has omitted) For Jesus already knew what the young man really worshipped, and that he coveted, and He would shortly be coming on to it.

Note On The Order In Which Luke Cites The Commandments.

The order of the commandments as given by Luke differs from that in Exodus 20 in the Hebrew text, but it may well have been a recognised order in use in 1st century AD (compare Romans 13.9; James 2.11), and is found in some LXX texts of Deuteronomy 5. Or it may simply be the order in which Luke’s source remembered them, or even Luke’s preferred

order, with the one he wanted to stress put first. Perhaps he felt that adultery was the sin that the ruler (or his readers) might be most likely to have committed of the two primary commandments. Matthew and Mark both have it slightly differently, following the normal order. But the basic ideas are the same. All of them put 'Honour your father and your mother' after the primary list, probably because they saw the other commandments as all going together.

But whereas Luke only selects out what are actual commandments in the texts he knows, Mark adds 'You shall not defraud', and Matthew adds, 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' We may see it as probable that Jesus gave a longer list than any of them record, but that Luke omitted what he did not see as actual commandments (he chose to do so, for he had Mark in front of him). We do know that 'you shall love your neighbour as yourself' is cited by Jesus (and Luke 10.27) at another time, and that Luke often seeks to prevent repetition. But the basic idea is clear in all, that he should keep the commandments and obey the Law.

End of note.

18.21 'And he said, "All these things have I observed from my youth up."

The ruler recognises that Jesus' reply is not really answering his question, but confirms that from his youth he has kept them all. It is really a polite reply saying, 'well I know that, but it is not enough'. He is saying by this that he is looking for something more. And by it he is confirming that he really has sought to please God and follow His commandments, but that he is still aware of something missing. He would certainly have felt that up to now he had learned nothing worthwhile from Jesus, but he was also probably expecting the prophet to go deeper. After all, that was why you went to a prophet.

18.22 'And when Jesus heard it, he said to him, "One thing you yet lack, sell all that you have, and distribute it to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven, and come, follow me." '

To Jesus the ruler's reply was revealing. It indicated that his thoughts on the matter were rather superficial. He revealed no sense of sin, nor had he broached anything beyond a rather trite orthodoxy. Indeed his attitude had told Him what He wanted to know. That here was a man who wanted a comparatively easy ride to eternal life, while at the same time genuinely desiring it. So He quietly pointed out to him how he could achieve the one thing lacking, by selling all his possessions and giving them to the poor, and then following Him. If he had really meant anything by his use of 'good', and if he really wanted to please God, this was what he should do. It would immediately free him from what was holding him back, and would bring him violently into the Kingly Rule of God as he followed the King in His life of wandering, having nowhere to lay his head. And it would free him from his idol. He would really begin to love God. And he would be freed from coveting.

And what was more he would lay up treasure in Heaven, and the result would be that his heart would be there as well, and this would ensure that he inherited eternal life.

18.23 'But when he heard these things, he became exceedingly sorrowful, for he was very rich.'

When the man heard this he was struck with great sorrow, for he was very rich. Jesus had taken him at his word, and had revealed to him the one thing that was preventing his life from being pleasing to God, and that would prevent him from having eternal life through faith in Jesus. And that was his great love for riches, a love that threatened constantly to overwhelm his love for God and prevent it from coming to genuine expression, and the more so as he grew older. Once that was dealt with, Jesus tells him, and he was following Him, he would experience eternal life in himself (John 5.24; 10.10), and be sure of its enjoyment into the distant future.

It was a crucial moment. Some stirring within had caused this ruler to seek out Jesus, and

now here he was at the crossroads. He could set his heart to follow Christ, or he could sink back into luxury and apathy. Jesus, who could see into the depths of his heart, knew that he could not do both. And Jesus no doubt only had to take one look at the man's face to know what his decision was going to be.

Note how Luke, who from the beginning has avoided some of the sentimentality of Mark now moves immediately on to the crunch point. He does not want us to be taken up with the ruler's dilemma. He wants us rather to immediately face our own dilemma. What is there in our lives that prevents our full obedience and dedication to God?

18.24 'And Jesus seeing him said, "How hard it will be for those who have riches to enter into the Kingly Rule of God!"

So Jesus pointed out to him how hard it was for someone who had riches to come under the Kingly Rule of God. For to be under the Kingly Rule of God means that God holds the reins, that God determines each moment what we should do, and that we acknowledge that all that we have belongs to Him. To come under His control thus means a man putting his riches under God's control, for Him to use as He wills. And to maintain such a position in a world where the rich man was king would be very difficult. Furthermore in the case of this man Jesus did not think that he could cope with it. He feared that unless his riches were gone completely it would not be long before Mammon again got the upper hand. His only real hope was therefore to rid himself of the weight that so easily beset him while he was thinking about it. Then he would be truly free. There are moments in every man and woman's life where they cannot afford to make the wrong choice. This man would theoretically be continually free to make the choice that was put before him. But both Jesus and he knew that the crunch moment was now. If he walked away now he might never be brought to this position again. His very riches might prevent it. How many of us there are that look back and think, 'if only I had made the right choice then'. But if we do we need not fear for this was not necessarily the ruler's last chance. If he repented God could 'make him again' (Jeremiah 18.4).

Some men can cope with wealth, for it means little to them and they use it for the good of others without it affecting their spiritual lives. To them God is all and their wealth merely a convenience made available to God and usable for Him. But for most it is a continual temptation to sink back into apathy and sin. And Jesus could tell enough about the man to realise that the only way that this rich ruler could succeed in breaking the spell of his riches was by getting rid of them all. (It may be noted that a little child would have had no difficulty in dealing with the question, which was why its coming under the Kingly Rule of God would be so much easier. To a child riches would not have seemed important. But for a man who had begun to know and feel something of his way in the world it was a different matter. He knew the value of riches. He knew that they brought him esteem. After all what was it that had made him a ruler? And now he knew too the stranglehold that they could have on the human heart).

18.25 "For it is easier for a camel to enter in through a needle's eye, than for a rich man to enter into the Kingly Rule of God."

Then Jesus spoke the immortal words known to Christians world over. 'It is easier for a camel to enter in through a needle's eye, than for a rich man to enter into the Kingly Rule of God.' There is no reason for us to take these words as having any other than their natural meaning. All could imagine the eye of a needle. All could visualise a camel coming to a rather abrupt halt as it faced it, and baying, 'Don't be ridiculous'. It was simply stating the extremeness of the impossibility. And there is no real evidence of any such thing as a 'needle gate' in Jerusalem at that time, nor a need to turn to an obscure word which might mean hawser. Jesus really was thinking of a camel and a rather large needle.

Why then did Jesus use this illustration of a camel? Apart from displaying a sense of humour

and giving a picture really worth remembering, the whole point was that the camel viewed the eye of the needle like a rich man viewed the challenge of life without riches, as not worth taking trouble over because it was impossible. It took one look at the eye of the needle and then turned languidly away, just as the rich man, when he was inspired by better thoughts, would take one look at the problems that might arise, and then give up. He was safely settled down in his own comforts. He did not need to alter anything. But the result was that unless he removed all dependence on them his urges towards goodness would always end up with his lying back and relaxing again, putting it off until another day. Like the camel he would turn away from the open door because going through it demanded too much from him. It would all be far too difficult and far too demanding. And then like the rich man in the parable he would die with his position unresolved.

So if we have not learned the lesson about riches from the unrighteous estate manager, and from the rich man and Lazarus, let us now learn it from the real life example of this rich ruler. Let us learn that our wealth and our security of life and whatever else it is that we consider important to us can be a curse to us and not a blessing. For they can prevent our being thrown upon God. What we too must do is thrust aside whatever it is that is holding us back, and then we too will be able to 'inherit eternal life'.

18.26 'And those who heard it said, "Then who can be saved?"

Those who were listening were stood there in amazement. They had grown up to believe that men prospered materially because they were good. Many probably looked on this rich ruler as a model. And if this man with all his privileges and status was actually going to find it difficult to be saved, what chance had others who did not have his advantages? After all his wealth enabled him to be good without having to worry about the financial effect of it, and he would be courted by the religious leaders, and could give generous alms, and gain a good reputation, and in general be good without too much effort. He had every opportunity. But what they failed to see was that man's heart is so sinful that that is precisely why the rich man would not be good. Because of his wealth, consideration concerning his heart's condition would never be thrust on him by his problems and needs. He would never be called on to depend on God. That is why God tells us that it is when His judgments are in the earth that men learn righteousness. We need something to shake us out of our apathy.

18.27 But he said, "The things which are impossible with men are possible with God."

Then Jesus explains that what is impossible with men is possible with God. He can enable wealthy men to walk humbly before Him as Abraham did, just as He can enable a poor man like Lazarus to do so. He is able to save to the uttermost all those who come to Him through Jesus. For He is the God of the impossible. It is a reminder that but for God's all prevailing goodness not one of us would be saved. We owe any hope that we have to God.

But nevertheless it is still necessary for us to thrust aside anything that hinders us from following God fully. For He could have added that in the case of this young man the problem was that he was too bound to his possessions. He knew that unless they were removed they would ever be a burden around his neck. His heart would never really be set on God. Thus he had to choose between God and Mammon, and he had to choose decisively. That at least is spared to those who have few riches (although even those can get a grip on us).

18.28 'And Peter said, "Lo, we have left our own, and followed you." '

Impetuous Peter, ever the one to break in, was now stirred in his heart by the thought of the impossibility of salvation without God's working in the heart and cried, 'Look, we have left all and followed you, like you are asking this ruler to do. What about us?' He was probably seeking to gain assurance for himself and his fellow disciples that they did have the certainty of eternal life rather than thinking only of reward. He wanted to be sure that God was doing the impossible in his heart. For the disciples were still very much learners (as will shortly

become apparent in verses 31-34). That is why Jesus could answer as He did.

Note the words 'we have left our own'. This gave a wide coverage, their own homes, their own land, their own fishing businesses, their own families, their own environment, their own possessions, and so on. All that they had treasured they had left for Him.

18.29-30 'And he said unto them, "Truly I say to you, There is no man who has left house, or wife, or brethren, or parents, or children, for the Kingly Rule of God's sake, who will not receive a great deal more in this time, and in the world to come eternal life."

Then Jesus assured them all that no one who had genuinely, for the sake of the Kingly Rule of God as revealed in Him, left behind what was their own, would lose out by it. They would receive much more than they had lost, both in this world and the next. And this included house, wife, family, children, or anything else. Thus the ruler, having gone away, had had the worst of the bargain. Luke is the only one who includes 'wife' in his list. As ever he is mindful to give due importance to women.

Some react at the thought of leaving wife. But he is not talking about an 'official separation'. He is pointing out that no relationship must prevent men from doing the will of God. Many men leave their wives for long periods for the purpose of building up wealth, with the wife's full approval. Others take them with them. The same was to apply under the Kingly Rule of God. They were certainly not to desert wife or children, but would trust them into the hands of God and their relations. For was His promise not that He would ensure that they would be fully provided for?

It should be noted that this is not a promise of the certainty of worldly prosperity. It is in the end the promise of 'something better', and is giving the certainty that no man who truly serves God will end up disappointed. If he lose his old family, he will have a new family. If he lose his wealth he will receive what is of more value. And so on. God is no man's debtor. But above all he would have life.

The disciples, contented, might well now have felt that they could fall back into the old routine, following the Master, and enjoying their privileges as His servants. But Jesus, aware of what lay ahead, knew that they now had to be brought to the realisation that like the rich ruler they too would soon be called on to make a choice. For like him their world would soon be brought crashing down, even though the challenge would be a different one. And their response then would determine their future. It is this that Jesus now tries to deal with.

Jesus' Disciples Must Recognise That Shortly Their Lives Also Would be Shaken By What Was Soon To Happen To Him. They Too Would Be At A Crossroads (18.31-34).

So Luke now draws attention to the fact that the rich ruler was not the only one unwilling to face up to the truth. Indeed without the grace of God all the disciples would have become lost to Him. For their comprehension too was dim and they had still not been prepared to face up to the realities of the future. They too therefore had nothing to boast about. They would only survive their folly by the grace of God. For they were blind and would need their eyes opened, a fact which is then illustrated by the opening of the eyes of a blind man who presses his way to Jesus and refuses to be silenced until he has come face to face with Him. In the chiasmus of the Section these passages parallel where the Pharisees, who are blind to the truth about Jesus, cavil at His teaching, while all whose eyes are opened and who come to see the truth press into the Kingly Rule of God (16.14-18).

This is the fourth time in Luke that Jesus has warned them of His coming sufferings (9.22, 44; 13.33, but see also 5.35; 12.50; 17.25), but there are none as blind as those who do not want to see. What was to happen was so outside their conception of what they thought ought to happen that they probably thought that by the words He used He was being mysteriously descriptive of the life of discipleship. He had constantly told them that they must take up their

crosses and follow Him, and they were used to Him speaking parabolically. Perhaps what He meant was that He too must be seen as taking up His cross and following God. As in Hosea 6 He would suffer some humiliation and would then come through it triumphantly. But the thought that it would happen to Him literally seemed so impossible and unlikely that it was probably not even considered. They would see His words as simply a very vivid parable.

Analysis.

- **a He took to him the twelve, and said to them (31a).**
- **b “Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and all the things that are written through the prophets will be accomplished to the Son of man” (31b).**
- **c “For he will be delivered up to the Gentiles, and will be mocked, and shamefully treated, and spat on, and they will scourge and kill him, and the third day he will rise again” (32-33).**
- **b And they understood none of these things, and this saying was hid from them (34a).**
- **a And they perceived not the things that were said (34b).**

Note that in ‘a’ we have what He said, and in the parallel they understood nought of what He said. How often we do not listen to God. In ‘b’ they had the prophetic word through the Spirit, and in the parallel such words were hidden from them. Until the Spirit opened their hearts they were blind. And centrally in ‘c’ we have the description of what was hidden from them, God’s whole plan of redemption. They probably actually thought that they were getting on quite well. In truth as yet they could not even pass the initial test.

18.31 ‘And he took to him the twelve, and said to them, “Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and all the things that are written through the prophets will be accomplished to the Son of man.” ’

Jesus now recognised more clearly than ever that His time was approaching. For quite some time He had lived with His eyes ever fixed on His final end in Jerusalem. But now that end was rapidly approaching. And He took the twelve to one side and informed them of His expectations. This was a secret reserved for them. They were approaching Jerusalem, and as far as He was concerned it would be for the last time, for now the things clearly written about Him in the Scriptures must come to fulfilment. The Shepherd must be smitten and the sheep scattered (Zechariah 13.7). The Servant must be arraigned and condemned and suffer for the sins of others (Isaiah 50.3-8; 52.13-53.12). The Son of David must be pierced and made mock of (Psalm 22.12-18). The Son of Man must suffer under the beasts (where the suffering of the ‘son of man’ is depicted in terms of the suffering of the people of the Most High) (Daniel 7). And this had been even more reinforced by the fact that a prophet could not die outside Jerusalem (13.33).

18.32 “For he will be delivered up to the Gentiles, and will be mocked, and shamefully treated, and spat on, and they will scourge and kill him, and the third day he will rise again.”

He then spelled it out in detail. He was to be handed over to the Gentiles. This was the indication of ultimate rejection, of ultimate shame (compare Deuteronomy 28.37; Judges 4.2; Jeremiah 29.18; Lamentations 2.9; Ezekiel 4.13; Hosea 8.8; 9.17). He would be treated as such an outcast that He was not fit to be sentenced in a Jewish court, as though He was cut off from Israel. He would be ‘cast out of the camp’ (Leviticus 24.23; Numbers 5.2, compare Hebrews 13.11-13). His prophetic status would be rejected, and He would be judged as a common criminal.

And then He would be mocked and shamefully treated and spat on. These words had in mind Isaiah 50.6; 53.3; Psalm 22.6-8. He would be the rejected Servant, the rejected Son of David.

Then they would scourge Him and kill Him. In those days no man could come before a Roman court on a serious crime without being scourged (Isaiah 50.6; 53.5). It was in order to bring home to him the seriousness of the situation. And on top of this Jesus also knew what the final

consequence must be. He knew that He must die (Isaiah 53.7-9).

But above all He knew that He would rise again, for He would receive His portion (Isaiah 53.10-12; Hosea 6.1-2). Triumph must follow disaster because God was in it. He would not allow His Holy One to see corruption (Psalm 16.8-11; Acts 2.25-28; 13.34-37). Rather He would be raised to a heavenly throne (Psalm 110.1; Acts 2.34-36).

Thus Jesus saw His whole future in terms of the Old Testament prophecies. It should be noted that as in Mark Jesus in Luke gives no hint of the fact that He will die on the cross. In view of His other sayings about His disciples taking up the cross this lack of mention of the cross would be quite remarkable unless these sayings were actually made before that event, and unchanged afterwards. We can imagine the great temptation to do so.

18.34 ‘And they understood none of these things, and this saying was hid from them, and they perceived not the things that were said.’

We are again reminded that the horrific truth did not come home to the disciples until after it had happened. They could not conceive of such possibilities. They probably thought in parabolic terms, and that He was depicting vividly His own faithful walk as God’s Servant, a walk of service, sacrifice and hardship, as though it were the same as the call to them to take up the cross. He too would ‘take up His cross’. But they closed their minds to the impossible idea of it actually happening. They probably did not even think of it as a possibility. They were used to only half understanding what Jesus was talking about, and probably wrote this off as another example.

‘This saying was hid from them.’ Compare 24.16. This was probably describing God’s merciful action lest they be unable to go forward to Jerusalem. But they would not be able to say that they had not been warned. And once it had happened they would recognise that Jesus had known about it all along. This would help to explain the triumphant way in which they so quickly went out to proclaim His death, resurrection and victory. They immediately recognised that it was all within the foreknowledge of God, and that God had brought it about, indeed had predestined Him to it from the beginning (Acts 2.23-24). What He had said would happen had come about! So God was in it after all.

What kept them firm throughout was their faith. They would be baffled, devastated, unsure. But their confidence in Him never wavered. Even in the darkest moments they stuck together and still did not doubt that it had been worth following Him. They did not understand what was happening but felt that somehow, in some way, they would rescue something from the future. For when the resurrection appearances began they were still there together. It was faith in the midst of thick darkness.

The Blind Man’s Eyes Are Opened And He Presses Into The Kingly Rule of God (18.35-43).

It can be no accident that this incident follows the depicting of the disciples as ‘blind’ to the truth about Jesus. They are going forward blindly into Jerusalem, where eventually their eyes will be opened. Compare Mark 8.18 with 23 where a similar ‘blindness’ on the part of the disciples is followed by the healing of a blind man.

In this passage the blind man recognises Jesus as the Son of David, and refuses to be quiet until he is brought to Him. His determination to see Jesus parallels the idea of those who press into the Kingly Rule of God and refuse to take ‘no’ for an answer (16.16). Then, once his eyes have been opened, he follows Him.

Analysis.

- a ‘And it came about that, as He drew near to Jericho, a certain blind man sat by the way side begging’ (35).
- b Hearing a crowd going by, he enquired what this meant, and they told him, that “Jesus of Nazareth passes by” (36-37).

- c ‘And he cried, saying, “Jesus, you son of David, have mercy on me” (38).
- d Those who went before rebuked him, that he should hold his peace, but he cried out the more a great deal, “You son of David, have mercy on me” (39).
- e ‘And Jesus stood, and commanded him to be brought to him, and when he was come near, He asked him’ (40).
- d “What do you wish that I should do to you?” And he said, “Lord, that I may receive my sight.” (41).
- c ‘And Jesus said to him, “Receive your sight. Your faith has made you whole” (42).
- b ‘And immediately he received his sight, and followed him, glorifying God, and all the people, when they saw it, gave praise to God’ (43).
- a ‘And He entered and was passing through Jericho’ (19.1).

Note that in ‘a’ He drew near to Jericho, and in the parallel He continued on through Jericho. In ‘b’ the crowd was going by and told him that Jesus of Nazareth was there, and in the parallel both he and they give glory to God because of what Jesus has done for him. In ‘c’ he cries out to Jesus for mercy (to be healed) and in the parallel Jesus responds to his cry and heals him. In ‘d’ he calls on Jesus for mercy, and in the parallel Jesus asks what he wants and is told what his cry for mercy was all about. Centrally in ‘e’ he is brought to Jesus face to face.

18.35 ‘And it came about that, as he drew near to Jericho, a certain blind man sat by the way side begging,’

Having crossed the Jordan from Peraea Jesus now approached Jericho on the way to Jerusalem. A meeting with a number of blind men and other beggars there would not be unexpected. At Passover time large crowds of people would be making their way to Jerusalem across the Jordan, both from Peraea and Galilee, and many of them would take this route. It was thus a good begging point at a time when people would be feeling generous. Possibly we are also intended to see that a blind Jerusalem awaited Him.

This was modern Jericho, not the site of ancient Jericho mentioned in Mark 10.46 (He would actually be between modern Jericho and ancient Jericho). Some have said that ancient Jericho was not known then still to have been recognised under that name, but while the fact may not be known to us it is unlikely to be true. The story of Jericho and what happened to its walls was so prominent that its site must have been recognised. Every generation who passed it would tell their children the story. Modern Jericho was only comparatively recently built. And Mark was probably proud of ancient Jericho. And he probably mentions old Jericho (for he does not usually mention place names) because he sees Jesus entry into the land almost as a repetition of Israel’s entry, followed by that of Elisha (compare 2 Kings 2.4-15). First the Jordan, and then Jericho. Thus it would be the ancient city that he was interested in.

18.36 ‘And hearing a crowd going by, he enquired what this meant.’

When the blind man became aware that larger crowds than usual were passing along the road he asked what it meant. Being blind he was sensitive to every movement.

18.37 ‘And they told him, that “Jesus of Nazareth passes by”.

He was immediately informed by the helpful crowd in festal mood that “Jesus of Nazareth passes by”. That Jesus was well known to him comes out in that the blind man knew who He was and that He was a son of David. The news excited him for he had heard stories of what Jesus could do.

‘Jesus of Nazareth’ was a name by which Jesus, with slight variations, was identified (Jesus was a common name and would require an appellation). It was used by evil spirits (4.34; Mark 1.24), by the serving girl who challenged Peter (Mark 14.67; Matthew 26.71), by the resurrection angel (Mark 16.6) and by two of Jesus’ disciples when identifying Him to ‘a stranger’ (24.19).

18.38 ‘And he cried, saying, “Jesus, you son of David, have mercy on me.” ’

Knowing something of Jesus by reputation the blind man saw his main chance. This was perhaps the first time that he had actually been in the same place as Jesus. And he called out to Him for help.

‘Jesus, you son of David.’ It is possible that, knowing of Jesus connection with the royal house, he simply meant this to be flattering, but it is far more probable that he meant more, and that he saw Jesus as Messianic, and used a local Messianic title. Yet as the crowd did not react to the name (their rebuke was because they thought he was making a disturbance and trying to beg from Jesus) and as Jesus made no comment, it is not likely that the crowd as a whole saw it as Messianic. But that need not mean that the man himself did not. He may well have been visiting Judea for the Passover from an area where such a title was used of the Messiah. Luke also probably sees it as significant. Here was prophetic recognition, whether conscious or subconscious, of Who Jesus really was, made on His approach to Jerusalem to die and rise again. And he probably saw it as significant that He was welcomed by a blind man in such terms when those who could see were oblivious of the fact.

‘Son of David.’ This was certainly a Messianic title in later Jewish literature, but the only known such reference in pre-Christian literature was in the Psalms of Solomon 17.23. It may thus have been a marginal rather than a popular Messianic title in Jesus’ time. Perhaps then its popular use was localised in parts of Galilee, and the blind man was from that locality taking advantage of a key route to Jerusalem before the Passover. The coming of a son of David as deliverer was certainly a common idea in the Old Testament (Isaiah 9.6-7; 11.1-10; Jeremiah 23.5-6; Ezekiel 34.23 and recognised in certain Psalms), and the crowds in Matthew 12.23 appear to have used it Messianically, as do two blind men in probably the same locality (Matthew 9.27), all of whom were in Galilee. This would support a Galilean locale. See also 1.27, 32; 2 Samuel 7.8-16.

Matthew 21.9, 15 may have been a more general use in typical Passover welcomes, or the result of visitors from the locality where it was used, the children in verse 15 having picked it up from the crowd. The use of it by the Syrophoenician woman (Matthew 15.22) was probably a polite title to Him as a Jew, son of David meaning a Jew (compare ‘our father David’ in Mark 11.10; Acts 4.25). That the Messiah would be the son of David was certainly recognised by the scribes (12.35) although that does not guarantee the use of the title by them at this stage.

So we must probably see it as a fairly peripheral Messianic title and as a good possibility that the blind man was hailing Him as Messiah in Galilean terms without the crowd on the whole recognising his intention.

The crowd here would largely have consisted of local inhabitants crowding the route taken by Passover pilgrims, although those on the road would also have included pilgrims from Galilee and elsewhere. None, however, appear to have reacted to the title which, had it been understood generally as Messianic, would have been surprising in view of the excitement which would be generated by the approach of Passover. On the other hand the Passover crowds who later hailed Jesus on His entry into Jerusalem would be mixed and would probably contain a large Galilean element.

18.39 ‘And those who went before rebuked him, that he should hold his peace, but he cried out the more a great deal, “You son of David, have mercy on me.” ’

When those in the forefront of the crowds heard him crying out they told him to be quiet. They probably thought that he was begging for alms. But he would not be silenced, and he continued to ‘cry out the more a great deal’, “You son of David, have mercy on me.” Here was one who was persistently seeking to press into the Kingly Rule of God (16.16) where blind eyes were opened (4.18; 7.21).

The word for 'cried out' here is much stronger than in the previous verse. He has now become desperate. He is fearful of missing this vital opportunity. He might never have the chance again. He will not take no for an answer.

18.40 'And Jesus stood, and commanded him to be brought to him, and when he was come near, he asked him,'

Jesus could never turn from a plea for help and commanded that the man be brought to Him. And on his approach asked him what he wanted.

18.41 "What do you wish that I should do to you?" And he said, "Lord, that I may receive my sight." '

"What do you wish that I should do to you?" Jesus must, of course, have known. But the man must be made to express his faith in words. And the man now more awed and humbled addresses Him as 'Lord.' He asks that he might receive his sight.

18.42 'And Jesus said to him, "Receive your sight. Your faith has made you whole." '

Whether this man was one of the two men similarly healed in Matthew, or whether they had in turn taken up on his lead resulting in a copycat healing, we do not know. But as there would be a number of blind men there and they would all want healing either is possible. It would be very surprising, indeed extremely improbable given the time and place, if Jesus had not healed a number of blind men that day, and the success of one would encourage all. It is a reminder that details are only mentioned when there is a point to be brought home. In the case of the two men in Matthew He healed them by a touch. Here we are only told of His word. His powerful word is a feature of Luke, continuing on to the end of Acts.

Note the emphasis on 'faith'. As ever faith, however weak, is required, for it is faith that 'saves' (5.20; 7.9, 50; 8.48; 17.19).

18.43 'And immediately he received his sight, and followed him, glorifying God, and all the people, when they saw it, gave praise to God.'

And the ultimate result was that he received his sight and he followed Jesus. His spiritual eyes were opened also. And he glorified God. And he was not alone, for the crowds, when they saw what had happened, also gave praise to God.

19.1 'And he entered and was passing through Jericho.'

Meanwhile Jesus continued on His way to Jerusalem, passing through Jericho on the way, for He had another appointment there. Another man was blind and needed to see. His name was Zacchaeus.

The Transformation And Salvation Of An Outcast (19.2-10).

In direct contrast with the rich ruler is another man of status. He is a chief public officer. But in contrast with the rich ruler his eyes are opened, and he gladly gives much of his wealth to the poor, and puts right all the wrong he has done. In the chiasmus of the Section he parallels the steward who used his lord's wealth wisely, and, following the thoughts on using money wisely in preparation for the eternal future in the everlasting dwellings (16.1-13), himself follows the same pattern.

Analysis.

- a Behold, a man called by name Zacchaeus, and he was a chief public officer (2a).
- b And he was rich (2b).
- c He sought to see Jesus who he was, and he could not for the crowd, because he was short in stature (3).
- d He ran on before, and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was to pass that way (4).

- e When Jesus came to the place, he looked up, and said to him, “Zacchaeus, hurry up and come down, for today I must stay at your house” (5).
- d He hurried, and came down, and received him joyfully (6).
- c When they saw it, they all murmured, saying, “He is gone in to lodge with a man who is a sinner” (7).
- b Zacchaeus stood, and said to the Lord, “Behold, Lord, half of my goods I give to the poor, and if I have wrongfully exacted anything of any man, I restore fourfold” (8).
- a Jesus said to him, “Today is salvation come to this house, forasmuch as he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost” (9-10).

Note how in ‘a’ Zacchaeus was a chief public officer, a totally unscrupulous man, an outcast, and in the parallel he has become a ‘son of Abraham’, one who is accepted, for the lost has been saved. In ‘b’ he was very rich, and in the parallel he disposes of large amounts of his riches to the poor. In ‘c’ he was short of stature, and in the parallel he was a sinner (short on righteousness). In ‘d’ he ran and climbed up the tree, and in the parallel he hurried and came down. And centrally Jesus came to stay with him.

19.2a ‘And behold, a man called by name Zacchaeus, and he was a chief public officer,

Here we have the account of a chief public officer who was converted, whose name was Zacchaeus (ironically his name is probably derived from the Hebrew word for ‘righteous’). His conversion and change of life must have caused a sensation, for he would have been an extortioner and seen by all, except for those who served him, as a traitor. He was probably one of those men (a tax farmer) who paid the Roman government a large sum in order to be granted the right to collect taxes in a certain area. Once that had happened he was allowed to keep whatever he managed to collect. There were, of course, certain regulations that they were supposed to follow, but backed by the state, and with soldiers to protect them, they inevitably misused their positions (no honest Jew would become a tax farmer in Palestine) and found ways of collecting far more than they should. They would each have under them a network of tax collectors, who would act on their behalf, and they too would seek to take their cut. The position of Jericho on the border of Peraea and Judea, on the road to Jerusalem, would make it a major toll collecting area. It was also one of the wealthiest parts of Judea, for its unusual climate and famous balsam groves produced the balm that was sold worldwide. Her great palm forest meant that she was called The City of Palms.

So Zacchaeus would be hated and despised, and seen as an outcast and as ‘lost’. He would be seen as cut off from Israel. But he would content himself with the thought that he was very rich. However, through the mercy of God through Jesus he was ‘found’ and became again a son of Abraham (verses 9-10), becoming much less rich, and yet even richer spiritually, at the same time.

19.2b ‘And he was rich.’

These words speak volumes. He had plied his evil trade successfully and had creamed off large amounts of money from the helpless people around. Many were the grudges that would be held against him, and great would be the hatred in which he was held. We can imagine people’s total surprise therefore when later they heard the knock on the door and found a collector of taxes bringing them some money back. In those days that was unheard of.

‘And he was rich.’ In the light of what we have seen before of the teaching of Jesus it is being made clear that he was an unlikely candidate for conversion. He was one of those who would find it hard to enter under the Kingly Rule of God (18.24). And on top of it he was a traitor, an outcast, and no longer accepted as a son of Abraham. Why, it would require the impossible!

19.3 ‘And he sought to see Jesus who he was, and he could not for the crowd, because he was short in stature.’

Zacchaeus suffered from being short of stature. It is surprising how many short men fight their way to success. It is as if their fight against being short spurs them on to great things. But later in verse 8 this is paralleled by the thought that he was ‘a sinner’. He was not only short on stature, he was short on goodness. He was a public outcast.

Thus when he wanted to see Jesus he discovered that it was not possible, because he could not see over the crowds who surrounded Jesus. And he would certainly not have sought to push his way through the crowds. Many a member of that crowd would be only too pleased to avenge himself for wrongs done to him by this man, and the moment that they saw who it was, alone and unguarded, they would have known what to do.

19.4 ‘And he ran on before, and climbed up into a fig-mulberry tree to see him, for he was to pass that way.’

So he ran on ahead, and found a fig-mulberry tree along Jesus’ route. From there he knew that he would be able to see Jesus, remain safe, and, with any luck, escape without anyone knowing that he was there. Fig-mulberry trees are well leafed, large and stout, and yet easy to climb. Herodian Jericho was spaciouly laid out and is known to have contained a number of trees.

19.5 ‘And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up, and said to him, “Zacchaeus, hurry up and come down, for today I must stay at your house.” ’

We can imagine his horror, therefore, when Jesus stopped below the tree and looked up. He was totally exposed to public view. There can be little doubt that some sharp eyed person would have spotted him a little earlier, and the moment that he did so the word would have spread around the crowd, so that Jesus would already have gathered who and what he was, and what his name was. But this was not what he had been hoping for, or expecting. He knew what a Jewish prophet would think of him.

But the horror turned to joy when he heard what Jesus had to say. For Jesus, Who knew his heart, informed him that He wished to eat with him in his house. All would know the house. It was a place that no good man would enter except under duress. But Jesus was not just a good man. He was the One Who had come to seek and to save that which was lost (verse 10). And this day He was seeking a particularly wayward sheep, and was willing to go ‘into the wilderness’ in order to do so.

19.6 ‘And he hurried, and came down, and received him joyfully.’

Something happened that day in Zacchaeus’ life. For he not only humbled himself and ‘came down’, he also received Jesus into his house, and did it joyfully. It was as though a great burden was lifted from his life. He was transformed by the presence of Jesus, and all the hatred and greed and covetousness and bitterness fell away, and he became a new creature (2 Corinthians 5.17).

19.7 ‘And when they saw it, they all murmured, saying, “He is gone in to lodge with a man who is a sinner.” ’

But all that the crowds saw was this rapacious and evil man, and that Jesus had gone in to stay with him in his house of crime. And they murmured among themselves. Something was wrong here. Jesus seemed to be putting himself on the side of the sinners. Did He have no thought for all the people who had been wronged by this man? For this man was not just your normal sinner. From the human point of view he was a great sinner. He was a traitor and unscrupulous, and there seemed no good in him. But what they could not see was what Jesus could see, the work that was going on in Zacchaeus’ heart. Had it not been for that Jesus would never have been in that house. But when there was a lost sheep to be found, the Shepherd would go anywhere.

19.8 ‘And Zacchaeus stood, and said to the Lord, “Behold, Lord, half of my goods I am giving

to the poor, and if I have wrongfully exacted anything of any man, I restore fourfold.”

Unknown to the crowd, inside that house a miracle was taking place. Earlier when Jesus had been questioned about who could be saved He had spoken of God doing the impossible. No doubt all would have seen as impossible the conversion and transformation of this evil man who had caused his people such harm. But this day God had done the impossible. For this man, who all his life had coldly calculated how he could extract as much as possible out of people by fair means or foul, suddenly became a giver. He now began calculating what he should give back to the people whom he had so systematically robbed. And he was going to restore fourfold. This was an admission of guilt. In the case of theft restitution had to be double (Exodus 22.7, 9). But in the case of sheep (Exodus 22.1), and in especially heinous cases (2 Samuel 12.6), restoration had to be fourfold. Josephus also speaks of a fourfold fine for thieves (Antiquities 16.1-3).

And not only would he be restoring what he had stolen from people, but he would then give half his goods to the poor (the Rabbis would have recommended a fifth). By the time he was finished he would no longer be so hugely rich.

‘Zacchaeus stood.’ The idea would seem to be of a special announcement. The ‘behold’ might suggest a spur of the moment decision. But he would have been thinking of it all through the meal. Jesus’ presence had affected him profoundly. ‘Am giving.’ This may suggest that he has already given instructions to his clerks to work out who was owed what.

Here then was the evidence of genuine repentance. Here is the explanation of Jesus’ presence in his house. For we need to recognise that Jesus did not just mix with any tax collectors, He mixed with those who were interested in His message. He did not meet with them to talk about the races, or to learn about their jobs. He met with them to talk about God.

19.9 ‘And Jesus said to him, “Today is salvation come to this house, forasmuch as he also is a son of Abraham.” ’

Jesus recognised his true repentance and his desire to be forgiven his sins, and declared that that day salvation had come to his house. God had accepted his repentance, and change of heart and life. He was forgiven. Like the public servant in the parable, from now on he could begin to live a new life, knowing that he was acceptable to God. For this day he had shown, whatever had been true in the past, that he was again a true son of Abraham, one who had been lost and was now found. This indicated that in God’s eyes he was now restored to the fellowship of Israel, was once more safely within the covenant, and was seen as one of the true people of God.

The fact that salvation had come to the house did not mean that automatically everyone living there was saved. It meant that the opportunity of salvation was openly presented to them. But each must respond and believe. For in the end the Gospel could divide households (12.51-53). This concept of salvation was a further indication of the arrival of the acceptable year of the Lord which would lead up to the final consummation.

19.10 “For the Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost.”

And then He described Himself and His saving mission in terms of the parables of the shepherd and the woman with the lost coin in 15.1-10, which in the Section chiasmus was in parallel with the verses that now follow. The emphasis on ‘saving’ indicates an especial reference to the parable of the lost sheep. Jesus is present to deliver. So this section, which begins with the parables describing the search of God for the lost, is approaching its conclusion with an example of one who was sought and found.

Here we have a clear application to Himself of the title of Son of Man in terms of One Who saves. It was an indication that He was the Messiah of the end times. In Daniel 7.13-14 He does it by coming to the throne of God on behalf of a people who along with Him are being

trodden down by the Beasts, and becoming their great Deliverer with power and authority over all things, for salvation is from the Lord. And here He does it, having come as the Great Deliverer, by seeking and saving the lost. We can compare the previous use of the title Son of Man as the One Who has authority on earth to forgive sins in 5.24. As the Ruler of His people He has jurisdiction over them, and will search them out and save them.

The Parable of The Receiving of the Kingdom, the Testing Out of The Servants As To Their Suitability For High Position, and The Fate of Rebels (19.11-27). .

We come now to the end of this sixth section of the Gospel. It appropriately ends with the picture of the one who goes away and returns, and the response that he meanwhile expects. That is the theme of the whole section (see introduction to the section), readiness for the coming of the Son of Man. In the parable we have here depicted the one who goes into a far country, who provides ten coins for his servants to trade with, one of which is 'lost' for the duration, which results in two servants being shown in a good light and the rebuke of the third. In the parallel passage in the Section chiasmus (see introduction to the Section) are the parables of the shepherd who goes into the far wilderness to seek his sheep, the woman who has ten coins, and the parable of the two who are revealed finally in a good light (the father and second son), and the third who is rebuked (the first son).

This present parable is partly based on the actual historical incident when, on the death of Herod the Great, Archelaus, one of his surviving sons, went to Rome seeking to receive the authority to rule over Palestine and the right to rule as king. But because of their dislike for his ways the people sent a deputation to Caesar opposing his appointment. In the event he was appointed as ethnarch, with the promise of kingship if he proved worthy, and was only given authority over part of what he had hoped for. He was not very pleased, and rather foolishly, in view of the fact that he was on probation, behaved abominably. In the end he was deposed and lost all, being replaced by Roman governors. Jesus may well have been reminded of these facts by the sight of the splendid palace and aqueduct that Herod and Archelaus had built in Jericho.

However, this should not affect the interpretation of the parable for the main point of the parable has nothing to do with Archelaus. What happened to him just suggested the idea. The themes of the parable are the departure of the one who was noble to receive his kingship, the opposition of rebels who rejected this king and are subsequently punished on his return, the appointment of servants to look after minor interests in order to test their faithfulness with a view to future governorship (to replace the rebels), the successful appointment and return of the king after a long period, and his final response to the servants whom he has been testing out, of whom one failed, while all of them are called on to give account, being then rewarded with suitable positions.

The parable bears a superficial similarity to a number of others but is sufficiently different not to be simply a reproduction of any one of them, except in so far as any preacher makes use of a good illustration to suit different purposes. The one that is seen as most similar (Matthew 25.14-30) is in fact based on a totally different concept. For in Matthew the parable depicts a man who is concerned that his business interests are well looked after while he is away, and hands them all over to three servants, while Luke's story is to do with a king seeking confirmation of his appointment from his overlord, quelling rebellion and trying out the suitability of certain servants to be governors in his kingdom. Various details are repeated in both simply because they could apply in both cases, but the subtle differences, which are apt in each case, but would have been out of place in the other, rule out the idea that one has been altered up from the other. It is simply that the same storyteller had told two stories based on separate plots, while utilising and fitting in common material. Any other view of them is quite frankly purely based on individual unproven opinion, and as usual all attempts to show otherwise have contradicted each other, with different opinions cancelling each other out. All

founder on the fact of the unlikelihood of the early church actually deliberately changing the words of Jesus, especially in view of the number of eyewitnesses around, and on the unlikelihood that if they had done so we would have them in any palatable form today. The distortions of the apocryphal Gospels make quite clear what happened when men actually did begin to play around with the tradition. We are wise therefore to see this parable as standing on its own foundation as a genuine and separate parable of Jesus.

Analysis of the Passage.

- a As they heard these things, He added and spoke a parable, because He was near to Jerusalem, and because they supposed that the Kingly Rule of God was immediately to appear (11).
- b He said therefore, “A certain nobleman went into a far country, to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return” (12).
- c He called ten servants of his, and gave them ten minas, and said to them, ‘You trade with this until I come’ (13).
- d But his citizens hated him, and sent a deputation after him, saying, ‘We will not that this man reign over us’ (14).
- e And it about that, when he was come back again, having received the kingdom, he commanded these servants, to whom he had given the money, to be called to him, that he might know what they had gained by trading (15).
- f The first came before him, saying, ‘Lord, your mina has made ten minas more’ (16).
- g And he said to him, ‘Well done, you good servant. Because you were found faithful in a very little, you have authority over ten cities’ (17).
- f The second came, saying, ‘Your mina, Lord, has made five minas’. He said to him also, ‘You be also over five cities’ (18-19).
- e Another came, saying, ‘Lord, behold, here is your mina, which I kept laid up in a neckcloth, for I feared you, because you are an austere man. You take up what you do not lay down, and you reap what you did not sow’ (20-21).
- d He says to him, ‘Out of your own mouth will I judge you, you wicked servant. You knew that I am an austere man, taking up what I laid not down, and reaping what I did not sow, then why did you not give my money into the bank, and I at my coming would have required it with interest?’ (22-23).
- c And he said to those who stood by, ‘Take away from him the mina, and give it to him who has ten minas’. And they said to him, ‘Lord, he has ten minas’ (24-25).
- b ‘I say to you, that to every one who has will be given, but from him who has not, even what he has will be taken away from him’ (26).
- a ‘But these my enemies, who would not that I should reign over them, bring here, and slay them before me’ (27).

Note that in ‘a’ the expectation was of the coming of the Kingly Rule of God, and in the parallel the king in the parable exercises a similar kingship by destroying those who had sought to prevent him receiving it. In ‘b’ the nobleman goes to receive his kingship, and in the parallel those who ‘have’ will be given. In ‘c’ ten minas are given to ten servants, and in the parallel there is emphasis on the ten minas connected with the first servant. In ‘d’ the king is hated, and in the parallel he is seen as fearful. In ‘e’ he calls on his servants to give account of their trading, and in the parallel one has proved faithless and has not traded. In ‘f’ one has used his mina and made ten minas, and in the parallel another has used his mina and made five minas. Central in ‘g’ are the congratulations and reward for the ten mina success.

The Purpose of the Parable.

19.11 ‘And as they heard these things, he added and spoke a parable, because he was near to Jerusalem, and because they supposed that the Kingly Rule of God was immediately to appear.’

The loose connection confirms that this passage is attached to the previous one, but is vague enough to otherwise give us no information as to when it was given. It is clear, however, that we are to see it as spoken just prior to His approach to Jerusalem in order to correct the wrong impression that His arrival there will result in the final appearance of the everlasting Kingly Rule of God on earth (a belief that the Apostles clung to until the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost - Acts 1.6).

It is understandable that, with His constant references to the importance of His approach to Jerusalem (9.31; 13.33; 18.31), together with His no doubt clearly revealed urgency about that approach, and the unwillingness of His followers to believe the worst, they had gained the wrong impression about it, in spite of His efforts to ensure that it was otherwise. They had probably interpreted His statements about His coming death and resurrection metaphorically in terms of the hard earthly battle that lay ahead whereby He would overcome the opposition of the Jewish leaders, seize Jerusalem, and commence the process which would result in final triumph. In principle they were right. Spiritually that was what would happen as Acts reveals. It was on how this was to be brought about, and the timescale involved, that they had got it totally wrong. This parable was an attempt to correct at least part of that error.

So He stresses His departure to a 'far country' to receive His Kingship, the fact that His absence will be sufficient for someone to multiply an investment manyfold, and meanwhile that there will be attempts by some to prevent the establishment of His Kingly Rule. It makes it clear therefore that His appearance as King will not be within the too near future.

19.12 'He said therefore, "A certain nobleman went into a far country, to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return."' "

The stress on 'far country' is an indication that they must not expect His immediate return, and that His Kingship will not be granted to Him in Jerusalem. Nor are they likely to interpret it as meaning that He will seek to obtain Caesar's recognition. That possibility had been rejected during the temptations that opened His ministry (4.5-7), nor could His teaching possibly have given that impression. For all knew that when the Messiah came He would receive His authority from God alone. So by the parable He was making it clear that they were not to see Him as immediately setting up a throne on Jerusalem under God (excited men get strange ideas), but as departing to God for the purpose of establishing His Kingship 'in a far country', in Heaven itself, from where He will eventually return as He has already told them (17.24).

19.13 "And he called ten servants of his, and gave them ten minas, and said to them, 'You trade with this until I come'."

Meanwhile it is made clear that His servants will have a job to do. They are being left with responsibilities that they are to fulfil. 'Ten servants' indicates 'a number of servants' (a regular meaning of 'ten'), thus leaving open who is being referred to. And to each of them is given one mina with which to exercise their functions until He returns. The point about this was that they all had an equal job to do, each in their different ways, with a not very large sum. A mina was about three months wages. While therefore a reasonable amount it was not large. The idea was therefore clearly in order to test out the servants without it being too costly. And all who heard His parable could see themselves as equally entrusted with the equivalent of a mina. None need feel overwhelmed, and none need feel left out. Each was to work with what he had been given.

19.14 "But his citizens hated him, and sent a deputation after him, saying, 'We will not that this man reign over us.' "

However, there were others who rejected completely the idea of His rule over them. And they sent a deputation after Him, basically informing God that they did not want Him as King. In this we see the activities of the religious authorities which would seek to prevent His Kingly

Rule being established. Being very much what happened when Archelaus, on whose life the parable is based, went to Caesar, it is clearly an essential part of the story.

19.15 “And it came about that, when he was come back again, having received the kingdom, he commanded these servants, to whom he had given the money, to be called to him, that he might know what they had gained by trading.”

But one day the King will return having received His Kingship. And in that day He will call on all His servants to give an account before Him of what they have achieved with what He had given them. This calling to account is clearly depicted elsewhere, both in parables of Jesus (12.35-48; 20.9-16; Matthew 20.1-16; 25.14-30, 31-46) and in the Apostolic letters (Romans 14.10-12; 1 Corinthians 3.11-15; 4.5; 2 Corinthians 5.10; James 1.12; 5.7-9). The subject of these parables was of such importance that we must surely assume that Jesus in fact gave a number of variations on these parables, varied in order to bring out different points, a few of which have been selected by the Gospel writers. This fact adequately explains both the similarities and differences between the parable here and that in Matthew 25.14-30. Any preacher of worth has done the same with his illustrations, as he seeks constantly to improve them and to use them to illustrate different points.

19.16 “And the first came before him, saying, ‘Lord, your mina has made ten minas more.’ ”

The first servant who was brought before the King had a success story to unfold. With the mina he had been given he had traded and worked hard, and had produced ten minas. He had increased what he had been given tenfold.

19.17 “And he said to him, ‘Well done, you good servant. Because you were found faithful in a very little, you have authority over ten cities.’ ”

The King commended him, and told him that in view of his faithfulness in making such large profits with such a small amount of money he would be given authority over the same number of cities as he had ended up with in minas. The suggestion that such a response is not likely in response to so small an achievement simply overlooks the king’s aim and problems, and must be rejected. For the King had already known that when he returned a number of his present governors would have to be replaced, for it is they who would have taken their stand against him. So to test out ten likely candidates in a small way in order to see if they were suitable as replacements, without making any promises and before he has actually take control of his kingdom, was a very wise and practical move. Such methods are regularly used in big business without revealing their purpose.

19.18 “And the second came, saying, ‘Your mina, Lord, has made five minas.’ ”

The second servant came and claimed that he had made five minas.

19.19 “And he said to him also, ‘You be also over five cities.’ ”

The King responded by setting him over five cities, one for each mina. The principle of reward was now established and would apply to all except ‘the other one’.

19.20-21 “And the other came, saying, ‘Lord, behold, here is your mina, which I kept laid up in a neckcloth, for I feared you, because you are an austere man. You take up that which you do not lay down, and you reap that which you did not sow.’ ”

But one of the servants came who, on receiving the mina, had begrudged doing what the King wanted. However, he did not dare tell the King that, so he pretended that he had been terrified of losing it because of what the King might do. He informed him that he had gone away and had wrapped it in a neckcloth or scarf, putting it somewhere where it would be safe. For he had known that the King was a severe man who did not accept failure easily, and indeed who expected to always receive more than he gave. By blaming the King he thought that he would get away with it. But his very statement gave him away. It revealed his attitude towards the

King, and suggested that in fact his argument was just an excuse and that the truth was that he had just not bothered. For had he acted on what he stated that he believed he would have been the one who worked the hardest.

The contrast with Matthew's separate story is interesting. In Matthew a huge sum had been entrusted. Thus the man with only one talent had buried it in order to ensure its safety. He knew that if he lost that he was done for. There was no way that he could replace it. Here the sum was not very large and therefore it was not put in quite so safe a place. He would not have liked to lose it, but the loss would not have been all that difficult to remedy. It was just not worth burying. In the two separate parables Jesus is bringing out the difference between the idea here, that we are all, even the least of us, given our opportunity to serve, and that in Matthew where the thought was on the preciousness and importance of what was entrusted to the servants. As you read both parables everything fits into place in each, but much would have been out of place in the other.

'The other came.' To suggest that this indicates that originally there were only three servants is totally unnecessary. It in fact confirms the opposite. It indicates the other type of servant to the ones already mentioned, including the seven unmentioned who would be treated in the same way. It indicates the 'odd one out'. Having given two examples the principles of reward have been made clear. To go through all ten servants would simply have been boring, something that Jesus never was. Now all that was required was to mention 'the other type of servant', and Jesus knew that the audience were in suspense waiting for 'the other one', the one who did not fall into line. (He was now the one that all the listeners were waiting to learn about). This was the one who was different and not like any of the others. He was the one who formed the contrast. We are probably expected to see that we know what happened to the other seven, they presumably paralleled the first two and were rewarded according to success. The only one who was not was 'the other one'. Storywise, once the principle had been established, it was 'the other one', the one who did not fall into line who was the only other one worthy of mention.

Some, however, have rather argued that the article was simply a carry over from the Aramaic where we would expect the article even if it mean 'another', or that as Jesus had in mind to deal with only three He automatically said 'the other one' (the other one I am going to mention). Any of these interpretations is possible.

'An austere man.' One who was exacting and strict. The kind who wanted to get blood out of a stone. This was the servant's view. It is exactly how many often wrongly see God. And this was why the servant had not fulfilled his duty. He had begrudged doing anything for this hard tyrant. He was as unlike the two who had joyfully fulfilled their responsibilities as it was possible to be.

19.22-23 "He says to him, 'Out of your own mouth will I judge you, you wicked servant. You knew that I am an austere man, taking up that which I laid not down, and reaping that which I did not sow, then why did you not give my money into the bank, and I at my coming would have required it with interest?'"

The King immediately spotted the weakness in his argument, and judged him on the basis of it, pointing out that he was judging him on the basis of his own words (compare 12.3). In the end what a man says is evidence of what is in his heart (6.45; Matthew 12.34). It was not a matter of the servant having been called on to take great risks. The King recognised that he may not have been able to do much, but all he had had to do was put the money with bankers (those who sat at tables as money traders), who would then have paid good interest. With his master's wellbeing in mind that would surely have been his obvious course. The problem was that he had not been concerned about his master's interests. All he had thought of were his own interests and how undeserving his master was.

19.24-25 “And he said to those who stood by, ‘Take away from him the mina, and give it to him who has ten minas.’ And they said to him, ‘Lord, he has ten minas.’”

The result of his failure was that he lost his mina, unlike the other two who have been mentioned. The minas, with their relatively small value, had been the King’s method of testing his servants. He was not so parsimonious that he took them back. (That is the difference between kings and businessmen). But he was not going to leave one with the servant who had been lazy. Note how in verse 25 the other servant has been allowed to keep his ten minas as a reward for his faithful service. Having fulfilled their purpose the King allowed them to keep them as a reward, for he now had greater duties for them. The odd mina was then given to the servant who had been most efficient, as a symbol of his gratitude. This represented a typical kingly attitude. It was not worth his taking possession of it again, so he told his attendants to pass it to the one who most deserved it. Jesus wanted it known that God was not a miser. The comment of ‘those who stood by’, his attendants, was in order to bring out how abundantly the other servant had already been blessed for his faithfulness, for that is now the point of the summing up that follows.

It is significant that the failed servant is not punished in any other way. He was simply left with nothing, in the same condition as he had been right at the beginning. He had failed his test and was simply sent back to private citizenship having received what he deserved. Nothing. he has missed his opportunity to be a disciple. This in itself suggests that Jesus’ emphasis is different here from that in Matthew 25 where the emphasis was on judgment. In this parable the emphasis on judgment will follow shortly.

19.26-27 “I say to you, that to every one who has will be given, but from him who has not, even what he has will be taken away from him. But these my enemies, who would not that I should reign over them, bring here, and slay them before me.”

The significance of the situation is now summed up by the King. Those who ‘have’, because of their faithful service, will receive more. They will receive abundantly. God is no man’s debtor. Those who produce nothing will end up with nothing. Even his blessings will be taken from him. But those who are openly antagonistic will be judged, and judged severely. For the King’s enemies who rejected His rule would be finally destroyed. It may be that we are to sense here again Jesus’ awareness of what was going to happen to Jerusalem (13.34-35). Apart from anything else it did not take too much prophetic instinct to recognise that the tension in Palestine could not go on for ever without something eventually sparking off a rebellion large enough to result in the downfall of Jerusalem. For He knew that in one way or another that was what the whole nation was working towards. And the fact that it lay heavy on His heart comes out in His constant repetition of the theme from now on (19.41-44; 20.15-16; 21.6, 20-24; 23.28-31).

However, it also represents the certainty of God’s final judgment, of which what happened to Jerusalem would only be the forerunner. It was necessary for those who were planning to kill Him to recognise that their behaviour would not go unpunished. So Jesus’ message, as so often, is to act as a spur to those who followed Him in order to serve, while at the same time being a warning to those whose presence was simply due to their antagonism against Him.

19. 28 ‘And when he had thus spoken, he went on before, going up to Jerusalem.’

Having attempted to put right the wrong ideas that His followers had, for Jesus was wary of any incidents that could be caused by too much excitement at this Passover time, Jesus then went on ahead of His followers, pressing on towards Jerusalem. He knew that His hour had come (John 13.1). He was eager to begin His journey to the far country, ready for His final return.

