

## *The Luke Daily Study Guide*

### **Week 2**

**Monday, March 5th**

**Luke 5:12-32**

12 While Jesus was in one of the towns, a man came along who was covered with leprosy. When he saw Jesus, he fell with his face to the ground and begged him, "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean."

13 Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" And immediately the leprosy left him.

14 Then Jesus ordered him, "Don't tell anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them."

15 Yet the news about him spread all the more, so that crowds of people came to hear him and to be healed of their sicknesses. 16 But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.

17 One day Jesus was teaching, and Pharisees and teachers of the law were sitting there. They had come from every village of Galilee and from Judea and Jerusalem. And the power of the Lord was with Jesus to heal the sick. 18 Some men came carrying a paralyzed man on a mat and tried to take him into the house to lay him before Jesus. 19 When they could not find a way to do this because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and lowered him on his mat through the tiles into the middle of the crowd, right in front of Jesus.

20 When Jesus saw their faith, he said, "Friend, your sins are forgiven."

21 The Pharisees and the teachers of the law began thinking to themselves, "Who is this fellow who speaks blasphemy? Who can forgive sins but God alone?"

22 Jesus knew what they were thinking and asked, "Why are you thinking these things in your hearts? 23 Which is easier: to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk'? 24 But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins."

So he said to the paralyzed man, "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home." 25 Immediately he stood up in front of them, took what he had been lying on and went home praising God. 26 Everyone was amazed and gave praise to God. They were filled with awe and said, "We have seen remarkable things today."

27 After this, Jesus went out and saw a tax collector by the name of Levi sitting at his tax booth. "Follow me," Jesus said to him, 28 and Levi got up, left everything and followed him.

29 Then Levi held a great banquet for Jesus at his house, and a large crowd of tax collectors and others were eating with them. 30 But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law who belonged to their sect complained to his disciples, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?"

31 Jesus answered them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. 32 I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

#### **Points of Interest:**

- 'reached out his hand and touched the man'—Jewish ritual cleansing rules (what we now know as kosher laws) prohibited contact with lepers (Numbers 5:1-3), probably out of a desire to minimize the spread of contagious skin diseases. People with leprosy were considered 'unclean,' or ritually impure, and required to wear a special uniform, to live outside of town, and to warn people who approached them not to touch them (Leviticus 13:45-46). Anyone who touched someone with leprosy was also considered unclean until it could be demonstrated that they had not caught the disease. Being unclean had very serious religious and social consequences: social contact was limited and participation in the normal religious ceremonies was not allowed. So, Jesus' choice to touch the man is unusual, bold, compassionate, and could be considered reckless. From other healing stories, it seems that Jesus could heal the man without touching

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him. By healing through touch, Jesus addresses the man's need in two ways: he physically heals the man of the disease, and he welcomes the man back into society; this is likely the first human contact the man has had since he caught the disease. Touching the man also turns the normal rules on their heads: usually when an unclean person touches you, you become unclean; but when Jesus touches an unclean person, the unclean person becomes clean. With Jesus, instead of an ever-spreading uncleanness, an ever-spreading cleanness becomes possible.

- 'show yourself to the priest . . . as a testimony to them'—the priests were responsible for officially inspecting people and declaring them clean or unclean (Leviticus 13 and 14). Jesus suggesting that this healed leper go to the priest is more or less analogous to recommending today that someone who thinks they have been miraculously healed go see their doctor. Jesus might have a few reasons in mind for making this suggestion: to confirm the healing and make it official; to demonstrate to the priests that he is working with them, not against them; and to give these experienced professionals a chance to see and celebrate something unexpected.
- 'Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed'—Jesus spends his days surrounded by the pressing needs of the crowd, but he also values these quieter times by himself with God. Luke doesn't tell us why Jesus withdraws alone, but I would guess it is to rest and be refreshed, to be equipped by God for his work, and to be guided by God.
- 'Pharisees and teachers of the law'—these are the religious experts. They're probably here to check out the new kid in town: to see how Jesus measures up and to figure out whether he's on their side.

The Pharisees are one of the major religious/political parties of the day, especially known for their scrupulous attention to the Jewish law. Their main project is to apply the general rules of the law clearly, exactly, and specifically to contemporary life. The teachers of the law are experts on traditional interpretations of the Jewish scriptures.

The Pharisee is a party, and teacher a job; so, you could be a Pharisaic teacher of the law, or you could be a Pharisee who is not a teacher of the law, or you could be a teacher of the law who is not a Pharisee—sort of like you can be a Democrat without being a member of Congress and you can be a member of Congress without being a Democrat.

- 'When Jesus saw their faith'—Jesus could see cutting in line and destruction of private property, but instead he sees faith. It's obvious to Jesus, because of the great effort they all go through, that these men truly believe that if they just get their friend into Jesus' presence, something good will happen. Jesus rewards them for that faith.
- 'Friend, your sins are forgiven'—this is probably unexpected to everyone. I imagine the paralytic and his four friends were hoping that Jesus would heal the man of his paralysis. It seems likely to me that they'd be disappointed with Jesus' response, either because they figure Jesus is just saying something pious to cover his inability to heal or because they'd rather have healing than forgiveness.

The Pharisees and teachers of the law are completely shocked by Jesus. He is not at all what they would expect of a rabbi: he's not referring to previous great rabbis as the source of the teaching; he's not really even teaching at all, but healing people instead; and he goes beyond healing to claim the power to forgive sins.

- 'the Son of Man'—this becomes Jesus' preferred title for himself. To a certain extent, it's a very humble title, simply meaning, 'human being.' By using it, he's identifying himself with all of us. But it is also a subtle reference to one of the more famous

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Messianic prophecies, in which Daniel predicts the coming of a holy king who would be 'like a Son of Man' (Daniel 7:13-14)

- 'I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins'—Jesus points out that it's equally impossible to heal someone as to proclaim forgiveness without power from God to back it up. Since no one has accused him of blasphemy for healing people, why would they all of a sudden be in an uproar now? To demonstrate that he does indeed have genuine authority behind his words, he heals the man.
- 'Levi held a great banquet for Jesus at his house'—throwing a party like this would be a fairly normal way to show gratitude.
- 'a large crowd of tax collectors and others'—naturally, Levi invites his friends and associates to this party. As I mentioned in the discussion of John's preaching, the tax collectors are essentially the gangsters of the day. The people Levi knows are other gangster-types, and the people who would hang out with them. Imagine a seedy nightclub, or a big party at a drug lord's compound. That's more or less the scene here—probably cleaned up some in honor of their special guest, but the same cast of characters. Again, this is not quite what would be expected of a rabbi.
- 'It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick'—Jesus has been doing a lot of healing of people who are physically sick. He's been healing them out of a genuine desire to see them well, but also as a metaphor for an even more primary mission: to forgive sinners. Just like doctors heal sick people, Jesus forgives sinners. He's a sin doctor. This puts Peter's exclamation, 'Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!' in a new light. By calling Peter to follow him, Jesus is not saying, 'Oh, Peter. Don't get down on yourself; you're not that bad.' Rather, he's saying, 'Of course, you're sinful, Peter. That's why I'm calling you. If you come with me, I can help you with that.' He has the same attitude toward the tax collector and his friends. The Pharisees think of sinners as people to be avoided. Peter fears that he will be punished for his sins. But Jesus draws near to sinners, for the sake of healing them, not punishing them.

#### **Taking it home:**

- *For you and your family:* Jesus looks at our faults and mistakes as sickness he wants to heal, rather than as failings that must be punished. Ask Jesus to take care of your sins today. Jesus is a sin doctor. Ask him to point out any sin-sickness in you, to diagnose the cause of the sin, to heal you, and to give you the prescription you need to stay in good spiritual health.
- *For your six:* Jesus shows the leper that he is both willing and able to heal his sickness. In other words, Jesus is both good and powerful. Do your six have a harder time believing in his goodness or his power? Try asking him to demonstrate whichever one they need most, just like he did for the leper.
- *For our city:* In this passage we see Jesus caring for people who are left on the outside of society. Ask Jesus to especially care for the people in our city who are similarly isolated. Ask him to give them what they need to feel welcomed and loved.

#### **Tuesday, March 6th**

##### **Luke 5:33-6:11**

33 They said to him, "John's disciples often fast and pray, and so do the disciples of the Pharisees, but yours go on eating and drinking."

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34 Jesus answered, "Can you make the friends of the bridegroom fast while he is with them? 35 But the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; in those days they will fast."

36 He told them this parable: "No one tears a piece out of a new garment to patch an old one. If they do, they will have torn the new garment, and the patch from the new will not match the old. 37 And people do not pour new wine into old wineskins. If they do, the new wine will burst the skins; the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. 38 No, new wine must be poured into new wineskins. 39 And none of you, after drinking old wine, wants the new, for you say, 'The old is better.' "

6:1 One Sabbath Jesus was going through the grainfields, and his disciples began to pick some heads of grain, rub them in their hands and eat the kernels. 2 Some of the Pharisees asked, "Why are you doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?"

3 Jesus answered them, "Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? 4 He entered the house of God, and taking the consecrated bread, he ate what is lawful only for priests to eat. And he also gave some to his companions." 5 Then Jesus said to them, "The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath."

6 On another Sabbath he went into the synagogue and was teaching, and a man was there whose right hand was shriveled. 7 The Pharisees and the teachers of the law were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched him closely to see if he would heal on the Sabbath. 8 But Jesus knew what they were thinking and said to the man with the shriveled hand, "Get up and stand in front of everyone." So he got up and stood there.

9 Then Jesus said to them, "I ask you, which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to destroy it?"

10 He looked around at them all, and then said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He did so, and his hand was completely restored. 11 But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law were furious and began to discuss with one another what they might do to Jesus.

#### **Points of Interest:**

- 'disciples'—*disciple* means, 'follower.' It's the term used for the students or trainees of a teacher.
- often fast and pray'—the law of Moses only called for fasting once a year, but the Pharisees, figuring more is better, would fast twice a week.
- 'Can you make the friends of the bridegroom fast while he is with them?'—It would be inappropriate, insulting even, to fast at a wedding; when a bride and groom invite you to celebrate with them, go through all the trouble of planning their reception, and spend \$50 a plate, you don't tell them, 'None for me, thanks; I'm saving my appetite for later.' Similarly, it is out of place for Jesus' disciples to fast. It makes sense that the Pharisees and John's disciples would fast. Fasting is an expression of a strong, unsatisfied desire. The Pharisees and John's followers fast because they are waiting for something to happen. That's not true for Jesus' followers; rather than waiting for something to come, they're celebrating someone who has. It would be silly for them to fast to express their longing for a savior, when they can just eat with the savior instead.
- 'people do not pour new wine into old wineskins'—new wine expands in volume as it ferments, but old skins have already been stretched to their limits. So, if new wine is put into old skins, the skin breaks and the wine spills. Jesus is saying that he is new and different, and to try to fit him into the old categories just doesn't work.

Jesus is primarily using the example of wine here because it serves as a good illustration of poor mixing between new and old, but I believe he also intends to draw on our associations with wine to describe the message he is bringing. Wine is a symbol of

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celebration, of fun, of abundance. In the Old Testament, it is often used as a sign of God's blessing on and abundant provision for his people (*Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* 951-952. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998). So, by calling himself new wine, Jesus is saying that he is a gift from God of abundance and celebration.

- 'The old is better'—Jesus doesn't see much hope that the Pharisees will ever accept him. It's not just that they're making the honest mistake of putting new wine into old skins; they're trying to force new wine to be old wine, because the very idea of new wine is distasteful to them.

At one time, the Pharisees were actually the bringers of new wine. When the people of God had completely forgotten about God's law, the Pharisees were an exciting new reform movement, drawing people back to the law as a source of blessing. Over time, though, they've become rigid, like an old wineskin, unable to accept anything new.

The problem with drinking only old wine is that, eventually, you run out. If you want to keep having wine, at some point you've got to drink new wine. The Pharisees' insistence on old wine leaves them in the place of eventually having no wine at all.

- 'what is unlawful on the Sabbath'—as I mentioned yesterday, the Pharisees are known for scrupulous, detailed observance of the law. They formed exact definitions of how to obey the laws laid down by Moses (*Illustrated Bible Dictionary* 1210). Their aim was absolute certainty as to what it meant to obey any particular law. The Sabbath was one of their particular areas of expertise. The Sabbath is the one day a week when God's people were to make sure that they rest from their work. For the Pharisees, the big question regarding the Sabbath was, 'What exactly constitutes work?' They developed quite a detailed scheme for answering that question. In this particular situation, they determine that Jesus' followers are breaking the Sabbath through a series of logic that goes something like this: work is prohibited on the Sabbath; harvesting a field is work; harvesting involves collecting the edible parts of plants; since Jesus' followers are picking heads of grain, they are harvesting, and therefore working.
- 'Have you never read what David did'—Jesus could reasonably argue with the Pharisees' definition of work here, perhaps by suggesting that a certain number of heads of grain would have to be picked before it constituted harvesting. The Pharisees may even have responded enthusiastically to such a response: having debates, among themselves and with people from other schools, is just how the Pharisees would go about honing their definitions. However, Jesus doesn't take that tack at all. Rather than accepting their methods but arguing with their conclusions, Jesus calls into question their entire approach to the law. He brings up an example when the great Jewish hero David clearly and blatantly broke the law, without being corrected or punished by God (The story is found in 1 Samuel 21: 1-6). This example shows that interpreting what is permissible is more complicated than the Pharisees' system allows for. David's story demonstrates one of two things (or, even more likely, both of them):
  1. sometimes, strict obedience to a specific law can be trumped by the larger purpose of that law, or even by some other higher priority;
  2. God gives some people the authority to re-interpret the law.
- 'The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath'—it would be audacious enough for Jesus to claim the same privilege as David, the privilege to re-interpret the law in light of particular circumstances. But Jesus goes significantly beyond that, essentially saying that the Sabbath belongs to him, and he can do with it what he likes. Since the Sabbath was also known as 'the LORD's day,' Jesus is pretty much saying he is God—or close enough to God that he would be given vast authority over the things of God.

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In fact, this is the second time recently that Jesus has used a 'Son of Man' statement to claim divine authority: in yesterday's passage, Jesus says, 'the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins,' which God alone can do, and here he is 'Lord of the Sabbath.' Jesus is very much making clear that he is new, and different, and his arrival is something special.

- 'to see if he would heal on the Sabbath'—they would consider healing, like harvesting, as work which was prohibited on the Sabbath. One could make the claim that the Pharisees are actually working harder than Jesus or the man with the withered hand. Speaking a few words and stretching out your hand aren't all that hard, and wouldn't normally be considered work. Meanwhile, the Pharisees and teachers are working pretty hard at spying on Jesus and building a case against him. However, according to their precise definitions, Jesus is breaking the Sabbath and they are not.
- 'But Jesus knew what they were thinking'—Jesus knows that they are hoping to get some dirt on him; but rather than avoid their trap, he consciously steps right into it. In this passage, Jesus seems to welcome any chance to distinguish himself from the Pharisees and the teachers.
- 'do good or to do evil'—to the Pharisees and the teachers, the Sabbath is more or less about not doing much at all. To Jesus, the more important question is whether you are doing something helpful or harmful. Jesus is doing helpful on the Sabbath, by healing the man's hand. Meanwhile, the Pharisees and teachers are planning harm to Jesus. The lack of compassion and the amount of pure hatred the Pharisees show here is pretty astounding. They see someone with a withered hand, and they think, 'Oh, good. This is a perfect opportunity for us to catch Jesus doing something wrong.' They are glad the man is healed, but only because it gives them the excuse they need to work against Jesus.

#### **Taking it home:**

- *For you and your family:* Following God's rules can be a tricky thing. On the one hand, it's easy to apply them legalistically like the Pharisees do, and miss the whole point of them. On the other hand, we seem to need some rules; we don't naturally do what's best for us without some guidance. Jesus' disciples seem to discover the key to getting the most out of God's law: they stick close to Jesus, trusting him to help them best interpret the law for their situation. Why don't you ask Jesus if he has any guidance for you from God's law today?
- *For your six:* It takes a new wineskin to hold new wine. Ask God to give your six the containers they need for the blessings he has for them. Pray that they would be open to new things from God.
- *For our city:* Pray that the people of our entire city would be able to see Jesus for who he is, rather than try to force him into whatever categories we already have for him.

#### **Wednesday, March 7th**

##### **Luke 6:12-26**

12 One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God. 13 When morning came, he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them, whom he also designated apostles: 14 Simon (whom he named Peter), his brother Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, 15 Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Simon who was called the Zealot, 16 Judas son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor.

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17 He went down with them and stood on a level place. A large crowd of his disciples was there and a great number of people from all over Judea, from Jerusalem, and from the coastal region around Tyre and Sidon, 18 who had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases. Those troubled by evil spirits were cured, 19 and the people all tried to touch him, because power was coming from him and healing them all.

20 Looking at his disciples, he said:

Blessed are you who are poor,  
for yours is the kingdom of God.

21 Blessed are you who hunger now,  
for you will be satisfied.

Blessed are you who weep now,  
for you will laugh.

22 Blessed are you when people hate you,  
when they exclude you and insult you  
and reject your name as evil,  
because of the Son of Man.

23 Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven. For that is how their ancestors treated the prophets.

24 But woe to you who are rich,  
for you have already received your comfort.

25 Woe to you who are well fed now,  
for you will go hungry.

Woe to you who laugh now,  
for you will mourn and weep.

26 Woe to you when everyone speaks well of you,  
for that is how their ancestors treated the false prophets.

#### **Points of Interest:**

- 'whom he also designated apostles'—*apostle* means 'sent out one' or 'commissioned one.' Jesus has been commissioned by God, and he is now commissioning these twelve people to share in his work. Jesus might be motivated by the growing crowds: he recognizes that he will need to have some deputies if he is to care for the huge crowds who are coming to him. It could also be that his recent conflicts with the Pharisees and teachers cause him to realize that his time is short and he needs to have someone to carry on his work.  
He may be choosing the number twelve in honor of the twelve tribes of Israel. It could also be that it's the most people he can really work closely with, or maybe these twelve are the only ones ready to take this step.
- 'He went down with them and stood on a level place'—this sermon is sometimes called the 'Sermon on the Plain.' It's similar to a sermon found in Matthew's gospel. Matthew's sermon is called 'the Sermon on the Mount,' because, well, it happens on a mountain. Luke's and Matthew's sermons may be similar sermons given at different times in different places, or Luke and Matthew may be writing from different memories of exactly what is said and of exactly where it is said: 'Were we still up on the mountain when Jesus gave that sermon, or was it just after we came down?'
- 'a great number of people from all over'—Jesus' popularity is growing. Tyre and Sidon are outside of the bounds of Israel; so it might be that even non-Jews have begun to hear about him. If not non-Jews, Jesus is certainly starting to attract people from farther afield.

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- 'Looking at his disciples'—Jesus is speaking specifically to his followers, but he is doing so in front of the crowds. It could be that he wants the crowds to witness this commissioning of his followers. As we'll see in tomorrow's passage, it could also be that he's opening up the invitation.
- 'Blessed are you'—these are the famous beatitudes, so-called after the Latin for 'blessed.' It might be worth considering for a moment what exactly 'blessed' means. Some synonyms for *blessed* are *avored*, *fortunate*, or even *happy*. Perhaps the closest common equivalent to *blessed* is *lucky*, if you add in a sense that the luck is God-directed. So, what Jesus is saying here is, 'When you're poor, or hungry, or sad, or hated, that's when you are really lucky!' When I look at it that way, it takes the beatitudes out of my 'Top 10 Beautiful Sentiments Expressed by Jesus' list and moves it straight to the top of my 'Top 10 Unsettling and Bizarre Sayings of Jesus' list instead. It gets even stranger when you add in the second half of the teaching, where Jesus says, 'I feel sorry for you if you are rich, or satisfied, or laughing, or well-received.' Jesus is making the claim here that our usual measures for when things are going well and when they're going poorly are 180 degrees off. When we think we're doomed, we might be in exactly the right place for something great to happen. When we think things are heading in the right direction, we might actually be missing out on something.

This teaching reminds me a little of John's call for people to repent, or to recalibrate themselves. Jesus too is calling for a recalibration; he's saying, if you're shooting for the best life possible, most of you are aiming in the wrong direction. His point here is not, 'If you people were really spiritual, you'd be acting a lot more miserable. Don't you know life's not supposed to be fun?' He is pointing people toward blessing, not misery, and it's a blessing that's felt in the present tense—even if full satisfaction only comes later. Somehow, even though the circumstances are terrible, life should feel great!

The key to understanding how this could possibly be true comes in the contrast between, 'for you will be satisfied,' and, 'for you have already received your comfort.' I think Jesus is saying here that the key to the best life is leaving enough room for God to give good things to you; if your hands are full of the things you've grabbed for yourself, you can't accept the really great stuff God wants to give you. Perhaps that's why John told the soldiers not to extort money (Luke 3:14). He's not saying, 'People who extort money are really awful people' (although that may, in fact, be kind of true), but, 'If your pockets are full of money you've extorted, how are you going to hold the things God wants to give you?'

Of course, it takes a lot of faith in Jesus to trust this advice. It's helpful for me to remember that the person who said these things is the same person who healed the leper: he is both willing and able to do wonderful things for people who have faith in him.

#### **Taking it home:**

- *For you and your family:* Do you find that your efforts toward happiness are often disappointed? Perhaps you need some recalibration. Ask God to point you in the true direction of happiness, and ask him for the faith to keep walking that way.
- *For your six:* God wants to bring satisfaction where there is hunger and laughter where there is sorrow. Ask God to fill the empty places in the lives of your six with good things from him.

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- *For our city:* In today's passage, Jesus' message starts to spread beyond the people who had heard it before. Pray the same thing for our city. Pray that people who have never met Jesus before would hear good news from him, and experience healing and freedom from him.

**Thursday, March 8<sup>th</sup>**

**Luke 6:27-49**

27 "But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, 28 bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. 29 If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn the other also. If someone takes your coat, do not withhold your shirt. 30 Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. 31 Do to others as you would have them do to you.

32 "If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. 33 And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that. 34 And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, expecting to be repaid in full. 35 But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. 36 Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

37 "Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. 38 Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."

39 He also told them this parable: "Can the blind lead the blind? Will they not both fall into a pit? 40 Students are not above their teacher, but all who are fully trained will be like their teacher. 41 Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in someone else's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? 42 How can you say, 'Friend, let me take the speck out of your eye,' when you yourself fail to see the plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from the other person's eye.

43 "No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. 44 Each tree is recognized by its own fruit. People do not pick figs from thornbushes, or grapes from briars. 45 Good people bring good things out of the good stored up in their heart, and evil people bring evil things out of the evil stored up in their heart. For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks.

46 "Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say? 47 As for those who come to me and hear my words and put them into practice, I will show you what they are like. 48 They are like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock. When a flood came, the torrent struck that house but could not shake it, because it was well built. 49 But those who hear my words and do not put them into practice are like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. The moment the torrent struck that house, it collapsed and its destruction was complete."

#### **Points of Interest:**

- 'to you who are listening I say'—the blessings and woes are addressed specifically to Jesus' followers, but what follows applies to everyone. Perhaps that means that the blessings and woes Jesus mention particularly have to do with people who are spreading Jesus' message: 'If you find yourself too wealthy, too full, too well-received for preaching my message, you're probably getting wrong.' If it's true that the

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blessings and woes apply uniquely in some way to the disciples or even the apostles, Jesus very quickly expands to include others in what follows. The rest of the sermon follows the same themes as the blessings and woes. It's as if Jesus is saying first to the disciples, 'Here's what you've signed up for,' and then turns to everyone else and says, 'And you are all welcome to join up as well.'

- 'Do to others as you would have them do to you'—this is another of those teachings of Jesus that packs a bigger wallop than you think it does at first glance. It's not just about being a nice person: turning in lost wallets to the lost and found, not hitting your little sister, etc. What Jesus is actually saying here is, 'Treat your enemies just like you'd hope your friends would treat you.' This seems crazy! And even if it's not crazy, it certainly is unfair. That might very well be Jesus' point. Jesus is calling people beyond fairness to generosity and mercy.
- 'Even sinners do that'—by 'sinners' here, I think Jesus means people who don't believe in God and/or have no regard for him. In other words, Jesus expects that believing in God would make a practical difference in a person's life. Specifically, belief in God should lead toward treating other people better than you otherwise would.
- 'Then your reward will be great'—Jesus is really into reward maximization. He's not recommending being 'good for goodness' sake'—as Santa Claus would say. He's not criticizing his listeners for trying to get the best deal they possibly can. His problem with people who only have reciprocal relationships ('I'll treat you well if you treat me well.') is that the strategy will never get anywhere: if you only give what you get and get what you give, you only end up breaking even. Jesus is giving us investment advice here: if we want big profits from our relationships, we should give more than we get. It's an investment in God's economy, and he pays very big dividends.
- 'and you will be children of the Most High'—children naturally imitate their parents. If we imitate God, we are showing ourselves to be his children
- 'Do not judge, and you will not be judged'—our treatment of others signals the treatment we will get. It's as if we have a choice between two different systems: a system of judgment and condemnation, and a system of forgiveness and generosity. We opt into a system by our attitude toward one another. If we choose to judge others, we'll be surrounded by judgment—from others, from God, probably even from ourselves. If we choose to treat others with generosity, we will find ourselves in an environment completely filled with generosity toward us.
- 'A good measure, pressed down, shaken together'—have you ever opened a potato chip bag only to be disappointed by how few chips there actually are in the bag? Jesus is promising us that we won't have that experience with the things he is talking about. God is generous with his portions.
- 'out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks'—in Jesus' analogy, our heart is a tree and our words are the fruit. We can test the state of our hearts by paying attention to our words.
- 'and do not do what I say'—it does no good to just listen to these words, or even to speak well of them. They are advice meant to be put into practice. They only help if you actually use them.

#### **Taking it home:**

- *For you and your family:* Try creating a judgment-free zone in your house today. Avoid judging one another, and even yourself. Check in at the end of the day. How does it feel? Do you notice a difference?

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### **Week 2**

- *For your six:* Pray that God would reward your six extravagantly for any acts of kindness they perform, especially when they are kind to people they don't particularly feel kindness toward.
- *For our city:* Pray for an economy of abundance to be unleashed in our city. Ask God to give us all the ability to treat others as we would want to be treated. Pray that our whole city would be changed, for the better, as a result.

**Friday, March 9<sup>th</sup>**

#### **Luke 7:1-23**

7:1 When Jesus had finished saying all this to the people who were listening, he entered Capernaum. 2 There a centurion's servant, whom his master valued highly, was sick and about to die. 3 The centurion heard of Jesus and sent some elders of the Jews to him, asking him to come and heal his servant. 4 When they came to Jesus, they pleaded earnestly with him, "This man deserves to have you do this, 5 because he loves our nation and has built our synagogue." 6 So Jesus went with them.

He was not far from the house when the centurion sent friends to say to him: "Lord, don't trouble yourself, for I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. 7 That is why I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you. But say the word, and my servant will be healed. 8 For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and that one, 'Come,' and he comes. I say to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it."

9 When Jesus heard this, he was amazed at him, and turning to the crowd following him, he said, "I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel." 10 Then the men who had been sent returned to the house and found the servant well.

11 Soon afterward, Jesus went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a large crowd went along with him. 12 As he approached the town gate, a dead person was being carried out—the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. And a large crowd from the town was with her. 13 When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her and he said, "Don't cry."

14 Then he went up and touched the bier they were carrying him on, and the bearers stood still. He said, "Young man, I say to you, get up!" 15 The dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus gave him back to his mother.

16 They were all filled with awe and praised God. "A great prophet has appeared among us," they said. "God has come to help his people." 17 This news about Jesus spread throughout Judea and the surrounding country.

18 John's disciples told him about all these things. Calling two of them, 19 he sent them to the Lord to ask, "Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?"

20 When the men came to Jesus, they said, "John the Baptist sent us to you to ask, 'Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?'"

21 At that very time Jesus cured many who had diseases, sicknesses and evil spirits, and gave sight to many who were blind. 22 So he replied to the messengers, "Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor. 23 Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me."

#### **Points of Interest:**

- 'a centurion's servant'—a centurion is a Roman army officer, more or less equivalent to a modern captain.

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### **Week 2**

- 'he loves our nation and has built our synagogue'—in other words, whether or not he's actually heard the sermons of John and Jesus, he's been living by them: he's not taking advantage of his position to gain at the expense of someone else; instead he's loving his enemies and doing good to those who hate him.
- 'I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you'—it is not out of pride, but out of humility, that he doesn't come in person to Jesus. For an outsider and a member of the ruling class, he's also quite culturally sensitive. He seems to know that Jews do not usually accept the hospitality of non-Jews, because of the increased possibility that they would become ritually unclean (non-Jews not, of course, being attentive to the kosher laws). So, even though Jesus is willing to come to his home, he sends someone to stop him outside.
- 'I have not found such great faith even in Israel'—the friends of the paralytic were willing to dig through a roof to get their friend into Jesus' presence, but the centurion has utter confidence that a simple word from him will suffice. He recognizes that Jesus is more than a healer: he is a ruler, who can command others to do his bidding. This centurion probably wasn't even looking for a Messiah, like the Jews were, but he recognizes one when he sees him.
- 'his heart went out to her'—Jesus' sermon about being happy in the midst of poverty and hunger could be interpreted as stoicism, but Jesus is not dispassionate toward suffering. All of the other miracles Jesus has done so far have been in response to a request; but this time, Jesus decides to do this one on his own, out of deep sympathy for the suffering of this widow.

In Zechariah's song in chapter one, he looks forward to forgiveness of sins and rescue from the shadow of death. Now, we've seen Jesus bring both. He showed his authority to forgive by healing the paralytic, and now he demonstrates his power over death by raising the widow's son.

- 'The dead man sat up and began to talk'—that has to have been pretty startling to everyone involved. Of course, it would have been quite a shock to see a dead man pop up like he was startled out of his sleep, but it must have been equally surprising to wake up in the middle of your own funeral.
- 'God has come to help his people'—the people recognize that something very special is happening. Everyone recognizes that Jesus is a great prophet such as hasn't been seen in a long time, but some go so far as to think that God himself has come to them.
- 'John's disciples told him about all these things'—John was thrown in Herod's prison before Jesus began preaching and healing; so he hasn't been able to see Jesus for himself.
- 'Are you the one who was to come?'—it's a little surprising that John doesn't know. You'd think that he would be able to recognize the one for whom he has a messenger. Maybe John wasn't as certain about when the savior would come and what his ministry would look like as I imagine he was. Or maybe John is confused and disappointed by the fact that he's still in prison—the Messiah is supposed to be a rescuer after all. In any case, John is not sure, but he also hasn't given up hope. He's heard enough that it's worth asking.
- 'The blind receive sight'—Jesus is referring to Isaiah 35, where Isaiah predicts that just such miracles will happen in the time when the Lord comes to replace sorrow with joy.
- 'Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me'—This reminds me of a few of the lines from Isaiah 35:

Strengthen the feeble hands,

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steady the knees that give way;  
say to those with fearful hearts,  
'Be strong, do not fear;  
your God will come . . .'

Jesus is encouraging John to continue in his faith, even though Jesus doesn't look exactly like he expected. He won't be disappointed.

### **Taking it home:**

- *For you and your family:* In this passage, we see Jesus answer a prayer from a distance, and raise someone from the dead! God is capable of doing much more than you might imagine or think of asking. Try increasing the boldness of what you ask him for. Who knows what might happen?
- *For your six:* Ask Jesus to show your six what they need to see in order to know he's the one they've been waiting for.
- *For our city:* Ask God to sustain anyone in our city who is about to lose hope.

**Saturday, March 10<sup>th</sup>**

**Luke 7:24-50**

24 After John's messengers left, Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed swayed by the wind? 25 If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear expensive clothes and indulge in luxury are in palaces. 26 But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. 27 This is the one about whom it is written:

'I will send my messenger ahead of you,  
who will prepare your way before you.'

28 I tell you, among those born of women there is no one greater than John; yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he."

29 (All the people, even the tax collectors, when they heard Jesus' words, acknowledged that God's way was right, because they had been baptized by John. 30 But the Pharisees and the experts in the law rejected God's purpose for themselves, because they had not been baptized by John.)

31 Jesus went on to say, "To what, then, can I compare the people of this generation? What are they like? 32 They are like children sitting in the marketplace and calling out to each other:

'We played the pipe for you,  
and you did not dance;  
we sang a dirge,  
and you did not cry.'

33 For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine, and you say, 'He has a demon.' 34 The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and you say, 'Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.' 35 But wisdom is proved right by all her children."

36 When one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. 37 A woman in that town who lived a sinful life learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, so she came there with an alabaster jar of perfume. 38 As she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them.

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39 When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is—that she is a sinner."

40 Jesus answered him, "Simon, I have something to tell you."

"Tell me, teacher," he said.

41 "Two people owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. 42 Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he forgave the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?"

43 Simon replied, "I suppose the one who had the bigger debt forgiven."

"You have judged correctly," Jesus said.

44 Then he turned toward the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. 45 You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. 46 You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. 47 Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—as her great love has shown. But whoever has been forgiven little loves little."

48 Then Jesus said to her, "Your sins are forgiven."

49 The other guests began to say among themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?"

50 Jesus said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

#### **Points of Interest:**

- 'What did you go out into the wilderness to see?'—to all appearances, John was just a rather strange man alone in the wilderness. Why, then, would huge crowds have gone out to hear him? Why would they have responded to his message? It's because he spoke with power and authority given by God.
- 'and more than a prophet'—John held a privileged place among the prophets, being the one given the opportunity to introduce the coming Lord.
- 'the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he'—John is great because of his place in history: he is the final prophet before the Lord ushers in an exciting new era. He could see that era, and he pointed out that it was on the way; but he did not actually get the chance to live in the wonderful new era himself.
- 'because they had not been baptized by John'—the tax collectors, among others, listened to John. Because of their repentance, symbolized in baptism, they created a straight path for Jesus to bring salvation to them, just as John had said. The Pharisees and teachers ignored John, unwilling to undergo the humiliation of renewing their membership in God's people by being baptized. That's why they've been so unready for Jesus.
- "'Here is a glutton and a drunkard'—the Pharisees are impossible to please. They dismissed John as a madman, and they dismiss Jesus as a party animal.
- 'wisdom is proved right by all her children'—John and Jesus are both wisdom's children, even if they show the family resemblance in much different ways. They both behave in ways that are appropriate to their time, their place, and their mission. John's more severe lifestyle was in accordance with his message of repentance and of desperate longing for something new to come. Jesus' propensity for partying fits well with both the exhilaration that the day has finally come, and with his mission to go wherever he can find sinners.

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### **Week 2**

- 'he went to the Pharisee's house'—despite the fact that the Pharisees have already shown themselves to be critical and unreceptive, Jesus graciously accepts this Pharisee's invitation. Jesus is doing to them what he would have them do to him.
- 'Jesus answered him'—I think this is a funny moment. The Pharisee is silently skeptical about whether Jesus is a prophet, and Jesus responds as if he was talking aloud. I would love to see the expression on this Pharisee's face. The Pharisee assumes that if Jesus were a prophet, he would know of the woman's sinful life, and therefore not have anything to do with her. The woman's past doesn't seem to matter to Jesus at all, except to lead him to remark on how much gratitude she expresses.
- 'You did not give me any water for my feet'—apparently, although the Pharisee invites Jesus to dinner, he is somewhat lacking in courtesy. He doesn't do any of the things that would express warm welcome or honor. Maybe he feels that Jesus should be grateful just to be invited. The woman more than makes up for the Pharisee's lack of courtesy with her lavish care.
- 'as her great love has shown'—she is not forgiven because of what she does; she does what she does out of gratitude, because she has already experienced forgiveness. Jesus is saying to Simon, 'Your actions toward me demonstrate that this woman feels as if she has been forgiven a great debt, and you do not.'
- 'Who is this who even forgives sins?'—perhaps this is new to the Pharisee crowd, or maybe it is just slow to sink in, that Jesus is a sin-doctor. He has come specifically to forgive sins.
- 'Your faith has saved you'—this woman is so confident that Jesus will forgive her that she extravagantly thanks him before it ever happens. It is just such faith in Jesus' goodness and power that leads to her being forgiven.

#### **Taking it home:**

- *For you and your family:* You can be utterly confident that Jesus will forgive your sins. After all, it's what he came to do. Spend a moment today praising Jesus for his forgiveness. Consider imitating the woman from today's passage, by figuring out some special way to thank Jesus. Perhaps you could write a letter to him, or give a gift in his honor to express your gratitude.
- *For your six:* John served as a forerunner for Jesus. He helped smooth the path so that it would be easier for people to recognize Jesus when he came to them. Ask God to help you to be the same kind of help for your six. What are the things that get in the way of your six being able to receive the good things Jesus might have for them? How could you play a role in helping them remove those barriers?
- *For our city:* The people in this passage could discern that John was a genuine prophet, sent from God. Pray that the people of our city would be similarly attuned to God's voice and able to recognize people who truly come from him.

#### **Sunday, March 11<sup>th</sup>**

##### **Luke 8:1-21**

1 After this, Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve were with him, 2 and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out; 3 Joanna the wife of Chuza, the manager of Herod's household; Susanna; and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means.

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### **Week 2**

4 While a large crowd was gathering and people were coming to Jesus from town after town, he told this parable: 5 "A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path; it was trampled on, and the birds ate it up. 6 Some fell on rock, and when it came up, the plants withered because they had no moisture. 7 Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up with it and choked the plants. 8 Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up and yielded a crop, a hundred times more than was sown."

When he said this, he called out, "Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear."

9 His disciples asked him what this parable meant. 10 He said, "The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of God has been given to you, but to others I speak in parables, so that,

'though seeing, they may not see;

though hearing, they may not understand.'

11 "This is the meaning of the parable: The seed is the word of God. 12 Those along the path are the ones who hear, and then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. 13 Those on the rock are the ones who receive the word with joy when they hear it, but they have no root. They believe for a while, but in the time of testing they fall away. 14 The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life's worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature. 15 But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop. 16 "No one lights a lamp and hides it in a clay jar or puts it under a bed. Instead, they put it on a stand, so that those who come in can see the light. 17 For there is nothing hidden that will not be disclosed, and nothing concealed that will not be known or brought out into the open. 18 Therefore consider carefully how you listen. Those who have will be given more; as for those who do not have, even what they think they have will be taken from them."

19 Now Jesus' mother and brothers came to see him, but they were not able to get near him because of the crowd. 20 Someone told him, "Your mother and brothers are standing outside, wanting to see you."

21 He replied, "My mother and brothers are those who hear God's word and put it into practice."

#### **Points of Interest:**

- 'and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases'—the followers of Jesus are not all men. We now hear of these women who play a crucial role in Jesus' work. They, like the woman from the previous passage, willingly give out of gratitude for Jesus' rescue; and by their sacrifice, they make it possible for Jesus to go on to rescue others.
- 'parable'—a parable is a story drawn from everyday life to illustrate some spiritual truth.
- 'seeing, they may not see'—another quote from Isaiah (Isaiah 6:9). Apparently, one of the reasons Jesus speaks in parables is actually to make his teaching harder to understand. This is an unusual teaching method.
- 'Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear'—this is the real point of the parable: pay careful attention to my words, because they are important.
- 'The seed is the word of God'—when he speaks, Jesus is sowing word-seeds. Just like the seeds of plants, these words he is sowing have the potential to grow and multiply in the lives of their hearers; but it's also possible that something could get in the way of

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### **Week 2**

their growth. Then it would be just as if the words were never sown at all: though they had ears, they would never really have heard.

- 'by persevering'—it takes some work for these seeds to grow. You have to try to hear these words, if you really want to have the words fulfill their true potential. Jesus' disciples are a perfect example in this passage of persevering to produce a crop. Everyone in the whole crowd hears Jesus' parable, but to them it probably just ends up being a semi-interesting agricultural story. The disciples actually put in the extra time and effort to ask Jesus what the parable means. Because they ask, the secret is unlocked, and the meaning of the words is able to grow in their lives.
- 'there is nothing hidden that will not be disclosed'—Jesus doesn't want his words to remain hidden. Just like you don't turn on a light unless you want people to be able to see, you don't speak words unless you want them to be understood. Jesus wants people to ask him what his words mean, but he does want them to ask.
- 'Those who have will be given more'—in the end, a farmer is looking for crops. He will plant more seeds where he has seen seeds grow, and he knows it's a waste to plant seeds where they don't grow. Jesus is the same way. He wants to see his words grow, and multiply, and have an effect; so, he'll always give more words to those who listen well. And he'll stop giving more words where they don't have any effect: it does neither him nor the hearer any good.
- 'My mother and brothers are those who hear God's word and put it into practice'—this principle of listening to and applying God's words is so important that people who do it are like family to him.

#### **Taking it home:**

- *For you and your family:* Is there anything from this week's reading that has been confusing to you? Let Jesus know. If this passage is any indication, Jesus will be happy to explain to you.
- *For your six:* Ask God to help your six to be good soil for Jesus' words. Pray that any words of Jesus that land in their lives would grow and produce some positive effect in their lives.
- *For our city:* Jesus traveled from village to village, making sure that all of them heard the good news that his kingdom had arrived. Pray that each and every neighborhood in Cambridge and Boston would be touched by Jesus' kingdom, and that all of the surrounding towns and cities would also. Pray for your own neighborhood or town, and at least five others.