



Jorge Cooco Santángelo, *The Good Shepherd*. Courtesy of the artist.

LUKE 12–15; JOHN 11

JESUS LEAVES GALILEE AND RETURNS TO JUDEA

LYNNE HILTON WILSON

Setting

After recording Jesus's time teaching, preaching, and healing in Galilee, Luke's Gospel follows Jesus and His traveling companions (including several women)¹ on their journey from Galilee to Jerusalem for the Passover. This is the only Passover pilgrimage found in the Synoptic Gospels during Jesus's ministry. The chapters are filled with conversations, parables, healings, and teachings.² In ancient Judea, the preparations for Passover began weeks before the feast:

- Six weeks before: Rabbinical agents went out to the countryside to inspect roads and bridges to determine what repairs were needed after the winter rains for pilgrims to safely travel to Jerusalem. These agents surveyed public squares (for pilgrims to sleep in as they traveled) and determined whether there were adequate wells to provide water for the travelers.³ Once in Jerusalem, they made sure there were enough *mikvaot* for travelers to be purified in

Jerusalem and ovens to roast the passover lambs properly.⁴ Ritual purity took time, so many came early “to Jerusalem before the passover, to purify themselves” (Jn 11:55).

- One month before: Bridges and roads were repaired in preparation for the pilgrimage. A red heifer was burned and its ashes prepared as the “testing draught” for women suspected of committing adultery (Num 19:1). Those who chose to remain as indentured servants for life had their ears pierced and wore a hoop as a mark of identification. All the sepulchers were painted white (so that travelers could stay away to maintain ritual purity).⁵
- Two weeks before: Flocks and herds were tithed, and temple treasury chests were opened and emptied.
- One week before: Homes were thoroughly cleaned to remove all traces of leaven (Ex 12:15, 19; 13:7).
- Four days before: Paschal lambs were selected and displayed in a public place (Ex 12:3).
- One day before: The last of the leaven was removed from homes, and all food for the feast was cooked.⁶

Jesus Warns against Being Puffed Up—Lk 12:1–12

Lk 12:1. “an innumerable multitude.” The word “innumerable” here could mean two things: either a large, indefinite number or literally ten thousand. To emphasize the enormous size of the crowd, Luke includes that the people “trode one upon another.” As the crowd gathers, Jesus talks to the disciples nearest Him as “friends” (Lk 12:4). Later at His Last Supper, Jesus teaches, “Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you” (Jn 15:14).

Lk 12:1 (Mt 16:6). “leaven of the Pharisees.” Jesus’s conversation pointed to the upcoming Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread by using an analogy of leaven. After carefully removing all the leaven or fermenting yeast agents from their homes, Israelites did not eat leaven for the entire weeklong Feast of Unleavened Bread.⁷ This represents the bread of their ancestors in Egypt that did not have time to rise because the people left in haste after the destroying angel passed over them. In addition, leaven also came to symbolize corruption. Jesus spoke against those who had internal leaven, or those who were puffed up with pride. He specifically denounced the Pharisees’ pride, which had led to hypocrisy. Jesus warns that all wicked thoughts and behaviors will at some point be revealed loud and clear.

Lk 12:4. “I say unto you.” This phrase, which introduces Jesus’s authoritative teachings, is repeated nine times in this chapter (it is also repeated throughout the rest of Luke’s Gospel).

Lk 12:5 (Mt 10:28). “Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell.” Jesus taught that we should be more aware of our spiritual safety than of our physical safety. Mortality will inevitably end, so we need not fear death. But losing our spiritual bearings could result in eternal consequences if we do not repent and come unto Christ.

God’s Awareness of our Witness—Lk 12:6–12; Mt 10:29–33

Lk 12:6–7. “*Are not five sparrows sold . . . the very hairs of your head are all numbered . . . ye are of more value than many sparrows.*” God’s awareness of every bird and hair demonstrates that He oversees the details of our lives—“not one of them is forgotten before God.” Jesus recognized that even the little things that seem insignificant are known and valued by God.

Lk 12:8. “*Whosoever shall confess me.*” We can bear witness of Jesus or deny Him with our words, thoughts, and deeds. Those who testify of the Son of God will be defended by Him in heavenly courts. The opposite is also true, as taught by Jesus. This message was very real for the early Christians who were being killed for confessing their belief in Jesus. The JST adds that the Apostles felt condemned: “*Now the disciples knew that he said this, because they had spoken evil against him before the people; for they were afraid to confess him before men. And they . . . [said], He knoweth our hearts, and he speaketh to our condemnation, and we shall not be forgiven.*” This explains why the Lord then went on to teach about the sin against the Holy Ghost.

Lk 12:10 (Mt 12:31; Mk 3:29). “*unto him that blasphemeth against the Holy Ghost it shall not be forgiven.*” The sin of blasphemy against the Holy Ghost “is a sin which is unpardonable” if one has had a sure witness, or if the Holy Ghost “once has had place in you.”⁸ Joseph Smith clarified the act of denying the Holy Ghost: “He must receive the Holy Ghost, have the heavens opened unto him, and know God, and then sin against him.”⁹ Similarly, President Spencer W. Kimball further explained, “The sin against the Holy Ghost requires such knowledge that it is manifestly impossible for the rank and file to commit such a sin.”¹⁰

Lk 12:12 (Mt 10:19; Mk 13:11). “*For the Holy Ghost shall teach you in the same hour.*” Jesus promises divine inspiration as we defend Him. Pray for inspiration to come to you. However, the Spirit is best heard when we have repented and learned the language of the Lord. President Russell M. Nelson warned in his first general conference as prophet, “In coming days, it will not be possible to survive spiritually without the guiding, directing, comforting, and constant influence of the Holy Ghost.”¹¹ This may become a matter of our spiritual life or death.

Stewardship

Earthly treasures—Lk 12:13–16

Lk 12:15 (NASB). “*guard against every form of greed.*” A new scene opens with a man approaching Jesus for help dividing his inheritance. It begins a long discussion on possessions, including a few parables. More than any other Gospel, Luke includes Jesus’s warning against valuing wealth and position. The narration invites us to ask ourselves, “How do I view this world’s goods?”

God gave Moses and the children of Israel laws for inheritance.¹² These laws were often a topic of dispute—after all, contention over financial issues has plagued most generations. Hugh Nibley helped define

the problem: “We have been warned against things of this world . . . but exactly what are the things of the world? An easy and infallible test has been given us in the well-known maxim ‘*You can have anything in this world for money.*’ If a thing is of *this world*, you can have it for money; if you cannot have it for money, it *does not* belong to *this world*.”¹³

Parable of the rich fool—Lk 12:16–21

Lk 12:16. “a certain rich man brought forth plentifully.” Jesus’s next parable describes a misunderstanding of our stewardships. The rich man claims that he owns “my fruits, my barns, my goods.” Personal pronouns (*I, me, himself*) are mentioned ten times in two verses (ten of the forty-five words) to emphasize the rich man’s problems of self-centeredness and self-indulgence. This is the antithesis of God’s laws to love God and our neighbors. The rich, foolish man has forgotten that the earth is the Lord’s. Humans are only stewards of God’s property—which includes our responsibility to take care of the earth. All we have is His.

Lk 12:19. “take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry.” Jesus attacks the dream of getting rich enough to retire with a life of leisure. The parable reminds His audiences not only that the future is not in our control but also that storing up riches is self-centered foolishness. The Lord revealed the law of consecration to teach a better way. Early Christians lived this law (Act 2:44; 4:32). The law was restored in 1831 in Kirtland, Ohio (with more details taught over time, found in D&C 42, 58, 105, and so on). Consecration works on three major principles: agency, stewardship, and accountability.¹⁴ The parable poked fun at the foolish man’s shortsightedness to teach that all is God’s. We all have the responsibility to bless each other with our God-given gifts because God’s creation has plenty for all if we all do our part to work hard and share generously.

God is our provider—Lk 12:22–34; Mt 6:25–34

Lk 12:22–23. “Take no thought . . . life is more than meat.” Jesus taught this same message as part of His Sermon on the Mount (Mt 6:25–34). At that time He instructed His Apostles on their focus as full-time missionaries and full-time servants to build His kingdom. God promises to provide for those sent out to serve and work with Him. He also teaches them to not worry or “be anxious about your life” (ESV). With faith and trust in God’s care, our anxiousness about the future diminishes. Parts of this advice apply to all, and parts are specifically for His special audience (the Apostles). God also directed us to plan, to balance our need for daily bread and our dependence on God with the sweat of our brow (Gen 3:19).

Lk 12:24. “Consider the ravens . . . God feedeth them.” God takes care of even the unclean birds like ravens (Lev 11:15) and reminds us, “How much more are ye better than the fowls?”

Lk 12:27 (Mt 6:28). “Consider the lilies.” We, like the beautiful lilies, are God’s handiwork. We are most beautiful when reflecting His light. How do you move from anxiousness to trust in God? Jesus’s answer is, “Ye of little faith . . . seek the kingdom of God.” (For more on lilies, see my comments on Mt 6:28.)

Lk 12:28. “will he clothe you.” In the discussion on Mt 6:28–30, this teaching appears to also address temple promises, as the word for “clothe” is a form of *endue* (an older form of *endow*). The word *endow* came from the idea “to provide with a dowry” and is occasionally used for one who “is endowed by his Maker with reason; to endow with privileges or benefits.”¹⁵

Lk 12:31 (Mt 6:33). “seek ye the kingdom of God.” The Lord’s counsel to not worry about meals and clothing appears to be mainly directed to those serving Him full time, but there is application for all disciples. As we prioritize seeking God’s will and His kingdom above our earthly wants, God promises that “all these things shall be added unto you” (Lk 12:31). This is an extraordinary return. When we give our time and money to God’s kingdom, He will supply us with everything else we need and more. God offers an amazing return on investment.

Lk 12:34 (Mt 6:21). “your treasure is . . . your heart.” Biblically, the heart was the source of thinking. Our thoughts and desires become our treasures, and unlike earthly treasure, heavenly treasure is inexhaustible. When we exercise faith, we trust God. It helps to look at how Jesus’s directives grow in this section (ESV and BLB translations): “do not be anxious” (verse 22); “consider” (verses 24, 27); “do not seek . . . nor be worried” (verses 29); “seek his kingdom” (verse 31); “do not fear” (verse 32); “sell . . . and give alms” (verse 33).

Parable of the prepared servants—Lk 12:35–40; Mt 24:42–44; Mk 13:33–37

Lk 12:36. “wait for their lord . . . when he cometh . . . open unto him immediately.” Good servants wait on the Lord in the same way that a waiter at a fine restaurant graciously waits on the guests’ every need. The Lord needs disciples who will serve Him and anxiously wait on Him. While we actively serve Him, we are to watch, “for the Son of man cometh at an hour when ye think not” (Lk 12:40).

Lk 12:37. “he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them.” Jesus foretells that He will serve those who serve Him. The JST repeats this entire message ten lines later, possibly for emphasis (JST, Lk 12:43). Jesus demonstrated serving those in need throughout His ministry. In word and deed Jesus communicated that He came to serve and not to be served (Mt 20:28; Mk 10:45). One aspect of this prophecy was literally fulfilled at the Last Supper when Jesus took on the role of a slave in washing His disciples’ feet (Jn 13:5–9).

Lk 12:38 (JST). “He cometh in the first watch of the night, and he shall also come in the second watch, and again he shall come in the third watch. And verily . . . He hath already come.” The JST adds over 160 words to this section on the importance of disciples watching and preparing for the coming of the Lord (see the Bible appendix). The Lord explains His regular intercession on earth. Jesus asked disciples to wait with ears listening for promptings from the Spirit and to stop the adversary with active efforts. Elder Larry Y. Wilson expressed:

As we wait on the Lord's timing it is not enough to just follow the people in front of you. . . . [This] approach takes little thought or effort. You can just do and think what others are doing and thinking. This works fine in sunny weather. But the storms of deception and the mists of falsehood arise without warning. In these situations, being familiar with the voice of the Holy Ghost is a matter of spiritual life and death.¹⁶

When we wait on the Lord in this way, we prepare for Him, hear His knocking, and can open our hearts and minds to see Him.

Parable of the unfaithful servant—Lk 12:41–48; Mt 24:45–51

Lk 12:43 (NET). “**Blessed is that slave . . . at work.**” Peter asked the Lord if the parable about the watching servants was for the disciples and whether they were the servants. Jesus did not directly answer his question. Instead, the Lord gave a short parable to describe the qualifications of servants of God. It helps to remember that the words for “slave” and “servant” were interchangeable at the time of Christ and, additionally, that one of those words also meant “child.” One-third of the population of the Roman Empire and one-half of those in cities (including Jerusalem) were either servants or enslaved.¹⁷ Jesus lived His life as a servant up to His death (Mt 26:39; Mk 10:45). He asked His disciples to do the same *until He comes again* “at an hour when [we are] not aware” (Lk 12:46).

Lk 12:48. “***much is given . . . much required.***” Returning to Peter's question (who is supposed to give up their cares of the world to work for the kingdom, and who is God going to bless for serving Him?), the Lord now answers that He expects more of His servants who have received more light and truth. The punishment for slothfulness and inattentiveness is greater for those to whom He has given more.

Coming Judgments

Lk 12:51 (BSB). “***I have come to bring . . . division.***” Jesus realized that Satan is at war with God's teachings. His message will not fall easily on those who serve the devil. Discipleship requires standing up for Christ's message, even in times of social conflict and family strife. (These verses have been discussed previously in Matthew as well.) President Russell M. Nelson brought up this same point in a recent general conference address.¹⁸

Repentance or destruction—Lk 13:1–5

Lk 13:1. “***whose blood Pilate had mingled.***” News traveled to the pilgrims about heinous murders among their people. The story was that the Roman governor Pontius Pilate killed Jews from Galilee and supposedly added their blood to the temple sacrifices. In this account, we learn more about what the Jews thought of Pilate and his atrocities.

Lk 13:2–3. “*Suppose ye that these Galileans were sinners? . . . Nay.*” Whether or not the murders happened as described, Jesus seized the opportunity to confront a misconception. A major part of the restoration Jesus brought included cutting away cultural baggage. He used this opportunity to teach that bad things happen to good people, too (like Job). Suffering and loss are part of the process of learning to distinguish good and evil and of developing faith, hope, and charity.

Lk 13:5. “*but, except ye repent.*” Jesus’s main point is that we all need repentance because we will all come before our Maker.

Parable of the fig tree—Lk 13:6–9

Lk 13:6. “*A certain man had a fig tree.*” Jesus began with calling all to repentance and then gave an illustration. The parable speaks of the need to produce good fruit. Jesus knew that repentance brings good works and righteous influence. Sincere repentance brings a change of heart, which then can bring good fruit. Jesus asks us to live in a way so that we are ready to meet our Maker. Jesus told this parable in early spring, so the formed figs would not have been ripe (they do not ripen until late summer). President Russell M. Nelson spoke on repentance in general conference, encouraging Saints to develop daily habits of repentance and to be in tune with God: “We can do better and be better.”¹⁹ Repentance is a great blessing for disciples who daily apply it.

Lk 13:7. “*dresser of his vineyard.*” God will authorize the cutting, which symbolizes God’s judgment to determine the sincerity of the fruits of repentance. Allegorically, God moves the trees around His vineyard to see if they will produce fruit elsewhere. By cutting down the bad tree, God can use the fertile soil for other spirit children to come to earth. But the servant does not want to destroy the tree yet. He encourages the man to work with dung and digging one more time to help the tree produce fruit. Symbolically, the fruit represents repentance and good works. Note that this is similar to Zenos’s allegory of the olive tree in Jacob 5. As we discussed in Matthew, we can find several accounts with a similar theme scattered across the Bible.

Lk 13:7. “*three years.*” This may refer to Jesus’s three-year ministry, but the Gospel of Luke never refers to Jesus’s ministry lasting three years (only John’s Gospel does). Beyond the time listed here, Jesus’s message deals with fruit. A tree without fruit is to be removed—especially because fig trees deplete the soil. The man asked, “Why should it use up the soil?” The parable also teaches that God warns His people before their destruction.

Healing the infirm woman—Lk 13:10–17

Lk 13:10. “*he was teaching in one of the synagogues.*” This is Luke’s last of seventeen references to synagogues—most of which referenced Jesus’s teaching on the Sabbath. As was His practice, Jesus chose to perform healings on the Sabbath not only to restore those suffering but also to restore the higher purpose of Sabbath worship. Jesus restores the Old Testament teaching that Sabbath observance is a sign

of His covenant (Ex 31:16–17). The woman does not approach the Lord, nor does anyone exert faith—the message is that Jesus wanted to teach a principle about the Sabbath.

Lk 13:11 (ESV). *“a woman who had had a disabling spirit for eighteen years.”* The woman’s years of scoliosis or osteoporosis left her bowed over. Physical deformities had social side effects in that culture. People saw this woman’s illness as God’s curse or an evil spirit that had demeaned her. Yet, in conjunction with Jesus’s earlier messages on repentance (Lk 13:5; 8–9), Jesus used this opportunity to teach that the woman’s infirmity did not make her a sinner. Luke may have chosen to include this story of Jesus here to further illustrate another aspect of repentance.

Lk 13:12 (NIV). *“Woman, you are set free from your infirmity.”* Jesus’s message is deliverance, and He demonstrated it immediately and permanently. The woman saw God in this great work and is remembered as “glorifying God.” Luke did not mention the Lord laying His hands on people’s heads during healings very often, but he did here.

Lk 13:14. *“the ruler of the synagogue answered with indignation . . . not on the sabbath.”* Regardless of the miracle and power of God just manifested, the rabbi could not see beyond the oral laws that had defined his Sabbath worship (see my discussion on Mt 14). The crux is that Jesus chose to act mercifully and heal as part of His Sabbath worship. He pointed out the hypocrisy in the law by giving the example of watering an animal on the Sabbath. He asked the rabbi to compare the greater value of humans to animals, paralleling His teachings of the sparrows and lilies from Lk 12:27.

Lk 13:16. *“daughter of Abraham.”* To further emphasize the previously infirm woman’s worth, Jesus gave the woman an honorary title. This may also have helped her social healing, raising her from the false judgment she had endured. Luke also included that Jesus equated her illness with Satan’s binding. This inclusion shows how Jesus’s healing pushes “back the power and influence of Satan’s kingdom.”²⁰

Parables of Growth and Equality: Mustard Seed and Leaven—Lk 13:18–21; Mt 13:31–32; Mk 4:30–32

Lk 13:18. *“what is the kingdom of God like?”* Repeatedly, Luke used the phrase “kingdom of God” to draw attention to Him whose kingdom it is. (Luke was a gentile convert to Christianity and did not have a problem referring to God, whereas Matthew, a Jewish Christian, avoided using the name of God, so he changed the phrase to “kingdom of heaven”). Also, Luke’s parables were often placed in pairs or triplets highlighting different genders, ages, and professions. The message is that all are needed to build the kingdom of God.

Lk 13:19 (NIV). *“like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his garden.”* John and Jeannie Welch elaborated on this parable:

The endearing parable of the tiny mustard seed teaches the principles of growth and progression that are essential to the operation of the plan of salvation. All people who come to this earth are here to

grow, to learn, and to progress. . . . In this context, Jesus then used the unsuspecting mustard seed that grew to fill God’s purposes and kindly welcomed all the needy birds of the sky to enter in and make their homes in its branches.²¹

All three Synoptic Gospels include this parable. For more on these two parables, including what Joseph Smith taught about them, see my discussion of Mt 13.

Citizens of the Kingdom—Lk 13:22–30

Lk 13:22. “*he went through the cities and villages.*” According to Luke’s descriptions, Jesus stopped off in many local towns to preach, teach, and heal on His journey to Jerusalem for Passover. A city was usually defined as a community with a wall even if it had a small population of only a dozen families.

Lk 13:23. “*are there few that be saved?*” The idea of a chosen people raises questions of exclusivity. Many Jews at the time mistakenly believed that only those Israelites born through Abraham’s son Isaac could get to heaven. They saw heaven as a place for Abraham’s righteous seed only. It is a question from the perspective of scarcity and wrongfully assumes a limit—as if heaven were not big enough for all and had room for only a few. All who qualify will be warmly welcomed in the kingdom of heaven. We can all choose to be chosen by following Jesus.

This is why Jesus restored the message that He is the way, that baptism is the gate, and that the condition of our hearts and minds matters. Both John the Baptist and Jesus denounced the idea that lineage will save us by teaching the need to do the works of Abraham (Mt 3:9; Lk 3:8).

Lk 13:24. “*Strive to enter in at the strait gate.*” *Strive to enter* was a phrase used for “athletic contests and thus has to do with focused, intense effort.”²² It is also reminiscent of the celestial kingdom requirement for being “valiant in their testimony of Jesus.”²³

Lk 13:24. “*I say unto you.*” Jesus spoke from a position of authority and had no need to quote scripture here. The JST adds an important conditional: “*For the Lord shall not always strive with man,*” highlighting the need for repentance before Judgment Day.

Lk 13:25. “*ye . . . knock at the door.*” The great banquet of the Lord is a repeated theme throughout scripture. All are invited, but only some choose to qualify themselves.

Lk 13:27 (JST). “*ye know not from whence ye are.*” This addition clarifies that it is not God who keeps us from heaven but our own level of understanding stemming from our choices. Our Savior will work everything out, but not all understand or want His gift enough to become like Him. As the parable concludes, in the end those who do not become like Christ will weep (Lk 13:28).

Lk 13:29. “*they shall come . . . and shall sit down in the kingdom.*” People from around the world will be able to enjoy the banquet in the kingdom of heaven. Often the cardinal directions (north, south, east, west) link to the temple in biblical texts. Here, too, they refer to those who will return into the presence of God.

Lk 13:30. “first which shall be last.” Before Jesus’s Second Coming, those who did not originally receive the promises will receive them. The Gentiles are allowed to be God’s servants by laboring to bring forth the kingdom of God on earth. Last of all, they will bring God’s news to the children of Judah. (This is a general statement; many descendants of Judah have accepted Jesus as their Redeemer.)

Jerusalem’s Future—Lk 13:31–35; Mt 23:37–39

Lk 13:31. “depart hence: for Herod will kill thee.” Luke alone included this conversation, in which Jesus is warned that Herod wants to kill Him. Jesus responded by calling Herod a fox. Luke’s inclusion is not merely to note a change of locale but rather to stress the inevitability of Jesus’s suffering, death, and resurrection. He will not die in Galilee because of Herod but in Jerusalem (where Herod will add his voice too).

Lk 13:34. “I have gathered . . . as a hen.” Jesus chooses to describe Himself as a mother bird trying to protect her young. The image of His wings describes His work on both sides of the veil because He is going and coming on behalf of His young.

Lk 13:35. “your house is left unto you desolate.” The house of God is the temple. The Jewish house can also be the temple, the people, or their future kingdom. The problem is that it is empty. It gives a message of judgment.²⁴ Jesus’s lament over Jerusalem stretches back to its history of killing prophets. It echoes other lamentations found in the Old Testament (see 2 Chr 35:25). Yet it is written in present tense, showing Jerusalem’s still-extant negative attitude toward heaven-sent messengers.

Jesus Teaches at Dinner Parties

Healing a man with dropsy on the Sabbath—Lk 14:1–6

Lk 14:1. “he went into the house of one of the chief Pharisees.” The setting changes to the group’s journey south to a home. A Pharisee invited Jesus to join him for a Sabbath supper. According to Josephus, the festive meal on the Sabbath was at the end of the synagogue service at the sixth hour (noon). To keep the Sabbath according to the Pharisaic oral laws, all the food was prepared on Friday before sundown.

Lk 14:2. “a certain man before him which had the dropsy.” The text leaves the possibility open that the man was planted there to trap Jesus in breaking the Sabbath. *Dropsy* was the name for swelling or the condition we call edema. Fluid accumulated in the tissues, causing swelling, although the person usually had a more serious problem with circulation, the heart, or the kidneys.

Lk 14:3. “Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath day?” Jesus asked the first question. As Lord of the Sabbath, He knew the answer but wanted to teach the importance of helping our fellow human beings and keeping the higher law of Sabbath observance. Healing on the Sabbath also points to the greatest Sabbath healing Jesus will offer, the Resurrection.

Lk 14:4. “*And he took him, and healed him.*” Jesus acted and taught with authority. The Mosaic law calls for help when an ox falls, so why not when a human falls? (Deu 22:4). However, the Palestinian Jewish community rule book states, “Let no one assist a beast in giving birth on the Sabbath day. Even if it drops (its newborn) into a cistern or into a pit, one is not to raise it up on the Sabbath.” Later rabbinic literature states, “They may not deliver the young of cattle on a feast-day, but they may give help.”²⁵

Teachings on humility—Lk 14:7–11

Lk 14:7. “*he put forth a parable.*” At the same dinner party, the Gospel of Luke adds that Jesus told the people a parable (this story is also similar to wisdom literature). Luke divided this section of dinner conversations into two parts—the first is a parable about someone of lesser social status usurping a position, and the second is about God’s feast.

Lk 14:7. “*he marked how they chose out the chiefrooms.*” Jesus’s attention turned to the way guests chose where to sit. Why do you try to get the best seats when you may not be the most important guest invited? He repeated an account found in Pro 25:6–7 (“Do not exalt yourself in the presence of the king” [BSB]). This has a double meaning here as Jesus taught first humility and second that *He* is the King. This advice for dinner parties can be applied by disciples to other public gatherings because Jesus asked for disciples to show more humility in all settings. Jesus’s parable warns of self-righteousness before God and other people. The message can relate back to Jesus’s earlier comments on where we think we fit in God’s heavenly kingdom. This latter view offers further eschatological overtones.

Lk 14:8. “*When thou art bidden.*” Both the first and second dinner parables begin with this phrase, tying the two together. At the time, dinner guests reclined rather than sat (the KJV choice); starting from a reclining position would make it more awkward to get up (and possibly more humiliating) to move to “economy class,” as it were.

Lk 14:11. “*whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased.*” This verse almost replicates word for word Lk 18:4, and it is similar to Mt 23:12.²⁶ Often messages are repeated for emphasis (see Lk 13:28–29). Jesus’s message becomes clearer as He repeats the need for disciples to seek humility, not status or notoriety. His example of serving others spoke even louder than His words.

Parable of the great supper—Lk 14:12–24

Lk 14:12. “*to him that bade him . . . call not thy friends.*” Jesus’s second parable turns from the guests to the host. Jesus encourages this prominent Pharisee (and all of us) to socialize not just with friends and family who will return the favor but also with those in need outside of our circles. (Matthew records a similar message that gives an eternal perspective of the Second Coming as the marriage supper of the Lamb in Mt 22:1–14).

Lk 14:13. “*the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind.*” Luke often included messages to the outcasts and here emphasized Jesus’s theme of befriending misfits, or the socially “unclean.” Interestingly,

three of the four groups that Jesus listed as the unclean that should be invited were specifically excluded from the list of “sons of light against the sons of darkness” in the Qumran War Scroll and from the list of priests that could serve in the tabernacle in Lev 21:17–23. His message directly hit and tore down the false thinking of His day.

Lk 14:14. “be recompensed at the resurrection.” The message Jesus taught goes beyond the requirement to serve the needy; it also teaches about charity. “Real love never reckons with recompense.”²⁷ He pointed to the Resurrection to give this counsel eternal implications. When a guest chimes in about the rewards in heaven for the upright, Jesus turns to another parable.

Lk 14:17. “Come; for all things are now ready.” Luke gives a general statement about the preparations, while Mt 22:4 includes a few details about the preparation of the feast—the calf has been slaughtered and foods prepared—which add eschatological implications to this marriage feast.

Lk 14:18. “began to make excuse.” The invited guests gave legitimate excuses for not attending the feast, but that made it more tragic—they do not see the value of the feast. These were good things they were doing, but the feast is the best thing they could do. (Note how three examples or witnesses are often used in Jesus’s parables, as we saw in the parable of the good Samaritan.) These are the excuses invitees in the parable gave. Do we have similar excuses?

- “I have bought a piece of ground.” The Greek here is in the present tense, “I am in the act of buying.” But in the ancient world, making those kinds of purchases was a very long, drawn-out process.
- “I have bought five yoke of oxen.”
- “I have married a wife.”

Lk 14:21–23. “Go out quickly . . . and bring in hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind.” The three affluent groups are contrasted with the same four marginalized groups that Jesus mentioned earlier (in Lk 14:13 as those unable to return a favor). Twice the servant went out to bring more guests and there was still plenty of room.

The word “compel” in verse 23 was the license that Augustine claimed when using physical force against heretics and that was again used as justification in the Middle Ages during the Inquisition. Latter-day revelation contradicts this: “No power or influence . . . ought to be maintained . . . only by persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned” (D&C 121:41). We believe in the gospel of peace and leave judgment to God.²⁸

Lk 14:24 (NIV). “not one . . . will get a taste of my banquet.” Those who miss the Lord’s feast have mixed up their priorities. Those who want to come enough will rearrange their lives to join the Lord. This message bridges Luke’s next section that asks disciples to prioritize the things of God above all else—family included.

Conditions of Discipleship

Lk 14:25–26. “*went great multitudes with him. . . . If any man come to me.*” As crowds followed, Jesus taught that following Him comes at a great sacrifice. Discipleship requires purifying conditions:

- To follow God, disciples “hate,” or are willing to give up, even the favor and protection of parents, spouses, children, and siblings.
- Disciples must be willing to give their own life—meaning being willing to live and die to serve Him if required (as often was the case in Luke’s community).
- Disciples “bear his cross,” literally meaning a cross of crucifixion but figuratively meaning that they are willing to suffer even death.

Nothing that life has to offer should deter a person from following Jesus. The JST changes in Lk 14:27 emphasize this point: “*Settle this in your hearts, that ye will do the things which I shall teach, and command you.*” To further illustrate His message, Jesus uses three examples: the analogy of building a tower, the analogy of making war, and the parable of salt.

Analogy of building a tower

Lk 14:28 (BSB). “*first sit down and count the cost to see if he has the resources to complete it.*” Just as we financially and emotionally need to count the cost of our house projects, we spiritually must count the cost of discipleship before making covenants. Not finishing a project is a blunder, but it does not have eternal ramifications. In that sphere, Jesus’s message is about more than just being prepared; it extends to the importance of making and keeping our covenants. If we choose to follow Christ, we must follow Him with all our heart, might, mind, and strength.

Analogy of making war

Lk 14:31 (ESV). “*sit down first and deliberate whether he is able.*” A benevolent king would never risk the lives of his soldiers without making sure he had a plan to win. Jesus used these examples hoping that all His followers would ask, “Am I willing to pay a similar cost?” We do not know what our specific or individual cost will be to enter the kingdom of God, yet we must always walk humbly and trust that God’s will is better than our blurred perspective. We must be willing to consecrate our all to build His kingdom.

Parable of salt

Lk 14:34 (ESV). “*if salt has lost its taste.*” In the ancient world salt was very valuable, and at times, people were even paid wages in salt. (*Salt* shares the ancient root of our word *salary*.) Jesus likens His disciples to valuable salt. Although our divine worth as children of God is constant, our value as His disciples diminishes if we become like salt that “has lost its savor.” If one’s commitment to God stops, one

becomes figuratively tasteless or unable to bless and preserve those around us to the same degree. This parable of losing flavor connects to the next three on losing and rescuing disciples.

Saving the Lost

Jesus came to earth to save lost souls (that is, all humanity). Luke shared three similar parables, each about lost souls, in this chapter. All three answer the pharisaic murmuring and include a little hyperbolic shock value to keep the Pharisees listening and thinking. Consistent with Luke's parallel patterns, the next two parables are paired to highlight opposite genders and social class.

Lk 15:2. *“This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them.”* The Pharisees condemned Jesus for eating with sinners earlier as well (Mk 2:16; Lk 5:30). I couldn't find anything in the Torah that forbade eating with sinners or the unclean (unless you were a priest), but often eating was looked at as a covenant or a sacred rite, so you would not want to contaminate yourself by eating with a sinner. The idea that publicans were all sinners developed into a hatred of the Roman tax collectors.

Parable of the lost sheep, or “the Gospel of the outcast”—Lk 15:1–7

Lk 15:4. *“What man of you.”* Jesus addressed the Pharisees as if they were shepherds. This may have been a social slam, as shepherds were socially unclean, were not trusted, and were not allowed to stand as legal witnesses. On the other hand, 90 percent of the people in Palestine lived off the land in small villages with an agrarian lifestyle, so many Pharisees had close contact with livestock and could relate to the parable.²⁹

Lk 15:5. *“when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders.”* Sheep who fall onto their backs cannot aright themselves. Depending on how long the sheep is in that position, their legs may be weak from a lack of circulation.³⁰ This sounds like the situation Jesus describes as the shepherd carries the sheep back to the flock.

Lk 15:6. *“he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me.”* Such extravagance is an unusual practice for shepherds. The climactic center of all three parables is a communal celebration over finding something that was lost. This was unheard of—in fact, it was extraordinary. Yet, in God's flock, it coincides with His work and glory.

Lk 15:7 (NKJV). *“joy in heaven over one sinner who repents.”* Jesus's interpretation explains that the sheep represent humans. The lost one is the repentant sinner who returns to the fold of believers, much to the joy of the angels.

Parable of the lost coin—Lk 15:8–10

Lk 15:8. *“what woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one.”* The word “silver” here is translated from the word for the ancient Greek coin *drachma*, which was a half day's labor in Athens. Women usually did not legally own anything. The money they earned or found was the property of their

husbands or fathers. Even her bride-price was given to her father.³¹ So perhaps this is why it is so important that the woman in the parable find the coin. Or perhaps the coins had sentimental value as part of the woman's dowry. Yet rarely in Judaism was the bride-price given to the bride. (However, in other cultures the bride sewed her bridal coins into a bedecked headdress.)

Lk 15:10. “Joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner than repenteth.”

The message of the parable is clear: if humans will exert such effort to recover their property (light a lamp, sweep, and search), how much more effort will God Himself expend to regain one of His children? God will initiate even greater efforts by His grace and love to find a lost soul. Jesus repeated this message three times as all three parables of finding the lost end with an exuberant eruption of joy once what was lost is found.

Parable of the prodigal son, or two sons, or the father's love—Lk 15:11–32

This parable is seen by many as the greatest of all parables. It beautifully teaches God's plan of salvation and ties in the messages that repentance is a gift and that God honors agency, responsibility, and grace. In his analysis of this parable, Latter-day Saint scholar Keith Meservy sees that we are initially spiritual and that if our spiritual needs are not met, we long for more regardless of how many other physical and material satisfactions we may have.³²

Lk 15:11. “A certain man had two sons.” The central figure in this parable is the father. Gordon B. Hinckley taught that “every parent ought to read it again and again. It is large enough to encompass every household, and enough larger than that to encompass all mankind . . . who need to repent and partake of the forgiving mercy of our Heavenly Father and then follow his example.”³³ Jesus's parables teach us about whom we worship as well as how to better worship. The two sons set up the two-part parable.

Lk 15:12 (RSV). “give me the share of property that falls to me.” Jesus's parable began with an outrageous request. A Jewish son from that time would never ask his father for his share of the inheritance while his father was yet alive. Scholars have not found a single case of any son, eldest or not, asking for an inheritance from a father who was in good health in Middle Eastern ancient literature; it “was equivalent to wishing his father's death.”³⁴ Giving the inheritance required the father to divide his land and property and even to sell his land, his source of income. Jesus's exaggeration would have emphasized how this son was outrageously rude.

The law of Moses divided inheritance by giving the firstborn a double portion and everyone else equal portions (Deu 21:16–17). In this family with two sons, the oldest would receive two-thirds of the estate and the younger would receive one-third. With the double portion, the older also had the responsibility to care for the widow or other family members when they were in need. The text describes the younger son as if he were not married, so it is assumed he would have been under twenty.³⁵

Lk 15:13. “wasted . . . with riotous living.” This is the only time the Bible uses the word *riotous*. It means “dissolute, extravagant, wasteful, reckless, decadent, licentious,” or “loose living” (RSV).

Lk 15:13. “a far country.” The young man has left his covenant people and gone to live among heathens. Later the older brother denounces his spending the father’s estate on prostitutes (Lk 15:30). In each parable we see pictures of Jesus too—in this case Jesus was perceived as associating with heathens like Samaritans and was chastised for “eat[ing] with publicans and sinners.” Perhaps His audience thought of Jesus as a prodigal too.

Lk 15:14. “famine.” The weather often stands in for God’s judgments in the Bible. In the ancient Israelite world, prophets sealed the heavens and promised good weather for good behavior.

Lk 15:15. “feed swine.” For a Jew, the most degrading of all occupations was serving Gentiles. What this young man is doing is one step worse: this young man serves a Gentile’s unclean animals (Deu 14:8; Lev 11:7).

Lk 15:16. “he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat.” This is the best biblical description of dire need. The pigs ate husks, or carob pods. The carob tree grows across the Mediterranean. Its long pods are filled with a sweet pulp that was often used as animal food. The son could have eaten the pulp, but that was like eating dog food. In addition to describing the son’s physical needs, Jesus describes his social isolation too: “no man gave unto him” any human food.

Lk 15:17. “when he came to himself.” Living in this disreputable state—living recklessly with Gentiles—the young man was humbled and became contrite. From this new perspective, he ponders the possibility of returning home. This is how the Spirit of the Lord works in all of us. Once we are humble enough to listen, we can again hear the Spirit’s voice.

The Spirit calls us all to return. This is also the meaning of repentance. John W. Welch finds the steps of repentance and restoration included in this parable:

- realizing one’s life is out of harmony with God’s will
- remorsefully and genuinely recognizing one’s situation
- resolving to make a permanent change
- requesting forgiveness
- relying on mercy, putting oneself in God’s hands
- receiving gestures of forgiveness
- rejoicing
- restituting and repairing
- reforming habits
- resisting the temptation to fall back
- reinforcing repentance by renewal
- retaining the remission of sin by returning God’s grace³⁶

Lk 15:18–19. “I will arise . . . make me as one of thy hired servants.” In his soliloquy, the starving young man chooses to return to his father, not the estate. Psychologically and legally, though,

he realizes that he can no longer be called a son—he will have to take a place as a hired servant. But he is motivated to move on and *anastas*, “arise,” or to come back from his spiritual death and be born again.

Lk 15:18. “sinned against heaven.” This phrase was used as a way to say “sinned against God” without using God’s name, which was considered too sacred to be spoken. The young man realizes that he has also sinned against his father—his father’s name, covenants, teachings, and inheritance.

Lk 15:20. “a great way off, his father.” The father was either looking off in the distance or, as he was out in the fields, recognized the emaciated silhouette of his son on the horizon.

Lk 15:20. “ran.” The father’s love broke through social propriety, as anciently, robed men never ran anywhere. Again, Jesus’s hyperbole made the story more shocking. This father allowed his love to dictate his behavior. Jesus’s storytelling techniques create multiple levels of meaning to captivate the audience.

Lk 15:20. “fell on his neck, and kissed him.” The father’s spontaneous hugging and kissing demonstrates his rejoicing over the lost soul. The parable sets a dramatic illustration of divine love and forgiveness.

Lk 15:21. “no more worthy.” The son’s repeated confession emphasizes his repentance. When we are sufficiently humble and have a broken heart and contrite spirit, this becomes the message we all cry to heaven.

Lk 15:22–23. “the best robe . . . ring . . . shoes . . . calf.” The best robe also signifies the first in rank. The robe represents an honorary position of chief or heir. Allegorically, it symbolizes not only the bestowed blessings after this life for the repentant but also our premortal heavenly dress. The ring possibly represents authority since rings were used to seal documents. The ring of authority and robe of honor could allegorically refer to a covenant meal as well. Rings were worn by the rich and may also symbolize a return to luxury. In the original Greek, the word translated as “shoes” (*hypodemata*) means “sandals.” The celebration brings the whole community together to rejoice at a feast.

The neighbors’ warm reaction would also have been culturally shocking. In the Judaic society of the time, sinners were often taunted, mocked, and physically punished. Instead of warmly welcoming the young man back home, the neighbors could have accused him of sexual immorality and could have suggested a trial to have him stoned. Instead, in Jesus’s shocking rendition, the younger son is treated as an honored guest. This speaks of divine forgiveness. In a timeless world where God lives, the sins of those who repent of their by-gones are absent (D&C 58:42). God’s compassion acts to “cheer on every runner” as they return home.³⁷

Lk 15:24. “my son was dead, and is alive again.” The prodigal was spiritually dead and by returning to his father’s house regains spiritual life. This verse parallels Lk 15:32 to emphasize Jesus’s forgiveness and God’s mercy.

Lk 15:25. “his elder son was in the field.” The elder son is not told about the situation. This may suggest that he was either absorbed in his work or not expecting his lost little brother to return. He was not as quick to forgive and to see the situation as his father had. I presume that over the years, the big brother experienced humiliation or at least embarrassment because of the actions of his reckless brother. He may have enjoyed not having the complainer around. Whatever the motivation, he is upset by the feasting and rejoicing over the returning troublemaker.

Lk 15:28. *“he was angry, and would not go in.”* The responsible, hardworking older son was invited to join in the meal, but his anger kept him out. The Greek word for “angry” here is the same one used when Jesus was cleansing the temple. Here, the older brother’s anger did not include a forgiving heart. Even when his father asked him to come, he refused. We can see how mad the older brother is later when he refers to his brother as “thy son,” not even claiming relationship to him (Lk 15:30).

Lk 15:28 (AB). *“went out and pleaded with him.”* The father hears of his firstborn son’s anger and comes outside to talk to him. Again, we see the father as the driving force in this parable. Family relations are the hardest relationships at times. The son complains, “You never even killed a goat for me,” which is a far less valued animal than a fatted calf. The older son does not feel that the father’s action was justified. Frustrating as it may be, justice is not part of this life—at least from a mortal’s perspective. Even when we obey the commandments, work hard, and honor our parents, happiness and the rewards we think we deserve do not always come. The balance does not seem right from our limited view of life. However, the parable goes on to teach that life is longer than we think. Mercifully, justice will be dealt with. The father’s actions represent God’s willingness to come to us, wherever we are, and listen to our complaints.

Lk 15:30. *“thou hast killed for him the fatted calf.”* This is a powerful statement. It is the third time that killing the fatted calf is mentioned (Lk 15:23, 27). This time though, it is the clearest reference to the symbol of Jesus as the sacrificial “fatted calf” that God symbolically killed for sinners (Lev 4:4; 16:6). God gave the best He had when he allowed His Only Begotten Son to be slain for the sins of the world.

Lk 15:31. *“all that I have is thine.”* The father begins his reply with a loving title in Greek, “my child.” He explains that rejoicing for his lost son does not diminish his love and rewards for his oldest son. For we know that “he that receiveth my Father receiveth my Father’s kingdom; therefore all that my Father hath shall be given unto him” (D&C 84:38). The older son’s jealousy has not taken him out of his father’s inheritance.

Lk 15:32. *“It was meet . . . thy brother . . . is alive again.”* From Jesus’s perspective, finding and nurturing the lost soul is “meet,” or necessary. This is the second time Luke used the word *lost*, which in Greek can also be translated as “destroyed.” The father helps his older son change his perspective, telling him, “Your brother has returned!”

From the times of the early Christians, the father in this parable represented a loving Heavenly Father, “filled with mercy toward one son and justice toward the other.”³⁸ The story also exemplifies each of us who return from our self-centered behaviors through repentance to enter into the loving and compassionate arms of our heavenly parents.

Raising Lazarus—Seventh Miracle in John—Jn 12

Setting

John’s Gospel explains that before this event, Jesus had been across the Jordan River in Perea for most of the winter (ever since the Feast of Dedication in late November or December in Jn 10:22–39). Then,

Why did Jesus perform miracles?

Approximately 14 percent of the text of the four Gospels is devoted to Jesus's miracles (12 percent of Matthew, 25 percent of Mark, 13 percent of Luke, and 9 percent of John). Forty to fifty miracles are recorded in the Gospels (depending on what you classify as a miracle). Jesus never refused to help anyone who asked (however, He often required a second request). The miracles in John's Gospel demonstrate Jesus's power over sin, nature, defects and illnesses, and death, thus showing the glory of God and testifying of Jesus's messiahship.⁵⁰

in the early spring, a few weeks before Passover, Jesus's friends in Bethany urgently called Him back. As Jesus and His group of Apostles and ministering women crossed the Jordan River back into Judea, they followed the path of Joshua and the children of Israel into the promised land. Figuratively, the path crosses from the world into the promised land. However, Jesus will enter His promised land when He reunites with His Father.

Only John's Gospel records this story of the raising of Lazarus. (But Lk 10:38–42 mentions Jesus in Bethany with Mary and Martha). John places this as Jesus's seventh miraculous sign. This miracle was the last straw that provoked the wicked leaders to set in motion their plan to kill Jesus. This miracle becomes a sign of what Christ will do—except rather than raising humanity back to mortality, He will raise us to immortality to never die again.³⁹ This chapter concludes the first half of the Gospel of John (sometimes described as the Book of Signs or miracles) and introduces the second half—Jesus's Passion and Resurrection.⁴⁰

Jesus receives news that Lazarus is sick—Jn 11:1–6

Jn 11:1 (NIV). “**Lazarus was sick.**” The name Lazarus means “whom God helps.” I find no connection between the two men named Lazarus in the New Testament (the other is a beggar in a parable recorded in Lk 16:20). This Lazarus is the brother of the sisters Mary and Martha mentioned throughout the Gospels.

Jn 11:1. “Bethany” was a suburb to the east of Jerusalem, about two miles (fifteen furlongs; Jn 11:18) from the old city. The distance was just far enough to separate the clean and unclean. The name Bethany means “house of affliction.” The town may have been one of the three places designated for the care of the sick (one of which was for lepers). The Qumran Temple Scroll mentions that these cities were located east of Jerusalem.

Bethany is approximately twenty-five miles from the Jordan River, which forms the border with Perea (modern Jordan). A town built on the ruins of Bethany is called El Azariyeh (named after Eleazar, which is the Hebrew equivalent to the Greek name Lazarus). Bethany's proximity to Jerusalem made the town an ideal place for pilgrims to stay during the three major pilgrimage feasts to Jerusalem. Because the law specified that all male Israelites were to eat the Passover feast within the walls of Jerusalem, during

pilgrimage feasts the city's boundaries metaphorically expanded so that all could fit. Bethany was close enough to be included in the city's extended holiday border. Jesus stayed there with His friends.

Jn 11:3 (NIV). *“Lord, the one you love is sick.”* As dear friends of Jesus, Mary and Martha sent messengers to Perea seeking Jesus's help when Lazarus became seriously ill. (Indirectly this informs us that Jesus communicated with His friends while outside of Judea). The Greek word here translated as “love” is *phileo*, and it is used twenty-five times in the New Testament for love and friendship (other words for “love” include *agape*, used to refer to charity, and *eros*, used to refer to physical attraction). *Phileo* has a broad meaning of “brotherly love” (the name Philadelphia means “the city of brotherly love”). John used the verb *phileo* to describe God's love for His Son and the disciples (Jn 5:20; 16:27). The relationship with Lazarus's family was close enough that Jesus often stayed with them in their home. The Gospels give evidence that this family had plenty of means (they were able to send messengers, owned a large house, held parties for dozens of people, owned spikenard, and so on).

Jn 11:4. *“for the glory of God.”* Jesus's purpose in performing this miracle is broader than compassion alone; it is specifically to show the glory of God. Jesus will glorify God by setting the stage for His own death and resurrection. Jesus knew Lazarus had died while He was still in Perea. If Jesus were only performing the miracle to heal a dear friend He would have come immediately, but His timing testified of His broader message to teach. We can always be assured that the Lord knows the end from the beginning. We can trust His plan and His timing, even when it appears impossible.

Jn 11:6. *“he abode two days still.”* As with all miracles, the timing of this miracle is especially important. On the surface, Jesus's delayed arrival tested the faith of Mary and Martha and the other disciples. Jesus wanted to teach something more than that He has power to heal. By delaying His arrival, Jesus was able to address a doctrinal issue.

Prophets in the Old Testament like Elijah also raised the dead (1 Kng 17:17–24). But they always performed the miracle shortly after the death. Some see the two days in Jn 11:6 as a parallel to Jesus's own Resurrection, as He rose on the morning of the third day, after two days in the tomb. Yet Lazarus was not resurrected but returned to mortality. He had to die again. Jesus was the first resurrected being on earth.

Jesus and disciples walk from Perea to Bethany—Jn 11:7–16

Jn 11:8 (RSV). *“the Jews were but now seeking to stone you.”* The disciples expressed their concern about Jesus's safety. The last time they were in Judea some Jews tried to stone Jesus (Jn 10:31). Furthermore, the twenty-five-mile hike from the Jordan River to Bethany went through some very dangerous areas where robbers were known to wait. Jesus knew that He could not be harmed until God deemed His mission complete.

Jn 11:9. *“walk in . . . the light of this world.”* Jesus countered the disciples worries with His plan to walk in the daylight, as the phrase “light of the world” can refer to the light of both the sun and the Son (D&C 88:7). John returns to one of his favorite themes: light and darkness. We will not stumble spiritually

if we have the Light of Christ and the fire of the Spirit burning brightly within our hearts to guide our thoughts and actions.

Jn 11:11. “Our friend Lazarus sleepeth.” It is understandable why the disciples became confused. The Greek word translated here as “sleepeth,” *kekoimetai*, is found eighteen times in the New Testament. Usually it means “to fall asleep,” and only once it is translated “death” (1 Cor 7:39). English has the same euphemism.

Jn 11:15–16. “to the intent ye may believe.” Jesus emphasized the relation of the miracle to the disciples. Interestingly, it is Thomas who spoke out this way. He must have also been very close to Lazarus, but his comments also show us a little more of his nature. He jumped to conclusions without exercising his faith. The JST adds an extra sentence: “*For they feared lest the Jews should take Jesus and put him to death, for as yet they did not understand the power of God.*” Thomas may refer to dying with Jesus, not Lazarus.

Jesus arrives in Bethany—Jn 11:17–40

Jn 11:17. “he had lain in the grave four days already.” Without embalming or refrigeration, dead bodies begin decomposing immediately. Within the day that one passed, the body was laid in the tomb, and after three days the tomb was usually closed with a stone to keep wild animals away. Later, the grave was opened and the bones were removed and put in a sarcophagus so that the grave site could be used again.

Many Jews believed that a spirit stayed near its dead body for three days. By the fourth day, when Jesus arrived, no one could doubt that Lazarus was completely dead. (Note the JST adds that He came to “*Martha’s house.*”)

Jn 11:19. “many of the Jews came . . . to comfort.” Because many came to comfort the grieving sisters, many witnessed the miracle of raising Lazarus from the dead. Funerals included elaborate traditions, and according to funeral customs in Jesus’s time, after one died and the body was entombed, loved ones or their servants’ rubbed oils and spices into the body and wrapped it. The more money one had, the more extensive the burial procedures were.⁴¹ At the moment of a man’s death, his wives, daughters, and female relations united in cries of lamentation.⁴² Women were hired as professional mourners to wail, shriek, and cry for days. The Mishnah calls for even the poorest man to hire at least one mourner at the death of his wife.

As was usually the case in public, men and women were separated at funerals and thus walked separately to the burial spot in a funeral procession. After the burial, the women returned alone from the grave to mourn for thirty days. This mourning included loud wailing and dramatic expressions of grief.⁴³ The Jewish men also played a prominent part in mourning rites.

Jesus had already shown His distaste for this tradition when He asked all the mourners to leave before He raised Jairus’s daughter. It appears this tradition was motivated by the adversary as it distracts the mourner from feeling the Spirit of God during that sacred time when the veil is thin.

Jn 11:20. “Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met him.” I love Martha’s interaction with Jesus—this time she is not in the house preparing for the company but is

the first to go outside, down the street, and outside of her village to greet Jesus (Jn 10:38–42; 11:30). She actively seeks Him out even in her overwhelming grief. We can only imagine how disappointed the family must have felt with the Lord's timing. They knew Jesus had been asked to come, and they also knew that He had not hurried to their side.

Jn 11:23. “Thy brother shall rise again.” As mentioned earlier, the word *anistemi*, “rise,” is used multiple times in the New Testament and can refer to the Resurrection (for example, at Jn 20:9, but usually the word used is *anastasis*). Martha's clear faith opens the door for Jesus to testify of His divinity.

Jn 11:25. “I am the resurrection.” This verse augments the prologue theme in Jn 1:4 to include eternal life through the Resurrection. As Jesus had earlier taught, the first, or physical, death is not to be feared; only the second, or spiritual, death is cause for fear. All sons and daughters of God who have not committed the unpardonable sin will live again in glory.

Jn 11:27. “Yea, Lord: I believe.” Martha's testimony is the clearest witness of Jesus's divinity in John's Gospel. She testified that He is the one the Jews have long awaited, “the Christ,” which is the Greek equivalent to *Messiah* in Hebrew. Her vibrant testimony shines as a second witness beside Peter's in Caesarea Philippi.

Martha's additional witness that Jesus is the one “which should come into the world” makes her testimony the most comprehensive as well. She may not quite understand everything that will happen to her brother, but one thing she knows for sure—Jesus is the promised Messiah—and that is all we really need to know.

Jn 11:28. “she . . . called Mary her sister secretly, saying, The Master is come, and calleth for thee.” In John's Gospel, Jesus is referred to as Teacher, Rabbi, Lord, and Master. Why does Martha cautiously whisper to her sister? Will so many people rush to Jesus that Mary cannot have a private conversation with Him? We do not know whether Mary and Martha sought privacy out of concern for the Lord's safety.

Jn 11:31. “to weep.” The Greek word here really means “to wail.” Supposedly, the noise from mourners was heard from quite a distance.

Jn 11:32. “Mary . . . fell down at his feet.” John described Mary of Bethany in this same position for most of her interactions with Jesus. She used the exact same words that her sister, Martha, spoke when she first met the Lord: “If thou hadst been here, my brother had not died.” Her sobbing moved Jesus to compassion, and he was “deeply moved in the Spirit” (RSV).

Jn 11:34. “Where have ye laid him? . . . come and see.” In the beginning of the Gospel, Jesus's disciples asked the Lord where He lived, and then He told them to come and see (Jn 1:39). Now Jesus is asking the disciples where they have laid Lazarus's body. All who follow Him will now see God's power to bring forth life from death.

Jn 11:35–36. “Jesus wept. . . . Behold how he loved him!” Jesus's compassion for Mary was so great that He wept even though He knew that He would shortly raise Lazarus from the tomb (Jn 11:4, 43). This act teaches much about Jesus's nature too. Jesus taught His disciples what real compassion is and

how to mourn with those that mourn. In the Sermon on the Mount, He blessed those that mourn. Jesus's actions validate the need to mourn. We also have record of Jesus weeping over Jerusalem in Lk 19:41 and a reference to the tears He shed in Gethsemane in Heb 5:7.

We find other scriptural examples of our Lord crying in empathy. Twice among the Nephites Jesus expressed His love and compassion through tears of gratitude (3 Ne 17:5–10). Jesus wept after exclaiming, “And now behold, my joy is full” (3 Ne 17:20–22).

Jn 11:37. “Could not this man . . .” The local Jews knew that Jesus had healed a blind man in Jerusalem three months earlier and added their belief that Jesus could have kept Lazarus from dying (Jn 9:1–7). They appear to be a group filled with faith. However, bringing Lazarus “back from the dead required not only that his spirit be brought back from the spirit world to be united again with his body, but also that the physical elements of the body be changed from a decomposed or unorganized state to their former or more organized state, thus seemingly defying laws of nature.”⁴⁴

Jn 11:38. “It was a cave, and a stone lay upon it.” This cave foreshadows Jesus's Garden Tomb. At the time, carved vertical shafts were more common for private burials than horizontal caves, and larger burial areas also had a mourning room adjacent to the burial room. Stones were placed to block the entrances to keep animals away. Jewish townspeople buried their dead outside of the town to avoid ritual impurity from contact with the corpses.

Jn 11:39. “he stinketh: for he hath been dead four days.” Again John includes the fact that Lazarus had been dead four days—emphasizing that he was unmistakably dead and that his spirit was gone. The stench refers to the decomposition that occurs without complete embalming. Martha's response shows that her faith is not yet perfect. In one of the Greek manuscripts of the Gospel of John, an extra phrase appears: “Lord, why are they taking away the stone?”⁴⁵ Jesus reminded Martha (and all His disciples) that the purpose of performing this miracle was to show the “glory of God” (Jn 11:4).

Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead—Jn 11:41–53

Jn 11:41. “Jesus lifted up his eyes, and said, Father, I thank thee.” Jesus's gesture of looking upward as a prelude to prayer is also mentioned in Lk 28:13; Jn 17:1; Mt 14:19. Gratitude fills His prayers. I love the fact that Jesus thanks the Father for hearing Him even before He performs the miracle.

Jn 11:43. “he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth.” This is the third recorded instance of Jesus restoring life, and it is the most dramatic (the others are when Jesus brought back to life the twelve-year-old daughter of Jairus within the hour of her death and when He restored the widow's son on the way to his grave in Nain).⁴⁶ Peter and Paul also raised the dead (Act 9:40; 20:9–10), as did others (like Elijah) in the Old Testament.

Jn 11:44. “came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes.” Lazarus's graveclothes are described just as Jesus's are, with a separate head cloth left in the tomb. Jewish practice was to wrap the

bodies in thin strips of cloth with spices and oils. Lazarus would use his death clothes again, for he was not resurrected but only restored to life.

Jn 11:45–46. “*many . . . believed on him. But some of them went their ways to the Pharisees.*” Ironically, this miracle to restore a life leads to Jesus’s death. Some who were eyewitnesses shared this great miracle with the antagonistic Pharisees, who used it to spur the Sanhedrin to plot Jesus’s and Lazarus’s death (Jn 12:10). The miracle was so well known that it became the last straw in the minds of those who wanted to kill Jesus. And they sought to do it as soon as possible (Jn 11:57). They based their decisions on traditionally recognized legal precedents from Deu 13. They felt justified in condemning Jesus as a deceiver or magician or false prophet.

Jn 11:47. “*Then gathered the chief priests and the Pharisees a council.*” Several prominent New Testament scholars find the language here suggestive of a Sanhedrin trial against Jesus.⁴⁷ John W. Welch argues that what these verses describe was more than the beginning of a plot to kill Jesus:

The proceeding before Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin reported at the end of John 11 should be viewed as a legal trial that resulted in a conclusive and binding verdict that Jesus was guilty of a capital offense. It was more than a preliminary discussion, a political caucus, or a preliminary hearing to establish probable cause, and it was more than a theological debate or religious council. . . . The legal action taken on that occasion by the Sanhedrin—under the leadership of Caiaphas and with the remarkable unanimity of both the Sadducees and the Pharisees—was deeply grounded in controlling biblical legal texts and principles, was based on traditionally recognized legal precedents, and made use of standard Jewish modes of judicial reasoning and related cultural assumptions.⁴⁸

Fortunately, Lazarus is not killed by the Sanhedrin. Christians also wondered what became of Lazarus. In an apocryphal source we read of “Lazarus’ later career as ‘treasurer of the church at Philadelphia’ and dying ‘when 67 years old, of the same sickness that carried him off when he was a younger man at Bethany.’”⁴⁹

It is not clear when Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. It appears to have happened either a few days or weeks before His triumphal entry into Jerusalem. Jesus and His entourage from Galilee may have stayed in Bethany during those days or weeks. John does not tell us, but Jesus is back in Bethany six days before Passover (Jn 12:1).

Notes

1 Mt 27:55; Mk 15:41; Lk 8:1–3; 23:49, 55.

2 In John’s Gospel, Jesus spends the last three months of His life in Perea. Luke has Jesus traveling during that time. The two may not be contradictory, but we assume that Luke uses this travel time to fit in many of the sources he hopes to include in his text (Lk 1:1–3).

3 Mishnah, Tractate Ta’anit 3:8. *Mikvaot* (singular, *mikveh*) are purification immersion baths, most often with seven steps down into a small square (or rectangular) pool of water.

4 Charles R. Barnes, ed., *Dictionary of The Bible: Biographical, Geographical, Historical, and Doctrinal* (New York, NY: Eaton and Maines, 1903), 60.

5 Mishnah, Shekalim 1:1.

6 For more historical background on Passover traditions in the late second temple era, see my commentary on Jn 2:13–22, “Passover traditions at the time of Christ.”

7 See Ex 12:15, 19; 13:7; and so forth.

8 Alma 39:5–6; Heb 6:4–6; 10:26.

9 “History, 1838–1856, volume E-1 [1 July 1843–30 April 1844],” p. 1976, The Joseph Smith Papers, <https://josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-e-1-1-july-1843-30-april-1844/348>.

10 Spencer W. Kimball, *The Miracle of Forgiveness* (Salt Lake City, UT: Bookcraft, 1969), 123.

11 Russell M. Nelson, “Revelation for the Church, Revelation for our Lives,” April 2018 general conference, online at churchofjesuschrist.org.

12 Num 27:1–11; 36:6–10; Deu 21:15–17.

13 Hugh Nibley, “Leaders and Managers” (Brigham Young University commencement speech, August 19, 1983), speeches.byu.edu; emphasis added.

14 Steven C. Harper, “All Things Are the Lord’s: The Law of Consecration in the Doctrine and Covenants,” in *The Doctrine and Covenants: Revelations in Context*, ed. Andrew H. Hedges, J. Spencer Fluhman, and Alonzo L. Gaskill (Provo UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 2008), 212–228.

15 “Endow,” Bible Hub, <https://biblehub.com/topical/e/endow.htm>.

16 Larry Y. Wilson, “Take the Holy Spirit as Your Guide,” April 2018 general conference, online at churchofjesuschrist.org.

17 Lynne Hilton Wilson, *Christ’s Emancipation of New Testament Women* (Palo Alto, CA: Good Sound Publishing, 2015), chapter 8.

18 Russell M. Nelson, “We Can Do Better and Be Better,” April 2019 general conference, online at churchofjesuschrist.org.

19 Nelson, “We Can Do Better and Be Better.”

20 S. Kent Brown, *The Testimony of Luke* (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2015), 663.

21 John W. Welch and Jeannie S. Welch, *The Parables of Jesus: Revealing the Plan of Salvation* (American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2019), 68–70.

22 Brown, *Testimony of Luke*, 670.

23 D&C 76:78–79; see also Mt 7:13; Rev 22:14.

- 24 Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke X–XXIV* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1985), 1035.
- 25 Fitzmyer, *Luke X–XXIV*, 1040.
- 26 Fitzmyer, *Luke X–XXIV*, 1044. These twin passages in Luke both end sections that only Luke records.
- 27 Fitzmyer, *Luke X–XXIV*, 1045.
- 28 D&C 27:16; 82:23; 98:16.
- 29 C. Freeman Sleeper, *James* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2011), 126.
- 30 Welch and Welch, *Parables of Jesus*, 98.
- 31 Mishnah, Ketuboth 4:7; 5:1. The contract included the groom’s payment of a bride-price. The minimum sum was two hundred denarii for a virgin, and there was no maximum (a denarius was one day’s minimum wage, thus two hundred days’ labor).
- 32 Kent P. Jackson and Robert L. Millet, *Studies in Scripture*, vol. 5, *The Gospels* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1986), 356.
- 33 Gordon B. Hinckley, “Of You It Is Required to Forgive,” October 1980 general conference, online at church ofjesuschrist.org.
- 34 Bruce A. Van Oren and Brent Top, eds., *The Lord of the Gospels: The 1990 Sperry Symposium on the New Testament* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1990), 58.
- 35 The ideal age for a young man to marry was eighteen, though marriage was legal from age twelve. If a man were still single at twenty-five, he would have to pay a higher tax. See Wilson, *Emancipation of New Testament Women*, chapter 7.
- 36 Welch and Welch, *Parables of Jesus*, 106.
- 37 Jeffrey R. Holland, “The Other Prodigal,” *General Conference*, April 2002.
- 38 Welch and Welch, *Parables of Jesus*, 109, paraphrasing Tertullian.
- 39 Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel according to John I–XII* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1966), 420: “A sign that Jesus is the life.”
- 40 Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel and Epistles of John* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1988), 61.
- 41 Josephus, *Jewish Wars*, 1.363. Josephus describes more than a month-long procession and other elaborate displays in conjunction with Herod the Great’s death.
- 42 Hugh Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert, the World of the Jaredites, There Were Jaredites*, ed. John W. Welch, Darrell L. Matthews, and Stephen R. Callister (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book; Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1988), 101.
- 43 Jacob Neusner, ed., *Dictionary of Judaism in the Biblical Period* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999), s.v. “mourning.”
- 44 Jackson and Millet, *The Gospels*, 334.

45 Brown, *John I–XII*, 426.

46 Mt 9:18–25; Mk 5:38–42; Lk 7:11–17; 8:35–42.

47 Brown, *John I–XII*, 441; Matthew L. Skinner, *The Trial Narratives: Conflict, Power, and Identity in the New Testament* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2010), 91–92; Mark D. Smith, *The Final Days of Jesus: The Thrill of Defeat, the Agony of Victory: A Classical Historian Explores Jesus’s Arrest, Trial, and Execution* (Cambridge, UK: Lutterworth Press, 2018), 135–136; Fiodar Litvinau, “The Trial of the Son of God: An Exegetical Study of Jn 19:4–16a” (thesis, Pontifical Biblical Institute, 2016).

48 John W. Welch, “Seeing John 11:47–57 as the Jewish Trial of Jesus” (lecture, Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, 2018), <https://biblicallaw.files.wordpress.com/2018/11/welch.pdf>. Read Welch’s full article for an analysis of the legal elements in Jn 11:47–57; 12:9–11.

49 C. Wilfred Griggs, ed., *Apocryphal Writings and the Latter-day Saints* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1986), 93.

50 Jn 1:29; 6:19; 9:1–7; 11:5, 17–46; 20:30–31.