

DEVOTED TO JESUS PROLOGUE

WHY READ ABOUT JESUS?

That is probably the \$10,000 question. Of what value is it to today's person to read about someone who lived so long ago? Isn't anything that happened in the 1st century absolutely irrelevant in today's fast paced world? The common thinking is that the church has become almost an obstacle given the way we live today. So each person reading these devotions has to come to grips with this central question. Why should I read about Jesus?

The answer to that central question lies in the fact that people in today's society have even less ability to cope with life than those say 50 years ago. I suppose that is because the world we live in continually depersonalizes us as individuals. It's all about information and efficiency. While it is true that we have more information, you have to ask yourself the question, "So what?" There has never been a correlation between happiness and knowing more. With the Earth's population surpassing 6 billion people, each person has much less significance than those who lived in the 19th century.

It is also true that we've become more efficient. We can beam out thoughts over the internet and have it half-way around the world in a matter of seconds, but does that make us happier? I'm reminded of a line in the movie, "Sabrina," where the main character says, "More isn't always better, sometimes it's just more."

So how is Jesus relevant? The truth is people haven't become any more adept at coping with life than they ever were. One only has to look at the increases in suicides, divorce and crime to understand that this flood of knowledge doesn't automatically give us a successful life. One has only to look at our failures at human relations, our inability to get along with others or even ourselves, to understand the need for the answers that Jesus gives us. As I write this I find that today's social media has made us less polite and less able to find the good in others. Because the internet is largely anonymous, our society has found that we can tear each other down and not have to bear any consequences. So what can we find when we approach Jesus Christ? I suppose the bottom line is that we find answers. We find the answer to our guilt when Jesus said, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." We find peace of mind when Jesus said, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you." As the population of planet earth grows, we find a new way to live with other people in the examples that He set in his daily life.

Each day that you read this devotion, you are going to be challenged to apply what you read about Jesus into your daily life. After all, that is really where it counts isn't it? If you just read about Jesus, what good does it do? It isn't good readers that Jesus desires, it is disciples. I just have the feeling that God is not going to be that impressed with what I know when I stand before Him on the last day. If that were true, God would be really impressed with the Scribes and the Pharisees of Jesus' day, yet Jesus had a lot to say about people who talk about the truth, but don't live it. I would challenge you to read a portion of this book each day with an open mind and an open Bible. Each day there will

be scripture for you to read and then we will talk about what you are reading. At the end of the day as you meditate on what you have learned, you will be asked to write down the answers to a couple of questions. The first is to write down the things you learned about God that day. The second asks you to write down the changes you sense that God is telling you to make with what you learned that day. It is my prayer that you will not only learn something about the life and times of Jesus Christ, but also that you will allow God to change you in the process. You cannot come into the presence of Jesus Christ without being changed. That's the work He did the few short years He was here. That's the work He continues to do today. So I invite you to take this journey with me. I have always believed it to be a journey worth taking. I believe you will also benefit from this year long journey in ways you cannot now imagine.

Ray Tuttle

WHAT WILL WE BE READING ABOUT THIS MONTH?

As the Jewish leadership reject the teaching and ministry of Jesus, we will be traveling again with Jesus and His disciples as they travel east across the Jordan River to the region of Perea. Jesus will travel around this area for 3 months in the time between Hanukah and Passover.

Most people believe that Jesus taught in parables for His entire ministry. Actually it wasn't until the mid-point in His 3 year ministry that He even began to speak in parables. From that point on, there were 3 separate times when Jesus spoke to the multitudes in parables. The Perea ministry contains one of those times. Some of the most well known parables were spoken to this particular group of people.

At the end of our time this month, we will be spending time looking at Jesus as He ministers to one of the most famous Bible characters. After all, who doesn't know about Zaccheaus?

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THE LATER JUDEAN MINISTRY
September 1st

One With God
John 10: 22-39

Jesus was deep in thought as He walked slowly and with purpose across Solomon's Colonnade one mild December night. The place was called Solomon's Colonnade because it was the one place that was built using the original stones from the temple that Solomon had built so many years ago. As He walked at times He would gaze across the Kidron Valley and view the white sepulchers that were built by the Jews to honor all of the prophets that came before Him that the Jews had killed because they didn't want to hear what God had to say about the way they lived their lives. Jesus had known from the beginning of time that His fate would be no different. In fact it was for that very reason He made the journey to earth in the first place. It was just that the time until the end of His visit on earth was fast approaching. He knew that it would be just a few months before His body would be temporarily laid in a sepulcher just like the ones he now gazed at. Today finds us looking at the events recorded in John 10: 22-39.

Jesus' time alone was interrupted by some people who wanted to know in plain, simple language if He was their Messiah. They didn't want to know this information because of some deep spiritual need to come closer to God. They wanted to obtain grounds for an accusation against Him. After all, the Hall of Hewn Stones was just around the corner where the Sanhedrin would meet, and this sham, as they saw it, could end quite quickly and without a lot of travel time. Jesus puts aside their hypocrisy in that He doesn't even address their initial request. There is no need for a fresh speech as they

had heard it all before. Jesus once again draws a parallel using the sheep illustration that he used in His last visit to Jerusalem and links the promise of the Messiah to the attitude of the sheep. This time, Jesus also teaches the absolute superiority of the One who keeps the sheep firmly in His hand.

What finally gets this crowd riled up is Jesus' claim that He is doing the work of Jehovah God. He says that if both Jesus and the Father are busy holding the sheep securely in their hand, then it would follow that Jesus and the Father are one. The statement implies within it that there is a single work, a single nature and a single power that is present in both Jesus and God. Man has debated throughout the centuries on exactly what Jesus was claiming when He said that He and the Father are one. I suppose it depends upon how you look at Jesus as to which side of the debate you are on. The Jews present had no doubt about what Jesus was saying. It's others who came after the fact that want to argue the matter. These Pharisees sum it up quite nicely in verse 33. They understood that Jesus was claiming to be God, the creator of the universe and the Father of all mankind. They regarded His statement to be utter blasphemy. Imagine a mere man claiming to be almighty God. The idea would be ridiculous in the mind of any rational thinking person if it were not true.

The idea of God, who can be present at one end of the universe and also be present at the other end, at the same time, could inhabit a human body is hard for the human mind to grasp. The concept that God, who placed the planets into their orbits by the mere moving of His fingers, limiting Himself to a frail human body seems far fetched to say

the least. Even more difficult to believe was that the Messiah would be any different from the one these Jews had studied so hard to understand. So we have a conundrum of the first magnitude here. As Frederick Farrar in his book, *The Life of Christ*, so adequately describes our situation, “He could as little descend to their notions of a Messiah, as they could rise to His.”

I have come to think that the reason most people in this world refuse to follow Jesus Christ as He is revealed in the Bible is that He doesn't fit their mold. Jesus refuses to be marginalized so that you can live your life the way you want and still be acceptable in God's sight. If Jesus were to physically walk the streets of any major city in our country, the words would be different, but the central theme would be the same. There would still be people who would demand that Jesus prove who He is even though deep down in their hearts, they already know who He is. They want to grasp at the idea that they are at heart, good people and are acceptable to God just the way they are. That way they can go on living their lifestyle and bypass anything that God would want for them to do or be. Jesus couldn't do that in the first century and He can't do it now. There has been only one constant question that has echoed down through the centuries, “What are you going to do with Jesus Christ?” The problem most people have with that question is that it requires one to deal with the Jesus as He really is and not how they would like Him to be.

What did God teach you about Himself today?

How has your relationship with Jesus changed today?

THE LATER JUDEAN MINISTRY
September 2nd

God's Representative
John 10: 22-39

When we last left Jesus, He was being confronted by a group of Jews whose sole aim was to trap Him in something He said. There were asking Him to identify Himself as Israel's Messiah in order to drag Him in front of the Sanhedrin and have Him done away with once and for all. Fortunately Jesus gave them more than what they were looking for when He proclaimed that He and God, the Father, were one. As we left our story, these Jews were gathering the many stones that had lain around Solomon's Colonnade at the time with the express purpose of stoning Jesus to death because they considered Jesus' statements to be blasphemy. After all, who was this Jesus that He should so plainly identify Himself as equal with the God of Abraham? We are still in John 10: 22-39.

Actually Jesus, in answering their questions about His identity, had pointed to His miracles and works as evidence of who He was. When that didn't work He tried a different tact and quoted from Psalm 82: 6. Now when I first came upon this area of John's gospel, I was puzzled because it seemed almost like Jesus was first claiming to be God and then back peddling on the issue. That was until I read Psalm 82. This Psalm of Asaph talks about a time when God will judge those to whom He gave the right and privilege of judging His people. In other words, Asaph describes a people who were given the power of judgment by God, Himself as His representatives on the earth. Jesus

argument was that if these men were called gods, how could it be blasphemy for Jesus to claim to be the Son of God? After all it was God, the Father, who sent Jesus to earth to do His work and who formally consecrated His Son to do that work. If those works that Jesus did could be seen to be God honoring and God sent, then by using simple logic, these Jews would have to conclude that Jesus must also be of God. As Jesus said in verse 38, "But if I do it, even though you do not believe me, believe the miracles, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me, and I in the Father."

The response of the Jews present is interesting. It seems that they no longer had a clear cut case of blasphemy against Jesus as His words immediately stopped the gathering of stones. They did, however, seek to seize Him by force to bring Him before their tribunal to stand trial for His words. Yet John indicates that He eluded their grasp because the time for such things had not yet come.

As we read on to close the 10th chapter of John, we see Jesus putting the Jordan River between Himself and those who wanted to destroy His ministry and end His life. Jesus and His disciples travel out into the region of Perea where John the Baptist had been so popular just a few short years ago. As the people saw Jesus and the signs that He did, there naturally arose a comparison between Jesus and their old resident, John. Yet John the Baptist had not done the kind of signs that Jesus now did among them. They used that fact and the fact that all that John had said about Jesus was true, as their basis for belief.

Jesus will not enter back into Jerusalem until the week before Passover. He will now spend the last three months of His time on earth in the region of Perea. It will be a time of ministering to the people of that region but also Jesus will finish the discipleship process for those who had consistently followed Him. After all, the time when they would have to take over His ministry was rapidly approaching.

In closing this chapter in the life of Jesus Christ, we go back to His claim to these skeptical Jews. Take a look at His words and the things that He did. Are these the words and works that God would do if He walked among us? As author Josh McDowell said in his book, *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*, “If Jesus was not God, then He deserves an Oscar.” If you can find an inconsistency in His life, if you can find anything that did not glorify God, then you have a right to reject Him as Lord of your life. If, on the other hand, you find as I have that His words and His life always reflected the God who is revealed in the entire Bible, then you have no other choice but to drop to your knees and openly acknowledge Him as Lord and Savior and to change the path of your future to do and to be all that He wants you to be.

What did God teach you about Himself today?

Where you able to find any inconsistency in Jesus’ life?

Another Narrow Door

Luke 13: 22-30

In the early books in the Left Behind Series, authors Jerry Jenkins and Tim LaHaye introduce us to a character by the name of Bruce Barnes. Bruce is the pastor of a church who never entered the narrow door that Jesus will be talking about today. He showed others the location of the door and even helped them to enter in, but he never bothered to walk through that door himself. Jesus often used the illustration of a narrow door to describe how one enters into the Kingdom of God. We've looked at two different occasions where this illustration is used, and today we are looking at a third. But in each case the circumstances that exist around that door are different as each time Jesus gives us a different aspect of door entering. Today we will be in Luke 13: 22-30 as we begin taking a look at the final three months of ministry in the life of Jesus Christ. He has taken his followers to the eastern side of the Jordan River into a kingdom that is ruled by the man who had beheaded John the Baptist, Herod Antipas. Jesus now strode through the countryside that was known as Perea.

In verse 23, we can almost imagine the person who spoke these words to be a Pharisee. This man was wondering about the number of people who would gain entry into the Kingdom that Jesus had spent so much time talking about. Though, this Pharisee would have been imagining a Messianic Kingdom far different than the one Jesus described. Jesus addresses the man's question with a challenge for the man to do all he can to enter the narrow door. The Greek word Jesus used here comes from the same root word from which we get our English word agony. The meaning that Jesus was trying to

convey was that it takes a great deal of struggling to get in. To Jesus' listener, the Pharisee, he believed that entry into the Messianic Kingdom was just a matter of course based upon who you were and the lifestyle you purported to live. We see evidence of that attitude in Jesus' words in verse 26. At the close of the age we can almost see the Pharisees approaching the gates of the kingdom extremely confident that they will gain entry once their claims of righteousness are recognized.

The problem was that in this instance as in all others, Jesus just doesn't cooperate with Pharisaic pride. For such pride will prove to be an obstacle that must be overcome in order to gain entry into His kingdom. The narrow door He talks about stands there obstructed by so many things that hinder one's entrance through it. One of those hindrances is false teachings by the scribes and teachers of the Law that are still present today. There's the enmity that exists in man's heart that refuses to buckle under any kind of suggestion that he is not in complete control of his own eternal destiny. All are obstacles that will prevent entry through this narrow door.

Jesus says that admission through that narrow door is not based upon outward relationships but inward realities. He talks about the kinds of people who will walk through the door. He lists Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and all of the prophets. Then, to add insult to injury, Jesus even alludes to the fact that even Gentile dogs are going to be allowed to enter. That is found in Jesus' remarks about the fact that the first will be last and the last, first. To the Jew, it was absolutely unthinkable that Gentiles would be fit for anything other than being squashed like a bug by Jehovah God. One can almost visualize

the law setting that was being done by the Pharisees and religious leaders that were always there spying on Jesus.

Have you ever noticed that when people are asked questions similar to the one Jesus was asking, they always begin with the words, “Well, I believe”? After they finish their answer they look at you as if to indicate that the issue is settled. What a person believes is not real relevant when it comes to who enters the Kingdom of God. In other words, God will not take a public opinion poll as to what the qualifications for entrance should be and then simply go with the majority. It is never enough that you believe something, even if you believe it with all of your might. The Pharisees believed as strongly as anyone can that they would be first in line when it came time to enter the Messianic Kingdom. Yet Jesus here says that their belief was not going to be of much help. As I have said before, it is God who sets the rules here. If what we believe about a thing agrees with what God says, then we are all right. The entrance into the Kingdom of God is too important a thing to be looked at casually. That’s because eternity is going to last for a really long time. It might be wise the next time someone you run into gives an answer beginning with “I believe,” that you show them the source for the correct answer.

What did God teach you about Himself today?

In what ways do your beliefs change the way you live?

Who's Really in Charge
Luke 13: 31-35

Have you ever had someone approach you to do you a favor where you just knew there was a hidden agenda somewhere in the offer? The alarm bells are ringing off in your head as you try to weigh whether or not to accept their “kind” offer. Your wariness probably comes from times in your life when the “favor” seems to benefit the giver more than you. Of course, it really depends upon the relationship that you have with that person. There are people who I would not even hesitate to accept an act of friendship. Others, well, I’m not so sure. Such is the case with Jesus in our story today.

In Luke 13: 31-35 we read about a group of Pharisees coming to Jesus and warning Him that He had better leave Perea because Herod Antipas is seeking to do Him great bodily harm. I don’t know about you, but I do a double take whenever I read this Bible verse. It was only a couple of days ago that we were reading in John where it was the Pharisees who were on the verge of stoning Jesus to death, now they are concerned about His health? This whole scene doesn’t make sense unless you approach it from the point of view of Herod, himself. I have read various accounts of the man which have all said that Herod never got over killing John the Baptist. If that were the case, it would seem logical that Herod might have coaxed these Pharisees into going to Jesus with the hope that such a threat would cause Him to leave Herod’s realm. That way Jesus would be someone else’s headache, preferably Pontius Pilate.

Jesus knows that His end is near, but that it will not come at the hands of this tyrant and it will not happen outside of Jerusalem. That is the whole message of the rest of these verses. Jesus talks as if His death will come within three days of that moment. Actually, Jesus is speaking figuratively. The point He is making is that there is a set time at which His end will come. The three days here is an allusion to His death, burial and resurrection, all of which took three days to accomplish.

In Jesus' response, He turns His attention to Jerusalem and talks about what it had been, what it was and what will become of it. We can imagine the anguish that was present in His voice. The city had a future of great judgment and another future of great joy. The great judgment, as we have talked about before, is fulfilled by the Roman general, Titus, in 70 AD as Rome made the city uninhabitable for centuries. The great joy has yet to be fulfilled when Jesus once more returns to Jerusalem as described in the 19th chapter of John's Revelation.

As Christians, there are times when we forget exactly who is in charge. We fume and we fret about the government and what it is doing to us at this particular moment in time. I've even known Christians who lived in constant fear that the government is coming to get them one day. We need to take a hard look at Jesus and the way He responded to Herod's threat. There is every reason for Jesus to be fearful of a man like Herod. The blood of John the Baptist still stains Herod's hands. The blood of many others who dared challenge his authority is also there. Yet here we see Jesus verbally stand up to Herod's threat because He knew whom He served and He knew who is

always in charge. What God sets out to do cannot be altered by anything that exists in this world.

So what do we do with all of this? If you have read the final chapters of John's Revelation, you know how it all ends. The events that John describes are set and there will be no altering them. Our part is to witness and be a tool in His hands each and every day. The rest of it we can leave to our God who is always in charge. The Apostle Paul said in Romans 13: 3, "For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you." So we need to rest in the truth that we know and have an intimate relationship with the One who's in charge.

What did God teach you about Himself today?

How has your view of the government changed today?

THE PEREAN MINISTRY
September 5th

A Blind Eye
Luke 14: 1-6

I guess I live in an affluent area in California. Those words seem strange to me because I really don't think of myself as being affluent. To be sure God has blessed me abundantly as He has promised, but I'm not rich by any measure of the word. Yet if you

look at the average price of housing in my city, we are talking a definite upper, middle class here. Living in such an area, it is easy for me to live under the illusion that there are no poor people in our city. I certainly can't see them as I gaze out of the windows of my home. The people who live in my neighborhood must have some level of wealth to even be here. I guess I am too much like the Pharisees in our story today. Please take a moment and read Luke 14: 1-6.

It is always interesting to notice the reasons why Jesus was invited in to dine in the various cities and villages in which He traveled. To be sure, it was common courtesy for the leading person in each village to invite Jesus in and to share a meal with such an honored and famous guest. I suppose if the President or Governor of our state came to town, he probably wouldn't be eating at my house, but you get the idea. On this occasion the purpose for inviting Jesus to dine was not one of simple courtesy. The Greek word that Luke uses gives us the idea that the intent of these Pharisees was a sinister one. The word means to search for the incorrect or to wait in order to point out something wrong.

Suddenly in their midst there is a man that is described as having dropsy. Now dropsy is a symptom and not a disease. In fact, it could be caused by a number of diseases. What this man suffered from was a collection of fluids in his body cavities, in his limbs or just under his skin. The question of the day would be did this man just show up because he knew Jesus was going to be there and needed help, or was he invited by this group of Pharisees? In other words, is this event happening because of God's

influence or Satan's scheming? It's an interesting question because it changes the lesson to be drawn from Jesus' words.

Let's say the man was an invited guest. The Pharisees knew Jesus couldn't resist healing on the Sabbath and this man appeared to be such an inviting target. After all, his illness is so visible. Jesus can't possibly miss it. If that is the case, then these Pharisees would have used this man for their own gain. How often are the poor and powerless taken advantage of by those who should know better? It's just like the politician whose only visit to the poor section of town is right near Election Day. It's like the thief who steals from people who don't have much of anything. The chronically ill don't have the power or influence to defend themselves, so they are easy targets.

On the other hand, perhaps the man just showed up at the Pharisees house. Do you notice that these Pharisees are so intent on watching Jesus; they don't even see the need. Their agenda of trapping and discrediting Jesus is so all consuming that they turn a blind eye to the needs of this man. He is not that important to them. Actually even if these Pharisees didn't have their alternate agenda, this man would have been seen by them as a reject, obviously steeped in sin which they believed had been the cause of his calamity. It was a classic case of being so caught up in the form and ritual of religion that you forget what your faith is all about.

As you can probably tell, this section of the Bible is loaded with personal application. Perhaps the Holy Spirit has begun the process of convicting you in this area.

I know He has convicted me. The question that I have been asking today involves my turning a blind eye to the needs of others within my own community. It's too easy for me to go about my own life and just assume that everyone's needs are taken care of. I need to stop and ask God what changes He wants to make in my life today. How about you?

What did God teach you about Himself today?

What attitude do you need to change as a result?

THE PEREAN MINISTRY
September 6th

Humility
Luke 14: 7-14

I used to think that humility was that one trait that once you've attained it, you've lost it. To me it was a character trait to be admired but only temporarily captured. That was because I had a misunderstanding of exactly what humility was. It took a once proud Pharisee to finally teach me about what humility is and what it isn't. It is the Pharisees gathered around this table who are about to be taught that very same lesson by the Master. We are still in the 14th chapter of Luke. Today we will be taking a look at verses 7-14.

If you had lived in the first century, you would understand that when you are invited to dine with an important person, you reclined at table in the order of your standing with your host. He, of course, sat at the head of the table with the most important person sitting on his immediate right. The second most important person

present sat at his left. Then the pecking order went down through the ranks alternating between the right and left sides until the least important person in the room sat at the opposite end of the table. Back then there was no such thing as name tags so what happened would be a form of the old child's game, musical chairs, where each guest scrambled to sit at the highest place possible. So the position of most important person present usually would go to the fastest rather than the most important.

Positions in life occur almost naturally. I remember learning in Sociology class how even on the playground, children will automatically rank themselves with the leader down to the lowliest without any help from teachers or their parents. It just seems to be as natural as breathing to the human experience. We all seek to be thought of as an important person and the opinion of our peers' matters no matter how old we get. Jesus noticed that fact when he sat down at this Pharisees' table. One of His aims that night was to teach a valuable lesson about behavior that is present in the Kingdom of God. In order to do that, He told the story that you just read.

If you were nimble of foot in those days, you could scramble to find a seat higher than your social standing in that village. The problem with that activity is that when the host arrives, something quite undesirable may happen. There is a good chance you will be asked to move to the only seat in the room not taken, that of the lowest and farthest away from your host. Imagine your embarrassment as all eyes fix upon you as you retire to the opposite end of the table. Jesus counsels those present to sit at the lowest seat so that when the host comes, he will exalt you by moving you to a higher place.

The Pharisee who taught me the most about humility was the Apostle Paul. In the second chapter of his letter to the Philippian church he said, “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. (Phil 2:3, 4)” He then went on to describe the greatest example of humility the world has ever known, that of Jesus Christ. We can’t even begin to imagine what it must have been like for Jesus to leave the splendor of heaven for the manger and life on this planet. We can’t even imagine what it was like to leave a place where you were in absolute and total control to a place where you washed men’s feet. Yet Jesus did exactly that as an example to us as to how we need to treat each other.

Go back and read Paul’s statement once again and let his words seep into the deep recesses of your mind. Humility is nothing more than treating the people around you as if their needs were more important than your own. You have a lot of choices in this life as to how you will live. That is the beauty of the free will that God has given you. What Paul has to teach about humility will make a striking difference in your relationships. Imagine a marriage where each partner looks out for the other’s interests before their own. Imagine what a co-worker would think if you promoted them before yourself. You want to make a difference in life. Start putting others first and you will be amazed at how differently others will treat you.

What did God teach you about Himself today?

In what ways can you care for the needs of others today?

THE PEREAN MINISTRY
September 7th

Reciprocity
Luke 14: 12-14

Today's section of the Bible means something different to me than most people. For a good part of my life, I was in the business of credit management. It was my job to see that a company's cash flow was such that it would not only be able to pay its bills but also to pay its owners a reward for their hard work and investment. The idea of reciprocity lies at the very core of credit management. You obtain the goods and services you need and in return you pay at a later date for those products or services. One follows the other in a logical sequence. Of course the reason I was paid a great deal of money for what I did was that the logical sequence did not always take place as designed in the agreement between the buyer and the seller. Jesus is not talking about the exchange of goods and services when He sat at the table of this Pharisee, but He is speaking about the whole idea of reciprocity just the same. Today finds us in Luke 14: 12-14, so let's start by reading this section of the Bible.

It was the habit of the rich and famous of Jesus' day to invite into their homes for dinner only those of equal or higher rank. That way one could assure themselves of a multitude of invitations to some really great parties. Jesus, however, speaks out against

such reciprocity in that He states that such behavior has its own rewards. If you invite people with the sole intent of gaining their favor and a future invitation into their homes, then the reward you gain is when you are invited over to their parties. He then gives another option for you to consider the next time you give a dinner party. Jesus suggests that you invite over only those people who cannot repay you. Then the reward you gain will come from God when the righteous are resurrected.

So what are we to do with what Jesus is teaching here? Is He saying that we need to start inviting the homeless into our homes for dinner? I can tell you there are some puzzled looks and furrowed brows among you at this point. You are truly hoping that I am not going to suggest such a strategy. As I have prayed and pondered over this part of the Bible, I'm not sure you can limit the application of this passage to a mere dinner invitation. The whole issue that Jesus addresses here is who is a righteous person? We all like to think of ourselves as righteous in God's eyes, but what does that really look like? Here we see God's son giving us a glimpse of how He looks at this idea of righteousness.

In God's eyes, the righteous person does the things that God would do if He were here on earth. The righteous person tends to look at life the same way that God looks at it. They also view people with the same love and tenderness as the God they serve. Did Jesus ever pass someone in need without ministering to that person with the gifts that God had given Him? While we do not have a record of every act that Jesus did while He was on earth, we do see a general pattern in that He spent a great deal of time helping

those who could not help themselves. His life was lived out in stark contrast to the Pharisees who reclined with Him at this table. It would be a safe guess to say that each person at that table looked at the poor in a different way. Even the disciples of Jesus didn't look at people the same way as their Master. These twelve men were still in a period of transition that would last for the rest of their lives.

So where does all of this find you today? If you look at your life over the last ten years, do you see a pattern of increased generosity towards the downtrodden of society? Are you able to look upon the poor with greater or lesser love than ever? Do you work to build a better life for yourself or to share with the less fortunate? The answer to these questions I will leave between you and the God whom you serve.

What did God teach you about Himself today?

Over the last 10 years has there been a change in your generosity?

THE PEREAN MINISTRY
September 8th

Parable of the Great Banquet
Luke 14: 15-24

This parable was told while Jesus was still reclining at the table of the leading Pharisee in an unknown Perean town. In order to familiarize yourself with Jesus' teaching, it would be a good idea for you to read Luke 14: 15-24. At first glance, it

would almost appear that Jesus is bringing home the point that these Pharisees need to be inviting the poor and disabled to their banquets instead of only their friends, but somehow I don't believe that interpretation to be the correct one. This parable is spoken by Jesus in response to the statement given to us in verse 15. It is all about the Kingdom of God and who gets to eat in that great banquet. What we have here is just some pious table talk like the often repeated "God bless you" automatically said when someone sneezes. The words sound holy and they are correct, but there was absolutely no thought put into the words spoken.

Now let's take a deeper look into the actual facts of the story. You can see Jesus using the rule of three in the parable to allow His listeners to better retain its meaning. There are three classes of guests invited to this party. Each class represents a different group of people living in Israel at the time. The first class is obviously represented by most of the men gathered at that table. They had been invited to dine and had initially given a positive response, agreeing to come. Yet when it came right down to the final word when it was time to attend, they all came up with some really lame excuses as to why they weren't coming. When the banquet is about to begin we see the true color of their pious words. These people saw nothing attractive in the banquet and had no reverence or respect for its host. Their own interests take precedence. So they got left out and were rejected by the Master of the banquet.

The second class of people is then brought in to the feast. They are described to us as the poor, the blind and the lame in town. These people, who lived in town, would be

representative of the common Jewish people. They lived where the first group lived, but were not of the same social strata. The servants were sent not only to invite, but to bring them in. Otherwise they might shrink from coming as they would not feel worthy of an invitation. After they arrive and are seated at the table, the servants still find that the great hall is still not filled to its capacity.

The final group is seen occupying those who do not live in the City of God, but in its surrounding countryside. I believe these people are a picture of the Gentiles of the world because they didn't live within the city. They lived outside the theocracy. Notice how the invitation becomes more ardent. One cannot assume that these people were forced to come, but there must be an earnest and more pressing invitation in order to convince them of the reality of the banquet and that they were welcome to sample its bounty.

As in a lot of parables, Jesus gives us the interpretation in verse 24. Now compare Jesus' words with those spoken by the Pharisee in verse 15. Do you notice the contrast? The intent of Jesus' words seems to be to jar these men out of their complacency and their empty piousness in order to show them how easily they will be left out of the Kingdom if they didn't alter their thinking dramatically.

As for the application that we can draw from Jesus parable, we have to take Jesus' words at face value and believe Him when He says that the only thing that we have to do to gain entrance into His Kingdom is to accept His open invitation. It doesn't matter

which social strata we currently occupy. Our family lineage is not at issue. There are some who come when word first arrives that they are invited. Still others must be coaxed and convinced that attendance will be all right and that the roof will not cave in if they walk into the building. No one is forced to attend, but those who accept this gracious invitation will be treated to one of the great parties of all time. So the only answer that remains is what did you do with your invitation?

What did God teach you about Himself today?

What things do you rely on when you approach God?

THE PEREAN MINISTRY
September 9th

Count the Cost
Luke 14: 25-35

After reading Luke 14: 25-35, I have to believe that Jesus would have made a really lousy recruiter. Can you imagine a recruiter for of the branches of our military using this tactic? “Before you sign up you need to think about all of the early morning hikes and crawling through mud you will have to do.” I can’t think that such an approach would bring many enlistees. It would be the same thing as a salesman telling you all of the things his product can’t do and wondering why you didn’t buy. So why is Jesus telling the crowd to count the cost before becoming one of His disciples? It is because Jesus knows that it will be those disciples who will forever alter the world. If you are to be

tasked with making such an impact, you had better be fully committed to what you are doing. There is no such thing as a half-disciple. This is not a part time job we are talking about.

Most people that I have run into have a really hard time with Jesus' idea that to be His disciple you have to hate those people closest to you. That's because they get caught up in the English and forget that Jesus wasn't speaking in English. The Greek word Jesus used here means to express a relative preference of one thing over another. Everything that Jesus said and did says that our relationship with people needs to be one of love. That would also include our relatives. What Jesus says here is that when it comes to a comparison between God and our relatives, there is no contest. For the disciple, God is always at the forefront.

The second requirement for being a disciple is that we carry our cross and follow Jesus. As we have said previously in these devotions, the word picture that the Greek language paints for the idea of carrying ones cross shows a person who obeys no matter what. We obey God just as Jesus did when He carried His cross to Golgotha. Disciples have to be more than just learners; they are to be doers of that which they learn. It is absolutely essential that a disciple not spend all of his time in Bible study without ever applying any of it to actual living.

To illustrate His point of counting the cost before we sign up, Jesus gives us two illustrations. The first one has always had an impact on me. For those of you would have

been reading these devotions for a time, you know that for most of my professional career, I was a Credit Manager in the construction industry. As such, I have watched a lot of people run out of money before a building project was completed. When contractors and material suppliers aren't paid, they tend to walk off the job and the building stands there unable to do the task for which it was intended. The owner does not have the cash flow that the completed building was to provide, and therefore, cannot repay his lender. The lender then forecloses and the building becomes a monument to the owner's lack of foresight.

The same thing can be said for the king who tries to do battle without enough of a force to win. This would be the same thing as if I were to go up to the average NFL linebacker and started to pick a fight. Unless I have a death wish, this is not a wise course of action.

So what does all this mean to the person who has accepted Jesus' free gift of salvation? It means that you are faced with a choice in what you do with that gift. There is a lot of difference between believing and being a disciple. It is possible for me to always sit on the fence when it comes to Jesus. That means I believe enough to gain entry into the Kingdom of God, but I refuse to give up control of my life to God. While it is true that my eternity is settled, I will never be what God wants me to be until I surrender and pay the cost of being a disciple. I will never know the ultimate joy that happens when God uses me in a mighty way. My life will never reach its full potential as I sit on my fence and watch others around me experience life in its fullness. Each of us

only gets one life. We only get one allotted span of years and there are no “do overs” here. My advice is for you to count the cost and get in the game. Besides, sitting on a fence can get really uncomfortable after a time.

What did God teach you about Himself today?

What are you currently doing with Jesus’ gift?

THE PEREAN MINISTRY
September 10th

Parable of the Lost Sheep
Luke 15: 1-7

In Luke 15: 2 we read of the mutterings of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law about the fact that Jesus actually ate and socialized with sinners and other low-life types. In response to their mutterings, Jesus tells a series of three parables to teach all who would hear how God views lost people. Each parable views the same situation from a slightly different angle so that in combining all three parables one gets a much clearer picture of how God views those who have wandered away from His original intent for them.

The teachers and Pharisees in the crowd that day had a much different gospel in mind. The fact is they didn’t have any message to give the lost. They had nothing to say to the sinner. They felt that it was the sinner’s responsibility to get cleaned up first and

then they would consider guiding the lost to where they could obtain God's mercy at some point in the future. Jesus, on the other hand, told of a different kind of forgiveness. To be sure, Jesus' model of forgiveness involved the fact that one needed to recognize that they had wandered from the life that God wanted for them. The difference was that Jesus and His disciples went out to the lost and spent time with them in order to show them what life with God was all about. All three of these parables speak to the fact that it is God who is constantly reaching out and doing the work of restoration of the lost. It is God who actively longs for their restoration. It is God who throws a party every time someone who is lost comes back to their creator.

In the parable of the Lost Sheep, as found in Luke 15: 3-7, the emphasis is on that which is lost. In this case, it is a single sheep out of a population of a hundred sheep. Now if you stood on a street corner and asked a hundred people if they would leave ninety-nine perfectly healthy sheep unattended in order to spend time looking for a single sheep that was too dumb to stay with the group, most people would say no. If you had asked the Pharisees and teachers of the law present if they would leave the flock, they would have certainly said no. The fact that Jesus' illustration of God shows that He cares so much for the lost that He will leave the ninety-nine is a testament to the great love God has for us.

So, if the shepherd in this parable is an illustration of God, who are the sheep? They are you and me. Now, I know you were thinking that these sheep are people who don't know God, and it is true they are also the sheep in this parable, but believing sheep

can wander away just as easily as non-believing sheep. You have to realize that sheep spend most of their time looking down at the ground. A sheep's only concern is where the next clump of grass is located, so his field of vision is usually less than two feet in front of him. This sheep is so concentrated on the here and now and how his life is going that he fails to notice that the rest of the flock has gone on to a new field. The satisfaction of the immediate has so dominated this sheep's life that he wasn't listening when the master called, so he was left behind.

Perhaps as you have read this parable, you have come to realize that it is more about you than you would like it to be. When was the last time you stopped long enough to actually listen for the shepherd? If you're like most sheep, you don't even realize you're lost until it's too late. The real comfort behind this parable is that we have a heavenly Father who never stops looking for us. He loves us so much that He is willing to leave the other ninety-nine just to look for us. When we feel His touch on our backs and we finally look up and realize we're lost, He is quick to pick us up and carry us back to where we need to be. That's the kind of God we serve.

What did God teach you about Himself today?

Are you currently one of Jesus' lost sheep?

THE PEREAN MINISTRY
September 11th

Parable of the Lost Coin
Luke 15: 8-10

The second of three parables that Jesus taught to those people who tend to devalue other people was the Parable of the Lost Coin. It can be found in Luke 15: 8-10. It is a short parable if you count the words, but as you read it you will find enormous applications in its few words. The basic facts about the parable are that a woman had ten silver coins of considerable worth in her house. On this occasion she finds that one of the coins has gone missing. She sweeps the entire place until the coin is located. It is at that point that she invites all of her neighbors over to help her celebrate finding the coin.

Now things get lost in my house all of the time, but then I possess a few more items than your average first century Israeli household. What gets me is when I lay a tool down somewhere and it turns up missing when I go back for it. I'm not sure if the tool magically disappeared only to reappear somewhere else in my house or a small group of mischievous pixies came and moved the tool. Something happened to move that tool from the place where I know I left it. It's the same thing when I can't find something in a drawer only to have it suddenly appear right on top when my wife opens the drawer a few moments later. So I understand how this woman can lose something of great value in her house.

On a more serious note, the lost coin was part of her household. How often we are more careless with the things that belong in our house than with something we have borrowed from a friend. More importantly, we tend to take for granted the people who

live in our household until we realize they are lost. Take a moment and let that thought rumble through your brain. We can lose the people in our house when they are set aside and forgotten for a period of time. Sometimes we forget that they once were valuable to us. As Martin Luther King said, “We spend so much time making a living that we forget to make a life.” Those close to us can be neglected for so long that we forget they even live there.

One can almost imagine the coin lying forgotten in the dust. Its silver glow was lost in the dirt and grime that was allowed to build up on it over time. Imagine how it felt as it was thoughtlessly stepped on day after day. The coin never lost its value, but that value couldn't be seen, and in its present condition, couldn't contribute anything to the richness within that household. Does this describe anyone in your house? Perhaps this is the day you need to do a little inventory.

The main image projected by this parable is one of a woman frantically searching once she discovers her error in taking care of such a valuable possession. In Jesus' parable, the woman is represented by our loving, heavenly Father, who like the shepherd will spare no effort to locate those who have wandered away and become lost. Yet this parable also reminds us that it is important to take care of those who are closest to us so that they might not end up carelessly lost and in need of their Father's search. Notice how this woman interrupted her life because it became more important to find this coin than anything else that was on her agenda for that day. She labored both diligently and hard to locate that coin and she had the stamina to keep on looking even when the coin

didn't appear right away. It did not matter to her that she had nine other coins sitting on a shelf all shiny and new. She was going to keep sweeping and searching until she found it.

Finally when the coin appeared in the dust, she rejoiced and threw a party for all of her friends. Notice her words in verse 9. In the original Greek, it reads "the coin which I lost." She took responsibility for what had happened to that coin. She didn't say, "This dumb coin went and got itself lost again." We have that same responsibility towards the people who live in our house. God will only hold you responsible for your stewardship of what He gives you. You are never responsible for the attitudes and actions of someone else. Yet you are responsible for your contribution to the situations you now find yourself in. If God's Holy Spirit is convicting you at this moment, you need to seek His help in setting things right in your home.

What did God teach you about Himself today?

How are you doing with your stewardship of God's stuff?

THE PEREAN MINISTRY
September 12th

The Young Rebel
Luke 15: 11-19

One of the roles I play in life is that of a parent. I always wanted to be a good parent, so I have always sought to develop my parenting skills. What I have found in the parable of the Prodigal Son has always been an example for me of what can happen when a child rebels against everything that I believe. This parable talks about every parent's nightmare. You spend a lifetime trying to instill a sense of values within a child only to have them walk away from everything that you have ever taught them and spend some time making really bad decisions. Their instrument of rebellion might come from friends, drugs or sex, but the result is always the same. What this parable offers is hope for an anguished parent that one day the teaching that you have done will matter; that your child will turn from his destructive lifestyle back to the bedrock of the faith that you have tried to instill. Parents of wandering children want to know that Solomon's wisdom in Proverbs 22: 6 where he says, "Train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not depart from it," actually has a possibility of happening. They hope that their child will walk the same path as the lad in our story today.

The Parable of the Prodigal Son can be found in Luke 15: 11-32 and you can tell from just the number of verses, it is the longest parable Jesus told. In keeping with Jesus' trend of using the ancient verbal rules to aid our memory, He uses the rule of three here and introduces us to three characters who are members of the same family. Though they come from a common stalk, these three people are very different from each other. As such, people reading this parable tend to identify with one of the three characters as an example in their own life. That being the case, we're going to be spending the next three days looking at each of these characters and attempt to draw some lessons from each.

Today, as we look at younger brother, we see the picture of a wayward individual. He is his father's child by birth, but far from him in heart and spirit. Having a bad case of the "gimmes," he demands his share of the inheritance before it would naturally have come to him. Jewish law said that he would inherit a third of the estate upon the death of his father. Of course, what the law said and what the boy demanded were two different things. For some unknown reason, the father grants his son's request and cashes in a portion of his estate and gives it to his son. This buys some peace for a short time, but life on the farm is much too boring when your pockets are overflowing with cash. One day he just ups and leaves in order to spend some time in the fast lane. Jesus describes the boy spending every bit of his money on riotous living.

Just as the boy's income is depleted, there is a famine in the land and he begins to experience something that is totally foreign to him. He begins to feel hungry and has no money with which he can take care of his basic needs. With his friends gone along with his money, the pangs of hunger awaken at least part of the teachings of his father that one has to work if they want to eat. Now it just so happens that the only employment the boy can find is working for a man feeding his pigs. Now Jesus' description of the boy's job is interesting given the fact that He is speaking to a Jewish audience. Jews have never been great fans of the pig. Finally the lad wakes up and makes the decision to return home. As he returns home, notice how the lad spends a bit of time practicing the speech he will make to his father when he finally gets there.

Of course, the end of the story is that the father welcomes the wayward son back into his house with open arms and throws a banquet in his honor. The spiritual side of this parable is that obviously Jesus is using this boy to describe someone who has walked away from a relationship with his creator and sets out to follow his own destiny. Does this boy describe anyone you know? The parable you have read today is one of the great stories of forgiveness that is found in the Bible. We'll talk more tomorrow about the attitude of the father in this story. Our focus today is on the idea of forgiveness. In the first letter that John wrote to the church, he said, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." What we see in that verse is a classic cause and effect. If a child of God confesses, God will forgive. It's automatic. It always happens. For the child of God, there is no such thing as a sin that cannot be forgiven once it is confessed. God is always there waiting for you with open arms. It does not matter what you have done. That doesn't mean that you will escape the consequences of your sin. This boy had no more inheritance, but what is more important is that the relationship was restored to what it was prior to the boy's rebellion. That is what God is willing to do for each one of us if we will but turn our attention back to Him.

What did God teach you about Himself today?

Did your view of God change as a result of your reading today?

The Waiting Dad
Luke 15: 20-24

As we continue our discussion about the Parable of the Prodigal Son as found in Luke 15: 11-31, you may identify with the second main character of the story, that of the father in this story. In the father, we see a man who loves his boys to a fault and will always want the best for them, even though at times we think him to be more than a little unwise. As we talked about yesterday, there was no legal reason for this man to turn over his son's inheritance before he died. As a father, myself, I have to believe that this man knew what his younger son would do with all of that money. So you have to ask yourself why he did it. Was it a case of a father giving his son enough rope to hang himself with? That view would not be consistent with the loving father we know this man to be by his actions after the son returned. Perhaps this father understood that the only way he could gain his son was to set him free and let him experience life in its rawest form. For that, I greatly admire this father. It is hard to let your children fail and to become distressed to the point that this young man did. Yet as the boy walked back into his father's life, one has to believe that he had learned deeply some of those harsh lessons that life sometimes has to teach. So lesson number one that we can take out of this parable is that this father loved his son enough that he allowed him to fail.

We have to believe that the younger son was rebellious before leaving this home. You get that in the first words of Jesus' parable. The boy demanded his inheritance. There is no use of the common rules of politeness. The boy didn't say "please," or "May

I have.” He said, “Give it to me now.” There are times when the only way a family can survive is to get the rebellious child out of the house. John White in his book, “Parents in Pain,” says, “The decision to dismiss children from home should not be made either because it will work or as a matter of expediency. It should be made on the basis of justice.” Is it morally just to keep children at home when other family members suffer deprivation in one form or another because of their rebellion? So that means lesson two is that a rebellious child should never be allowed to ruin a home.

Lesson number three would be that the father in Jesus’ story never lost faith that his son would return. Jesus tells us that while the boy was still far away, the father saw him. That means that the man was actively looking for his son’s return. We don’t know how many days the man kept watch. It was probably for quite some time, given the facts of Jesus’ story. Through all of that time, this father never gave up hope that one day he would see his son walking down the path back home.

Finally, lesson four is that the father rewarded the repentance of his son. The man actually threw a party for the boy. There wasn’t even a hint of an, “I told you so,” ever said. Instead of recrimination the boy received grace. Instead of a lecture, the boy received praise for making the right decision. It wasn’t the time for driving the lesson home. That had already been done. Now was the time to rejoice with the boy in order to affirm in him the acceptance of who the lad was in spite of his earlier actions. The boy saw true love in action and I doubt he ever forgot that lesson.

Well that's the list. Today's lesson was all about parenting. I know that some of you may never know the joys and the trials of such an experience. The principles that we have talked about today, however, apply to all relationships. It doesn't take a parent to want the best for other people. So take what you wish out of our time today. Tomorrow we will draw the spiritual elements out of this parable and be able to apply some more of its elements to our lives today.

What did God teach you about Himself today?

If you are a parent what do you need to do to improve your skills?

THE PEREAN MINISTRY
September 14th

The Impatient Brother
Luke 15: 25-31

As we conclude our look at the Parable of the Prodigal Son as found in Luke 15: 11-31, we come to the third and final character in our little drama. In the older son, we see the responsible one. He has sweated and labored for his entire life doing his father's bidding and feels more than a little used and angered by his father's attitudes towards his younger brother. If the truth were known, this older brother had written off his sibling a long time ago. In his obedience to all of his father's wishes, this boy had developed a sense of superiority and pride. It was where he found his identity and his self-worth. His only thought was to the future where one day he would be calling the shots; where he

would be the master of all he surveyed. The older son looked forward to a time when he would no longer have his life and his peace disrupted by the rebelliousness of his brother.

As you read verses 25 to 31, there is nothing outrageous in the older brother's attitude. At least that is what I have always thought. Perhaps my view is a bit clouded because I happen to be an older son. Yet there is nothing forgiving in his attitude or his words. To his way of thinking his brother got exactly what he deserved. His attitude was that there should be no recognition given to his brother's remorse. The actions of his brother warranted the punishment of God and to give his brother any comfort was tantamount to standing in the way of God administering His justice.

In understanding that Jesus often used the oral technique of end stress, you have to believe that the older son was the real point of His parable. Go back to the beginning of the chapter and you see that Jesus' audience consisted of some Pharisees and teachers of the Law. It was to this particular group of people that Jesus' words are addressed. If you were one of the teachers of the law standing there that day, you would have strongly identified with the older son. That's exactly how they felt about life and about others who didn't measure up to their standards. They were the ones who were saying, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them." To their way of thinking such "dregs of society" were fit vessels for God's wrath and nothing more. For Jesus to be seen publicly with such scum was beyond their understanding. At the end of his parable, Jesus gives us the father's view which is radically different from that of the older son. Jesus is teaching them that their attitude shows just how far they are from God. The disciple of God must

emulate God's attitudes about things and especially how He deals with His rebellious creation. After all is said and done, these men had more in common with the younger, rebellious brother than they cared to admit.

In looking at the Parable of the Prodigal Son as a whole, most people would have either liked to have had or would like to be this type of loving, forgiving father. Yet in looking at this parable in its context, we understand this father is none other than our heavenly Father. Once again, this parable is told in a sequence of three parables to a group of Pharisees and teachers of the Law whose attitudes tend to rebel against this father's faithfulness to his wayward son. The parables of the lost sheep, the coin and the wayward son all tell of a God who is continually in the business of searching out those who are lost. All three parables tell of the party that happens in heaven when the lost are found and come back into a place in life where they should be, and should never have left. These three parables give us a glimpse into the very heart of God. We who have wandered away from the life that our heavenly Father intended for us do cause grief for Him. Yet when even one of us turns away from our rebellion and returns home, the party that is thrown in heaven is something to behold. As Christians, our job is to see that this kind of party is thrown often. It's time for us to roll up our sleeves and do what we can to get a heavenly party started.

What did God teach you about Himself today?

Is there going to be a party in heaven as a result of what you will do today?

THE PEREAN MINISTRY
September 15th

The Parable of the Shrewd Manager
Luke 16: 1-15

If you could take a look at the average delivery in my mailbox, you would see that there are a lot of people who believe it's their job to tell me how and where to spend my money. From the ads to the pleas for help, my mailbox is just full of ideas on where my money should be spent. Most times I simply recycle all of this helpful advice without even a reading. Today, however, is much different. For when the King of Kings gives me financial advice, I have to sit up and take notice. That is exactly what Jesus is going to do for us today. So now its time to open up your Bible and turn to Luke 16: 1-15 and take a moment to slowly read what Jesus has to say about this most important of areas.

At first glance, most people are confused by the Parable of the Shrewd Manager. That is because it appears that Jesus is commending this man for his dishonesty. We know that there is no other place where Jesus actually promoted sin, so we can be certain that He is not doing so here, so we go away from this parable confused as to its meaning. Actually at no time did this manager violate any laws. As steward of his master's resources, he had complete control over those resources. Though he acted in an unrighteous manner, his actions were completely within his power and authority as a steward. Thus neither he nor the master's debtors could be charged with any crime.

As we read over this parable, the first key we see that will guide our interpretation is that this parable was addressed to those who call themselves disciples of Jesus. That being said, we turn our attention to verses 8 and 9 as Jesus gives us the meaning and guides us to its interpretation. The rich man commended the steward for acting shrewdly in taking care of his future needs. In the same way, Jesus adds, we need to be using the resources that God has entrusted to us in such a way so as to win eternal friends. In other words, Jesus is telling us that we are stewards of God's material wealth while we are here on earth. As a steward, we are to use those resources to bring more people to God so that when we are in heaven there will be a lot of friends there to greet us when we arrive.

At the stage of life that I find myself in right now, retirement is starting to stare me right in the face. Being a numbers guy, I have always been a financial planner and so have built up a nice little nest egg for those years. My kids are through college and we are in the launching process. I had always thought that at this stage of my life, I would be concentrating on squirreling away cash so that there will be enough to last for the rest of my life. Then I read this section of the Bible and I come away questioning my motivation for all I am doing in this area. Now don't get me wrong, I am not questioning the wisdom of saving over spending every nickel that comes into my possession. It's just that there is no way for me to know just how much money I will need in the future. My future rests entirely within God's hands.

The more today's Bible verses run around in my head, the more I become convicted that I need to clear my spending decisions with God before I commit rather than after.

God makes it clear that as His disciple, my number one priority has to be the advancement of His kingdom. My number one priority cannot be the accumulation of so much wealth that I can live out my days without ever having to depend upon Him for my needs. When God brings before me opportunities for me to give so that His kingdom will be advanced, I need to be free to open up my checkbook and give out of the abundance with which He has blessed me. "I can't afford it," is not supposed to be a part of my vocabulary.

When you hear a sermon on giving, how does it make you feel? If such a sermon makes you angry, you have to ask yourself why. Do you live your life with God's Kingdom always in view, or do you only look towards your own needs? As we have talked several times over the past few months, God owns everything that you currently call yours. That is more than just a nice idea. It needs to be the way you live your life. Perhaps this is the time when you take this area to God in prayer. Let Him teach you and mold you into the kind of Kingdom giver that He wants you to be.

What did God teach you about Himself today?

What truly motivates your giving?

THE PEREAN MINISTRY
September 16th

Jesus on Divorce

Matt. 19: 3-12

The whole question of divorce has been a controversial subject for the church to handle ever since there was a church. There was a time when I had my opinions on this matter completely resolved theologically and then I watched some good friend's marriage split apart and I felt the need to revamp the theology I had so carefully crafted. Since then I have watched a number of marriages fail and have spent some time doing more Biblical study until I arrived at what we will be talking about today. The subject comes up at this point in Jesus' ministry because the Pharisees were actively attempting to discredit Jesus with either the multitudes who were following Him or Herod Antipas in whose territory Jesus now walked. You can read about what Jesus had to say on this subject in Matthew 19: 3-12.

As you remember, the Jewish view of divorce is exactly what got John the Baptist arrested and killed by Herod Antipas. Perhaps it was the Pharisees sincere desire to see Jesus walk that same path. In any event the whole topic of divorce was just as controversial then as it still is today. The controversy in the first century revolved around one's interpretation of Moses' words in Deuteronomy 24: 1-5. What did Moses mean when he said, "Finds something indecent about her"? The great Jewish school founded by Rabbi Shammai held that Moses only meant a moral transgression such as infidelity. The other great Jewish theological school, that of Hillel, held that Moses meant that a certificate of divorce could be given for any reason where a woman displeased a man. Since culturally a divorce meant the loss of a dowry, there was also a financial element involved.

Jesus' answer took His audience beyond Moses to the highest possible source in any and all subjects; that of God, Himself. His answer goes back to the whole issue of sovereignty, or who is in charge. If God joins two people in marriage, is it man's right to separate that union? Moses had given Israel a "green light" when it came to divorce, but even in his words you don't get the idea that he commanded divorce, only tolerated it. According to what Jesus says here, there is only one instance where divorce should be allowed and that would be on the basis of marital infidelity. Now I know there are some of you reading this that are beginning to turn me off right about now. If you notice in verse 10, the disciples were doing exactly the same thing.

As I said earlier, there is no more controversial subject in today's church than this one. I have seen a great many beliefs expressed on this subject, so let me add mine and you can take it for what it is. I believe that God's original intent for marriage was that it is to remain until one of the partners dies. Jesus, in this passage, allows divorce for marital infidelity, but you cannot hold the position that He requires divorce in such a case. It is still God's desire that a marriage hold together. Remember Jesus' teaching that the amount of forgiveness one receives from God being directly proportional to the amount of forgiveness one gives towards others? That teaching holds true even when the issue is divorce.

It is also a Biblical reality that divorce is not ever mentioned as the unforgivable sin. You cannot point to a place in the Bible where once you were divorced you were

forever excluded from the Kingdom of God. Divorce is no better, nor is it any worse, than the sin that I commit on a daily basis. Once sin is nailed to the cross, it is forever forgiven and forgotten by God. To be sure, we have to live with sin's consequences, but there is nothing that can separate us from the love of God (Romans 8: 38, 39.) When someone in your church goes through something as emotionally wrenching as a divorce, it is not your job to condemn, but to lift both parties up and uphold them in love. Notice I said both parties. It is not your job to take up sides in the dispute. There are no "good guys" when a marriage fails. It is at this very point when a person going through a divorce needs our love and support the most. Let us not fail them or our God in what we now say and do towards those who are hurting as a result of a failed marriage.

What did God teach you about Himself today?

To whom can you minister today?

THE PEREAN MINISTRY
September 17th

The Disciples' Marching Orders
Luke 17: 1-10

Jesus spent a lot of time teaching and developing His disciples into the kind of believers who would take His message into the world. He has talked about counting the cost before undertaking the journey. Now He gives them four sets of marching orders to describe the kinds of character traits which a disciple of the Living God is supposed to

work on. This section of the Bible is also called the four laws of discipleship, but I have never been a big fan of laws so I like the term “marching orders” a lot better. We are in Luke 17: 1-10, so why not take a moment to review this section to get familiar with what Jesus had to say?

The first of Jesus’ marching orders is that the disciple is not to lead others into sin. The fact that sin is inevitable is found throughout the Bible. It is within the nature of the human to stray from God’s plan for us. In this section of the Bible, we find that Jesus warns us to not lead others in that same direction. Such an act usually comes in three different facades. The first common facade lies with the person who doesn’t want to wander alone, so they take another along for the company. The second person is the one who is only pretending to be saved. They like playing the role of the Christian, but have never experienced Jesus entering their heart. Finally we see the one who actively discourages others from following our Lord. For them church is but another power base to conquer. They want the thrill of having people follow them in whatever direction their heart desires. If you find yourself living any of these three facades, it would be a wise thing for you to take Jesus’ warning in verse 2 to heart.

The second of Jesus’ marching orders is found in verses 3 and 4. Here we see that the disciple is to be a great forgiver. To be sure, Jesus directs us to rebuke each other in love, but there is also the idea that we are to be unlimited in our forgiveness of any offenses that are made against us. For the disciple, compassion and love rules their life. Jesus told His disciples to forgive even seven times a day if that’s what it takes.

Verses 5 and 6 give us the third of Jesus' marching orders for His disciples. He speaks to us in the area of our faith. Jesus' disciples want Him to show them how to have more faith. The thrust of Jesus' answer is that we not have more faith, but great faith. Do you see the difference? It is not the quantity of our faith that matters. It is the quality of that faith that makes a difference. That is why Jesus talks about the idea of having a tiny amount of faith, the size of a mustard seed, and being able to do really large things with that faith. There is to be a boldness that describes a disciple's belief. Once they hear the voice of God, they move out to accomplish the task that God has given them knowing that everything they will need to succeed will be supplied by God exactly at the moment when it is needed. Perhaps there are some of you reading this who have experienced God working in your life in this manner. If so, you will have no problem with the whole idea of walking in faith. You tend to do it every day.

Finally, the last 4 verses talk about the fact that the disciples needs to view his service as a duty not a favor. There is a problem that can occur when the disciple believes God, steps out in faith, and then watches heaven and earth move in front of them as the task is accomplished. To do anything by the power of God can be an almost intoxicating experience. What Jesus is telling us here is that when we see God at work in our lives, pride should never govern our reaction. We are to remember that the service we are doing for God is something we should be doing as a natural course of life. We are nothing but a bond servant doing the master's bidding. As Paul said in Romans 12: 11, we should "Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord." In

other words, we work for God until the job is done. We work with endurance. As Paul said to the Galatian church, “Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up” (Galatians 6: 9.) Finally, the disciple of Christ does his service with all humility. As Paul also said, “For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you” (Romans 12: 3.)

This section of the Bible is absolutely loaded with personal application. Each of these marching orders are not simple tasks that can be mastered in a single Sunday afternoon. Each of these marching orders will take you a life time to just scratch the surface. Yet as each day dawns, he who considers himself to be a disciple of the Master must find himself working on these kinds of qualities for his life. How well are you doing in this area?

What did God teach you about Himself today?

How well are you doing in this area?

THE PEREAN MINISTRY
September 18th

Ten Lepers
Luke 17: 11-19

The Apostle Paul writes that we are to, “give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus” (1 Thes. 5: 18.) It is also customary in our culture that when someone does something for you that is extraordinarily nice, that you show your gratitude either by words or by deeds. That, at least, is what my mother always taught me. Today we will read about a case where that common courtesy was not extended for some reason by the majority who were blessed by Jesus. Now I know that a lot of you know the story that Luke tells us in chapter 17, verses 11-19. Yet it still would be a good idea for you to open your Bible right now and to read the story once again. I’m sure that I will point out a few things that you probably won’t see at first glance.

We are told by Luke that Jesus is traveling on the border between Samaria and Perea headed towards the City of Jerusalem. As he entered a village, there were ten lepers who were crying out to Him. Now we know from our prior time that leprosy was the most feared disease in the first century. These men were forbidden to come within six feet of any person, so they would not have been allowed to do anything else than to cry out from a distance. What is interesting about their greeting is the Greek word they used that is translated “master” is only used three other times in the New Testament. The word is used to denote someone in a position of authority as we would use the word, “commander.” The other three times the word was used in the New Testament it was by the disciples when they were reacting to Jesus’ authority rather than something He taught. The other thing I notice in their greeting is that they were asking for mercy, which has a definite spiritual side to it. When someone asks for mercy instead of healing, it usually

means that they do not consider themselves worthy of such a favor, but wants to appeal to someone's compassion in the hopes that healing will come.

Notice that Jesus did not heal them immediately. He asked them to do a simple act of faith. As it was stated in the Mosaic Law, someone healed of leprosy was required to immediately show themselves to a priest in order to be declared physically and spiritually healed. The other thing to notice was that these ten men would have split off and gone in different directions. Nine of the men would have set off for Jerusalem and one of them would have gone to Sychar in search of a priest. Notice that it was only the Samaritan who came back and fell at Jesus' feet to thank Him for the miracle that had occurred in his life.

So the question of faith always comes up at a time like this. Each of these men had the faith to go and find a priest. Each of them had to have faith in Jesus' ability to heal in order to ask Him in the first place, but I have to ask, "so what?" What other alternatives did they have? Leprosy was incurable at the time. Each of them had probably heard of Jesus' track record by now. After all, Jesus batted a thousand when it came to healing people. It was the one with the stronger faith that came back and threw himself at the feet of Jesus. That is how it is supposed to be when someone is a disciple of Jesus Christ.

It's like the man who falls off a cliff and grabs at a small branch sticking out of the side of the mountain. As he is hanging there inches from his eternity, he calls out for help. He says, "God, if you exist please help me." He hears an answer from the heavens

telling him to just let go and everything will be all right. After a moment of thought, the man yells, “Is there anyone else up there?” It is not that uncommon for someone who is in deep trouble to seek some kind of benefit from Jesus. There are others who receive Jesus as a result of receiving such a benefit from Him. There was only one man that day that was truly healed. As Jesus picked up this Samaritan and dusted him off, He told him, “Rise and go; your faith has made you well.” That is the man who would walk differently from that day forward. Do you find yourself approaching Jesus only for what you can get out of Him? I know that sounds a bit crass, but it happens all of the time. Do you go to church only to be fed and so that you will feel good when you leave? Isn’t that the same thing? The truly healed are those who hear Jesus’ voice and then allow Him to change their heart from the inside. That was true of this Samaritan. It can also be true for you.

What did God teach you about Himself today?

Do you regularly spend time thanking God?

THE PEREAN MINISTRY
September 19th

The Parable of the Persistent Widow
Luke 17: 20-37, Luke 18: 1-8

We come today to another really difficult parable to understand. Most times it is taught as an illustration to keep on praying, and that would be at least part of the answer

to unlocking this parable. Yet I believe one also has to keep in mind what was on everyone's mind at the time. To gain that, we have to read Luke 17: 20-37. Jesus spends quite a bit of time talking about a time of terrible judgment that actually is just on the horizon for the Pharisees He is addressing during the time when Rome came to discipline its rebellious province. This parable was spoken directly to His disciples in order to make sure that they keep on praying even though they would not see God's kingdom come in their life time. The actual parable can be found in Luke 18: 1-8.

Notice how the judge is described by Jesus. The picture Jesus paints is not of a man who is concerned about what God or the general population thinks of him. What Jesus is trying to tell us is that this widow had only two chances of getting justice from this judge; slim and none. This man would have been a political appointee of either Herod or Rome. He would not have judged based upon the Jewish Law, but would have been concerned with keeping the peace in the location which he was assigned. These men were paid for their service and were on call at all times in case the need arose. In addition to his normal salary, his income would have been supplemented by any bribes that would come his way under the table.

The other character in our story is a widow. We have talked before when we visited the Galilean town of Nain about the plight of widows in that culture. They were constantly on the verge of starvation and lived in total poverty for as long as she could survive. Being as poor and as powerless as this woman was, there was absolutely no way she would get any justice from the courts of the time. Jesus does not even tell us if this

woman's issue was worthy of a judgment in her favor. That's not the point of the parable.

So as we look at these two characters as they interact, the judge is absolutely unwilling to rule in the widow's favor. After all, there is nothing in it for him. That is until the widow wears him out with her constant pleading. Actually there is something interesting in the judge's words as Jesus relates them. Most of our translations have the idea that the judge feared that the woman was going to wear him out. The actual literal translation of the phrase in the Greek is, "unless she gives me a black eye." I read a number of commentators who surmised that the judge feared the frustrated widow was going to go at him physically.

Jesus contrasts the attitude of the judge with that of God. In my opinion, however, it would be a mistake to think that Jesus is teaching us that we are to wear out God with repeated requests as a way of getting God to do what we want. I like what Alfred Edersheim said in *Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, "The inference from the Parable is not, that the Church will be ultimately vindicated because she perseveres in prayer, but that she so perseveres, because God will surely right her cause: it is not, that insistence in prayer is the cause of its answer, but that the certainty of that which is asked for should lead to continuance in prayer, even when all around seems to forbid the hope of answer."

When you look at this parable in the context of our waiting for the coming Kingdom of God, the reason for staying at it in prayer is obvious. The Apostle Peter

dealt with those who ridiculed the fact that Jesus was coming back. With these words He comforted the church, “But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.” We are to continue to pray for that day when all things will be made right. As Aslan said to Beaver in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, “Peace Beaver, all names will soon be restored to their proper owners.” We continually pray, not because of a desire to wear God out, but because of the certainty that in the end justice will prevail and God will have the final word.

What did God teach you about Himself today?

How is your prayer life different today?

THE PEREAN MINISTRY
September 20th

God’s Work Day
John 11: 1-16

Green’s Fruit Grower reports that, “Our hours are nothing to the birds. Why, some birds work in the summer nineteen hours a day. Indefatigably they clear the crops of insects. The thrush gets up at 2:30 every morning. He rolls up his sleeves and falls to work at once, and he never stops till 9:30 at night. A clear nineteen hours. During that time he feeds his voracious young two hundred and six times. The blackbird starts work

at the same time as the thrush, but he lays off earlier. His whistle blows at 7:30 PM, and during his seventeen-hour day he sets about one hundred meals before his kiddies. The titmouse is up and about at three in the morning, and his quitting time is nine at night. A fast worker, the titmouse is said to feed his young four hundred and seventeen meals; meals of caterpillar mainly in the long, hard, hot day.” When I read that, I thought that it kind of makes the hours that I work in a typical day seem short. How about you?

The eleventh chapter of John begins one of the more famous stories about Jesus that exists, the raising of Lazarus from the dead. As we have been reading, Jesus has been ministering in the area of Perea for the past several weeks when He receives word from Mary and Martha of Bethany that their brother, Lazarus, was sick. We originally met the two sisters in Luke 10: 39-42, but Lazarus was not mentioned in Luke’s narrative. Yet we gather from John 11: 3 that Lazarus must have made quite an impression on Jesus during that visit. Now if we do some mathematics from the verses in the 11th chapter of John an interesting thing emerges. In verse 6, we read that when Jesus heard that His friend Lazarus was sick, he stayed in Perea another two days. We know from any map that Bethany was probably a day’s journey from where Jesus was in Perea. From John 11: 39, we read that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days when Jesus arrived. That means that Lazarus had died on the exact day that Jesus had received the message that he was sick. Yet in verse 4, Jesus proclaims that Lazarus’ sickness would not end in death. Do we have a misdiagnosis here? Actually because we know the end of the story, we know that the end result of Lazarus’ condition was not death.

So anyway, upon the pronouncement by Jesus that they were going back into Judea, there arises a mini-mutiny within His group of disciples. Their last visit to the area had almost resulted in the stoning of Jesus, so one can understand their reluctance to revisit the area any time in their lifetime. Jesus addresses their concerns using some figurative language in verses 9 and 10. Why not take a moment to reread these verses so they are fresh in your mind. The point that Jesus is making is that each of us has our work day or work period set by God. While this time elapses, nothing can stop the work. You have to remember exactly who is in charge of all things. When that time ends, the disciple must be sensitive to the Holy Spirit so that he feels released from the work and must then wait for God to assign Him elsewhere. The purpose of God in assigning Jesus each of His tasks is that He would be glorified. That would also hold true in what was before the twelve back in Judea. We know from reading on in John that the result of Lazarus' healing did impact the entire region of Judea. As long as the disciples followed Jesus when He was about His Father's business, they had nothing to fear from anything man could do to them.

It is only when that lesson sunk in that Jesus told His disciples plainly that their good friend, Lazarus, was dead. The disciples reluctantly follow, though there was the sarcastic comment of Thomas that is recorded in verse 16.

The lesson that can be drawn from our story today is that as disciples of Jesus, we also must be sensitive to the work that He has for us to do. Sometimes we want to quit when it gets tough. Sometimes when we are criticized, constructively or not, we want to

throw in the towel. Sometimes we fail to be as diligent in our work for God as the creatures in our story today. These 12 men followed Jesus even though they felt that it might even lead to their death. Yet still they followed because they had developed a trust in their master that transcended even the threat of death. When you work for God, you need to allow Him to direct all aspects of that work. Let Him direct when you start, how you accomplish the task and when you finish. Anything else is not true servanthood.

What did God teach you about Himself today?

How much of your day is directed by Jesus?

THE PEREAN MINISTRY
September 21st

Comforting the Living
John 11: 17-27

By the time Jesus had arrived in Bethany, the funeral procession had passed and the real job of mourning was in full swing. People had arrived from all over the area as the rabbis had always instructed them. It was an important thing in Jewish society to comfort the living, to stand with them in their hour of need. The mourning in the house of the deceased lasted up to thirty days, the first three being the greatest period of mourning, then began the seven days of less intense mourning, followed by the next three weeks of just being there for the family as a show of support.

As we begin our story in John 11: 17, we see that Jesus and those following Him had arrived on the outskirts of Bethany. He sends word to the house of His arrival, which prompts Martha to hurry out to meet Him. We can only imagine how many times over the last several days, she had spoken those very words to herself. “Lord, if you had only been here, my brother would not have died.” Martha knows she asks the impossible, but that does not stop her. One can almost sense that in her statement, “But I know that even now, God will give you whatever you ask.”

It is on Jesus’ response that we want to concentrate our attention today as He gives us insight into the giving of life and His part in that process. The Old Testament does not give a clear theological teaching that the dead will rise and the soul will spend eternity somewhere. As a result, in Jesus time no other subject could start an argument between a Sadducee and a Pharisee faster than this one. Even in the Psalms, there is no mention of exactly what happens after one dies. In the prophets, there are only two references, Isaiah 26: 19 and Daniel 12: 2, which give any light to this subject. So the belief that Martha exhibits here is probably more of a hope and a confidence in her Lord than anything else. Still, in the short time that Martha has known the Lord, there has built up a confidence in who He was and in the relationship that had been built up between Jesus and the family.

I can remember years ago singing the words of John 11: 25, 26, though the real meaning of those words do not come out in song. What does it mean that Jesus is the resurrection and the life? Did you notice that Jesus did not say that He gives the resurrection and life to man? His words indicate that He is the source of the resurrected

life. What Jesus is telling Martha is that her brother never stopped living, and was at that moment alive in the spiritual realm. How many times have the bereaved been comforted by these kinds of words. Yet Jesus makes it clear that He is the source of that resurrection and life. There is no other place where one can gain that kind of comfort after losing a loved one.

As I write this, I am in the process of watching my own parents deal with the aging process. My memories of them are always that they could do all things. Yet as time takes its toll on their bodies, I take comfort and hope from what I know lies in their future. As I am witness to the difficulties they experience in the very act of living, I know that one day soon they will be set free from those difficulties into an existence where pain and suffering lose all meaning. Those who have been crippled with arthritis will once again be able to run and leap like they did when they were children. People who cannot straighten their back will be able to turn cartwheels. Those who can no longer walk without an aide will be able to run with the wind. The people in Martha's house could not give her that kind of comfort and hope. That's something that only Jesus can give to us.

As Martha returns to her house to summon her sister Mary, one can almost imagine the peace that now reigns within her soul. All she knows is that her Master is here and everything will be all right. Can the same thing be said about your soul right now?

What did God teach you about Himself today?

When is the last time you went to Jesus for comfort?

THE PEREAN MINISTRY
September 22nd

The Master Has Come
John 11: 28-37

I've sat under a number of senior pastors over my many years of being a Christian. Each one of them had their own strengths and weaknesses. One in particular taught me how to study the Bible properly. Before this pastor, I didn't appreciate the pictorial qualities of first century Greek. Before that time in my life, I couldn't even spell "hermeneutics;" much less know that there were rules governing how one interprets the Bible. The problem is that I came away from that experience with a gospel that was cold. I felt that all I needed could be found in scripture through proper study. It was in those years that I became a Pharisee. Emotions for me were suspect. I felt they had no place and even got in the way when one seeks only the truth. It was passages like the one we will be looking at today that brought me back from the "dark side." It was here that I found that I serve a God who is not just about knowledge, but also a God who feels comfortable with His emotions. That is the side of Jesus that we will be looking at today. We are in the 11th chapter of John and will be looking at verses 28 through 37.

Yesterday, we took a look once again at Martha of Bethany. She had made a great statement of faith when she said, "I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who

was to come into the world." I believe that as she walked away from the presence of Jesus she felt a great hope deep within her. I'm also sure that, though she felt the presence of that hope in her life, she had no idea why she felt that way. She certainly had no idea of what was about to happen.

In Mary we see someone of great emotions. She's the type of person who likes to experience life in its fullest sense. Perhaps you see a lot of yourself in Mary. We can almost imagine her throwing herself at the feet of Jesus. In her complete and total despair, she can only utter the same words as her sister, Martha. These were the same words that they had been consoling themselves with over the last several days. "If only Jesus had been here, our brother would not have died."

As Jesus witnessed her grief and the weeping of the people who had followed her out there, He became extremely moved by the scene. The original language that John uses here means to become agitated, moved deeply or disturbed within. Now Jesus was the only person present who knew what was about to happen. He knew that the mourning He was witnessing would soon turn to extreme joy, yet He was still moved by all that was happening around Him to begin weeping Himself. It was enough for Him to see His friends broken in sorrow. That sight moved Him as He sought to give them comfort in their grief.

So where is God when you are grieving, or are dealing with the great tragedies of life? In his second letter to the Corinthian church, Paul writes, "Praise be to the God and

Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows” (2 Corinthians 1: 3-5.)

The picture of God that Paul paints here is not of a God who sits in heaven and calmly utters, “There, there, it will be all right.” In the original language, the word, comfort, means to pull along side of someone and put your arms around their shoulders to give them comfort in both words and deeds. Have you ever felt God’s arms wrapped firmly around you giving you the strength you need to get through a time of trial? Then you have experienced the God of all comfort that Paul talks about.

Martha and Mary took comfort in the fact that their Master had come. They didn’t know why they felt that way, they just did. It was probably because they knew enough about Jesus to know that everything would be all right. That same Jesus is there for you when you need Him. He is just a prayer away from ministering to your heart as He did to their heart.

What did God teach you about Himself today?

Do you trust Jesus like Mary and Martha?

The Raising of Lazarus
John 11: 38-44

Over the last couple of days, we have viewed Jesus' interaction with two sisters living in Bethany to comfort them after the death of their brother Lazarus. As we have seen, there is nothing that we have read or discussed that would give us an indication that these sisters had any inkling of what the last page of our drama would contain. It was probably common knowledge that Jesus had on two other occasions raised someone from the dead, but in both cases the dead had been brought back to life on the same day as life had been taken from them. That was not the case here. Their brother Lazarus had now been dead for four days. It was a commonly held belief that the drop of gall that had fallen from the sword of the angel of death had completely worked its effect. These ladies could not have possibly imagined what was about to take place. Let us now rejoin our story as we read John 11: 38-44.

We can almost picture the scene as the group of mourners arrived at the garden tomb of Lazarus. Most tombs of the rich lay in ornamented gardens in order to provide a place of solace and comfort for the living as they paid their respects to the dead. The peace of that place was interrupted by the weeping and wailing of the throng of people who had now arrived. Jesus' request that the large stone that covered the entrance of the tomb be rolled away was met with an instant complaint by Martha. There are a lot of possibilities to explain her reluctance to grant Jesus' request. Perhaps she could not bear to witness the ravages that death had brought to her beloved brother. Perhaps she sensed what Jesus was about to do and feared that such an attempt would undoubtedly fail.

Perhaps it was as the Apostle John had said and she didn't want to subject the entire company to the stench that was associated with death.

We can almost visualize the look that Jesus gave her at that moment. Did Martha really believe that confession of faith she had made only a few moments before in verse 27? Was her belief such that she would take action, even though the very thought of that action so thoroughly repulsed her? Yet Martha had a complete trust and faith in the character of her Master. Through all of her doubts and misgivings, she ordered that the stone be rolled away. After all, Jesus had promised that if she only believed she would witness the glory of the living God.

As Jesus gazes heavenward, His prayer is one of thanksgiving to a God who had already heard Him and had given answer. There was no ritual chanting, no booming voice intended to increase the drama of what was about to unfold. It was just a simple prayer of thanksgiving. After that prayer, Jesus commanded the dead to vacate the tomb. One can only imagine the scene that was witnessed here. Lazarus would have been wrapped in foot wide linen clothes from his feet to his shoulders as we commonly see in museums where they have an Egyptian mummy. His head would have been wrapped and his jaw tied shut. He obviously would have been miraculously transported out of that tomb. Yet his body was markedly different from its state when it was laid in that tomb. The flesh that was gray in death was now pink with the blood of life. Jesus commands that His friend Lazarus be set free from the clothes of death so that he could resume his life.

The question that begs to be answered right now is how big is your God? Is your God small enough to fit in your pocket or purse? That way He can be taken out only for special occasions when He is really needed or when it is convenient. Do you confine your God so that He exists only on those “religious” occasions like Christmas or Easter? Is your God someone to be feared, so that you dare not get too close lest He somehow hurt you or demand you do something you don’t want to do? I had a pastor once who asked me a question that still continues to haunt me. He asked, “Is Jesus all you need?” If all that befell Job in the Old Testament happened to you, would you still be satisfied because you still held Jesus deep within your soul? It took a lot of courage and belief for Martha to direct that stone be rolled away. The reality is that Jesus never disappoints the person who calls upon Him. Every time I have had to rely on His strength, He has been there. Every time when life was crashing around me, I felt His arms around me, holding me close. The fact of the matter is that Jesus will never leave nor will He forsake you. He will always be there. Perhaps you need to enlarge your view of God so that He can really be all that you need for each moment of your day?

What did God teach you about Himself today?

How big is your God?

The Great Imposter
John 11: 45-53

Here I was thinking that it was going to be a wonderful day. The weather seemed to finally be showing that the coldness of winter was about to break its grip on things and that spring was just around the corner. That was when word came that I had been summoned to the Hall of Hewn Stones to a special meeting of the Sanhedrin. The only thing the messenger had said was that the “Great Imposter” was at it again.

As I rushed to get ready to attend the meeting, I began to think back to all of the times that I had heard this Man speak in Jerusalem. To be sure His words always gripped me and His knowledge of the Torah was quite impressive, but His claims to be our Messiah were quite laughable. No, his miracles were definitely of satanic origin. How else could you explain them? The man just doesn’t come with the right credentials for anyone to take Him seriously. No, he must be treated as just an irritant; something to be swatted away like a fly on a hot summer’s day.

As I arrive at the hall, I caught sight of a Pharisee named Saul and asked him what all of the commotion was about. It was at that point that I learned that the Great Imposter had raised a man from the dead in nearby Bethany. I wasn’t sure what the big deal was all of a sudden until I learned that this man had been dead four days. It seems that word was quickly spreading throughout the populace and that belief in His claims was now spreading like wild fire. Yes, this was a most serious situation. The dangers of what

could lie ahead were now racing through my mind as I searched for the answers that would save our nation.

As our meeting convened, Caiaphus, our High Priest, had someone brief the entire gathering of the events of the day. It seems that a man by the name of Lazarus, a man of some prominence in the village of Bethany had been brought back to life. Word of this event was even now upsetting the status quo. I could sense that the entire city was in danger of erupting into a riot that would bring Roman troops. The thought of the Roman soldiers indiscriminately slaughtering our people brought a sudden chill to my heart.

My mind was searching for an answer as bedlam ruled the meeting room. Caiaphus stood up with his usually pompousness and bid the room to quiet down. With his usual arrogance, he begins with the statement, "You know nothing at all." That's Caiaphus in a nut shell; always elevating himself at the expense of the rest of us. Yet at that point he finally says something that makes sense. He pronounces that it is better for one man to die than the entire nation to perish. As he says these words, my mind races back to the Torah and to the words of Solomon where he said, "Wisdom is better than weapons of war, but one sinner destroys much good (Ecc. 9: 18.) Yes, that was the answer to our imposter problem. This man must die for the good of our nation.

Every person has a set of philosophical beliefs from which they make major decisions about life. These beliefs tend to guide them in the very direction they take in the short time we live here on earth. Sometimes those core beliefs are quite strong and

they will resist with everything they have any attempt to challenge or change them. It's the whole idea of, "Don't confuse me with facts, I've already made up my mind." I believe that is exactly what was going on within the entire Jewish leadership at that time. Jesus represented a challenge both to their way of life and to the power and prestige they had enjoyed until this "Great Imposter" showed up. That was simply not acceptable to their way of thinking. You will run into people like that as you travel through life. You want very much for them to see Jesus the way you see Him, but they just won't allow themselves to get it. You pray year after year for them, but nothing seems to ever change. If that describes where you are today, my advice to you is to not lose hope, nor to stop praying for them. Remember standing in that meeting hall that day was a young man named Saul who later suffered a change in heart and became one of the greatest Apostles of all time. Who knows, the God of miracles might just have another one in store for the one you are praying for.

What did God teach you about Himself today?

Are you still praying for someone's salvation?

THE PEREAN MINISTRY
September 25th

The Pharisee and the Publican
Luke 18: 9-14

C. I. Scofield writes, “On one of Mr. Moody's western campaigns, he was followed from city to city by an aged and broken man of venerable appearance who, in each place, asked the privilege of saying a word to the great congregations. He would stand up and in a quavering voice would say: ‘Is my son George in this place? George, are you here? O George, are you here? O George, if you are here, come to me. Your old father loves you, George, and can't die content without seeing you again.’ Then the old man would sit down. One night a young man came to Mr. Moody's hotel and asked to see him. It was George. When the great evangelist asked him how he could find it in his heart to treat a loving father with such cruel neglect, the young man, said: ‘I never thought of him; but Mr. Moody, I have tried to do all the good I could.’ That is a good picture of a self-righteous prodigal in the far country. He was generous with his money and with his words yet every moment of his infamous life he was trampling on the heart of a loving father.” So often we think that what is on the outside of a person is the only thing that matters because that is the thing that is seen by others. Today we are talking about another famous parable that was told by Jesus, that of the Pharisee and the Publican or Tax Collector. You can find this parable in Luke 18: 9-14.

What you have just read is a parable of contrast between two completely different men. We see each man walk into the holiest place in the nation of Israel in order to offer a prayer to God. Yet the thrust of each prayer is completely different. With the first man, we see someone who is confident in his own position before a Holy God. Notice how he feels blessed that God has kept him from a list of truly heinous sins and wants his God to notice his extreme generosity and obedience to the commands of God. One can

almost imagine this man casting a superior glance at the other man in our story as if to mentally point out to God a perfect example of all of the evil that he was talking about.

The second man is given to us as one whose occupation is a tax-collector. This is where one can't look at the parable too closely as it is doubtful that this man would even be allowed in the temple if his occupation were known. Tax-collectors in those days were cut off from the nation of Israel by an angry population. Notice the lack of self-righteousness in this man's prayer. The only thing that matters is his recognition of his sinful state and his need for forgiveness. He beat upon his breast as a symbol of his moral bankruptcy and even refuses to glance heavenward; he was so ashamed of his present lifestyle.

Jesus draws His lesson to a close in verse 14 when He says, "I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." Sometimes I think Jesus' main business was to shock people. This parable has that effect on most people who hear it. I don't care how long you have been a Christian and how good you think you are, this parable will burrow deep down in your heart if you will let it.

The parable says that there is no difference between the wrong that lies deep within us and the wrong that is done in full view of the public. When we stand before a Holy God, the cruddy dirt in our lives stands in stark contrast to God's complete purity. The tax-collector was not free of sin. It's just that as he cast himself at the feet of God and

begged for mercy; Jesus tells us that he was a recipient of that mercy. Just as each person reading this, the man remained a sinner. Unlike the self-righteous Pharisee, this tax collector was set free and was counted by God as one who had obtained righteousness. So the next time you are about ready to enter into the presence of God, it might be a good idea to do a little spiritual inventory of your life and allow the Holy Spirit to point out to you the things in your life which are currently separating you from God.

What did God teach you about Himself today?

Are you a Pharisee or a tax collector?

THE PEREAN MINISTRY
September 26th

The Rich Young Ruler
Matt. 19: 16-22, Luke 18: 18-23

In Luke 18: 18-23 we meet a rich young ruler who came up to Jesus to ask Him an interesting question. You can also read another account of the same interview in Matthew 19: 16-22. This young man wants to know what he has to do in order to gain eternal life. Jesus points him to the Law and directs the man to do what it says. To which the man replies that he has obeyed what was written in the Law since his earliest days. Now we know from taking the Bible as a whole that no one is going to be able to keep every one of the Laws perfectly throughout their life, so why would Jesus answer the man's question in such a manner? One would expect that Jesus would have directed

the man to Himself, and ultimately that is exactly what Jesus did, but why in such a round-a-bout way?

The answer to that question lies in the young man's opening statement. Take a moment and go back and read verse 18 again. The man addresses Jesus as a "good teacher." Jesus' response to that title is in keeping with Jewish thought of the day. No Jewish rabbi would have accepted such a title. Only God was thought to warrant such a title. Is the young man saying that he believes that Jesus is God in the flesh? If so, he is not far from the Kingdom of God. That is the point of Jesus' statement in the next verse. Jesus' intent is to draw the man out as to exactly what he meant by the words, "good teacher." If you think about it, Jesus' answer to this man's question is consistent with the entire Bible. If a person were going to work his way into heaven, then he must keep the commandments of God.

Instead of dropping at the feet of someone whom the man believed to be God, he attempted a little prideful boasting in order to impress Jesus with how good a boy he was. That showed that his use of the title, "good teacher," was nothing more than empty flattery used to gain a favorable answer to his question. In other words, the rich young ruler was looking to be patted on the back and told to keep on doing what he was doing and he was going to get in. Unfortunately Jesus apparently failed to read the man's script and gave him the challenge of selling all of his possessions and following this "good teacher."

Think about the very first commandment that this young man had boasted that he had kept since his youth. Exodus 20: 2, 3 says, “I am the Lord, your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of slavery. You shall have no other gods before Me.” This young man loved his wealth more than he loved his God. Jesus tripped the young man up with the very first commandment. The young man went away sad and probably quickly before Jesus had a chance to get to commandment number two.

When you look at this story, you have to understand that Jesus addressed this man from exactly where he was in relation to the Kingdom of God. Jesus never says that it is impossible for the wealthy to enter into the kingdom unless they sell all they have. You cannot point to a single point in the Bible where that is ever taught. Entry into the Kingdom of God is never about how much money you have or don't have. It's always about either accepting Jesus' payment for sin or perfectly obeying all of the commandments of God. Those are the only two criteria for entry into God's Kingdom according to all that God has said in His Word. The thing that Jesus points out here is the utter impossibility of gaining entry into the Kingdom of God using the second path. It is my personal belief that this rich, young ruler will not be the only one to walk away disappointed that all they did to obey the commandments was not good enough. I meet a lot of people who think they are good enough and should be let in based upon their own merits.

The other thing that has always impressed me about this story is that Jesus didn't run after this man saying, “I was just kidding.” The subject at hand was just too

important. To be sure having the wealthy and powerful in your group has always been seen by some as being important. It's just that it was never important to Jesus. It was more important to Jesus was that entry into His kingdom will never be compromised. He wouldn't be God if it was any other way.

What did God teach you about Himself today?

What is your criteria for who is important in life?

THE PEREAN MINISTRY
September 27th

Discipleship Has its Rewards
Matt. 19: 27-30

At a Verdi festival at which Arturo Toscanini was scheduled to conduct several of the concerts, an envious rival was approached to take one of the other performances. "I will," he agreed, "on one condition...if you will pay me one lira more than Toscanini receives." His request was granted and after the concert this conductor received his check for one lira. Toscanini had conducted without charge in homage to Verdi. There are times when it is wise to be careful what you ask for. I am sure there were times when the disciples followed Jesus for the simple joy of being in His presence. This was not one of those times. Peter, taking on the role of group spokesperson, essentially wants to know what is in it for them. We are going to switch over to the gospel of Matthew

because there is some additional information that Matthew gives that Luke doesn't. So turn now to the 19th chapter in the Book of Matthew and read verses 27-30.

If you take a look at the context in which this event occurs, you understand that Jesus had just talked about the difficulty that the rich have in entering the Kingdom of God. Yet, as Jesus said, with God all things are possible. Now we know from the gospels that Peter, Andrew, James and John were quite well off. Fishing was a lucrative endeavor in those times and we remember that when James and John left their boat to follow Jesus, they left behind their hired servants. When Jesus stayed at Peter's house, it was large enough to not only accommodate all of the disciples, but seemed to hold half the town of Capernaum. Also the verses you just read came immediately after Jesus' interview with the rich young ruler. As the young man was still walking away from their presence, the thinking of the disciples would have naturally turned on all they had left in order to follow Jesus. The question Peter asks in verse 27 comes not only out of those thoughts, but also out of need to be reassured that after all they had done and all they had given up, they would gain entry into the kingdom of God. There was not a single disciple who had sold everything they had when they followed Jesus. I believe their assets were still in their control.

Jesus begins to tell them of a future event which He calls "the regeneration." The Greek word He uses in verse 28 is only used one other time in the New Testament. It talks about a time of new birth, when all things will be recreated and restored. He tells them that there are thrones waiting for these men to occupy where they will sit in

judgment of all Israel. Now you can believe that one of those thrones was going to sit empty as Judas will not be there, but I personally believe that throne will be occupied by the Apostle Paul. To my thinking this special honor should be bestowed upon these men. They followed Jesus despite incredible odds and hardships. They followed even when they were faced with teaching that defied everything they had ever been taught about God. They followed even when the rabbis whom they knew and had always respected rejected their Master and their way of life. They followed even after their Master had been crucified and was buried in a borrowed tomb. Through this and many more hardships, they endured right up to their deaths. In my opinion, these thrones rightfully belong to these men.

Of course, I have always been glad that Jesus didn't end His rewards discussion right there. He also goes on to talk about the amount of rewards that are waiting for everyone else who believes and follows Jesus. In the Gospel of Luke, there are a few words added to what Jesus says in Luke 18: 29, 30. He talks about the fact that the rewards come both now and in the future. In my years of following Jesus, I have often been witness to the rewards that come now, but I can't imagine the rewards to come. To be sure, I have thoroughly read the very end of John's Revelation and have dreamt about the glorious sight that he describes within those pages, but I'm also sure that John was just scratching the surface of all that awaits me.

It's natural for humans to want to know what lies ahead. I have always found that the Christian life is far from easy. Will the sacrifice be worth it in the end? It appears

from what Jesus has told us today that our reward will be so much more than worth it that we couldn't comprehend it all even if Jesus had spent hours listing them. Even so, it is not about forgoing our reward for some future time. The rewards start right at that moment when we say to God, "We will follow you." For we have the privilege of witnessing the workings of our creator each and every time we choose to do His will in our lives instead of our own will. So our challenge for today is to keep ourselves open for the opportunities where we will see God at work and then to roll up our sleeves and get busy helping Him.

What did God teach you about Himself today?

What has God been doing through you lately?

THE PEREAN MINISTRY
September 28th

Lord Have Mercy
Matt. 20: 29-34, Mark 10: 46-52, Luke 18: 35-43

As a blind man, Bartimaeus was typical of his time. The only occupation that he could successfully do would be that of a beggar by the side of the road. Now the road he picked was one of the main thoroughfares between the new and the old sections of Jericho. Since this was a major trade route, it was always busy and one could always depend upon the kindness of strangers for one's sustenance. What Bartimaeus first sensed this particular day was a great increase in the hustle and bustle of what was

normal for this street. His senses that did work told him that something unusual was happening. He probably would have asked someone nearby about all of the commotion and would have been told that Jesus of Nazareth would be passing by shortly. I'm sure that Bartimaeus had heard of this Jesus and had probably even come to believe that He could be the long awaited hope for Israel. Given the fact that such an important person was about to pass by, he had to believe that a poor, insignificant, blind beggar would be hard pressed to catch the Master's attention. Yet what other hope did poor Bartimaeus have?

As Bartimaeus sensed Jesus passing by, he began to cry out, "Son of David, have mercy on me." As the din of the crowd increase, so did the volume with which Bartimaeus cried out in his quest to receive mercy. If this Jesus was Israel's Messiah, then He must be from God and Bartimaeus had always believed that his calamity was brought about by some sin in his life. At least that's what his rabbi had always told him. If he could just take care of the sin issue, perhaps his eyesight would be restored. The people who had surrounded him tried to shut him up, but Bartimaeus would not be silenced. He cried out until he heard a strange voice say to him, "What do you want me to do for you?" As he sensed a presence he had never felt before, Bartimaeus cried out, "Lord, I want to see." It was at that very moment that he began to sense something that hadn't occurred since his youth as his world began to come into focus. The very first thing that he saw was the one who had changed his life forever.

Before we talk about a personal application to the story we just read, there are some housekeeping things that need to be taken care of. This story can be found in Matthew 20: 29-34, Mark 10: 46-52 and Luke 18: 35-43. If you read the story in all three gospels, you will notice some differences. Matthew says the incident happened as Jesus was leaving Jericho, Luke says it happened as they arrived at Jericho and Mark says it happened as they came to Jericho. That's why, when I told the story, I said that Bartimaeus was between the old Jericho and the new one that was built by Herod the Great. That would be the only way all three accounts could be correct. Matthew tells us there were two blind men, Luke only mentions one and Mark even names the man as our Bartimaeus. Actually that was fairly common for the times as writers would usually mention only the lead guy. That doesn't mean that someone else wasn't there, it's just that the writer only concentrates on one of the men. It's not that these discrepancies affect the story or the lesson they have for us. I just felt the need to resolve any conflicts you might have with the differences.

So what lesson does this story have for us today? It actually gives us a great demonstration on at least one way people can approach God when they need help. We can see from our story that Bartimaeus had a great need. He recognized that his only hope was in Jesus. He didn't depend upon his own strength. He knew he wasn't going to see on his own. Second, we see in Bartimaeus persistence in letting God know his need. He didn't quit. He didn't get discouraged when others told him to be quiet. He kept asking until he got his answer. Third, Bartimaeus had the boldness to ask great things of God. He didn't just ask God to bless him and leave it at that. He was very specific and

wasn't afraid to ask God for the kind of things that only God can do. Finally, we see that Bartimaeus had a great appreciation for all that God had done for him. Mark tells us that Bartimaeus followed Jesus and Luke tells us that his gratitude caused others to praise God on account of what happened to him. Well that's my list. How do you stack up when compared to the kind of faith that Bartimaeus had? I'll leave the answer to that question between you and God.

What did God teach you about Himself today?

How do you stack up to the kind of faith that Bartimaeus had?

THE PEREAN MINISTRY
September 29th

Zacchaeus
Luke 19: 1-10

Zacchaeus was a wee little man and a wee little man was he.
He climbed up in a sycamore tree for the Lord he wanted to see.
And as the Savior passed that way, He looked up in that tree
And He said, Zacchaeus, you come down.
For I'm going to your house today,
I'm going to your house today.

That's what goes through my mind as I think about the story as told in Luke 19: 1-10. In case you missed it, what I wrote above is an old children's song that is sung in most pre-school Sunday school classes in America. I actually wrote the song out without consulting anything. It's that imbedded in my brain. Anyway, I digress. Jesus is now

entering Jericho on His way to Jerusalem for the final time. His date with the cross is just over a week away.

Jericho was also known as the City of Palms as it was located on the extremely lush plain of Jericho, a one day journey from Jerusalem. As we talked about yesterday, the new part of Jericho was built up and fortified by Herod the Great. We also know that the city was flanked by four fortresses to protect it, and it was the central station for the collection of taxes for all products coming into Israel from across the Jordan River. History actually tells us that Herod the Great died at Jericho. The Jewish historian, Josephus, calls Jericho “Little Paradise” with its palm trees, sycamores and cypress growing in great abundance. It was early spring as Jesus enters the city. It was probably already quite warm. We can assume that because Josephus tells us that the inhabitants of the city wore linen clothing even in the dead of winter.

What we notice about this story is the extreme contrast between Zacchaeus and Bartimaeus whom we looked at yesterday. Zacchaeus is described to us as the chief tax collector for this important trade route. That description tells us two things about the man. First that he was used to wielding a great deal of power. He would have answered only to the Roman government, or Herod Antipas. This man would have been used to snapping his fingers and people would come running, anxious to do his bidding. Second, Luke describes him as being rich. Of course, I’m sure that this was a great understatement. It would be like our referring to Bill Gates as someone with a lot of

pocket change. Tax Collectors at that time were all wealthy people, but the head guy; well, you get the idea.

As we look at Zacchaeus, we also remember the rich, young ruler who walked away from entrance into the Kingdom of God because he loved his wealth too much. We remember the Pharisees and Sadducees in Jerusalem who rejected Jesus because they too loved their wealth and power too much to see the truth. Yet here is Zacchaeus taking the opposite approach when confronted by Jesus. Jesus never said anything to Zacchaeus about his money, yet in verse 8, we see him volunteering to give half his wealth to the poor and use the rest to make restitution to anyone that he had cheated in his life.

What we've seen throughout this study is that Jesus affected each person in a different way. There are some who immediately drop everything they once held as important at the very moment Jesus walked into their lives. There are others who rejected Him and the message He brought because they held on to their power and wealth a bit too tightly. Jesus said, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God." Yet He also said that all things are possible with God. That is what we see in our story. That is what we see in life. There are a lot of applications for you to draw from today's reading. I believe that God will use this section of the Bible to reach a variety of people. My challenge to you is to pray and have God teach you something about yourself as He uses the story of Zacchaeus.

What did God teach you about Himself today?

What is God saying to you right now?

THE PEREAN MINISTRY
September 30th

Fifteen Ounces of Responsibility
Luke 19: 11-27

As we come to the close of Jesus' ministry in the region of Perea, Luke records a final parable that Jesus told to the people of Jericho. As you read The Parable of the Minas in Luke 19: 11-27, you will see two different stories intertwined together. We will talk about one today and the other tomorrow. Today we want to talk about what happened to the minas. Now there are some translations that read that the king gave out pounds instead of minas. According to W. E. Vine, a mina was a unit of weight equivalent to fifteen ounces. Since an English pound is sixteen ounces, some translations use the word pound because it has more meaning to those of us in western civilizations. In either case the exact weight of the money is not important to the meaning Jesus was trying to convey here.

As Jesus tells the story, there is a man of noble birth who is about to assume the responsibility of ruling over an entire country. Those in the crowd Jesus spoke to, who were older, would have remembered how the entire family of Herod the Great had traveled to Rome after the death of the old tyrant to argue over which of Herod's three wills should prevail and who should succeed him and rule Israel. As the nobleman in

Jesus' parable left town, he gives ten of his servants an equal sum of money with instructions to put the money to work until he returns.

The parable resumes when the newly crowned king returns home and demands an accounting of what was done with his money. Notice how Jesus only gives us the result of three of the servants. In this parable, Jesus is using both the oral technique of rule of three, but also end-stress. Remember, people will better remember something done in threes over tens every time. The oral technique of end-stress means that the real meaning of the parable can be found in the last part, or in this case the last servant. The first two servants come through their test with flying colors. Each servant is rewarded with the opportunity to rule over an equivalent number of cities within the kingdom.

So what motivated the last servant? He fears the nobleman because he believes him to be a hard man. It would be the same fear that a mother of ten children would have if she were entrusted with a priceless Ming vase. This man was afraid that he would lose the money and incur the wrath of his master. It is the servant's own words that condemn him. As the nobleman pointed out, this servant could have at least put the money on deposit with bankers and earned interest. Instead he wrapped the money in a cloth and hid it away for safe keeping. Since the servant knew his master to be a harsh man, it should have been all the motivation he needed to invest the money; instead he did nothing. As a result the responsibility was taken from that servant and given to the one who had really excelled in the assigned task. The end result was that the final servant heard "the Donald" say "You're fired."

The final servant is like the one who honors religion and believes that it is important thing to have in our society. This person has probably undergone baptism and might have even joined a local church, but refuses to live or even appropriate the power that Jesus offers His people. Instead this person's religion became a closely guarded secret for the other six days of their everyday life. Jesus is saying that in the end all of the advantages that they thought they had, all of the hours spent on Sunday mornings will vanish and will be gone.

The Pharisees in that crowd were busy building a large hedge around their faith to keep it from becoming contaminated. They would not associate with people like Zacchaeus or his friends. They would not even dream about sharing their faith with such "rabble." They were so afraid that the "rabble" might convert them instead. Jesus drove His point home when He takes away all that the last servant has. The lesson of this parable becomes clear. God has given you a talent with which He wants you to build up the body of Christ. If you are faithful in using that talent for His purpose, the rewards will be more than you can imagine and will last for all eternity. If you take what God has given you and hide it while you go about your normal life, all that is truly important and eternal will be taken from you. That doesn't mean that you will be excluded from the Kingdom of God. The parable never says that. It's just that you will have an eternity to regret what you did or didn't do with your God given talents today. Think about that the next time you are about to dismiss a request for help that might come your way and so avoid having to do some ministry at your church.

What did God teach you about Himself today?

Do you think you are using your God given talents well?
