

LUKE—WEEK 23

THE ROAD TO JERUSALEM



F. Michael Slay
A DEEP Study

The Fellowship of Ailbe

*The Cover Picture is The Healing of the Blind in Jericho by
Lucas van Leyden (1494–1533) on display at Hermitage, St. Petersburg*

Jesus is marching to the cross, and He tells His disciples this, but they don't understand. He continues to teach about the Kingdom of God, and people continue to miss the point, or even oppose things.

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Thank you.

Luke 18:24–19:27 — *The Road to Jerusalem*
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1 Luke 18:24–30 (ESV)

Jesus, seeing that he had become sad, said, “How difficult it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God! For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.” Those who heard it said, “Then who can be saved?” But he said, “What is impossible with man is possible with God.” And Peter said, “See, we have left our homes and followed you.” 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, who will not receive many times more in this time, and in the age to come eternal life.”

This is one of those passages that some folks try to explain away. The “explanation” offered is that there was a smaller city gate, next to the main gate, that was called “the eye of the needle” and that’s what Jesus was referring to. It’s difficult to get a camel through this gate but not impossible.

That’s wrong for two reasons. First, Jesus said, “*For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle,*” not “the needle.” Also, the follow up question (“*Then who can be saved?*”) only makes sense if Jesus is speaking of an impossibility. Jesus confirms this when He says, “*What is impossible with man is possible with God.*”

But His point about rich people apparently applies to everyone. His audience assumed that Jesus meant that no one can be saved except by God. That’s true, but it seems that they viewed the rich as the best candidates for heaven. That’s how they thought back then.

Then Peter says something that sounds like bragging, but He’s really just worried that the sacrifices the disciples made don’t count for anything.

Jesus teaches that they very much do count, just not towards salvation.

Only God can get someone into His kingdom.

What we do matters. Think back. How have you’ve grown in faith, love, and service?

Don’t think in terms of “what have I done this month?” or “what am I doing now?” Look at growth in multi-year chunks. That’s important because we get a more Godly perspective. His plans are long term.

Now consider your future. Where does God want you? What is He preparing you for?

Don’t just ask what He wants you to do today; ask how He wants you to grow over the next few years. Where is He leading you? What does your heart long to see happen? Are you called to make it happen?

Is there something you feel called to study? What books are you reading? Is there some aspect of Christianity you wish you knew more about?

Planned growth can do amazing things.

2 Luke 18:31–34 (ESV)

And taking the twelve, he said to them, “See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished. For he will be delivered over to the Gentiles and will be mocked and shamefully treated and spit upon. And after flogging him, they will kill him, and on the third day he will rise.” But they understood none of these things. This saying was hidden from them, and they did not grasp what was said.

Yet again, Jesus foretells His crucifixion. The first two times (Luke 9:22 & 44), He didn’t go into the gory details. Now He does.

But first He explains what those gory details are all about. It’s so that *everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished*.

A few years ago, Disney released a surprisingly good movie titled “Oz the Great and Powerful.” Its portraits of evil are useful and quite biblical, but because it’s a prequel, it has a predetermined finish. By the end of the movie, the characters and settings of the original “Wizard of Oz” must be put into place. The earlier movie functions as a prophecy. This all works out quite cleverly, and it’s impressive how all the pieces come together. Disney gets an A on this one. (Note: The evil is a bit too vivid for young eyes.)

The action in this passage is like that. These things were prophesied long ago, so that when they happen, people will recognize them for what they are—the signs of the Messiah’s arrival.

But the evil is pretty vivid, and watching it unfold according to plan is chilling. The last verse makes sense in this context. *But they understood none of these things. This saying was hidden from them, and they did not grasp what was said.*

But why say something while hiding the meaning from the audience, especially this audience?

The answer has to be that Jesus wants to plant something in their heads for future reference, but they can’t handle it just yet.

I couldn’t have handled it either.

There are a lot of things we don’t seem to be able to handle—namely the neediness of our neighbors. People are in pain, and they don’t talk about it. It’s all around us, but we’d rather not see it. So we don’t.

If you think you’re ready to handle this (that’s a serious “if”), here’s how to get started. Ask God to open your eyes to the needs all around you. Our hearts seem pretty compassionate already (though praying about that is always important), but we need to give those hearts more exposure.

But understand that this is asking for pain. You will be so moved that you won’t be able to just sit back and do nothing.

You don’t have to go to a third-world country to see despair. You don’t have to go ten miles.

3 Luke 18:35–43 (ESV)

As he drew near to Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging. And hearing a crowd going by, he inquired what this meant. They told him, “Jesus of Nazareth is passing by.” And he cried out, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” And those who were in front rebuked him, telling him to be silent. But he cried out all the more, “Son of David, have mercy on me!” And Jesus stopped and commanded him to be brought to him. And when he came near, he asked him, “What do you want me to do for you?” He said, “Lord, let me recover my sight.” And Jesus said to him, “Recover your sight; your faith has made you well.” And immediately he recovered his sight and followed him, glorifying God. And all the people, when they saw it, gave praise to God.

When the blind man finds out that all the commotion is because *Jesus of Nazareth is passing by*, he cries out, “*Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!*” He knows who Jesus is.

But curiously, *those who were in front rebuked him, telling him to be silent*. Why would they do something rude like that? Surely they have seen Jesus do many healings. In fact, many in the crowd are people Jesus had healed. The blind man is asking to join their ranks. So, why are they shushing him?

As wrong as this behavior is, it’s typical. The disciples did something similar back in verse 18:15 when they rebuked people who were bringing their babies to Jesus.

They’re being control freaks! They’re in the presence of the Messiah Himself and they’re trying to “help” by managing the situation for Him. Specifically, they think they’re keeping out disruptions.

Of course, they forget that they were once nothing more than a disruption.

We’re not any different. It’s good to make plans, but when the Lord overrules those plans, we need to flex. We should recognize what’s going on and not be too arrogant to let our plans change.

This happens all the time. People move away, and we adjust. Ministries are born, schedules get disrupted, plans change, but life goes on. It always feels like a crisis, then things turn out fine.

Yet every time, we feel like resisting. And sometimes we do more than feel like resisting; we resist.

Curiously, these low points in our walk with the Lord—when we are actively opposing His plans—often turn out, in retrospect, to be the high points. We are at our worst, but we are learning and growing at top speed.

It’s fair to call these moments “growing pains,” because we often get a boatload of pain and embarrassment dumped on us when the lightbulb comes on and we realize how stupid we’ve been.

No pain, no gain, eh?

We love the Lord, but never quite get used to His lordship.

4 Luke 19:1–10 (ESV)

He entered Jericho and was passing through. And behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was rich. And he was seeking to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was small in stature. So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was about to pass that way. And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today.” So he hurried and came down and received him joyfully. And when they saw it, they all grumbled, “He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner.” And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, “Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold.” And Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”

Think about Zacchaeus’s steps to salvation.

- 1) He climbs a tree. — He doesn’t believe; he just wants to take a look. But don’t miss the backstory here; he had to have heard something about Jesus. That something made him curious enough to climb a tree. Remember this when you encounter someone who doesn’t know Jesus. You don’t need to convert them. If you make them curious enough to want to take a look, you’ve accomplished a lot.
- 2) Jesus calls him. — This isn’t our job. Conversion is always supernatural.
- 3) He repents. — Something in Zacchaeus snaps and he doesn’t want to be the person he is. Remember, even if Zacchaeus never cheated anyone*, his riches are still other people’s money that he “collected.” That’s why the people hate him and don’t want him to be saved.

*Zacchaeus surely cheated someone.

The takeaway here is that salvation is mainly the job of the Holy Spirit. Sure, evangelism was different while Jesus was walking on earth, but we still tend to overstate our role.

This can make us antsy when sharing the gospel. We act like conversion is our responsibility. That’s nuts.

The “preparing the soil” stage of evangelism is precious. You rarely know where someone is on the path to salvation, and most of the time they’re not ready to receive Christ today. But they’re always in a position to be made more curious.

Think about what might have happened to make Zacchaeus curious about Jesus. It wasn’t some canned presentation; it was people chatting about their own curiosity.

It could have even been people explaining why they thought that Jesus is **not** the Messiah. How ironic is that? Someone can do effective evangelism by opposing Christ. We’re on the right path any time the topic is, “Who is this guy?”

Just be yourself.

5 Luke 19:11–27 (ESV)

As they heard these things, he proceeded to tell a parable, because he was near to Jerusalem, and because they supposed that the kingdom of God was to appear immediately. He said therefore, “A nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and then return. Calling ten of his servants, he gave them ten minas, and said to them, ‘Engage in business until I come.’ But his citizens hated him and sent a delegation after him, saying, ‘We do not want this man to reign over us.’ When he returned, having received the kingdom, he ordered these servants to whom he had given the money to be called to him, that he might know what they had gained by doing business. The first came before him, saying, ‘Lord, your mina has made ten minas more.’ And he said to him, ‘Well done, good servant! Because you have been faithful in a very little, you shall have authority over ten cities.’ And the second came, saying, ‘Lord, your mina has made five minas.’ And he said to him, ‘And you are to be over five cities.’ Then another came, saying, ‘Lord, here is your mina, which I kept laid away in a handkerchief; for I was afraid of you, because you are a severe man. You take what you did not deposit, and reap what you did not sow.’ He said to him, ‘I will condemn you with your own words, you wicked servant! You knew that I was a severe man, taking what I did not deposit and reaping what I did not sow? Why then did you not put my money in the bank, and at my coming I might have collected it with interest?’ And he said to those who stood by, ‘Take the mina from him, and give it to the one who has the ten minas.’ And they said to him, ‘Lord, he has ten minas!’ ‘I tell you that to everyone who has, more will be given, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. But as for these enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them, bring them here and slaughter them before me.’”

This passage, and a parallel one in Matthew 25, may be the most misunderstood passages in the Bible. People think they say that the rich get richer and the poor get poorer.

That’s easily cleared up with one question. Did the guy with ten minas get another mina to spend or to manage?

Manage. This has nothing to do with personal gain; it’s all about responsibility. That’s why they were put in charge of cities. God rewards His faithful servants with more responsibility.

And this isn’t just for now; it’s for eternity. The reward for faithful service won’t be a bigger harp.

Heaven will not be boring.

But responsibility means responsibility. The honor that comes with responsibility does not come cheap. Responsibility is work.

Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required, and from him to whom they entrusted much, they will demand the more. — Luke 12:48b

Faithfulness comes from strong faith.

Without that, who would even want more responsibility?

