

**Excerpts from *The Great Physician*
Correlative to This Week's Bible Lesson**
For study related to the Bible Lesson May 8 - 14, 2023

Mortals and Immortals

Introductory Note – *The Great Physician*, Vols 1 & 2 were written by Vinton Dearing, a Christian Scientist, who was Professor of English at UCLA where he taught the English Bible as Literature for forty years. The book is a composite translation of the four Gospels, organized by event rather than book, and includes a commentary. Because of the composite nature of the translation and commentary, the excerpts below may cover more topics than the citation in the Lesson. These excerpts have been compiled by Doug McCormick. Both volumes are available in paperback for purchase at <https://vintondearing.com/>.

SECTION I – B5 (John 4:23,24)

AMONG THE SAMARITANS

[John 4:4-42.](#)

Continuing with John. “And it was necessary for him to go through Samaria. So he comes to a city of Samaria called Sychar, near the field that Jacob gave to his son Joseph.”⁴⁶

Sychar is often said to be another name for Shechem, modern Balatah, about a mile east of Neapolis, modern Nablus. Shechem was destroyed in 107 B.C. and has never been completely rebuilt. Neapolis was built in A.D. 72. Hence the city of Sychar, if it is correctly identified with Shechem, must have been a settlement among the ruins of Shechem that has left no trace. It is also possible that modern Ascar is the site of Sychar, but the well mentioned below is closer to Balatah than to Ascar.⁴⁷

As we have seen, Jacob's other name was Israel, and his descendants were the Israelites. At the death of King Solomon, about 930 B.C., the Israelites divided into two kingdoms. The northern and larger one called itself Israel, the other called itself Judah. Omri, king of Israel, built Samaria as his capital. Judah's capital was Jerusalem, which had been the capital of the united peoples. Jeroboam, the first of the northern kings, built temples at Bethel and Dan where his people could offer sacrifices instead of going to Jerusalem. In the temples there were statues of bulls that many scholars today think were intended to represent God's power, but the people of Judah believed the northerners worshipped the bulls.

The Assyrians conquered the northern kingdom in 721 and destroyed the temples there. They took many of the people away and replaced them with colonists from other parts of their empire, which corresponded roughly to modern Syria, Lebanon and Iraq. The colonists believed that they ought to worship the deity of their new land if they were to prosper there,

so the government sent them a priest of Israel. The colonists also intermarried with the remaining people of the land. The descendants of this mixed population were the Samaritans of Jesus' time, and some of their descendants still live in and around Nablus. The Jews emphasized the Gentile ancestry of the Samaritans, the Samaritans emphasized their Israelite ancestry and still prefer to be called Israelites.

To review some of the history given in earlier chapters, in 626 the Babylonians revolted against the Assyrians and took over their empire. In 586 they conquered Judah, destroyed the temple in Jerusalem, and took most of the people away. Then in 539 the Persians conquered the Babylonian empire. They allowed the people of Judah to return to their homeland if they wished, and a great many did. They found themselves welcomed by the mixed population to their north as persons of the same blood and religion, and began to intermarry with them. But the leaders of the returnees felt they must break up these marriages if they were to keep their religion pure. This was the beginning of the enmity between the Jews and the Samaritans.

The Samaritans tried to prevent the Jews from rebuilding their temple and the walls of Jerusalem. They built a temple of their own on Mt. Gerizim, which rises above Nablus to the south. Soon after the Jews won their independence in 144-143 B.C., they conquered the Samaritans and destroyed their temple. They also settled many of their own people to the north of Mt. Carmel and west of the Sea of Galilee, so that in Jesus' time the Samaritans lived between the Jews of Galilee in the north and the Jews of Judea in the south. At first, the Jews allowed the Samaritans to worship at the temple in Jerusalem, but relations became strained again when Samaritans created a disturbance there at Passover some time in the years A.D. 6-9.⁴⁸

When Jews from the north went south to Jerusalem for religious festivals, to serve in the temple, or on business or government affairs, they usually took the shorter route through Samaria along the central ridge of mountains, as Jesus did in this instance, instead of going along the Mediterranean coast or down the Jordan Valley. Samaritans also might do business or live among Jews (the Good Samaritan in Jesus' parable was going from Jerusalem east to Jericho in the Jordan Valley, and somewhere north of Jericho Jesus healed ten lepers, one of whom was a Samaritan). Such contacts did not restore harmony, however. We shall see that on one occasion a Samaritan village would not put Jesus up for the night because he was going south to Jerusalem.⁴⁹

In the present narrative, perhaps because he was going north, Jesus' reception was a good deal different, though not at first.

Continuing with John. "And Jacob's well was there [near Balatah]. So Jesus having become tired from going along the road was thus sitting on [the curb of] the well."

I attribute Jesus' tiredness to a sense that he was personally responsible for his mission and that he had suffered a major defeat in having to withdraw from Judea, where he had been so effective. I also believe that he was praying for himself, and that we can watch the progress of his healing as we read what now happened at the well. A friend of mine, called to come pray for a sick person when she herself was suffering from pneumonia, found herself healed when she returned home, and I have come across another experience of the same kind. I think Jesus had a similar experience. A woman asked his help, as we now see, and when he had helped her understand the nature of God and His sustaining power he found he was no longer heavy laden but had a new sense of direction in his life's work.

Continuing with John. “It was the hour between eleven and noon or thereabouts. A woman, [a citizen] of Samaria, comes to draw water [with a water jar and a long thin rope].

Jesus says to her, ‘Give me [something] to drink.’ For his students had gone off into the city to buy food.”

The well near Balatah has been repeatedly identified as the one in John’s narrative from at least the second century and without any alternative tradition. It is possible that my insertion above, “the curb of,” should be “the cover of,” for some wells were covered with heavy stones. Jacob met Rachel at a different well, when she came to draw water, and he rolled away the stone over it for her. Accordingly, we may, if we wish, imagine that Jesus uncovered the well for the Samaritan woman.⁵⁰

As John has already told us twice over, Jesus read people’s thoughts. When he spoke to the woman, therefore, it was not because he was thirsty but because he knew she needed to lead a better life. What he said startled her, as no doubt Jesus intended it to.

“So the Samaritan woman says to him, ‘How [is it that] you, who are a Jew, ask [something] to drink from me, who am a Samaritan woman?’ (For Jews do not have dealings with Samaritans.)⁵¹

“Jesus said to her in reply, ‘If you knew the gift of God and who it is who says to you “Give me [something] to drink,” you’d have asked him and he’d have given you living water.” The term “living water,” as we saw in Chapter II, normally meant water in a flowing stream. Jesus had something else in mind, namely, teaching, as when he spoke to Nicodemus.

“The woman says to him, ‘Sir, you’ve nothing to draw with, and the well’s deep. [If you pour some water into it today, you do not hear the splash for several seconds.] So where do you have [your] living water from? You aren’t greater than our ancestor Jacob, are you, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, and his sons, and his flocks?’

“Jesus said to her in reply, ‘All who drink from this water will thirst again, but whoever will drink from the water I’ll give him won’t ever thirst again, but the water that I’ll give him will be a well [or flowing spring] of water in him that leaps up into eternal life.’

“The woman says to him, ‘Sir, give me this water so that I don’t thirst or come here to draw.’

“He says to her, ‘Go call your husband and come back here.’

“The woman said to him in reply, ‘I don’t have a husband.’

“Jesus says to her, ‘You well said, “I don’t have a husband,” for you had five husbands and the one you have now isn’t your husband. You’ve said this truly.’

“The woman says to him, ‘Sir, I see that you’re a prophet. [And she also sees an opportunity to put a theological question to an expert.] Our ancestors worshipped on this mountain [pointing south to Mt. Gerizim, where perhaps the ruins of the temple could still be seen from the valley], and you [Jews] say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem.’

“Jesus says to her, ‘Woman [again, not a disrespectful term in Greek], trust me that the hour’s coming when you [Samaritans] won’t worship the Father either on this mountain or in Jerusalem. You worship [a deity] whom you don’t know [understand], we worship [a deity] whom we do know, because salvation is [to come] from the Jews. But the hour’s coming, and is [here] now, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth [mentally and sincerely]. For indeed the Father seeks such to worship Him. God [is]

Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and truth.⁵²

“The woman says to him, ‘I know that Messiah,’ which means Anointed, ‘is coming. When he’ll come, he’ll announce everything to us.’

“Jesus says to her, ‘I who speak to you am [he].’

“And at this his students came and were wondering because he was speaking with a woman [of Samaria]; nevertheless, no one said [to her], ‘What do you seek?’ or [to him], ‘Why are you speaking with her?’ [Perhaps my insertion, “of Samaria,” is unnecessary; perhaps the students had accepted the teaching of Jose ben Johanan, “Engage not in too much conversation with women.” If so, they were not yet aware of Jesus’ thinking on that subject or had not yet accepted it.]⁵³

“So the woman left her water jar and went off into the city and says to the people, ‘Come see a man who said to me everything I ever did. This [man] isn’t the Messiah, is he?’⁵⁴

“They went out of the city and were coming to him.

“In the meantime, his students were asking him, saying, ‘Rabbi, eat [some more].’⁵⁵

“But he said to them, ‘I’ve food to eat that you don’t know.’

“So the students were saying to each other, ‘No one [else] brought him [anything] to eat, did he?’

“Jesus says to them, ‘My food is to do the will of Him who sent me and finish His work. You say [about God’s work], “It’s still four months before the harvest comes,” don’t you? Look, I say to you, raise your eyes [your spiritual perception] and see that the fields are white for harvest. Already the reaper takes his [daily] wage and gathers fruit for eternal life [eternity is not a long stretch of time, eternity is now], so that the sower rejoices too with the reaper, for in this [spiritual sense] the word, “One sows and another reaps,” is true [that is, it is not just a proverb about rapine or labor lost]. I sent you to reap what you haven’t labored for; others [over the ages who have worked to make Israel a holy nation] have sown, and you’ve come into their labor.” [There are innumerable receptive minds ready to drink in the water of life.]⁵⁶

Jesus’ renewed vision and its immediate effect upon him accord with the words of Isaiah, “They that wait upon the Lord . . . shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.” And Jesus’ healing of his fatigue was permanent. We read later that he took his students aside to give them rest, but never again that he was tired. Instead, he told others that his burden was light and that theirs could be too.⁵⁷

Continuing with John. “Many of the Samaritans from that city trusted in him because of the word of the woman testifying ‘He told me everything I did.’ So when the Samaritans came to him they were asking him to stay with them, and he stayed there two days. And more by far trusted because of his word, and they were saying to the woman, ‘We no longer trust [just] because of what you said, for we’ve heard [him] ourselves, and we know that this [man] is truly the Savior of the world.’”

I think we may take it also that the woman either married again or broke off her illicit relationship. As for Jesus, he now knew that his path was not to be that of John the Baptist. Striking out on his own, he put the past behind him.

Footnotes

46. Jacob’s gift of the field to Joseph: Joshua 24:32.

47. *ABD*, V, 1174-1186.
48. The history of the Samaritans as it appears in the Bible and Josephus may be found conveniently summarized in any Bible dictionary, sometimes with references to scholarly disagreements on the subject. For recent scholarship see also James D. Purvis, "The Samaritans and Judaism," ch. 3 of Kraft and Nickelsburg. See also *ABD*, V, 941-943. A later disturbance led to the recall of Pontius Pilate (see *ABD*, V, 399).
- As it happens, an earlier Jesus (or Joshua) the son of Sirach, singled out the Samaritans as abhorrent to him (Ecclesiasticus 50:25-26, written about 180 B.C.).
49. Customary route: Josephus, *Antiq.*, 20.6.1 [XX, 18]. The good Samaritan: Luke 10:30, 33. The ten lepers: Luke 17:12-16. Samaritans will not house Jesus: Luke 9:51-53.
50. For a detailed description of the well see *ABD*, III, 608-609. Joseph and Rachel: Genesis 29:1-10.
51. It may be that the words I have put in parentheses are part of what the woman said, for we often tell people things they already know.
52. "Salvation is [to come] from the Jews": the teaching of the whole Bible in Jesus' day.
- "Is [here] now": those familiar with spiritual healing emphasize "now" and add mentally at the end of the sentence "and experience His allness."
- "God [is] Spirit": so also the American Bible Union version, the Translator's New Testament, and the Revised English Bible. Most translations have "a Spirit," but since Greek has no word for "a" translators are free to add it or not. What worshipping "in spirit and in truth" means is open to interpretation (see Newman and Nida, pp. 650-661). I believe that "in spirit and in truth" contrast with outward observances, and that Jesus is putting himself in the line of the Old Testament prophets, who report God as saying such things as
- Is not this the fast that I have chosen:
to open the fetters of wickedness,
to shake off the thongs of the yoke
and let the oppressed go free,
and that you tear off every yoke?
- (Isaiah 58:6); see also Isaiah 1:11-17, Amos 5:21-24, Zechariah, ch. 7.
53. Jose b. Johanan: *Aboth*, I, 5.
54. "This [man] isn't the Messiah, is he?": the translation, "Is not this the Christ?" in the King James Version (1611) makes the woman appear more convinced. In the nineteenth century, grammarians decided that questions in a negative form expected a positive answer only if the negative word was *ou* and that a negative answer was expected if the negative word was *mê*. The word here is *mê*. If it had been *ou*, the words could have been translated, "this [man] is the Messiah, isn't he?"
55. The word "eat" is in the present imperative, whereas "give," Jesus' first word to the Samaritan woman, is in the aorist imperative. Typically, the aorist imperative calls for a single act, the present imperative calls for a repeated act. Usually I see no need to make a distinction when translating, and I may be wrong here in supposing that Jesus ate some of what his students brought but not as much as they thought he needed to.
56. "One sows and another reaps": cf. Micah 6:15, Job 31:8, Deuteronomy 6:10-11.
57. Isaiah 40:31. Jesus gives his students rest: Mark 6:31. Jesus' burden is light: Matthew 11:28-30.

SECTION II – B9 (Matt 4:17,24)

JESUS' TEACHING IN A NUTSHELL

Matthew 4:17 Mark 1:15 Luke 4:31-32.

Matthew then says, “From that time, Jesus began to preach and to say, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has drawn near.’” **Mark’s summary is similar**: “The right time has been fulfilled and the kingdom of God has drawn near; repent, and trust in the good news.” **Luke does not summarize the teaching but says** “he was teaching them on the Sabbath days. And they were wondering at his teaching, for his word was with authority.” “**With authority**” means more than “as befits an expert” or “without citation of precedents,” it means, as the whole tenor of Jesus’ life shows, “with God-given authority to heal and bless.”

According to Matthew, as we have seen, John the Baptist also said “The kingdom of heaven has drawn near; repent and believe the good news.” But Jesus made the words his own, telling his students to use them also, as we shall see. It is important, therefore, to review what Jesus meant by them.⁶⁷

Toward the end of Jesus’ ministry, Luke says, he told the Pharisees, “the kingdom of God is within you.” So understood, the kingdom of God is a sense of inseparability from the ever-presence and all-power of divine Truth and Love, a God-given sense and therefore itself also ever-present within us. Truth is always pressing upon us to recognize it, for its opposite cannot be permanent. Sooner or later error will expose itself or be exposed and will vanish, whereas truth is eternal. As long as circumstances are the same, a transitory or evanescent truth about them is a contradiction in terms, an absurdity. We are shortly to see more fully what Jesus told his followers they must do and think if they were to maintain that correct understanding of God, that unity with God, which would enable them to meet their own needs and the needs of others then, now and always.⁶⁸

Footnotes

67. Matthew 3:2, 10:7.

68. Luke 17:21.

Mark 1:39 Matthew 4:23-25 Luke 4:44.

Matthew now rejoins the others. Mark says: “And he went into all Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and throwing out demons.” (Luke says that Jesus “was preaching in the synagogues of Judea,” but as “Judea” is a slip of the pen most manuscripts have “Galilee” instead.) **Matthew says**: “And Jesus went about in all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom [of God, that is, that it had drawn near and was knocking at the door, waiting to be recognized], and healing every sickness and every disease among the people. And his fame went out into all Syria [the next Roman province to the north, roughly modern Syria]. And they brought to him all those ill with different sicknesses and those in great pain, and demoniacs and epileptics and paralytics, and he healed them. And many crowds followed him [that came] from Galilee and the Decapolis [east of Galilee] and Jerusalem and Judea and across [east of] the Jordan [that is, from Perea].”⁸⁰

Footnotes

80. For the word translated “epileptics” see pp. 340-341.

SECTION II – B10 (Luke 9:1,2)

A SERMON FOR THE APOSTLES

Mark 6:7-13 Matthew 10:5-11:1 Luke 9:1-6.

Mark and Luke then tell how Jesus sent out his twelve apostles. According to Matthew he did so as soon as he chose them, but I believe Matthew anticipated the event. Luke gives the most details: “And he called together the twelve and [by further teaching] gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them to proclaim [the presence of] the kingdom of God and to heal the sick.”

Mark adds that Jesus sent them out two by two.

Matthew gives a much fuller account than Mark or Luke do of the “ordination sermon” Jesus preached before sending out the apostles, and I accordingly follow it.

Mark and Luke give the substance of the first paragraph below in their introductions to the sermon, and they end with the second paragraph, the substance of which each gives in largely different words. Both give the substance of the fourth and fifth paragraphs at a later time, and their agreement suggests that they give a correct context for those ideas. Several other parts of the sermon as Matthew gives it appear more than once in Jesus’ teaching, however, so he may simply have repeated himself.²⁰⁷

Continuing, then, with Matthew. “Don’t go off into a road belonging to Gentiles and don’t go into a city belonging to Samaritans, but go rather to the sheep of the house [people] of Israel that have been lost. And when you go, proclaim, saying ‘The kingdom of heaven has drawn near.’ Heal the sick, rouse the dead, cleanse lepers, throw out demons. You received without payment, give without payment.

“Don’t get gold or silver or copper for your [money] belts, nor a backpack for [the] road, nor two tunics nor [a change of] shoes, nor a staff, for the worker is worthy of his food. And into whatever city or village you’ll enter, find out who in it is worthy, and there remain until you’ll go out. When you come into the house, greet [those who live in] it, and either, if the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it, or else, if it’s not worthy, let your peace turn back to you [don’t lose it]. And whoever will not receive you nor hear your words, when you come out of the house or that city, shake the dust [of the place] from your feet [that is, retain no memory of the rejection.] Truly, I say to you, it will be more endurable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city.

“Look, I’m sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and harmless as doves.

“But watch out for people, for they’ll give you away to sanhedrins, and in the synagogues they’ll flog you. And you’ll be brought before governors and kings because of me for a witness to them and the Gentiles. But when [people] will give you away [to the authorities], don’t worry how or what you’ll speak, for what you’ll speak will be given to you in that hour. For you’re not the ones speaking but your Father’s Spirit [is] the one speaking in you.

“Brother will give away brother to [those who will put him to] death, and father child; and children will rise up against parents and kill them. And you’ll be hated by all because

of my name [because you're the Messiah's], but the one who endures to the end, he'll be saved.

"But when they persecute you in this city, flee into another. For truly I say to you, you won't finish the cities of Israel until the Son of man will come.

"A student is not above the teacher nor a slave above his owner. It's enough for the student to become as his teacher and the slave as his owner. If they called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more [will they call] the members of his household [that].

"So don't fear them, for nothing has been covered that won't be revealed, and hidden that won't be known [or, as Jesus was to say later, "my words certainly won't pass away"²⁰⁸]. What I say to you in the darkness, say in the light, and what you hear [whispered] into the ear [that is, taught to you in private] proclaim on [top of] the houses.

"And don't fear [anything] from those who kill the body, but can't kill the soul. But rather fear him who can destroy soul and body in Gehenna. Aren't two sparrows sold for an assarion [a small copper coin]? And one of them won't fall on the ground apart from your Father. But even the hairs of your head have all been counted. So don't fear; you're worth many sparrows. [No aspect of the universe or yourselves is so inconsequential that it falls outside God's allness, so inconsequential that it suffers real, not just apparent, destruction.] So everyone who will acknowledge me before people, I too will acknowledge him before my Father who [is] in heaven [that is, those who follow my rules for healing and salvation will find them effective]. But whoever will deny me before people, I too will deny him before my Father who [is] in heaven.²⁰⁹

"Don't think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I didn't come to bring peace but a sword. For I came to turn

a man against his father,
and a daughter against her mother,
and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law,
and a man's enemies [will be] members of his household."

The "sword" might be drawn not only by those with opposite standards but also by those with parallel but lower standards, who through pride or fear bitterly opposed the idea that more was demanded of them.

Jesus' words seem at first glance to offer a strong contrast to Gabriel's words about John the Baptist, "He'll . . . turn the hearts of fathers to children," and the other angels' words about Jesus himself, "peace on earth." But, as in his words on the cross, "My God, my God, why have You forsaken me," Jesus quoted only the beginning of a biblical passage, expecting his listeners to remember the rest. Micah, whom he was paraphrasing, goes on,

Therefore will I look to the Lord,
I will wait for the God of my salvation,
my God will hear me.

And Jesus proceeds then to define explicitly the true Father-child relationship and the true peace that results from its recognition.²¹⁰

Continuing with Matthew. "He who loves father or mother above me isn't worthy of me,

and he who loves son or daughter above me isn't worthy of me. And whoever doesn't receive his cross [suffer condemnation] and follow after me isn't worthy of me. He who found his life will lose it, and he who lost his life because of me will find it."

It might seem that Jesus was here prophesying his crucifixion, but Alexander Jannaeus had crucified eight hundred Jewish revolutionaries and the Romans had crucified two thousand, so it seems more likely that we have a single metaphor in the foregoing paragraph and that Jesus meant one must lose a sense of unregenerate human life as all there is, even if one is condemned for it. He meant what he meant in another metaphor when he said to Nicodemus, "You [people] must be born again."²¹¹

Continuing with Matthew. "He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives Him who sent me. He who receives a prophet in the name of a prophet [because he respects him] will receive a prophet's payment [that is, will be repaid by the prophet, as the woman who took Elijah into her home in a time of famine was repaid when she never ran out of food and when he restored her son to life], and he who receives a righteous [man] in the name of a righteous [man, because he recognizes a bond between them] will receive a righteous [man]'s payment. And whoever will give only a cup of cold water to one of the least of these [my students] in the name of a student [because he is my student], truly, I say to you, he won't destroy his payment."²¹²

The sermon ends, then, with a vigorous reaffirmation of the immense value of all that the apostles would bring to everyone who received them or did them the least kindness, climaxing in the requirement that the apostles share their good with others.

The following matters require some comment. First, we notice that even though Jesus had trained his students for their work he did not suppose they were ready to meet every kind of opposition. He therefore told them not to go to Samaritans or Gentiles, where they would meet animosity or blank incomprehension. He also told them how to handle opposition among their fellow Jews, namely, not to let it disturb them but to separate themselves from it and to forget it. Loving instruction, this last, to all persons of good will. Later Jesus was to tell these same students, now more experienced and understanding, to preach and heal everywhere after he left them.

Second, Josephus tells us that the Essenes limited themselves to only one garment and one pair of shoes, which they wore to shreds before replacing them. But those people were ascetics and Jesus was not. Therefore, Jesus must have been telling his apostles once more that they could trust God to supply their needs appropriately. There are modern examples to justify such a trust.²¹³

Third, those familiar with spiritual healing as I defined it at the beginning of this chapter will interpret the words "fear him who can destroy soul and body in Gehenna" as meaning "avoid sin, for the sinner makes his own hell." The surrounding instructions not to fear because God is good and comes to our aid show that "fear" must have a different meaning in the phrase "fear him." As for interpreting the following words metaphorically, I have been guided partly by Paul and partly by two fundamental principles in spiritual healing: one, that sin is to be destroyed but the sinner is to be saved, the sin is to be seen as nothing in the ever-presence of God's all-righteousness and the sinner is to be seen in his or her true and inviolable being as a child of God, seen first by God, then by the healer, and at last by all; the other, that until sinners understand how God sees them, their sense of sin "destroys soul and body in Gehenna," whether they recognize it or not, both here and hereafter. Until they

acknowledge Jesus and their sin, that is, acknowledge the correctness of his teaching and begin their reformation, his teaching will do nothing for them.²¹⁴

Fourth, scholars cannot agree as to the meaning of the words I have translated “you won’t finish the cities of Israel until the Son of man will come.” Perhaps “until” should be “before,” as in the Twentieth Century New Testament and other translations. My own sense of the words in their context is that Jesus means “you won’t suffer rejection or fail to heal without help from me.” Such would be the promise of a teacher lovingly concerned both for his students and for their work.

Fifth, Luke says “aren’t two sparrows sold for two ases” (an as was another small copper coin), and before the quotation from Micah, which he gives in somewhat different words, he has “For from now on there will be five in one house divided three against two and two against three.” I suppose Jesus differed from himself somewhat when he repeated the same idea. Luke also has two versions of what Jesus said when he assured his students that nothing he told them would remain hidden, one version among his last teachings, in much the same words as Matthew gives here, and the other, in rather different words, in the great set of parables of the kingdom, where we have already read them. If we do not accept the idea that Jesus repeated himself, we will suppose that Matthew assembled his version of the ordination sermon from scattered sayings of Jesus just as we will suppose he assembled the Sermon on the Mount.²¹⁵

Lastly, we may consider more fully what it was that the apostles “received without payment,” what it was that, as Jesus had said earlier, many prophets and righteous men had desired to know, what it was that would bring them into such trials and demand such self-denials and persistence as he now unsparingly foretold. Can we reason from the teachings explicitly set out in the Gospels? Can we understand better how Jesus taught as well as what?

For one thing, Jesus had sought out men who were already sincere, generous, noble, and open to the truth he had come to bear witness to, but he proceeded to lift them still higher. Spiritual healing requires moral character and intelligence, but it requires divine understanding as well. The divine understanding by which Jesus healed the sick was not directed only to his patients but to all whom his thoughts rested upon. We shall see occasions when we are told that he prayed earnestly for his students, but his life with them moment by moment was a kind of constant prayer, an unwavering vision of their perfectibility. They were not, one might say, empty vessels into which he poured information, they became sturdier and more beautiful vessels, transformed, not merely filled, by the truths they received and applied and by their teacher’s loving concern for them.

Jesus did not teach the history of religion and medicine or even ethics and ontology, he taught his students how to express their unity with God by their work as healers and by transmitting to others what they had learned about man in God’s image, as the first chapter of Genesis puts it. The same trust in God that gave Jesus his healing power he demanded of the apostles and continued to demand until they attained it. The same spotless integrity of life and the same purity of motive that were his he taught them they must have if they were to heal as he did, and continued to teach them until they could do so consistently. Together with these principles came warnings that to deviate from them was eventually to lose the power to diagnose the minds and hearts of their patients and to heal them. His love, so spiritual, so penetrating, so deeply felt and so powerful that it could bring instantaneous

healing, moral and physical, rested on the twelve. At the limited human level the learning process was regeneration; at the divine and universal level it was revelation, unfoldment, recognition of ever-present, God-given energies and abilities, the fruit of prayer.

Jesus taught, as we shall see, that his true students would never deviate in any respect from what he taught and proved to them was successful in every battle of good with evil. They were not free to modify the rules of life he gave and illustrated. They must not doubt but know that God is omnipresent, omniscient, omnipotent, and the only Good. They must fear no other power, no temptation, no mental attack, but know its unreality because God is All. They must understand and affirm that the exercise of divine power and mental, moral, spiritual and physical recuperation are natural, not supernatural, and never impossible. They must recognize in all mankind the latent capacities and energies for good that flow from the unlabored vitality of the divine. They must be friendly and helpful in their everyday contacts with other systems intended to benefit mankind and with their proponents, even if these people were unreceptive or combative. But they must never be content with ignorance or moral blindness in themselves or others. They must never suppose that mere faith is more or less the same as understanding and will serve. They must avoid immoral situations unless seeking to reform them. As professionals, they must make healing and teaching their only vocation.

Because the students were to become teachers as well as healers, Jesus had to make them the same kind of teacher as he was. They had to do more than just parrot him and cite his proofs of his teaching, they had to prove for themselves the truth of what they taught. Just as he took away the fears of those he healed, so did they have to do, not just use his words “fear not.” Just as he was without self-importance they had to root out self-importance and competitiveness, a form of human will, in order to do God’s work as he did. No other moral gardening seems to have been harder for them; he gave them “precept upon precept, line upon line,” and at his last supper with them dramatized his message by washing their feet. At that time of his life he himself had more than once to pray “Thy will be done.” Just so did they have to pray, for only thus could they be consistently correct in determining what ways of thought and action in themselves or others were wrong, dangerous, forgivable, harmless, had seeds of good in them to nurture, or were right, happifying, and must be practiced.

They must not denounce Satan as a liar and at the same time fear his influence or, what is worse, use their developed mental powers to harm others. On the contrary, they must learn how realizing that a lie is nothing makes it less difficult to shut out of experience. It was no easier for Jesus’ students than for us to be consistent, but they learned. Peter was to scare Ananias and Sapphira literally to death, but afterward he refused to sell his healing power to a wizard and in due course he raised Tabitha from death to life.²¹⁶ Finally, they must choose students and teach them just as wisely as Jesus had. They must love, supervise, and improve their students mentally, morally and spiritually just as he had loved, supervised and improved them. They must never abandon their students, just as he never abandoned them.

Matthew concludes his account of Jesus’ sermon as follows: “[And it happened when Jesus finished giving orders to his twelve students \[that\] he went away from there to teach and proclaim in their cities.](#)” What Jesus proclaimed we see from what Mark and Luke say the apostles did when he had finished speaking to them. Mark: “[And they went out and proclaimed that \[people\] should repent, and they were throwing out many demons and](#)

anointing many sick people with olive oil and healing [them].” Luke: “And going out they were going through the villages, proclaiming the good news [that the kingdom of heaven had drawn near] and healing everywhere.”

Because of Mark’s mention here of anointing the sick with olive oil, and a passage in the book of James saying that a sick person is to call on the elders of the church, who are to “pray over him, anointing him with olive oil in the name of the Lord [because they are all the Lord’s],” consecrated oil is sometimes used in rites of healing today. Those who practice spiritual healing in the way I have described at the beginning of this chapter do not use oil for the same reason that they do not heal by laying on of hands, that is, because its use is not only unnecessary, it suggests that material means can help spiritual. They strive instead to express what they understand the healing oil represents, namely, consecration, charity, gentleness, prayer, heavenly inspiration.²¹⁷

Footnotes

207. Parts of the sermon found elsewhere: the teaching about persecutions is also in Mark 13:9-13 = Luke 21:12-17, among teachings in Jerusalem, and in Luke 12:11-12, in an ordination sermon for seventy-two students (seventy in the King James Version); the latter also includes what Jesus says here about not being afraid and about nothing remaining hidden (12:2-9). The comparison with Sodom and Gomorrah is also in Matthew 10:15 = Mark 6:11, in the ordination sermon for the apostles, and in Matthew 11:23-24, in Jesus’ comment on the reception accorded John the Baptist (the story of Sodom and Gomorrah is told in Genesis, ch. 18-19). The teaching that nothing will remain hidden is also in Mark 4:22 = Luke 8:17. Taking up one’s cross is spoken of not only in this sermon in Matthew but also in Matthew 16:24-25 = Mark 8:34-35 = Luke 9:23-24 and partly repeated in Luke 14:27 and 17:33. For divisions in households see also Luke 12:51-53 and 14:26; for giving a cup of cold water see also Mark 9:41.
208. Matthew 24:35 = Mark 13:31 = Luke 21:33.
209. “Don’t fear [anything] from those” (*mê phobeisthê apo tôn*) may also be translated “don’t be afraid of those.”
210. Gabriel: Luke 1:17. Other angels: Luke 2:14. Paraphrase of Micah: see Micah 7:6-7.
211. Many crucified: Josephus, *Antiq.*, 13.14.2 [XIII, 380], 17.10.10 [XVII, 295]. Baba Mezi’a, 33a (II, 11), says that a teacher takes precedence over a father (it is not clear how old the rule was). “You [people] must be born again”: John 3:7.
212. Elijah: I Kings 17:18-24. Modern examples of righteous persons finding their needs supplied include those recorded by Brother Andrew (with John and Elizabeth Sherrill) in *God’s Smuggler* [New York:] New American Library [1967], his own and those of others trained at the Worldwide Evangelization Crusade Missionary Training College in Glasgow, Scotland. Brother Andrew was at first almost as ascetic as an Essene, but he enlarged his sense of God’s goodness and love when he found his wife in tears because they were to attend a dinner party and she had only second-hand clothes. After that she bought some dresses. “Fundamentally, this was a lesson in abundance” (pp. 168-169). Over the last hundred years the Christian Science periodicals have recorded many other examples.
213. Josephus, *War*, 2.8.4 [II, 127].
214. In Romans ch. 5-8 Paul writes of sin as if it were a person. See also Eddy, *Science and Health*, p. 196.
215. See note 207 above.

216. Acts 5:1-11; 8:9-24; 9:36-42.

217. James 5:14. Eddy, *Science and Health*, p. 592.

SECTION II – B11 (Luke 17:20,21)

THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Luke 17:20-37.

“And when he was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God was coming, he said to them in reply, “The kingdom of God doesn’t come with observation [sense impressions], nor will they say, “Look, [it’s] here” or “there,” for you see the kingdom of God [a state of love, justice, mercy, unselfishness, goodness, holiness, health, and universal harmony] is within you [a practical possibility here and now, within reach of your spiritual consciousness or consciousness of Spirit, and nothing can dispossess you of your power to recognize it].’

“And he said to [his] students, ‘The days will come when you’ll desire to see one of the days of the Son of man, and you won’t see [it]. And they’ll say to you, “Look, [it’s] here” or “Look, [it’s] there.” Don’t go off or pursue [it], for just as the lightning when it flashes shines from one side of the sky to the other, so will the Son of man be on his day. But first he must suffer many [things] and be thought unsatisfactory by this age.”

Jesus is here saying that his followers will find times when the comfort, healing or supply they seek through prayer seems to elude them. Then others will propose that they can find help or solace in other ways. But those who remember his words will find brilliant illumination of their thinking (and the disappearance of their problem) if they stand firm.

Continuing with Luke. “And just as it happened in the days of Noah, so will it be also in the days of the Son of man. [People] were eating, they were drinking, they were marrying, they were being given in marriage, until the day Noah went into the ark and the cataclysm came and killed all. Just so, likewise, it happened in the days of Lot. [The people in Sodom and Gomorrah] were eating, they were drinking, they were buying, they were selling, they were planting, they were building houses, but on the day Lot [and his family] went out of Sodom fire and brimstone rained from heaven and killed all [the rest]. It will be in accordance with these [events] on the day the Son of man reveals himself.¹⁶⁰

“In that day, he who’ll be on [the top of] the house, and his goods in the house, let him not come down [the outside stairs] to take them, and he in the field, likewise, let him not turn back to what [he left] behind, [a tool, lunch, or a cloak taken off to work more freely]. Remember Lot’s wife [who disregarded a divine warning not to look back on the evil city she was leaving, and was turned into a pillar of salt]. Whoever will seek to fence his soul about [in the Pharisaic way] will lose it, but whoever will [be willing to] lose [it] will [thereby] give it life. I say to you, on this night there will be two [men] in one bed, the one will be taken [to me] and the other will be left. There will be two [women] grinding [meal] on the same [stone, pushing and pulling the upper stone back and forth between them], the one will be taken and the other will be left.’ [Progress toward salvation is individual, not collective.]¹⁶¹

“And [his students] say to him in reply, ‘Where [will you be], Lord?’

“And he said to them, ‘Where the [dead] body is, there also the vultures will be gathered together.” I take this to mean, “You’ll have sufficient indications,” and the whole

passage to mean that when we seem to make no progress in our way heavenward we must continue our prayers, for sooner or later what is holding us back will be swept away as when a dam bursts. When that happens, we must decisively abandon the evil being destroyed and not seek to take some of it with us in thought or practice on the grounds that it is necessary, pleasant or profitable. Jesus' words here are memorably vivid.

Footnotes

160. The idea that the wicked have no sense of impending doom is not explicit in the stories either of Noah (Genesis ch. 7) or of Sodom (Genesis ch. 19).

161. After the two women grinding, most manuscripts of Luke add 17:36, "Two men will be in the field; the one will be taken, and the other left."

SECTION III – B12 (Matt 13:24-30)

TEACHING BY PARABLES

Matthew 13:1-53 Mark 4:1-34 Luke 8:4-18, 13:18-21.

Matthew and Mark continue with an occasion on which Jesus did a great deal of teaching by parables. Matthew says it occurred on the same day that Jesus' mother and brothers came to see him, and Luke may be thought to imply the same since he puts the teaching before the visit. Matthew gives the most parables, two of which Luke puts in another place. Mark and Luke have one that Matthew puts in the Sermon on the Mount. Mark has one not in the other Gospels. Assembled as they are in Matthew, with Mark's and Luke's extra parables added in, they make a noble group, and so I give them.

We have seen that parables and briefer figures of speech that are almost parables were much used by Jesus. He was not the first, of course, to realize their usefulness. Parables or fables are among the earliest forms of literature in more than one language. There are several in the Old Testament, the most ancient, if we accept the text as it stands, belonging to the twelfth century B.C. Some of the Old Testament parables tell of plants and birds that act like humans, some tell about people. Jesus' parables are all of the latter kind.¹⁷¹

John Dominic Crossan has won acclaim among his fellow form critics for his definition of the genre parable, a definition which is so narrow that many of the examples in the Bible do not fit it. In his and their opinion, we can then distinguish the parts of the parables that are truly Jesus' words (that is, the parts that fit his definition) from the additions and distortions of subsequent tradition that appear in the Gospel texts. Samuel Johnson, on the other hand, remarked of fables that "the authors do not appear to have formed any distinct or settled notion" of the genre. If Johnson is correct, and I believe he is, then we cannot use our own notion of the genre to explain what they were writing but must have a similarly indistinct and unsettled definition.¹⁷²

Very crudely put, Crossan defines Jesus' parables as puzzles for which Jesus gave no solutions. Such solutions as the Gospels provide, he says, were provided by those who solved the puzzles and we can solve the rest by mentally reliving the experiences that gave them rise. More precisely, he divides parables into two kinds. In the first kind the deviser of the parable explains what he or she knows. In the second kind, the deviser invites the listener or reader to experience that knowledge. The first kind says, "A is like B"; the second kind

says in effect, “let’s experience the likeness of A to B.” The latter kind of parable does what twentieth-century poets like Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot sought to do in their metaphors. (Pound and Eliot were notorious in their refusal to explain their poetry.) Crossan says Jesus used this second kind of parable and spoke as a poet, or more precisely, as if he belonged to the school of Pound.

I explained in the Preface why I reject what I regard as a priori critical approaches to the Gospels. I prefer to define the genre parable on the basis of what we find in the Bible and in the literature of fable. We might define a parable, then, as a narrative in which fictitious characters act in normal human ways but at the same time present us with a pattern for living that is the real goal of the story. Sometimes the characters may be mere personifications of good or bad qualities, as in Jesus’ parable of the Pharisee and the publican, sometimes the real import of the narrative may be so loosely parallel to the plot that it is hard to see. In the latter case, authors have generally taken care to explain their purpose either in an opening statement, as in Jesus’ parable of the houses on the rock and sand, or in a closing or separate analysis, as in his parables of sowing seeds, to which we shall come shortly.¹⁷³

Parables are not easy to write. Jonathan Swift gave them up as too hard even after he had written several good ones. We can then increase our enjoyment of Jesus’ parables if we remember that they may reflect “difficulty overcome,” the sense of which Wordsworth said was part of the enjoyment of poetry.

Swift started with the point he wished to illustrate and then sought to find a story to match, and I suppose that is the normal way for those who do not see “sermons in stones, books in the running brooks.” We do not know Jesus’ procedure.

We can sometimes increase our enjoyment of the ingenuity of a parable by carefully comparing the surface story with its meaning and asking how many of the details have a double meaning, and how many are there only to make the story go. Again and again almost every word in a parable of Jesus carries part of the message, almost nothing is there only because the surface story requires it, as we can see from his explanations. His parables are therefore very artfully constructed and can be enjoyed as such.

The interpretation of parables makes an interesting study for students of literature. Crossan is not the only interpreter to have been struck by the fact that Jesus’ parables often require full prior knowledge on the hearer’s part for their interpretation. What sort of communication is going on when the hearer has to know what is being said before it is said, so to speak?

Crossan’s reply, as I have said, is that one must participate in or with the parable as it seeks to express what never can be expressed. This is too abstract for me, but satisfactory for those who find the same seeking to express the inexpressible in words like “omnipotent.” But then I believe anyone who has practical experience with power can generalize it into a clear understanding of all-power. So my reply to the question of why some of Jesus’ parables require prior knowledge is as follows.

As I have already noted in commenting on the Sermon on the Mount, all speech requires prior knowledge if it is to be communication. Language is entirely arbitrary, so that if we do not know what a person’s words will mean before he opens his mouth we cannot understand what he says. This is an extremely interesting aspect of Jesus’ teaching. Much of what he had to say was so new that the available language could not express it. We have seen him struggling with language and Nicodemus—“You [people] must be born again”—and we shall

see him struggling with language and his students—“Lazarus our friend [who had died] has gone to sleep.” But he could always give practical experience of what he meant by means of his healings and other mighty works—for example, by restoring Lazarus to life—and by teaching others how to do the same, so that little by little his special vocabulary became generally understandable, in retrospect as well as in the present, to those who wished to understand it.¹⁷⁴

Other interpreters find an element of exaggeration in Jesus’ parables, which results because it is impossible fully to represent the divine in human terms. When we read, then, that the kingdom of heaven is “like” or even “exactly like” this or that, we must say to ourselves, “something like” or “almost exactly like,” for a human parallel must always fall short of the divine.

Another aspect of the noncommunicating parable was touched on long ago by Richard Trench: “No one can deny, without doing great violence to our Lord’s words as recorded in Matt. iii. 10-15; Mark iv, 11, 12; Luke viii. 9, 10 [passages to which we shall come shortly], that it was sometimes his purpose in teaching by parables, to withdraw from certain of his hearers the knowledge of truths which they were unworthy or unfit to receive.” A more recent study has pointed out that, by and large, when the Gospels say Jesus explained a parable they say he was speaking to students and that when he did not he was speaking to enemies.¹⁷⁵

Trench goes on, “But notwithstanding this, we may assume as certain, that the general aim of our Lord in teaching by parables, was either to illustrate or to prove, and thus to make clearer, the truths which he had in hand.” How prove? Trench felt that what was true on earth must be true in heaven. His sense of what was true on earth, however, would have included much that those familiar with the principles and practice of spiritual healing would reject as having been proven false. They reason not from earth to heaven but from heaven to earth.

Trench’s sweetness of faith, and perhaps our own, may predispose us to “assume as certain” that Jesus meant to make his teaching clearer by the parables. John Dryden thought Jesus also intended to convey pleasure thereby. He wrote with mock modesty,

Who spoke in Parables, I dare not say,
But sure, he knew it was a pleasing way,
Sound Sense, by plain Example, to convey.¹⁷⁶

But those who take Jesus literally must recognize that he spoke about his parables in a way that led Trench to believe he used them so some people would not understand him.

Those who accept the doctrine of predestination may well agree with Trench. Others, however, may agree with me that it would be unlike Jesus to out-and-out abandon anyone to mental darkness. He must have told how everyone could be enlightened by his words. And indeed he seems to have done so. In the parables we are about to read he says that a lamp isn’t stored away except so that it will come to view. In other words, the parables are intended to bring light, purify thought and action, but we may have to store them away in our minds until our experience and continued thought give us the necessary understanding of their radiance. All speech requires prior knowledge if it is to be communication, but it can be speech remembered from a time before the knowledge came, speech that was incomprehensible at first. A simple solution to a theoretical paradox, supported by the

example of Jesus' brother James and by the experience of dedicated teachers to the present day. James appears in the Gospels only as a disbeliever (John 7:5), but after the risen Jesus appeared to him (I Corinthians 15:7) he joined Peter and John as a leader of the church (Acts 12:17; 15:12-22; 21:18; Galatians 2:9). Dr. Russell Baum, who taught my children in junior high school, said to me recently that a teacher should never abandon hope for students who resist the good offered them. If it was presented in a memorable way the students may well profit from it at a later time. He told me that he had had a young man approach him, saying, "Do you remember me? I gave you and all my teachers a bad time until I dropped out of high school. But my life after that was unsatisfying until I remembered how you used to write wise sayings on the blackboard and make us copy them in our notebooks. I reread my notebook and decided to finish high school. Then I went to junior college. And do you know where I am going now? The state university."

It might seem that a cryptic parable is not much of an advance beyond a cryptic saying of the kind Jesus had used before he began his Galilean ministry, telling Nicodemus he must be born again and speaking of his body as "this temple building." Yet I think it likely that as Jesus advanced beyond John's message "repent and be baptized" he decided that parables gave people something more memorable to ponder than briefer statements of his ideas. Did he also foresee that his words about "this temple building" would be misremembered, if not deliberately misquoted? Perhaps not. At any rate, the stories in his parables had a human interest that helped to preserve them in people's minds.

I shall now follow Matthew unless the others agree against it or supplement it. The parables are:

- Sower
- Lamp (not in Matthew)
- Seed Growing Secretly (Mark only)
- Wheat and Weeds (Matthew only)
- Mustard Seed (elsewhere in Luke)
- Leaven (not in Mark; elsewhere in Luke)
- Explanation of Wheat and Weeds (Matthew only)
- Hid Treasure (Matthew only)
- Pearl of Great Value (Matthew only)
- Net (Matthew only)

I shall leave my comments to the very end, except to say that all the parables explain aspects of the kingdom of God and some are prophecy.

"On that day [the day Jesus' mother and brothers came] Jesus came out of the house and was sitting by the Sea [of Galilee]. And great crowds were assembled to him, so that he got into a ship to sit down, and the whole crowd stood on the shore. [Presumably this was the same place where he had taught from a boat before, the bay just west of Capernaum.] And he spoke many [things] to them in parables, saying:

"A sower went out to sow [grain], you see, and in the sowing, some [seeds] fell beside the road [on which the field abutted], and the birds came and ate them up. And others fell on stony ground where [the sowing] did not have much earth, and it sprang up immediately because it had no depth of earth. But when the sun came up it was scorched, and because it didn't have a root it was dried up. And other [seeds] fell into the thorn

bushes [that hedged the field] and the thorn bushes grew up and choked them. And others fell on good earth and gave fruit, some a hundred[fold] and some sixty and some thirty. He who has ears, let him hear [that is, you will understand my parables if you attune your thought to their spiritual meaning].’

“And his students came and said to him, ‘Why do you speak to them in parables?’

“And he said to them in reply, ‘It’s been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but it hasn’t been given to them. For whoever has, it will be given to him, and he’ll have more than he needs, but whoever has not, even what he has [Luke says “seems to have”] will be taken from him [he can’t insure himself against misfortune]. This is why I speak to them in parables, so that when they see they don’t see, and when they hear they don’t hear or understand. And in them the prophecy of Isaiah [6:9-10] is fulfilled, which says,

In hearing, you [people] will hear and not understand
and seeing, you will see and not know,
for this people’s heart was thickened
and they heard heavily with [their] ears
and they closed [their] eyes
lest they will see with [their] eyes
and hear with [their] ears
and understand with [their] heart
and turn back [from evil]
and I [God] will heal them.”

God’s words, dictated when he called Isaiah to be a prophet and speak for Him, have been interpreted as a promise that He would nevertheless prevent people from understanding what Isaiah was to say. Note however that Isaiah then asked, “How long will You do this?” and God replied, “Until almost all of them have lost their lives and the remnant has learned by suffering” (vss. 11-13). That is, God was speaking of the results of Isaiah’s labors, not their purpose: “When you tell people what they don’t want to hear they will close their minds against you, being unwilling to change their ways, but eventually some will remember and reform.” Familiarity with spiritual healing supports the idea that Jesus understood his quotation in this latter way. He continued as follows:

“But blessed are your eyes, because they see, and your ears, because they hear. For truly, I say to you that many prophets and righteous [men] desired to see what you see and didn’t see [it], and to hear what you hear and didn’t hear [it].¹⁷⁷

“So hear, you [students], the parable of the sower. Everyone who hears the word of the kingdom and doesn’t understand it, evil [or, the evil one] comes and seizes what has been sowed in his heart.¹⁷⁸ This is what was sowed by the road. And what was sowed on the stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy. But he doesn’t have a root in himself, but is transitory, and when suffering or persecution comes because of the word, he’s immediately shocked [thrown off base]. And what was sowed into the thorn bushes, this is he who hears the word, and the worries of the time and the love of wealth choke the word and it [or, he] becomes unfruitful. But what was sowed on the good ground, this is he who hears the word and understands it, who also bears fruit and

produces, one a hundred[fold], one sixty, one thirty.”

Mark (and Luke) continue: “And he was saying to them [the people], ‘A lamp doesn’t come [into the house only] to be put under the eight-quart measure or under the bed, does it? [It comes] to be put on the lamp stand, doesn’t it? For it isn’t concealed except so that it will be shown [later], nor did it happen to be stored away except so that it will come to view. If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear [that is, again, you will understand my parables if you attune your thought to their spiritual meaning].’

“And he was saying to them, ‘Regard what you hear. [Luke omits the next sentence.] In the measure you measure by, it will be measured to you and put to your account. For whoever has, it will be given to him, and whoever doesn’t have, even what he has will be taken from him.’” **The last sentence is found earlier in Matthew.**

Mark alone has the following. “And he was saying, ‘Thus is the kingdom of God: as a man will throw a seed on the ground, and sleeps and rouses up night and day and the seed sprouts and extends itself he knows not how. The automatic earth bears fruit, first the grass, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. And when the fruit will allow, immediately “he thrusts in the sickle because the harvest has come” [a quotation from Joel 4:13, referring there to a day when God will rescue Israel from their oppressors].’

Matthew alone has the following. “He put another parable before them, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven was likened to a man who sowed good seed in his field, but while people sleep, his enemy came and sowed weeds in the middle of the wheat and went off. [The exact weed is not known; darnel, an annual grass that grows in grain fields, has been suggested; a similar grass is called cheat, because of its likeness to wheat plants. “Tare,” the translation in the King James Version, is strictly a kind of vetch instead of a grass.]¹⁷⁹

“But when the grass [that is, the wheat plants] sprouted and produced fruit, then the weeds appeared too. And the slaves of the master of the house came to [him] and said to him, “Sir, you sowed good seed in your field, didn’t you? So where does it have weeds from?”

“And he said to them, “An enemy did this.”

“And the slaves say to him, “So do you intend that we’ll go off and gather them?”

“And he said, “No, lest in gathering the weeds you’ll uproot the wheat along with them. Let both grow up together until the harvest, and in harvest time I’ll say to the reapers, ‘First gather the weeds and tie them into bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my storehouse.’”

Continuing with Matthew (and Mark and Luke). “He put another parable before them, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field. Although it’s indeed the smallest of all the seeds, still when it will grow it’s the largest of the plants and becomes a tree, so that “the birds come and take shelter in its branches.”’” [Jesus was rather loosely quoting Psalm 104:12.]¹⁸⁰

Mark omits the next paragraph. “He spoke another parable to them. ‘The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three seahs of meal [about one and a quarter bushels, or roughly 55 pounds] until the whole was leavened.’”

Luke omits the next paragraph. “Jesus spoke all these things to the crowd in parables and he was speaking nothing to them without a parable, so that the statement [that came] through the prophet [Asaph, in Psalm 78:2] would be fulfilled, saying,

I will open my mouth in parables,
I will proclaim that which has been hidden
from the foundation of the world

[or rather, says the Christian idealist, from materialism's eclipse of idealism in general thinking].'

Matthew alone has the rest. "Then he let the crowd go [or, left the crowd] and went into the house. And his students came to him saying, 'Make clear to us the parable of the weeds in the field.'

"And he said in reply, 'The one who sows the good seed is the Son of man. And the field is the world. And the good seed, these are the sons of the kingdom. But the weeds are the sons of evil [or, the evil one]. The enemy who sowed them is the devil. And the harvest is the perfecting [or, end] of [the] age, and the harvesters are angels. So just as the weeds are gathered up and burned up with fire, so it will be at the perfecting [or, end] of the age. The Son of man will send his angels and they'll gather out of his kingdom all those things that shock and those who do iniquity, and they'll throw them into the fiery furnace. Weeping and gnashing of teeth will be there. Then the righteous will shine out like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear [that is, once more, you will understand my parables if you attune your thought to their spiritual meaning].

"The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure that has been hidden in a field, which a man finds and hides [again], and goes, out of his joy, and sells all he has and buys that field.

"Again the kingdom of heaven is like a man, a merchant, seeking fine pearls. And when he found one pearl of great value he went off and sold all he had and bought it.

"Again the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and that brought up together [sea creatures] of every kind, which when it was filled they pulled to the shore and sat down and gathered the good [ones] into a basket, but the rotten they threw out. [Jesus' listeners may have thought of the "rotten" creatures as those forbidden by the dietary laws, such as catfish or (if they had fished in the Mediterranean or rivers running into it) eels, but he himself rejected those laws, and in any case they probably sold catfish and eels to Gentiles instead of throwing them away.] So it will be at the perfecting [or, end] of the age. The angels will go out and separate the evil from the midst of the righteous and will throw them into the fiery furnace. Weeping and gnashing of teeth will be there.

"Did you understand all these [parables]?"

"They say to him, 'Yes.'

"And he said to them, 'For this reason every scribe instructed about the kingdom of heaven is like a man who is master of a house and who throws out of his treasure [things] new and old.'

"And it happened [that] when Jesus finished all these parables he went away from there."

The Gospels differ a good deal in the degree to which they support one another in recording these parables. At one extreme is the parable of the leaven, where Matthew and Luke agree exactly, except that they use different words for "hid" (Mark does not have this parable). At the other extreme is the explanation of the parable of the sower, where the wording in each Gospel is almost entirely different, though the general meaning is the same in all three.

We can suggest a reason for the differences in the explanation of the sower when the parable itself almost always finds at least two of the Gospels agreeing word-for-word. Mark concludes his account of the parable set by saying that “when they were alone he was explaining everything to his students individually.” This I interpret to mean that there was one version of the parable of the sower, which everyone heard and which the Gospels record, but many separate explanations of it, which the students heard individually and some of which the Gospels record. Those who are interested in all Jesus’ words may then like to read the explanations given in Mark 4:14-20 and Luke 8:11-15.

In one respect the explanations differ because the records of the parable differ. Matthew says, as we have seen, that the good seed brought forth “some a hundred[fold], some sixty and some thirty.” Mark has the numbers in reverse order, and Luke has only “a hundredfold.” Some readers suppose that these differences reflect different attitudes on the part of the Gospel authors, but I do not.

The kind of word-for-word agreement we find in the parable of the sower continues into the account of why Jesus used parables. Here Mark and Luke agree that he said he used parables “so that” (where Matthew has “because”) those seeing would not see and hearing would not hear. Matthew’s word “because” better fits my understanding of why Jesus used parables, but the agreement between Mark and Luke indicates that they represent Jesus’ words correctly.

Because the parables build on common human experience, other writers had expressed themselves in similar ways. Jesus the son of Sirach had said that “the children of the ungodly shall not bring forth many branches, but are as unclean roots upon a hard rock” (Ecclesiasticus 40:15) and Job had replied to his three friends, who said he had sinned, that if he had done any wrong then “let thistles grow instead of wheat” (Job 31:40). These passages may have drawn Jesus’ attention to the possibility of developing his parable of the sower.

Ezekiel had said in a parable that Israel would be a cedar in the shadow of whose branches all birds would dwell (17:23). In the book of Genesis we read that when God and two angels in the form of three men came to have lunch with Abraham he told his wife Sarah to take three seahs of fine meal and make bread for his guests (18:6). Daniel tells how Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were thrown into a fiery furnace (3:21). David’s last words were a warning that a king must be just, in which case he would be “as the light of the morning, when the sun rises” (II Samuel 23:4). Proverbs urges that we seek for wisdom as for hid treasures (2:4). Habakkuk had compared righteous men in the grasp of the wicked to fish taken in a net (1:15).

Since the three men in Daniel emerged from the furnace unharmed, Jesus would not seem to be alluding to or quoting that book but using the same words by accident. The other passages and one or two like them may have given him hints for others of the parables here.

The teaching, “whoever has, it will be given to him, and he’ll have more than he needs, but whoever has not, even what he has will be taken from him [he can’t insure himself against misfortune],” we shall find repeated among Jesus’ last instructions to his students and illustrated by two very similar parables, of the talents in Matthew and the minas in Luke. The parable of the houses built on rock and sand, which closes the sermons on the mount and the plain, makes the same point. It would appear that Jesus felt it wise to repeat this very important warning often.¹⁸¹

Jesus’ next words to his students, beginning “Blessed are your eyes, because they see,”

emphasize that they were living in exciting times and receiving supremely valuable teaching. Mark omits these two sentences and Luke has them in another place, the second sentence, beginning “For truly I say to you,” being nearly word-for-word the same as Matthew’s, and therefore possibly drawn from the same written source. My heart warms to the words every time I read them, so I like to think Jesus repeated them.¹⁸²

Other repetitions are to be found in the parable of the lamp and the measure-for-measure warning that follows it. Only Mark and Luke give the parable here, and only Mark gives the warning but Matthew had given both in the Sermon on the Mount and Luke had given the warning in the Sermon on the Plain and gives the parable again among Jesus’ teachings on his last journey to Jerusalem with his students. The parable is really a semi-parable, since it does not tell a full story as the other parables do. It would appear to have been one of Jesus’ favorite metaphors, but we may notice that he used it for a slightly different purpose each time. Here he makes the point that his parables can be understood if thought about, in the Sermon on the Mount he adds, “Likewise shine your light before people, so that they’ll see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven,” and the last time he uses it in a warning against trying to cloak bad motives.¹⁸³

Three of the parables, the sower, the lamp, and the wheat and the weeds, end with some such words as “he that has ears to hear, let him hear [that is, again, you will understand my parables if you attune your thought to their spiritual meaning].” In a humble desire to “have ears,” then, we may conclude that Jesus’ explanation of the sower does not exhaust its meaning, which is fundamentally that we should strive to be the good ground for the seed, his teaching, we should refrain from imparting that teaching to those who are not good ground, and we should pray for a nurturing atmosphere for it. Likewise the parable of the wheat and the weeds tells us not just to wait until the end of time for the destruction of all that is earthly and evil but to root out whatever is ungodlike and unspiritual from our thoughts and actions as soon as we can, in the meantime patiently insisting to ourselves that good and evil never really mingle in us or in others.

I had always thought of the enemy as coming at night to sow the weeds until I saw “The Devil Sowing Tares,” by Jan Wilders, in the picture gallery in Kensington Palace in London. Wilders portrays the farmer and his hands asleep under a tree while in the background the devil, with a neat little horse’s tail, is sowing the weeds in the field. Pictures of biblical scenes all include interpretation, and I thought this one was particularly interesting. It alerts us to the general problem of being asleep at the switch.

Many who read the parable of the seed growing secretly will recognize they have had good experiences that came about not by accident but in demonstration of some biblical truth already accepted and hidden away in consciousness. The parable of the leaven has a similar meaning, but adds that a person’s and all humanity’s thinking will be completely transformed.

The parable of the leaven is especially interesting not only in the fact that almost every important word, “took,” “hid,” “meal,” “whole,” can be seen to have a second meaning, but also in the fact that the leaven itself may represent both good and evil. Jesus used leaven in a bad sense, for example, when he warned his students against the “leaven of the Pharisees.” The two possibilities are not mutually exclusive, both may be present in the same set of words, though we may have to read the words twice to separate the meanings in our minds.

Taking leaven in a bad sense, the parable says that the kingdom of heaven comes when

evil has worked all its wiles and been completely exposed and destroyed. Taking the leaven in a good sense, the parable says that our vision of ourselves as mere dust which will return to dust, a false vision of life, substance and intelligence, will be completely changed. By that interpretation, the three measures of meal may be three modes of human thinking, perhaps in science or ethics, theology and medicine, all of which came within Jesus' purview (for his mighty works, such as walking on the water, challenge the findings of science), and all of which, when recognized as modes of divine law, have their place in the realm of spiritual reality.

Two of the parables, the wheat and weeds and the net, end with the words "weeping and gnashing of teeth will be there," that is, in the fiery furnace to which the evil are to be sent. The net is the final parable in the series, so its message is the climactic one. Only Matthew has these two parables, and their closing phrase is found mostly in his Gospel. We have seen it closing his version of the healing of the centurion's slave, and shall see it closing the parables of the royal wedding, the good and bad slaves, and the talents. Luke has the phrase in the parable of the narrow gate. Christians differ as to what Jesus meant.¹⁸⁴

Those who have carefully considered the implications of a life after death, and the question of whether or how God can be both just and loving, have arrived at conclusions that we may divide into three classes, each having subdivisions that I need not go into here. Jacques Le Goff has traced the development of two of these conclusions as follows. Division of the hereafter into heaven and hell long preceded Christianity among the Persians, Egyptians, Greeks, Romans and Jews, that is, in almost all the cultures from which the first Christians came. Some of the Jews, however, had come to believe that those who were not irretrievably bad could be rescued from hell by the prayers of the righteous.¹⁸⁵

For the general reader today, the most accessible statement of this new belief is in II Maccabees 12:32-45, where we read of a battle in which the Jews who died were found to have been wearing talismans instead of trusting in God for their safety. Those who buried them nevertheless prayed for their souls. We are not sure when II Maccabees was written, but a guess of about 100 B.C. would satisfy most scholars. The battle in question took place about 160 B.C.

We do not know how or when Christians began to adopt this belief in postmortem rescue of people who had been neither wholly good nor wholly bad, nor how or when it took the form of a belief in a third place, purgatory, where these people would go for a time instead of to hell. The belief of purgatory was well established in the thought of St. Augustine, who converted to Christianity in 387 and who is the first theologian known to us to have cited II Maccabees, but it was not until 1254 that Pope Innocent IV made it official doctrine for western Christians and 1274 that the Council of Lyon confirmed it. It never developed in eastern Christianity, in the west various forerunners of Protestantism refused to accept it, and Protestants agree that Luther was right to reject it.

Those Christians who believe only in heaven and hell see Jesus as teaching that doctrine in the parables we have mentioned and another we shall be reading, Lazarus and the rich man. Those who believe also in purgatory do not see him as denying its existence.¹⁸⁶

A third conclusion about the parables has been reached by those who deny any fundamental reality to evil on the grounds, first, that it is inconsistent with an all-good, all-present, and all-powerful God or Spirit, as taught by Jesus, and second, that spiritual healing flourishes when undertaken with this understanding of the nature of things. In a universe

created and maintained by such a deity, say these thinkers, there is no place for either hell or purgatory as they are usually conceived; rather, individuals work their way out of hellish or purgatorial states of mind both here and hereafter in a struggle with their more or less stubborn or lingering beliefs in the reality of evil and suffering. For such thinkers, every day is judgment day, Jesus' teaching and example being always before us; the kingdom of heaven is within, as Jesus taught; and the fiery furnace of the parables is the same as the fiery baptism John said Jesus would bring; it is evil that is destroyed in this fire, for which the evil people in the parables are metaphors.

As Paul put it, "Each person's work will become evident; for the day will disclose it, because the day reveals itself in fire, and each person's work, what its quality is, the fire will assay. If a person's work that he has built remains, he will receive payment. If a person's work is burned down over his head, it will be lost, but he himself will be saved, and the way [he is saved is] through fire. Don't you know that you're God's temple and the Spirit of God houses in you?"¹⁸⁷

Two minor matters. Matthew's reason for saying that "I will open my mouth in parables" is a quotation from a prophet is because in II Chronicles 29:30 Asaph is called a seer (as is the prophet Samuel in I Samuel 9:18). We can see that the owner of the field where the treasure had been hidden had not hidden it himself, for he did not remove it before the sale. J. D. M. Derrett was, I believe, the first to point out that therefore, by Jewish law, the treasure did not belong to the owner of the field but to the one who moved it. Presumably the man who found the treasure was an employee of the seller, so that if he had moved the treasure before he bought the field he would have taken possession of it for his employer.¹⁸⁸

Footnotes

171. The oldest parable in the Old Testament is Jotham's fable in Judges 9:8-20.

172. John Dominic Crossan, *In Parables: The Challenge of the Historical Jesus*, New York [etc.]: Harper & Row [1973], esp. pp. 7-22. An earlier and influential book of the same kind is Joachim Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, 2d ed. rev., New York: Scribner [1972]; a more recent one is Bernard Brandon Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press [1989].

Samuel Johnson's discussion of fable is to be found toward the end of his "Life of John Gay" in the *Lives of the English Poets* (1779-1781, and often reprinted). What I say of fables and parables here repeats some of what I said in my edition of Gay's *Poetry and Prose*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974, II, 620-621, 632.

173. The Pharisee and the publican: Luke 18:9-14. The houses on the rock and the sand: Matthew 7:24-27 = Luke 6:47-49.

174. John 3:3-12, 11:11-14.

175. Trench: first paragraph of his Chapter II.

Audience research: J. Arthur Baird, *Audience Criticism and the Historical Jesus*, Philadelphia: Westminster Press [1969]. Among exceptions to the rule are Jesus' words about the sign of Jonah, which we have just read, where he explained his metaphor to his opponents.

176. "The Cock and the Fox," II. 816-818.

177. Instead of this paragraph Mark 4:13 has the following: "and he said, 'Don't you know this parable, and how will you know all the parables?'" This question has been interpreted as an outburst of exasperation, but need not be. Jesus has just said (Mark 4:11), "The mystery of the kingdom of God has been given to you, but to those outside everything is in parables, and as a

result,” and he quotes Isaiah 6:9-10. Paraphrased, “Your inborn spiritual sense is unclouded, but others must relearn spiritual things from analogies they remember.” A better understanding of Jesus’ question then is, “If you don’t understand this parable you won’t be able to understand the others I tell you (so you must learn to interpret them; to start you off, I’ll explain this one),” which he does. There may have been an element of exasperation in Jesus’ question, but if there was it is better to think of it in terms of the parable’s explanation, that is, as exasperation at Satan’s attempt to extend his reign by making the students’ good ground unfruitful.

178. The translation “the evil [one]” rather than “evil” is supported by Mark, which has “Satan” here, and Luke, which has “the devil.” Luke adds, “so that [the person] won’t believe and be saved.”

179. *Fauna and Flora of the Bible*, pp. 194-195, agrees that darnel (*Iolium tremulentum*) is the weed in question and says its seed grains are poisonous. If the identification is correct, the latter fact adds an element to the meaning of the parable.

180. It is now known that orchids have smaller seeds than mustard does.

181. Parable of the talents: Matthew 25:14-30. Parable of the minas: Luke 19:12-27. Parable of the houses: Matthew 7:24-27 = Luke 6:47-49.

182. Luke 10:23-24.

183. Sermon on the Mount: Matthew 5:15, 7:2. Sermon on the Plain: Luke 6:37. Last journey: Luke 11:33.

184. Gnashing of teeth: Matthew 8:12, 22:13, 24:51, 25:30; Luke 13:28.

185. Jacques Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, Chicago: University of Chicago Press [1984]; another ed., London: Scholar Press, 1984.

186. Lazarus and the rich man: Luke 16:19-31.

187. I Corinthians 3:13-16.

“Built”: in the preceding verses Paul has spoken of himself as a wise contractor who has laid a foundation, Jesus Christ, upon which others build houses. “Down over his head”: I give the fullest possible force to the prefix *kata*, “down.”

“And the way [he is saved is]”: *houtôs de hôs*, literally, “and [this is] how [he is saved], as if,” and therefore possibly meaning “as if he were escaping from a fire.”

188. Derrett, *Law in the New Testament*, pp. 1-16.

SECTION V – B18 (Luke 7:11-15)

A DEAD MAN RESTORED TO LIFE

Luke 7:11-17.

Continuing with Luke. “And it happened [that] he went next to a city called Nain [now a village]. And his students and a great crowd were going with him. And as he neared the gate of the city, you see, a man who had died was being carried out, his mother’s only son, and she was a widow, and a large crowd from the city was with her.

“And seeing her the Lord pitied her, and he said to her, ‘Don’t cry.’

“And he came and grasped the bier, and the bearers stood [still].” Although they had undertaken to defile themselves by contact with a corpse and would have to wait a week before they could be cleansed and take their normal places in society, very likely they were shocked that a stranger would deliberately touch something that had touched the dead body.

“And he said, ‘Young man, I say to you, rouse up.’

“And the dead man sat up and began to speak. And he gave him to his mother.

“And fear seized them all, and [besides recognizing that no defilement had occurred] they were glorifying God, saying, ‘A great prophet has been roused up among us,’ and ‘God looked upon His people [today].’ And this report about him went out through the whole of Judea and all the surrounding area [in Galilee].”

Considering that the people glorified God, perhaps their “fear” was reverence, but it is possible that they felt like Peter after Jesus caused the great catch of fish, when he said, “Go away from me, because I’m [still] a sinful man, Lord, [and am not yet up to a life like yours].”

Human sympathy leads some commentators to suppose the mother was destitute of family and unable to afford a coffin, but for all Luke tells us she might have had brothers-in-law or nephews who would have taken her in, or she might have been in business for herself, and in any case might have been intending to place her son’s body on a ledge or in a niche in a tomb, a kind of burial where coffins were not used. Instead of imaginatively exaggerating her very real sorrow, Jesus’ truer sympathy removed its cause.¹⁴⁸

This is the first of four accounts in the Gospels of Jesus’ restoring dead people to life. They tell us that he also restored a child who had just died (and whom he also touched as he restored her), Lazarus, who had been dead for four days, and himself after something more than twenty-four hours in the tomb. Now if we define death as “that bourne from which no traveller returns,” to use Tennyson’s phrase, then a person said to have been restored to life cannot in fact have been dead; even if an expert issued a death certificate, he must have been wrong. For a great many readers, then, the narratives of Jesus’ restoring people to life must be accounts of recovery from deep comas at best, total fabrications at worst.¹⁴⁹

Jesus defined death differently. As I pointed out in Chapter II, he said God “is not a God of the dead, but of the living, for all live unto Him.” If everyone is always alive in God’s sight, then there is no death in God’s sight. People can only seem to die, and one who sees through the appearance to the reality, one who truly and completely sees people as God sees them, can “awaken” the dead “from sleep,” to use language Jesus used later.¹⁵⁰

A final and direct proof that people cannot die would be the disappearance of their bodies before death rather than their resuscitation, a proof that Jesus gave in his ascension, the Gospels say. Such a proof is not to be found today, of course. Most of those who accept the Gospel narratives as true, therefore, do so by faith alone. Some, however, find an indirect proof, a kind of awakening from “the dream of death,” in present-day instances where spiritual means have healed those whose illnesses or accidents have been pronounced fatal by competent physicians. Both ways of thought refuse to limit God.

Footnotes

148. For nephews’ responsibilities, see I Timothy 5:4. For a woman in business for herself, see Proverbs 31:10-31, Tobit 2:11-12, Acts 16:14, 40. Lazarus and Jesus were entombed without coffins; see John 11:44, 20:5-7. The word I and others have translated “bier” might be translated “coffin,” but if that is what it was it was without its top.

I like to think that the mother’s intuition told her that Jesus had come to her aid as soon as he touched the bier, when, as she would have seen matters, he was willing to become unclean for her sake by indirect contact with her son’s corpse (see Numbers 19:11-16). Of course, Jesus knew that the son was not dead in any real sense, just as he knew that the lepers he touched were not leprous in any real sense. Were it not for Jesus’ teaching about the essential

nothingness of death, his willingness to touch the dead would be additional evidence that he was not a Nazirite. Nazirites took a vow not to touch corpses (Numbers 6:6-12). For the rewards of those willing to do the helpful work of burial, who might be any people of good will, see p. 354.

149. Four examples: The other three are the restoration to life of Jairus' daughter (Matthew 9:18-19, 23-26 = Mark 5:22-24, 35-43 = Luke 8:41-42, 49-56), Lazarus (John 11:1-44), and Jesus himself.

150. Not a God of the dead: Matthew 22:32 = Mark 12:27 = Luke 20:38. Awaken: John 11:11.

Please contact me (dougmcoco@gmail.com) if you have any questions or comments.