

The Gospel of Luke

Lesson 19

Faith

Luke 17:5 The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith!" ⁶ And the Lord said, "If you had faith like a mustard seed, you would say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and be planted in the sea'; and it would obey you. ⁷ "Which of you, having a slave plowing or tending sheep, will say to him when he has come in from the field, 'Come immediately and sit down to eat'? ⁸ "But will he not say to him, 'Prepare something for me to eat, and *properly* clothe yourself and serve me while I eat and drink; and afterward you may eat and drink'? ⁹ "He does not thank the slave because he did the things which were commanded, does he? ¹⁰ "So you too, when you do all the things which are commanded you, say, 'We are unworthy slaves; we have done *only* that which we ought to have done.'"

We are able to overcome the greatest difficulties of forgiving our brethren because of our faith in God's pardoning mercy. With God, nothing is impossible, so all things are possible to him who will believe. Here, the Lord shows His disciples the need for deep humility. Here, Jesus uses many proverbial sayings of that day to make His point clear. The expression, the "mustard seed" is used to describe something very small and insignificant. The statement, "Say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted'" is commonly used by Jews to indicate that a person has accomplished some great deed and overcome a seemingly insurmountable difficulty.

1 Corinthians 13:2 If I have *the gift of* prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.

To "properly clothe yourself" refers to the clothing people wear in the East which is generally loose and flowing. Before doing anything that required physical exertion, they would first "gird up the loins," or tie the garments tightly around their waist.¹⁶ The phrase, "unworthy slaves" is a contrast between what we must say about ourselves, "we are unworthy servants", and what Christ will be graciously pleased to say on the last day.

Matthew 25:21 "His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.'

Matthew 25:34 "Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. ³⁵ ~'For I was hungry, and you gave Me *something* to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me *something* to drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; ³⁶ naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.' ³⁷ "Then the righteous will answer Him, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give You *something* to drink? ³⁸ ~'And when did we see You a stranger, and invite You in, or naked, and clothe You? ³⁹ ~'When did we see You

¹⁶ As seen with Elijah in 2 Kings 4:29, Elisha in 2 Kings 9:1, Job in Job 38:3 and 40:7, and Jeremiah in Jeremiah 1:17.

sick, or in prison, and come to You?' ⁴⁰ "The King will answer and say to them, 'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, *even* the least of *them*, you did it to Me.'

The tragedy in this meeting is that the Pharisees have not properly dressed themselves and completed the jobs that are expected of them. Doom is awaiting them in the hereafter.

Ten Lepers

Luke 17:11 While He was on the way to Jerusalem, He was passing between Samaria and Galilee. ¹² As He entered a village, ten leprous men who stood at a distance met Him; ¹³ and they raised their voices, saying, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!" ¹⁴ When He saw them, He said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." And as they were going, they were cleansed. ¹⁵ Now one of them, when he saw that he had been healed, turned back, glorifying God with a loud voice, ¹⁶ and he fell on his face at His feet, giving thanks to Him. And he was a Samaritan. ¹⁷ Then Jesus answered and said, "Were there not ten cleansed? But the nine—where are they? ¹⁸ "Was no one found who returned to give glory to God, except this foreigner?" ¹⁹ And He said to him, "Stand up and go; your faith has made you well."

The Lord has begun his journey toward Jerusalem. It is the Sabbath and on the next day He will make His triumphal entry into Jerusalem; however, there are still many events that will transpire before that happens. On his way, in a certain small village, ten lepers are healed and cleansed but only one returns to thank the Lord. Gratitude is rare! The Lord asks these solemn questions, "Were there not ten cleansed? But the nine – where are they?" Here is a humbling and heart-searching lesson. The best of the best are far too often like the nine lepers. We are more disposed to ask God for what we do not have than to thank him for what we do have. The widespread thanklessness of Christians is a scandal. It reveals a lack of humility. So we must pray for a deeper sense of our own sinfulness and admit how unworthy we are. After all, gratitude is the true secret of a grateful heart. The person who daily feels his debt to grace and daily remembers that he deserves nothing but hell will be blessing and praising God every day. Thankfulness blossoms only from a root of deep humility. It is an example to the Pharisees because only a handful are grateful.

Kingdom of God

Luke 17:20 Now having been questioned by the Pharisees as to when the kingdom of God was coming, He answered them and said, "The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed; ²¹ nor will they say, 'Look, here *it is!*' or, 'There *it is!*' For behold, the kingdom of God is in your midst."

Some have taught that in this passage two personal comings of Christ are revealed in the Scripture. It is true; however, in verses 20 and 21 Jesus is speaking to the Pharisees. They are looking for the glorious kingdom of the Messiah here on earth, not the humble appearance of Jesus and all that He has done in the past three and a half years. Jesus is the kingdom of God in their very midst and they are blind to it.

Second Coming

Luke 17:22 And He said to the disciples, "The days will come when you will long to see one of the days of the Son of Man, and you will not see it. ²³ "They will say to you, 'Look there! Look here!' Do not go away, and do not run after *them*. ²⁴ "For just like the lightning, when it flashes out of one part of the sky, shines to the other part of the sky, so will the Son of Man be in His day. ²⁵ "But first He must suffer many things

and be rejected by this generation. ²⁶ "And just as it happened in the days of Noah, so it will be also in the days of the Son of Man: ²⁷ they were eating, they were drinking, they were marrying, they were being given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all. ²⁸ "It was the same as happened in the days of Lot: they were eating, they were drinking, they were buying, they were selling, they were planting, they were building; ²⁹ but on the day that Lot went out from Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all. ³⁰ "It will be just the same on the day that the Son of Man is revealed. ³¹ "On that day, the one who is on the housetop and whose goods are in the house must not go down to take them out; and likewise the one who is in the field must not turn back. ³² "Remember Lot's wife. ³³ "Whoever seeks to keep his life will lose it, and whoever loses *his life* will preserve it. ³⁴ "I tell you, on that night there will be two in one bed; one will be taken and the other will be left. ³⁵ "There will be two women grinding at the same place; one will be taken and the other will be left. ³⁶ [~~"Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other will be left."~~]

³⁷ And answering they said to Him, "Where, Lord?" And He said to them, "Where the body *is*, there also the vultures will be gathered."

Turning to His disciples, Jesus explains His next coming to earth. In these verses, the Lord speaks about both of His comings. He speaks about the first when He says that the Son of Man "must suffer and be rejected by this generation". He speaks about the second coming when he says that the Son of Man will return as "the lightning, when it flashes out of one part of the sky, shines to the other part of the sky, so will the Son of Man be in His day."

It is very important to see these two comings of Christ separately if we are to understand Scripture correctly. The disciples and all the Jews in the Lord's day appear to expect only one personal coming of the Messiah. They expect Him to reign; they do not expect Him to come and suffer. In the same way, the majority of Christians today appear to see only one personal coming. They believe that Christ came the first time to suffer but they seem unable to understand that Christ is coming a second time to reign. Both parties have grasped part of the truth but neither have embraced the whole truth. Both are more or less in error and the Christian's error is second only in importance to that of the Jew. Jesus' coming as a person the first time to suffer and His coming in person the second time to reign are two landmarks of which we should never lose sight. We stand between the two and we must believe that both are real and true.

The kingdom of God is among the Jews. This kingdom is set up in the heart by the power of Divine grace of the Lord Jesus. Observe how it had been with sinners formerly and the judgments of God about which He had warned them. Here we see what a dreadful surprise this destruction will be for the secure and sensual. Thus it will be in the day when the Son of man is revealed. When the Jewish nation is basically destroyed by the Roman armies in 70 AD, that nation is in a state of false security. In like manner, when Christ Jesus comes to judge the world, sinners will be found in their evil ways and they will not foresee their end. Nevertheless, wherever the wicked are, those who are marked for eternal ruin will be found by the judgments of God. The whole passage applies exclusively to the second personal coming of Christ when He will come to set up His glorious kingdom. To apply the conclusion of this chapter, as many do, to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans appears to be an unwarrantable and violent straining of the Scripture.

The Lord teaches His disciples that His Second Coming will not be a time of ease for everyone as the Jews believe; it will be a time of trial for people in their religion and livelihood; it will be at a time of sifting and separation from the visible church. It will be

ushered in by a time of such tribulation and suffering that no one will come out of it unscathed unless he or she is unwilling to give up everything for Christ.

"The vultures will be gathered" is a dark and mysterious saying that has greatly perplexed many commentators. It refers to the well-known power of the vulture to discern carcasses, whether by eye or by smell. However, as for the precise application of the saying, we find a great variety of opinions. Taken in context, the eagles are more likely to be signs of the angels who will be used at the Lord's Second Coming than anything else. Verse 36 speaks about the separation of the just and the unjust which will take place at our Lord's appearing. In that separation, we are specifically told that angels will be used.

Matthew 13:49 "So it will be at the end of the age; the angels will come forth and take out the wicked from among the righteous,

Prayer

Luke 18:1 Now He was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart, ² saying, "In a certain city there was a judge who did not fear God and did not respect man. ³ "There was a widow in that city, and she kept coming to him, saying, 'Give me legal protection from my opponent.' ⁴ "For a while he was unwilling; but afterward he said to himself, 'Even though I do not fear God nor respect man, ⁵ yet because this widow bothers me, I will give her legal protection, otherwise by continually coming she will wear me out.'" ⁶ And the Lord said, "Hear what the unrighteous judge *said; ⁷ now, will not God bring about justice for His elect who cry to Him day and night, and will He delay long over them? ⁸ "I tell you that He will bring about justice for them quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?"

The purpose of this parable is explained by Luke. Jesus tells the parable about the need to pray always and not lose heart. Link these words to the solemn words about the Second Coming at the end of the last chapter and the meaning is found.

Vultures

Luke 17:37 And answering they said to Him, "Where, Lord?" And He said to them, "Where the body *is*, there also the vultures will be gathered."

The believer needs to pray without fainting as the vultures gather. It does not mean that a person will be constantly on his knees performing the act of prayer. It means that a person should be constantly in a prayerful frame of mind. The helpless and friendless condition of a widow in these times should be remembered.

1 Kings 17:9 "Arise, go to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and stay there; behold, I have commanded a widow there to provide for you." ¹⁰ So he arose and went to Zarephath, and when he came to the gate of the city, behold, a widow was there gathering sticks; and he called to her and said, "Please get me a little water in a jar, that I may drink." ¹¹ As she was going to get *it*, he called to her and said, "Please bring me a piece of bread in your hand." ¹² But she said, "As the LORD your God lives, I have no bread, only a handful of flour in the bowl and a little oil in the jar;

and behold, I am gathering a few sticks that I may go in and prepare for me and my son, that we may eat it and die."

The poor, the orphan and the widow are the most vulnerable. The Old Testament prophets were particularly concerned with the injustice done to the orphan and widow.

Isaiah 1:17 Learn to do good; Seek justice, Reprove the ruthless, Defend the orphan, Plead for the widow.

Malachi 3:5 "Then I will draw near to you for judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers and against the adulterers and against those who swear falsely, and against those who oppress the wage earner in his wages, the widow and the orphan, and those who turn aside the alien and do not fear Me," says the LORD of hosts.

Widow

Luke 18:3 "There was a widow in that city, and she kept coming to him, saying, 'Give me legal protection from my opponent.'

This widow needs protection and she has come to the highest authority, begging to receive the protection she is due, but this man is godless and does not care for the laws of God.

Exodus 22:22 "You shall not afflict any widow or orphan.

Deuteronomy 24:17 "You shall not pervert the justice due an alien *or* an orphan, nor take a widow's garment in pledge. ¹⁸ "But you shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt, and that the LORD your God redeemed you from there; therefore I am commanding you to do this thing. ¹⁹ "When you reap your harvest in your field and have forgotten a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it; it shall be for the alien, for the orphan, and for the widow, in order that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands. ²⁰ "When you beat your olive tree, you shall not go over the boughs again; it shall be for the alien, for the orphan, and for the widow. ²¹ "When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, you shall not go over it again; it shall be for the alien, for the orphan, and for the widow. ²² "You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt; therefore I am commanding you to do this thing.

Wear Out

Luke 18:4 "For a while he was unwilling; but afterward he said to himself, 'Even though I do not fear God nor respect man, ⁵ yet because this widow bothers me, I will give her legal protection, otherwise by continually coming she will wear me out.'"

Here we see the perfect example from the Word of the Lord giving justification for petitioning the government for protection and rights that have already been spelled out. It is sad that a governor or a congressman or even a president must be worn out by petitions before they will do what is proper. Even our petitions for justice can be prayers to God. In all situations, there is a correct way to handle them. In the widow's day, she did what was proper and received her protection.

Find Faith

Luke 18:6 And the Lord said, "Hear what the unrighteous judge said; ⁷ now, will not God bring about justice for His elect who cry to Him day and night, and will He delay long over them? ⁸ "I tell you that He will bring about justice for them quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?"

The implied lesson shows that persevering prayer is the secret of keeping the faith. Augustine, one of the early Church leaders named says, "When faith fails, prayer dies. In order to pray, then, we must have faith; and that our faith fail not, we must pray. Faith pours forth prayer; and the pouring forth of the heart in prayer gives steadfastness to faith."¹⁷

Pharisee and Tax Collector

Luke 18:9 And He also told this parable to some people who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt: ¹⁰ "Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹ "The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: 'God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. ¹² ~'I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.' ¹³ "But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, the sinner!' ¹⁴ "I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted."

The purpose of this parable is also explained by Luke. It is for those who trust in themselves and view others with contempt. This parable is linked to the previous one. The parable of the persevering widow teaches the value of persistence in prayer; the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector teaches the spirit which should pervade our prayers. The first parable encourages us to pray and not faint; the second parable shows how and in what matter we should pray. Right or wrong, standing is as common a position for prayer as kneeling among the Jews. Both the Pharisee and the tax collector are standing.

Matthew 6:5 "When you pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full.

Mark 11:25 "Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father who is in heaven will also forgive you your transgressions.

2 Chronicles 6:12 Then he stood before the altar of the LORD in the presence of all the assembly of Israel and spread out his hands.

There is no more miserable and fake righteousness than that found in this Pharisee. His goodness consists in not being as bad as some people! His goodness consists in fasting and paying tithes. We do not hear a word about heart-holiness. The tax collector knows that he is a sinner. We must not think that this means that the Pharisee is a little justified and the tax collector is greatly justified and that the difference between them is only one of degree. No degrees exist in justification. The words mean that the Pharisee is not justified at all or

¹⁷ Augustine sermon 115.

accepted by God and that the tax collector can go home pardoned, forgiven and counted righteous before God. Jesus' words "everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled, but he who humbles himself shall be exalted" is illustrated throughout the Bible in the lives of Pharaoh, Goliath, Haman, Sennacherib, Nebuchadnezzar, Herod and many more.

Permit Children

Luke 18:15 And they were bringing even their babies to Him so that He would touch them, but when the disciples saw it, they *began* rebuking them. **16** But Jesus called for them, saying, "Permit the children to come to Me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. **17** "Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it *at all*."

How ignorant people are about a child's soul. We read that some people are bringing infants to Him that He might touch them and when the disciples see it, they sternly order them not to approach the Lord. They probably believe it is a waste of the Lord's time, and after all, they are infants and can derive no benefit from being brought to Christ.

The disciples are not the only people who are ignorant about this idea. The souls of young children are precious in God's sight. Both here and elsewhere, there is clear evidence that Christ cares for them as much as He cares for adults.

Eternal Life

Luke 18:18 A ruler questioned Him, saying, "Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" **19** And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone. **20** "You know the commandments, 'DO NOT COMMIT ADULTERY, DO NOT MURDER, DO NOT STEAL, DO NOT BEAR FALSE WITNESS, HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER.'" **21** And he said, "All these things I have kept from *my* youth." **22** When Jesus heard *this*, He said to him, "One thing you still lack; sell all that you possess and distribute it to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me." **23** But when he had heard these things, he became very sad, for he was extremely rich. **24** And Jesus looked at him and said, "How hard it is for those who are wealthy to enter the kingdom of God! **25** "For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." **26** They who heard it said, "Then who can be saved?" **27** But He said, "The things that are impossible with people are possible with God." **28** Peter said, "Behold, we have left our own *homes* and followed You." **29** And He said to them, "Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, **30** who will not receive many times as much at this time and in the age to come, eternal life."

Many have gained great wealth and that is commendable, yet, they will perish for lack of one thing and that is eternal life. So too, this ruler will perish because he cannot bear Christ's terms which would cause him to sell his estate. Many who have struggled with Christ's terms will be in the same situation. After a long struggle between their convictions about Christ and their possessions in the world, their possessions usually win the battle. Men are apt to speak too much about what they have left and lost or what they have done and suffered for Christ, as Peter did, rather than being ashamed that they have many regrets or difficulties in doing it. What a glorious and satisfying promise the Lord offers to all believers who make sacrifices for His sake. What a very particular promise! It does not refer to the believer's reward in another world or the crown of glory which never fades; it refers to this life, to the here-and-now. The believer will find that whatever he must give up will be more than compensated for in his fellowship with Christ. He will find great peace,

hope, joy, comfort and rest in communion with the Father and the Son. In such case, his losses will be more than counterbalanced by his gains. In short, the Lord Jesus Christ will mean more to him than property, relatives or friends.

It has often been noted that Peter and his fellow Apostles had left little or nothing for Christ's sake. A few boats and fishing nets were probably all of their worldly goods. Yet, it must never be forgotten that a poor man's possessions are as dear to him as the rich man's palace. He knows nothing higher or better. In giving up everything for Christ's sake, he makes the greatest sacrifice within his power.

Rise Again

Luke 18:31 Then He took the twelve aside and said to them, "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and all things which are written through the prophets about the Son of Man will be accomplished. ³² "For He will be handed over to the Gentiles, and will be mocked and mistreated and spit upon, ³³ and after they have scourged Him, they will kill Him; and the third day He will rise again." ³⁴ But the disciples understood none of these things, and *the meaning of* this statement was hidden from them, and they did not comprehend the things that were said.

The following passage from Philip's Doddridge's *The Evidence of Christianity Briefly Stated and the New Testament Proved to be Genuine*, 1799, is worth quoting in reference to this Scripture.

"This prediction is a strong instance of the spirit of prophecy exerted by our Lord. It was more probable that he would be privately killed, or stoned to death by a crowd. And when he was delivered back to the Jews by Pilate, with permission to judge him according to their laws, it is amazing that he was not stoned. But all was done that the scriptures might be fulfilled."

Blind Man in Jericho

Luke 18:35 As Jesus was approaching Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the road begging. ³⁶ Now hearing a crowd going by, he *began* to inquire what this was. ³⁷ They told him that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by. ³⁸ And he called out, saying, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" ³⁹ Those who led the way were sternly telling him to be quiet; but he kept crying out all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" ⁴⁰ And Jesus stopped and commanded that he be brought to Him; and when he came near, He questioned him, ⁴¹ "What do you want Me to do for you?" And he said, "Lord, *I want* to regain my sight!" ⁴² And Jesus said to him, "Receive your sight; your faith has made you well." ⁴³ Immediately he regained his sight and *began* following Him, glorifying God; and when all the people saw it, they gave praise to God.

Just outside Jericho, the Lord and His followers are only a few miles from Jerusalem and a few miles from Bethany. The march to Jerusalem had started just a few days earlier in Capernaum. In this passage, we see the importance of the diligent use of the means of grace. The blind man has found the place where his pitiful condition is most likely to attract attention. He does not sit idly at home or wait for help to come to him. He puts himself by the roadside so that travelers might see him and help him. This story shows the wisdom of such behavior. Sitting by the roadside, he hears that Jesus is approaching. He calls out for mercy and for his sight to be restored. If the blind man had not sat down by the roadside on that day, he may have stayed blind all his life. The person who seeks salvation should

remember the example of this blind man. He must diligently seek out every means of grace; he must be found regularly in those places where the Lord Jesus is especially present; he must sit by the roadside, wherever the Word is read and the Gospel preached, where God's people meet together.