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I. Introduction to Additional Material Related to Jesus' Galilean Ministry

In our last lesson we looked back across the period of time spanned by Jesus' Galilean ministry (which we had surveyed before that following the gospel of Mark) to see what additional material, particularly teaching material, was found in Matthew's sweep of Jesus' time in Galilee. In this lesson, we want to do the same with the gospels of Luke and John. There is far too much material here for a brief survey such as this to comment on each individual passage, but we will try to make some general observations and then point out some interpretive highlights of the text covered.

II. Additional Teaching in Luke

A. Jesus' Travels From Galilee to the Cross

Only Luke has a central section of his gospel, beginning in 9:51 and going through approximately 18:34 and following, in which Jesus is apparently on the road, traveling from Galilee—having left it for this last and climactic time to make the trip up to Jerusalem for the fate that He knew awaited Him there. Yet when one looks at the geographical references that are found in this part of Luke they are few and far between, and what do appear rule out any kind of straight-line journey from Galilee to Jerusalem. In 9:51-56 Jesus sets out by way of Samaria, is rejected there, and goes to a different place, suggesting to many scholars that He traveled across the Jordan to the province on the eastern side of the river known as Perea. Therefore some scholars refer to this central section in Luke's gospel as Jesus' Perean ministry, although the word itself never appears in the Gospels so we cannot be sure about this geographical equation.

Luke 17:11

Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee.

In 10:38-42 Jesus is with Mary and Martha whom we learn from the gospel of John resided in Bethany just outside of Jerusalem. It seems his journey is just about complete, and yet in Luke 17:11 we find Him back again journeying between the boundary of Galilee and Samaria. Probably, therefore, Luke is not trying to describe a single sequential chronological or straight-line journey from Galilee to Jerusalem but rather grouping together what turns out to be almost exclusively teaching material of Jesus from one decisive climactic stage in His ministry, as He leaves Galilee for the last time and travels across various regions in the vicinity. In many cases we do not know exactly where He is at a particular time, but always under the shadow of the cross.

B. Another Look at Jesus' Parables

It is interesting that Luke's distinctive concern to present Jesus as a teacher of parables comes particularly to the fore in this central part of his gospel. We have made some brief comments already about parables in connection with Mark 4, but we may expand on them here. If one looks at the structures of the plots of the various stories Jesus tells to illustrate the truths of the kingdom of God, we discover that seldom, if ever, are there more than three main characters or groups of characters and that in a significant majority of cases those three characters are grouped in a triangular fashion. That is to say one particular character seems to stand for God—a master or a father or king figure. Other characters or groups of characters take on subordinate roles, often contrasting with each other—an exemplary model to be followed and a wicked or nonexemplary model to be eschewed. In many cases the heroes, the people whose models we are to follow, turn out to be surprise heroes; they are the reverse of who we might expect.

Parable Structure



We can illustrate this very clearly with the parable of the Prodigal Son, the longest of all Jesus' parables, in which a father clearly stands for God in His lavish love, the Prodigal Son for the wayward person in this life who seems to be as far from God as possible and yet who returns and is welcomed, even lavishly, and the hardhearted elder brother who is likened to some of the Pharisees and scribes by Jesus in Luke 15:1 and following who are grumbling at His acceptance of tax collectors and "sinners." We see it

Central Theme:

Illustrated by means of a finite and relatively small number of subpoints according to the main characters.

Luke 9:59-60

He said to another man, "Follow me." but the man replied, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God."

in the parable of the Good Samaritan, although here the central character is not someone in a position of power but rather one in a position of powerlessness. Yet he is able to do one thing; he is able to recognize who offers him help—neither the priest nor Levite, symbols of the Jewish clergy and those whom one would have expected to be the helper, but rather the hated Samaritan. Not all parables fall into this model; some have three characters but each is a subordinate of the previous one, as in Luke's parable of the unjust steward or Matthew's parable of the king who forgives a servant of a large debt. Several shorter parables may make only one or two main points based upon their main characters, but these relatively few structures that recur again and again are good to keep in mind when interpreting Jesus' parables.

There is always a central theme that is illustrated by means of a finite and relatively small number of subpoints according to the main characters. And we must beware of reading in details of allegorizing or symbolic meaning to all of the supporting elements of the passage, as unfortunately has often been done in the history of the church. With these brief overview comments we may turn now to some selected remarks on teachings and events which are narrated in Luke 9:51-18:34, again focusing just on some highlights.

C. Urgency of Christ's Call

In 9:59-62, Jesus issues two of His famous commands about letting the dead bury their own dead and not even stopping to greet people or say farewell to those at home, both of which sound enormously harsh and presuppose rather elaborate burial and even elaborate greeting and farewell procedures of the ancient world, so that they are not quite as harsh as they perhaps sound in various modern contexts. Nevertheless, both illustrate dramatically the urgency of Christ's call. As one commentator has put it, following Jesus is not a task which is added to others like working a second job—it is everything. It is a solemn commitment, which forces the disciples to be, to reorder all of their duties.

In 10:1-24, we have the famous sending of the seventy or, as some manuscripts have it, the seventy-two disciples), parallel to sending out of the Twelve that occurred earlier in Jesus' ministry, but now perhaps more overtly involving or at least foreshadowing a mission to the Gentiles. The number seventy, even the very textual variant seventy or seventy-two, harkens back to the Mosaic law in which seventy or seventy-two was said to be the total number of nations, including the Gentiles, in the world. It is in this context that we also read in 10:18-20 of how the disciples' ministry, particularly of exorcism, fulfills Jesus' words that He saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Although Satan remains active throughout the entire church age, His defeat has been ensured by the first coming of Jesus. The second coming will simply be a mopping up action. Or the famous illustration from World War II that has often been used—D-day occurred with Christ's first coming; V-Day, or victory day, will occur with Christ's return. We can be assured that complete victory has already been made certain.

D. Violation of Cultural Principles

Luke 10:25-37 then points us back to the parable of the Good Samaritan. Again, we must remember our historical background of the hated enmity between Samaritans and Jews. Whatever else this passage teaches—a good model for compassion, the fact that the religious professional must show as much love as someone else—clearly the punch line, the most dramatic countercultural effect of the passage, was to have one who was a hated enemy, from a Jewish perspective, be the hero of the story. Unless we recontextualize the passage today to make the hero someone who is one of our hated enemies, perhaps in the context of racism or tribalism, we will have lost much of the force of Jesus' initial teaching.

Chapter 10:38-42 is the famous story of Jesus and Mary and Martha, to which brief allusion has been made in our introduction to Luke. Again, it is worth reiterating that Jesus violates the cultural principles that women's roles were to be primarily domestic, and praises instead Mary for counterculturally acting as though she were qualified to be a learner, a disciple at the feet of Rabbi Jesus.

Luke 11:29-30

This is a wicked generation. It asks for a miraculous sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah. For as Jonah was a sign to the Ninevites, so also will the Son of Man be to this generation.

Crucifixion

Resurrection



E. Exegetical Controversy

Luke 11:29-32 involves another interesting exegetical controversy, as Jesus refuses to work a sign on demand for His skeptics, a consistent practice throughout the Synoptic Gospels. He then predicts that just as Jonah (Mt 12:38-40, parallel passage) was in the belly of the whale three days and three nights, so the Son of Man must be in the heart of the earth for three days and three nights. Some people, counting very literally, have assumed therefore that since Easter took place on a Sunday, the Resurrection, the only way to get three full days and nights prior to that is to have Jesus crucified on a Wednesday. There are chronological reasons for rejecting this, as we will see when we come to the passion narrative, but the language here can be explained as a Semitic idiom: in the Jewish language and culture, a day and a night, strange as it might sound to modern ears, could be used to refer to any portion of a 24-hour period of time—that is, any portion of Friday evening and Sunday morning combined with all day Saturday would have qualified as three days and three nights in the ancient Semitic mindset.

F. Riches

Luke 12:13-21 (like its twin parable, Luke 16:19-31), the parables of the rich fool and the rich man and Lazarus are again very pointed about the potentially damning effects of riches to make it possible, as in the case of the rich fool, for someone to take no thought for God, or as in the case of the rich man and Lazarus, never to have repented. But it is interesting to see how one determines those who have taken no thought for God or never repented. It is those who are aware of the acutely physically needy in their midst, at their doorstep, able to help with lavish material possessions, and yet who lift not one finger to help. When one sees some of the statistics of the paucity of contemporary Christian giving (the percentage even in local churches of people who give not a cent as far as any records are kept) to the Lord's work, one wonders how many closet non-disciples masquerade as Christians in our age.

Christ's Return:

Later than expected

Sooner than expected

Completely unexpected

Luke 14:11

For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.

Luke 14:26

If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters - yes, even his own life - he cannot be My disciple.

G. End Times

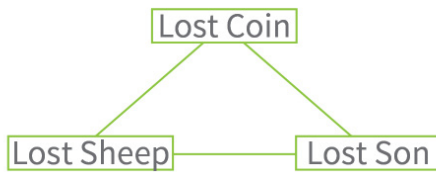
Luke 12:35-48 includes several parables of Jesus that bear on His views of the end times. Luke apparently intentionally groups three of these together to form a very interesting combination. In the parable of the watchful servants in verses 35-38, the master comes later than is expected. In the parable of the householder and the thief in 39-40, He comes entirely by surprise. In the parable of the faithful and unfaithful steward in verse 41 and following, He comes sooner than is expected. Put together, these three give us all possible options for the timing of Christ's return: later than expected, sooner than expected, or completely unexpected. How dare any of us continue, as unfortunately Christians from time to time do, to claim to know the time of Christ's return.

H. Kingdom Reversals

Luke 13:10-14:24 give a series of kingdom reversals. All of the passages in this section deal with mistaken expectations about the nature and participants of the kingdom. It again is a sobering reminder to think of how frequently Jesus declared the religious leaders of His day—those who everyone would have believed that if anybody was right with God surely these people were—as the people who were outside of the kingdom; or as those who were ostracized and outcast from the community were declared inside. I wonder how often we fall victim to the same mistake in our thinking today.

I. Discipleship Is Costly

Luke 14:25-35 is a collection of short passages that talk about counting the costs and remind us that following Jesus in discipleship is a costly activity. Luke 14:26 is perhaps the most stringent of these, calling upon us to hate our fathers and mothers—if we do not we cannot even be a disciple. The parallel in Matthew 10:37 helps explain a Semitic idiom here: Jesus is really saying our love for God must be far greater than that for any human friends or family. But it is a sobering reminder again, when we pair this teaching with Jesus' earlier teaching that those who are His spiritual followers are His true family, rather than His biological siblings or mother, and to ask ourselves,



“Have we often reversed this and put our families above our Christian brothers and sisters in our thinking and in our priorities today?”

J. More Parables

Luke 15 introduces us to the famous triad of parables of the lost sheep, lost coin, and, we might say, lost sons—although the passage is better known as the Prodigal Son. We have already alluded to some comments about it. The parable of the unjust steward in Luke 16:1-13 does not praise the steward’s injustice but praises his shrewdness and recognizes that Christians, unfortunately, are often much more naive than shrewd in a healthy and positive way.

K. Arrival of the Kingdom

Luke 17 includes important teaching again about the arrival of the kingdom, balancing the fact that it is “in our midst” (Luke 17:21)—a better translation than “within us.” Jesus’ point is that, with His ministry, the kingdom is in the midst of the Jewish leaders He is speaking to, not that somehow it is inside of them since they are His opponents. Also, Luke 17:22-25 goes on to point out the future aspects of the kingdom yet to be fulfilled.

III. Additional Teaching in John

After this rapid-paced survey of some highlights of Luke’s central section, we may turn in the second part of this lesson to what we have omitted thus far in the gospel of John. John, particularly in chapters 5-11, has very little material that duplicates what we read in any of the Synoptic Gospels, even though he is describing the same period that Mark, Matthew, and Luke do, that we have labeled the Galilean ministry. The parallels that do appear come with the miracles of the feeding of the five thousand and the walking on the water in John 6. But apart from these two stories, the substantial majority of all that John narrates involves all those occasions in which He went up to Jerusalem. If we had only the Synoptic Gospels we would perhaps never guess that Christ’s ministry lasted more than a few months, certainly no reason to imagine it more than a year. But John punctuates his gospel with references to Passovers in chap-

Luke 17:21b
... the kingdom of God is in your midst. ... the kingdom of God is within you.

| Jesus' Claims in John

"I am the bread of life."
(6:35)

"I am the light of the world."
(8:12,9:5)

"Before Abraham was born, I AM."
(8:58)

"I am the good shepherd."
(10:11)

"I am the resurrection and the life."
(11:25)

John 5:19

... the Son can do nothing by Himself; He can do only what He sees His Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does.

ter 2, 5, and again in chapter 6, suggesting to us that a three-year ministry or perhaps even slightly more comprised the time of Jesus' public appearance in Israel.

John, for whatever reason, has no desire to repeat information that is already told well in the Synoptic Gospels for this phase of Christ's life, but instead highlights that aspect of the story that Matthew, Mark, and Luke have not told: Jesus traveling up to Jerusalem as a faithful Jewish man was expected to do at the time of the various seasonal and annual festivals. In each case, He embroils Himself or finds Himself embroiled in controversy with the Jewish leaders. In each case, He makes what seem to them presumptuous, if not even blasphemous, claims about His identity. In each case, John—consistent with his pattern throughout the first half of his gospel—continues to intersperse long sermons with various signs or miracles that Jesus works. And in these chapters also appear a number of Jesus' famous "I am" sayings: I am the bread of life, the living water, and so forth—pointers to His identity that have seemed to many readers much clearer than the more veiled allusions to His self-understanding in the Synoptic Gospels.

A. Healing on the Sabbath

The first of these distinct episodes in John 5-11 appears in chapter 5: Jesus heals a paralyzed man. There are parallels in this story to the healing of the paralytic in Mark 2 (and parallels), but the important controversy that this healing generates is not Jesus' claim to forgive sins, as in the Synoptic account, but the fact that He heals on the Sabbath. He apparently is violating the law from the perspective of the Jewish leaders. Jesus, therefore, defends His right to heal on the Sabbath by saying that His Father is working even on the Sabbath, and therefore He is working—in the Jewish minds, identifying Himself too closely with God the Father (see especially John 5:17-18). But the bulk of the sermon that ensues, verses 19-47, focuses instead on the Son's dependence on the Father—that He does absolutely nothing other than what He sees the Father doing and what is the Father's will. Both that humanity and dependence, as well as the divinity of Christ, must be stressed in any balanced understanding of Jesus. Recall our comments in introducing the gospel of John about its probable origin as a response to Gnosticism which, among other things, believed that Jesus was fully God, but had greater troubles

John 7:37-38

On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him."

~~John
7:53-8:11~~

John 9:5

While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.

with his humanity because they believed the material world was inherently evil.

B. Living Water

The next distinctive portion of John 5-11 then comes at the Feast of Tabernacles in chapters 7-8. Here Jesus announces Himself as the living water in the context of the dialogue of 7:1-52, and this fits very nicely the ceremonies that took place as part of the Festival of the Tabernacles. There was the water drawing ceremony on the final day of the festival, in which priests processed from the Pool of Siloam to the temple with the golden pitcher of water proclaiming, with trumpet blasts, the text of Isaiah 12:3—"With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation." What a poignant opportunity for Jesus to stand up in the midst of this ceremony and say, "I am the living water."

In most of our modern-language translations, the story of the woman caught in adultery occupies John 7:53-8:11. We had commented in an earlier lesson on the textual criticism of the New Testament that this text almost certainly was not in the original autograph of what John first penned, although the story rings true and may well be something that Jesus actually did. For a survey of the original text of John, therefore, we should pass over this text in silence and in doing so we see a connection that is not otherwise clear, namely that 8:12 follows flawlessly on from the end of 7:52 as a continuation of the Festival of the Tabernacles in Jerusalem and the claims that Jesus made there.

C. Light of the World

From living water we turn to the light of the world, which is also appropriate if this is still the ceremony or Festival of the Tabernacles, because on the final day, the eighth day following the seven days of the standard ritual of the Festival of the Tabernacles, the candelabra in the temple is deliberately not lit. It was a service of darkness, if you like. Into this context Jesus stands up and declares that He is the light of the world. That claim forms the transition into chapter 9, where He will state again in the context of the healing of a man born blind that He is the light of the world, a natural contrast from literal blindness to the discussion of spiritual blindness.

Jesus heals a man born blind.



Who sinned?

John 5:1-15

John 9:1-12

But before He gets there, the remainder of chapter 8 includes perhaps the most pointed and detailed controversy between Jesus and various Jewish members of His audience to date. At the climax of this controversy Jesus also makes His greatest, His most outrageous, His most exalted claim for divinity thus far, when quoting—now explicitly even as He had alluded to it implicitly in the context of the walking on the water— the very divine name of Exodus 3:14, “I am”—ego eimi in the Greek—“Before Abraham was,” our modern translations of John 8:58 states, “I am.” That is not bad grammar; that is an allusion to the divine name. And the outrage of the Jews shows that they understood it as such.

D. Healing Miracles

Proceeding then to chapter 9, this chapter is entirely occupied with the miracle story— the healing of the man born blind—but its focus eventually and most prominently centers on the debate about Jesus’ identity that this miracle generates. The man himself comes to believe in Jesus as the Messiah and to say as much to the Jewish leaders. But they are unprepared, because of Jesus’ unorthodox style and His healing on a Sabbath, to accept this testimony. On Jesus as a judge, one commentator has written: His presence and activity in the world themselves constituted judgment, as they compel men and women to declare themselves for or against Him.

It is also interesting to note in passing the similarities and differences between the two miracles of healing on a Sabbath of John 5 and John 9. In the one case, the case of the paralyzed man in John chapter 5, Jesus tells the individual after he has been healed to stop sinning, lest something worse befall him. Here, apparently, this man’s physical malady was at least in part the result of some spiritual sin. Pity the poor disciples, who in John 9, think they have learned this lesson but do not know how to apply it to a man born blind, and ask the natural question, “Who sinned, this man (presumably in-utero) or his parents?” And Jesus’ reply is, “Neither, but rather that you might see the glory of God.” There are times when no one’s sin at all is directly responsible for sickness or suffering.



The Good Shepherd

The True Liberator

The Resurrection
and the Life

E. The Good Shepherd, True Liberator, and Resurrection of Lazarus

John 10-11 then rounds out this supplementary material from John: by portraying Jesus as the Good Shepherd over against the false hirelings, the Jewish leaders of His day (John 10:1-21); the Feast of Dedication or Hanukkah (10:22-42), in which Jesus portrays Himself as the true liberator—someone who is one with God—in a way that is outrageous enough that the Jewish leaders take up stones to try to stone Him, (10:30 and following); and finally the marvelous miracle of the resurrection of Lazarus (John 11:1-57), not the first resurrection that Jesus has performed but the first one of someone who has been dead for several days already. As John likes to do, he then balances this miracle with a statement, a sermon, and a claim by Jesus. The miracle points out Jesus' identity as the one who is the resurrection and the life (John 11:25). How ironic that the chapter concludes with Caiaphas, the Jewish high priest, plotting to kill Lazarus and ultimately to kill Jesus because they are too dangerous. Do they think that the power of death will somehow keep Jesus down when He has shown the ability to raise others? Obviously they do not yet understand.