

## Day 301

### Jesus Unmasks Hypocrisy

Luke 11.37 – 13.17

Lk.11.37 – 44 Offending a Pharisee host by not going through the hand-washing ritual before eating, Jesus takes up the issue of external religion which is not coming out of internal integrity. Although fastidious about their traditions, He accuses the Pharisees of ignoring justice and generosity. While they should continue their giving, they need to engage with their hearts. He also rounds on their love of status and position.

Lk.11.45-52 A legal expert is affronted by Jesus' harsh words, but Jesus points out that the experts in the law are the ones who make the rulings that cumber people with the minutiae of regulation never envisaged by the Torah (such as the counting of the leaves on a sprig of mint which Jesus has just alluded to.)

And despite being the descendants of those who killed the prophets, they are now seeking to make good by building elaborate tomb-shrines for them, which Jesus says is just abetting their murders. They have removed the 'key to knowledge', the key to relationship with God, and themselves have stopped others getting to Him.

Lk.11.53-54 This interchange leads to a more determined attempt by the traditionalists to trap Jesus by His words.

Lk.12.1-3 Jesus now goes public with His criticism of the Pharisees, the ultra-orthodox branch of Judaism. He warns His listeners to be on guard against the 'yeast of the Pharisees' (Greek ἡ ζύμη τῶν Φαρισαίων *ee zýmee ton Pharisaíon*), a small element with a big effect, which is their raging hypocrisy. Jesus explains that transparency is a hallmark of the kingdom, that what people try to hide from others, to be what they are not, will come out.

Lk.12.4 – 12 Jesus infers that there will be great trouble and resistance ahead for His followers. He calls them not to be afraid of those who have the power of capital punishment, for they cannot touch the inner reality of man. His followers are worth more to God than the birds for which He also cares.

Jesus encourages them to hold fast their confession, which will be challenged soon in courts and before tribunals. The Holy Spirit, against whom much will be said, will Himself aid them in their defence. Luke may well have in mind some of the testimony he will later record from Peter, Stephen and Paul before such courts.

Lk.12.13-21 Jesus, as a rabbi, is assumed to be able to arbitrate in disputes. He is appealed to as a referee in an argument over an inheritance. Jesus then gives the parable of the fool and his barns, demonstrating the pointlessness of such inordinate attachment to material wealth, which can be of no eternal value. Jesus

encourages us instead to be ‘rich toward God’ (Greek εἰς Θεὸν πλουτῶν *ees Theón ploutón*).

Lk.12.22-34 Echoing words spoken in the sermon on the Mount recorded by Matthew, Jesus reminds His followers that worrying about material things will not produce them. He assures them of the Father’s provision and care for them, and tells them not to be like the pagans who do not know this Father’s love. Rather, in view of the Father’s plan to also include them in the rule of God, they can afford to divest themselves of the materials onto which they are clinging for security.

Lk.12.35 – 40 Readiness, preparedness for the coming of the Son of Man is a watchword Jesus gives to his followers. There is implied here His leaving for a space in which His followers will work and prepare, being always ready for the knock at the door, for the Lord to come not to be served, but to serve and wait on His people. Yet His coming will be at an unknown and unpredictable hour.

Lk.12.41 – 48 Peter asks for clarification to whom Jesus is speaking, but Jesus answers with a question, about whom this could refer to. Jesus is speaking of a wise manager (Greek οἰκονόμος *ikonómos*, literally, a house-lawyer, one who oversees the order of a household, a steward.) one who is left to see to the supply of others by the master. But if this steward abuses the servants and lives off their backs, when the master returns he will receive a due punishment. Perhaps Luke, in recording this, has in mind the story of the church after Jesus’ ascension which he will be unfolding, and sees the issues which are up ahead, thus recalling Jesus’ warnings to those in stewardship of the Lord’s household not to lord it over the flock.

Lk.12.49-53 Jesus spells out the divisive nature of His mission; His baptism is the immersion into death He will endure, which will not cause peace but separation. Again, Luke will have in mind as he remembers these words of Jesus, the conflict following the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the believers persecuted and martyred for their faith which he has witnessed as he writes this later in the first century. Following Jesus is not a popular path.

Lk.12.54-59 Jesus urges the listeners not to procrastinate in their allegiance, but to be decisive in their commitment to His message.

Lk.13.1-5 When Jesus is told of an atrocity committed by Pilate against rebels possibly following Judas the Galilean, a man who taught his followers to refuse to make tributeto Caesar, whose have been massacred in the Temple area, hence mingling their blood with the sacrifices, Jesus does not give anyone the possibility of believing that they deserved this. He also highlights a recent natural disaster in Siloam, where a building has fallen, forbidding His hearers to believe that this was a payback for their sins. Jesus says that repentance (Greek μετάνοια *metánia*), a whole turn-around of the way of thinking about sin is needed for all people.

Lk.13.6-9 Jesus reflects the patience and perseverance of God with people by showing from nature, and the unproductive fig, that the Lord will give time for change to take place before removing the seemingly barren tree. God has a longer timescale in mind than man.

Lk.13.10-17 Another Lucan Jesus encounter with a woman, this time in a synagogue on Sabbath. The woman, crippled for eighteen years (Luke's eye for detail and context again), has hands laid on her by Jesus, and she unfolds like a flower in bloom, praising God.

The leader of the synagogue then makes a public order announcement that healings cannot take place on the Sabbath. But Jesus reveals the hypocrisy of this nit-picking attitude by asserting that people will look after their animals still on Sabbath, so why shouldn't the Lord set people free on that day as well?

Although humiliating for his detractors, this kind of approach has the congregation (ὁ ὄχλος *o óchlos*, the crowd) hanging on his every word.

## **Day 302**

### **Parables of the Kingdom**

Matthew 13.1 – 52; Mark 4.21 – 29, 33-34

Living in a visual age as the 21<sup>st</sup> century is, as perhaps much of non-literate history has been, pictures and images are vital to our learning and understanding. Jesus knows that His teaching needs to be memorable to the simple people of his day. Thus He takes models from the world around Him and uses them as vehicles of His wisdom. In many ways, this is familiar to the Jewish people – the image of the vine in Isaiah 5, or of the pot and the potter in Jeremiah 18, or Nathan's parable of the lamb in 2 Sam. 12 – but there is also a hiddenness in Jesus' parables; they have depths of meaning which bear research and contemplation. They speak to the heart more than to the mind.

The Greek word *parabolée* (Greek παραβολή) comes from the root word, *parabhállō* (Greek παραβάλλω) meaning to set alongside, cast beside, with the sense of likening something to. These illustrative stories were used in Greek rhetoric to drive home a point.

Mt.13.1-9 (mirrored in Mk.4.1-9, Lk.8.4-8) Jesus told the parable of the sower outdoors, by the lake. There were fields around, and perhaps even a sower in the act of sowing. It was not a foreign context, and He paints the familiar picture of seed falling on various kinds of ground, with various levels of productivity. Jesus leaves the meaning of the parable to the listeners (he who has ears, let him hear.)

Mt.13.10-17 (mirrored in Mk.4.10-12, Lk.8.9-10) But the disciples want to 'see the answers' and so they ask Jesus what it means and why He uses parables to teach people. Jesus' reason seems to be so that it isn't just given on a plate to people. They hear and see so much without perception and understanding. In using parables, Jesus is making them

reach deeper than surface-level meaning. Jesus says that what they are seeing and understanding, the prophets yearned after seeing.

Mt.13.18-23 (mirrored in Mk.4.13-20, Lk.8.11-15) Jesus spells out the meaning of the seed; the seed is the word (Greek *λόγος* *lóghos* – teaching) of the Kingdom. Some don't receive it at all, others begin to receive it and then don't pursue it, while yet others receive it and thrive and reproduce the kingdom. Whatever the outcome, the sower still sows.

Mt.13.24-30 Jesus follows up with another parable on the subject of seed. This time, there are two kinds of seed, good seed and weed seed, with the wheat crop growing up among the unwelcome and maliciously sown rogue plants. Yet the sower is content to leave the weedy crop to be separated at the harvest, so that good seed is allowed to come to full maturity undisturbed.

Mt.13.36-43 The disciples again ask Jesus the meaning of this parable. Jesus is very clear; the sower of the good seed is Jesus, the Son of Man. The good seed are the followers of Jesus who are growing in the world, the field. But the devil has planted among them evil seed, which will be pulled up at the end of the age, at the harvest.

There is a reckoning to come, and a rooting out of all that is evil 'in the kingdom'. Jesus warns of a definite destruction of the weeds in the fire, while the righteous will be radiant in His Father's realm.

Mt.4.21-25 (mirrored in Lk.8.16-18) Jesus speaks several times about the good news of Jesus being like a lamp to be seen burning. What use is a lamp hidden? Jesus encourages His disciples not to hold back on giving away the good news of the Kingship of God, making known what has been shared with them in secret.

Mk.4.26-29 Another parable linked to the kingdom seed is that of the man who sows a crop and leaves it to grow; there is nothing he can do to increase the speed of the yield, because the seed itself is good and able to produce after its kind. This is perhaps a caution to us to let the seed sown do its work in its time.

Mt.13.31-32 (mirrored in Mk.4.30-32, Lk.13.18-19) Yet another seed parable is that of the mustard seed, most probably the black mustard, which can grow to nine feet in height from its tiny seed, giving shelter for the birds. So it is with the kingdom, which can grow from small beginnings.

Mt.13.33 (mirrored in Lk.13.20-21) To emphasise the pervasive nature of the kingdom, Jesus likens it to yeast in dough, which, unseen, works its way organically through the whole batch to change its nature and make it rise.

Mt.13.44 The kingdom is also like treasure trove in a field; its worth is so great, that is worth giving all to gain it.

Mt.13.45-46 Still on the subject of worth, Jesus compares the kingdom to a rare pearl which is so valuable, all might be given up to capture it.

Mt.13.47-50 In another parable, not unlike the parable of the wheat and weeds, Jesus compares the kingdom to a great haul of fish; there are good and bad in the net, the bad being rejected, the good being kept. This emphasises the decisive nature of following Jesus or refusing Him.

Mt.13.51-52 Jesus asks His disciples if that have followed what He has been teaching, and they answer that they have. Jesus now sees them as equipped to bring out materials from their treasury of things old and new.

Mt.13.34,35; Mk.4.33,34 Jesus' teaching method, then, uses the illustrative story as a powerful visual communication of truth. Matthew sees this as fulfilling a further word from the Old Testament concerning the Messiah's use of parables, in Psalm 78.2

### **Day 303**

#### **Signs and Wonders on and around Galilee**

Matthew 8.18 – 22; 9.27 – 34; Mark 4.35 – 6.6; Luke 9.57 – 62

Mt.8.18 – 22, Lk.9.57 – 62. When Jesus calls disciples to follow Him, He leaves no room for individual preference. If one follows Jesus, it is on His terms, not ours. The part of us which finds hard the uncompromising nature of Jesus' call to leave all is the part which wants His comfort and His peace, but not the cross and the suffering. Jesus does not make it easy to come after Him, nor comfortable.

Mk.4.35- 41 (mirrored in Mt.8.23-27 and Lk.8.22-25) As they cross the lake of Galilee after a hard day of ministry, with a small number of other boats with them, a terrible wind springs up (Greek λαίλαψ άνέμου *laílaps anémou* – a squall of wind). Jesus is asleep in the stern of the boat, and doesn't see that the disciples are struggling to keep them afloat. They wake Him, panicking and accusing Him of letting them drown. Jesus stands up and shuts down the storm, saying *Silence, be muzzled (and stay muzzled!)* (Greek σιώπα, πεφίμωσο *siópa, pephímoso!*) . It is as though He is speaking to an unruly dog, which obeys His voice. Jesus then rebukes their little faith, leaving them astounded at His power over nature.

Mk.5.1-20 (mirrored in Mt.8.28-34, Lk.8.26 – 39) They arrive in the region of Gadara on the east coast of the lake. The three synoptic writers have variant terms for the place in which this deliverance took place, Mark placing it in the land of the Gerasenes, Matthew in the land of the Gergasenes and Luke among the Gadarenes. The city of Gadara is five miles from the sea, so too far from the lake for it too have happened there. However, most likely is the modern port of Umm Qeis, where there are some cliffs moderately high enough to fit the account.

The mentally ill and tormented were routinely driven out of their communities, and lived where they could find shelter, in this case, in tombs and mausoleums. The demonised man rushes at Jesus, declaring His divine origin, and when questioned, giving the demons name as Legion. (There has been a suggestion that this is a parable about the unwelcome Roman occupation at Caesarea, hence the name ascribed to the demon.) Jesus expels the unclean spirits into unclean animals, which stampede to their deaths off a cliff.

The people of the area, seeing what has happened, instead of welcoming Jesus, ask Him to leave. The healed man wants to go with Jesus, but the Lord urges him to go and be a witness to his own people, which he does throughout the region of the Ten Cities.

It is most probable this man was a Gentile, a non-Jew, since Gadara was not part of the Jewish community, and pigs were being kept, which are not acceptable to Jews. Once again, Jesus is reaching beyond the people of the Lord to bless the *goyim* – the Gentiles, the nations.

Mk.5.21-24a (mirrored in Mt.9.18-19, Lk.8.40-42) Having crossed back over to Jewish territory, Jesus is accosted by the synagogue ruler, Jairus, pleading with Him to come and heal his dying daughter. Jesus agrees.

Mk.5.24b – 34 (mirrored in Mt.9.20-22, Lk.8.43-48) On the way to the house, Jesus stops and delays by asking who has touched Him. This is a big crowd, Jesus is being jostled; the disciples observe it could be anyone. But Jesus knows divine energy has been withdrawn from His body, and He searches for the answer. A woman comes forward. She has had bleeding for twelve years, and has spent all her savings on doctors (although the physician, Luke, neglects to record this detail in his account!) For this woman to have touched Jesus would have made Him ritually unholy, but Jesus' purity and power have turned the tables on her haemorrhage, and she confesses her healing, having reached out just to take the fringe of his coat.

Jesus blesses her and sends her away in peace and wholeness (Heb שְׁלוֹמִי *Shalom*)

Mk.5.35 – 43 (mirrored in Mt.9.23-26, Lk.8.49-56) Men arrive from Jairus's house with the terrible news that his daughter is dead, and advise to give up worrying Jesus. Jesus ignores them, and encourages faith, carrying on to the house of mourning.

When Jesus arrives, the community is already in full grief-mode, with wailing and weeping. When Jesus suggests this is only a sleep, He is derided. But He dismisses the mourners, and takes Peter, James and John and the girl's parents into the room where she lies. He takes her by the hand and says *talita kumi* (Aramaic תַּלְיָתָא קוּמִי), 'girlie, arise!'

The little twelve-year-old opens her eyes and gets up, to the shock and amazement of her parents. The Greek script at this point says of the parents ἐξέστησαν ἐκστάσει μεγάλη *exésteesan ekstási meghálee*, they were beside themselves with great ecstasy, which gives a better feel for what Mark is trying to say than just that they were astonished. Jesus, so loving and practical, suggests they give her something to eat, and asks them not to say what has just happened.

Mt.9.27- 31 Jesus is followed by two blind men crying for mercy from the one they see as the Son of David, the Messiah. They follow Jesus into the house where He is going, and confess their faith in Jesus' power to heal. Jesus touches their eyes, and they are healed.

Mt.9.32-34 This miracle is followed by the healing of a demonised dumb man; who knows what trauma he had gone through that had robbed him of the power of speech, but

it must have been a great evil. Jesus expels the evil power, and releases his voice. There is amazement from the crowd, but condemnation from the Pharisees of Jesus as a cheap shaman, empowered by satan.

Mk.6.1-6a (mirrored in Mt.13.53-58) Jesus returns to his home-town, Nazareth, and teaches in the synagogue, but their familiarity with His family and upbringing prevent them from reaching into the deeper truth of who He is. In their eagerness to 'lop the head off the tallest flower' by bringing Jesus down to size, they miss His healing presence, and even Jesus cannot do many wonders among them, apart from a few healings. Jesus is surprised at their lack of faith.

## Day 304

### Jesus Sends Out His Emissaries

Matthew 9.35 – 11.1; 14.3 – 12a; Mark 6.7, 14-33; Luke 9.6 – 11a; John 6. 1

Mt.9.35-36 (mirrored in Mk.6.6b) What energises Jesus to His mission is compassion. He is preaching, healing and setting free, but He is limited to one human body. As He looks on the vast amount of need before Him, He recognises the urgency of bringing help and healing to a wider constituency. What He needs are workers in the harvest.

Mt.10.1-4; Mk.6.7 (mirrored in Lk.9.1,2) The twelve are sent out by Jesus and given authority to do the same things Jesus is doing – they have now seen Him, they know what to do. The word 'to send out' in the Greek is ἀποστέλλειν *apostéllein*, whence the word 'apostle', not a word linked to position or status, but to function as one carrying the message and burden of another, an emissary or an ambassador. Jesus sends these out, not to rule, but to serve.

Mt.10.5-15 (mirrored in Mk.6.8-11, Lk.9.3-5) Jesus 'apostles' these twelve men as the first wave, to go specifically to the Jews. They are to do what they have seen Jesus doing. They are not to be loaded down with luggage, but they are to live from those they serve. (ἄξιός γάρ ὁ ἐργάτης τῆς τροφῆς αὐτοῦ ἐστίν *axiós ghar o erghátees tees trophées avtóu éstin* –the worker is worthy of his provision, his food.) They are to lodge in a town with welcoming hosts, blessing the home, or if they become unwelcome, they are to leave in peace. They are not to stay around and try and convince people of their message. If they are not received, they are to leave well alone and go to the next place to teach.

Mt.10.16-33 Jesus is realistic about the task. He knows the opposition His ambassadors will face. He encourages them to be shrewd yet harmless, not cynical but not a pushover, either. He knows the cost of this word, He knows the malice of those who oppose Him. But this is the Holy Spirit's work, and He will empower them.

Jesus promises hatred and rejection to His team, and that they will be accused of serving the prince of demons. But they are not to fear, because the Father Himself cares for them.

Mt.10.34 -39 Jesus makes it clear that this will cost even their closest relationships, in the battle of the usurper Satan and the Word Incarnate, Jesus. The call is to selflessness and death – the one taking up a cross is on the way to die – but loss for Jesus is ultimate gain.

Mt.10.40-42 Jesus also makes clear that for the hosts, receiving His team is the same as receiving Him. These emissaries have the full authority of their master, and serving them is serving Him.

Mt.11.1, Lk.9.6 (mirrored in Mk.6.12,13) Jesus now multiplies His ministry. He does not sit back and take a rest, He also goes out and continues the work in the villages of the Galilee, while they go to other places.

Mk.6.14 – 16, Lk.9.7-9 (mirrored in Mt.14.1-2) The work of Jesus comes to the attention of Herod Antipas, the Quarter-Ruler (Tetrarch) of Galilee and Perea. He is called a Quarter-Ruler, because on the death of Herod I, the territory was divided into four regions. Two of these, Judea/Samaria and Edom went to Archelaus, who was also called the ‘Ethnarch’ (people ruler) because his territory included most of the Jews. The northern quarter of Galilee-Perea became Herod Antipas’s realm, while Philip took on the northern areas of Gaulanitis. The area of the Dekapolis (Ten Cities) was a network of self-governing cities under the Romans, mainly Gentile in culture.

Herod Antipas (whose second name means ‘like his father’ or ‘seen against his father’) had his capital at Tiberias, on the western shore of Lake Galilee. When he hears about Jesus, he is filled with dread, because he believes the rumours that Jesus is John the Baptist returned from the dead, and he tries to get to see Him for himself.

Mt.14.3 -12a, Mk.6.17-29 We are now given the details of the scurrilous events that led to the execution of the Baptist, forerunner of the Messiah, Elizabeth’s son.

Herod Antipas had divorced his first wife Phasaelis to marry Herodias, the divorcee of his brother, the tetrarch Philip. This was regarded under the Law of Moses as an unholy relationship, tantamount to incest. Because of John’s outspoken criticism of Herod, he was arrested and imprisoned. However, Herod was fascinated by John, and kept him from the murderous intentions of his new wife who wanted to destroy him.

As is so often the case with kings, Herod is trapped into sin by his lust. Herodias’s daughter (traditionally called Salome, although her name is not given in Scripture), dances for the king and his guests, and Herod makes the mistake of allowing his loins to rule his head, swearing to her to give her whatever she wants.

Consulting her aggrieved mother, she returns with the request for John’s head on a dish, which Herod has to do, against his conscience, bringing this holy man of God’s life on earth to an end. For this reason, then, Herod is seriously shaken by the thought of John the Baptist raised from the dead!

Mk.6.30-33, Lk.9.10-11a, John 6.1 (mirrored in Mt.14.12b,13) The emissaries return for a time of reporting back to Jesus, but the task is made impossible by the needs the people keep bringing, so they are unable even to sit down for a meal together. Jesus therefore calls them to take a break away, and they head off onto the lake in a boat, for a ‘deserted

place' (Greek εις ἔρημον τόπον *eis éreemon tópon*) though, as the lake is not vast, their progress is tracked across the water, and even before they reach land, the crowds are waiting for them. This must have been a taxing and exhausting time for Jesus and His team.

## Day 305

### Bread for Many

Mark.6.34 – 7.23; Luke 9.11 ; Matthew 14.28 -33; John 6.2 – 7.1

Mk.6.34, Luke 9.11b (mirrored in Mt.14.14, Jn.6.2-4) Even though Jesus and His disciples are trying to have some time apart from the people, Jesus' heart of compassion goes out to them because of their uncared for state. He heals many and teaches the Kingship of God around the time of Passover.

Mk.6.35-44, Jn.6.5-14 (mirrored in Mt.14.15-21, Lk.9.12-17) There are echoes in this story of Jesus' feeding of the five thousand of Elisha's feeding a hundred men with twenty barley loaves in 2 Kings 4.42; also, it is redolent of the miracles of multiplication which Elijah and Elisha performed for the needy widows in 1 Kings 17.14 and 2 Kings 4.1. In this sense, Jesus is continuing the prophetic line of God's provision to the poor. Yet here the scale is immense by comparison.

Jesus stretches His disciples faith by telling them to give the crowd food – Jesus blesses the bread, but they distribute it. As the five thousand are fed, with basketfuls left over, the message is of the plenty that comes where God is King. The crowd's acclamation of Jesus is that He is the Prophet (in the line of Elijah) who has been promised.

Mk.6.45-46, Jn.6.15-17a (mirrored in Mt.14.22,23a) Jesus enables His disciples to get some respite by taking to the water while He sends the crowd away. John has the crowd trying to make Jesus king after this miracle, but Jesus slips away and gets His solitude at last in the hill country behind Galilee.

Mk.6.47-50, Jn.6.17b-21 (mirrored in Mt.14.23b-27) The wonder of Jesus' walking on the water is unprecedented in the Scripture, and unrepeated elsewhere. This is the Master of Creation, suspending the natural law to enable Him to get to His team, or even to get to the other side of the lake, since it seems He might have passed them by! When they are terrified, thinking they have seen a ghost, Jesus encourages them by telling them it is He.

Mt.14.28 – 33, Mk.6.51-52 Peter tests Jesus by asking to come to Him on the water. As he goes towards the Lord at His invitation, Peter finds himself going down. Jesus reaches out and lifts him, laughing at his small faith (Greek ολιγόπιστε *oligópiste*, little-faith), but walking him back to the boat. At this, the storm they were in dies down, and they worship Him as the Son of God. (Note how Matthew has Jesus given 'worship' here, when the Magi come in Matthew 2, and at the end in Matt.28, among others.)

Mk.6.53-56 (mirrored in Mt.14.34-36) Once again, as soon as Jesus makes landfall, He is besieged by those seeking healing, wherever He goes in the region.

Jn.6.22-24 The people in the area where Jesus had multiplied the bread, who had wanted to make Jesus king, are mystified as to how Jesus got away unseen without a boat. When they realise He has gone to Capernaum, they go in pursuit of Him.

Jn.6.25-40 When these people find Jesus, they ask Him when He arrived; Jesus answers them with an observation. They are not interested in the 'signs' of the kingdom, but in getting a supply of food. Jesus urges them to not rely on the physical food, but to seek the heavenly. Jesus then goes on to really stretch their understanding, deliberately offending the materialistic bent in their seeking Him. Jesus speaks of Himself as the bread of life, and the giver of eternal life.

Jn.6.41-51 The Jews who know Him are getting annoyed; isn't He getting above Himself, this carpenter's son from Nazareth? But Jesus pursues the claim to His own uniqueness, referring to Himself as the bread of heaven, which surpasses the manna which sustained the children of Israel in the wilderness. Going a step further, Jesus claims that it is His flesh which will be bread for the world.

Jn.6.52 – 59 Jesus then makes one of the deepest of His statements; the life of God will come to those who eat His flesh and drink His blood. Jesus must know how offensive this is to the Jewish listener, who was forbidden to eat anything with the blood in it. How can we eat His flesh? Jesus makes this clearer when He comes to the last supper with His friends, but what He is making inescapable is the conclusion that our relationship with God the Father depends on our relationship with Jesus Christ, and the more we encounter and deepen our dependency on Him and His Spirit, the more we will be fed and grown in God.

Jn.6.60-66 Having pursued Jesus around the lake in hopes of more bread and fish, many of the crowds turn away in disgust, unable to get behind what Jesus is saying. Jesus lets it be known that the key is the Spirit in what He is saying, not the flesh. But even many disciples find His message too extreme for them and leave Him.

Jn.6.67 – 71 Jesus now gives His twelve emissaries the chance to leave as well. But Peter confesses their total implication in His life now – they have nowhere else to go, no exit routes. They know Jesus is the unique, surrendered, holy One of God.

Jesus then makes a comment which must have left them stunned – Jesus has called them, and they have followed, yet even after this statement of allegiance to Him, He knows that there is one among them who is being guided by another source, the enemy. We must never discount the possibility of our own fickleness in the face of darkness.

Mk.7.1-13 (mirrored in Mt.15.1-9) The Pharisees take issue with Jesus because his disciples eat without going through the traditional hand-washing before food which the Pharisees would do with panache and vigour. Jesus highlights the paradox in the Pharisees' behaviour, in that they worry over non-Scriptural, man-made rules while ignoring the moral requirements of God, twisting the Law to their own ends.

Jesus gives as an example of this another man-made tradition of Corban. (Hebrew קֶרְבָּן derived from the Hebrew word קָרַב *qarov* meaning near, that is, that which is brought near the altar, gifted to God.) If a Jew pronounced some of His wealth 'corban' this

meant it could not be used for secular or family purposes, but was dedicated to God. This would make someone look very religious and godly, but Jesus highlights the moral discrepancy of thus depriving one's aged parents of any help in their need, thus breaking a commandment of God to honour one's parents in order to keep a human tradition.

This is a very relevant teaching of Jesus, in days when many parents live to ripe old ages and need care. Jesus is commending and promoting the care of parents rather than religious acts which look good outwardly, but break God's heart.

Mt.15.10-20, Mk.7.14-23 Jesus directly contradicts the teaching of the Pharisees in His statement that holiness and ritual purity is not about external actions but internal motives. What comes out of someone is the unclean thing, not what goes in. The Pharisees are angry with this contravention of their authority, but Jesus drives home His point by showing that the real issues are the heart-sets of evil, the uncleanness that results in impurity.

Jn.7.1 Jesus stays in Galilee to avoid His aggressors in Judea are seeking to take His life.

## **Day 306**

### **To Galilee and Points North and East**

Matthew 15.21 – 31; 16.1-12, Mark 7.24 – 8.26

Mt.15.21-28, Mk.7.24-30 Jesus leaves the confines of Palestine and goes north into the Tyre and Sidon, to get away from the pressure of ministry, (indicated by Matthew's use of the Greek word ἀναχωρέειν *anachoréin*, to withdraw or make space in v.21) He tried to keep His presence secret, says Mark, but even there a Gentile woman, a Phoenician, looks for healing for her daughter. At first, Jesus dismisses her; His mission is not to the Gentiles, but to the Jews. However, the woman persists and humbles herself, likening herself to a dog under the table, which have would have been extremely self-effacing in Jewish eyes. As a result, her daughter is healed.

Mt.15.29 – 31, Mk. 7.31 – 37 Jesus now heads south, and east into the region of the Ten Cities, the Decapolis (Greek Δεκάπολις). This was a predominantly Gentile area, also, with ten self-governing communities inaugurated along a Roman model. Here Jesus heals a deaf mute, employing hands, saliva and sighing in the process of the healing! Although Jesus tries to keep the noise down, His fame is heard far and wide, and many more come to receive His ministry, praising Israel's God – note here that this would have been among Gentiles.

Mk.8.1-10 (mirrored in Mt 15.32 -39) In a further miracle of multiplication, Jesus feeds four thousand people who have been with Him for three days, with seven loaves of bread and a few fish. This comes out of Jesus' compassion, which is deep and real. The Greek word, to have compassion, is *splanchnízomai* (Greek σπλαγχνίζομαι), a word connected to the intestines or guts (Greek σπλάγχνα *splánchna*) which is similar to the Hebrew word for compassion, *rechem* (Heb רֶחֶם) which also is identified with the innards or a woman's womb.

Mt.16.1-4, Mk.8.11-13 Jesus is approached by Pharisees and Sadducees together, an uncommon alliance, since they were at odds with each other ideologically. They want to examine Jesus by asking Him for a sign. But Jesus gives them only the sign of the weather, telling them to judge by what they already see rather than asking for a miracle on demand. Jonah's call to repentance is the only thing He will leave them with.

Mt.16.5-12, Mk.8.14-21 It is rather amusing that having seen the miracles the disciples have seen, they are still worrying about physical food! They are on a lake-crossing, and they only have one loaf in the boat. Jesus, on the metaphysical level, warns them to beware of the influence (the yeast) of the Pharisees and Sadducees, whom they have just left disgruntled at Jesus' snub to them. But the disciples think Jesus is upbraiding them for forgetting more bread! Jesus reminds them of the provision they have just witnessed both in the feeding of the five thousand and of the four thousand. (By this, we can be sure there were two separate incidents of multiplication.) So Jesus is not worried about bread, but about the pervasive control of the religious parties in the culture. Finally, they understand what Jesus means!

Mk.8.22-26 This occurrence of a healing in Bethsaida is of note in that Jesus doesn't achieve the complete healing in one go, but after laying hands on and spitting on his eyes, asks how the man is seeing. When the man says he has partial sight, Jesus lays hands on him once more to complete the restoration. This is an encouragement to those praying for healing to persist, for even Jesus does not give way after a first partial development.

## **Day 307**

### **Jesus Reveals His True Nature**

Matthew 16.13 – 23; 17.1 – 21; 17.24 – 18.35; Mark 8.34 – 9.1, 38 – 50; Luke 9.36, 46 – 48; 17.3b-4, 7-10.

Mt.16.13 – 20 (mirrored in Mk.8.27-30, Lk.9.18-20) In the north of Israel, near to the mountains, at Caesarea Philippi, Jesus quizzes His disciples about the popular view of who He is. After various responses, He pins it down to who they say He is. Peter, reaching deep into his heart, declares Jesus to be the Christ, the *Mashiach*, the son of the Living God. Jesus in response blesses Peter, and designates him as the rock on which the church will be built, giving him powers of binding and loosing. Whatever we make of this address to Peter, Jesus' words to him are in the second person singular.

Mt.16.21-23 (mirrored in Mk.8.31-33, Lk.9.21-22) Jesus now speaks of the suffering and death He will undergo, but also of His resurrection. However, Peter, still with the blessing of Jesus in his ears, rushes in to defend his Master from such thoughts, only to find himself now named as an agent of satan! It is distressing how quickly we go from the sublime to the ridiculous in our lives with God.

Mk.8.34-38 (mirrored in Mt.16.24-27, Lk.9.23-26) Jesus is clear about the cost of following Him – the only way to be His is to deny the self, to kill the ego which demands fulfilment. My being ashamed of Jesus now will be a source of shame to Jesus in the age to come.

Mk.9.1 (mirrored in Mt.16.24-27, Lk.9.23-26) There is a promise that there are those present who will see the Lord's kingship revealed in all its glory.

Mt.17.1-8 (mirrored in Mk.9.2-8, Lk.9.28 – 36a) The word used in the Greek for what Jesus experiences is *metamórhosis* (Greek μεταμόρφωσις) meaning transformation. It's the same word Paul uses of the believer in 2 Cor. 3.18 when he speaks of being transformed from one degree of glory to another.

Here then is the revelation to three of the disciples of the full glory of the Son in His divine nature. Perhaps this is the kingship glory Jesus refers to in Mk.9.1. When their focus begins to edge onto the figures of Moses and Elijah, they are left seeing only Jesus, and the voice from heaven pointing to Him alone as the key to the fulfilment of the promises. The disciples' reaction is terror, but Jesus raises them up and tells them not to fear.

Mt.17.9-13, Lk.9.36b (mirrored in Mk.9.9-13) As they come down the mountain, the disciples ask Jesus a question about the promised return of Elijah. Jesus says he has already come, and has not been noticed – referring to the forerunner, John the Baptist, who is clearly in Elijah's place in Jesus' understanding. They keep quiet about what they have seen on the mountain.

Mt.17.14-21, Mk.9.14-29 (mirrored in Lk.9.37-43a, 17.5-6) As they arrive back with the disciples, they find them struggling to deliver a boy from an evil spirit. Jesus invites the boy's father to believe, and in response to his declaration of faith, delivers the boy from his torment. The disciples are distressed that they could not free the boy from his pain, but Jesus encourages them to pray and see things change.

Mk.9.30-32 (Mt.17.22-23, Lk.9.43b-45) Jesus goes through the Galilee region, but does not make His presence known, as He is seeking to instruct His disciples without interruption. He repeats again the nature of His coming death but they do not understand what He means.

Mt.17.24 -27 In Capernaum, the tax-collector comes looking for payment of the two drachma tax, which Jesus says is not an obligation on sons of the kingdom, but so as not to offend the authorities, the Lord has the disciples go and catch a fish, which has a four drachma coin in its mouth! Once again, Jesus is seen as Lord of creation.

Mt.18.1-4, Mk.9.33-35, Lk.9.46-48, 17.7-10 The thirst for power, particularly among men, is one which drives them to competitive living constantly. Here Jesus takes them to task for their disputes, and says that they will always be 'unprofitable servants', that is, they will never be able to do enough to earn the grace and favour which is being showered upon them. Unless we are like children, who do not seek to earn their place of favour, we cannot be part of the realm of the King. Jesus calls for a lowering, a humbling in order to be part of the kingdom.

Mt.18.5-6, 10-14; Mk.9.36-37, 42 (mirrored in Lk.17.2,3a) Jesus makes clear the valued place children have in His economy of love. It is a heinous sin to harm them in any way, because they have angelic representation before the Father's face.

Jesus emphasises this by a comparison with one lost sheep, which will be gone after by the shepherd, so valuable is it to the heart of the keeper.

Mt.18.7-9, Mk.9.43-50 (mirrored in Lk.17.1) Jesus speaks of the woe caused by man's failure to walk God's ways. He counsels drastic measures of no compromise, using hyperbolic speech about amputation of sinful parts of the body, to show how invasive sin's effect can be.

Mk.9.38-41 (mirrored in Lk.9.49-50) The disciples express concern over someone they have seen not of their number expelling demons in the name of Jesus. But Jesus is completely at ease with this, saying anything done by anyone in His name will be rewarded. Jesus is not narrow and partisan.

Mt.18.15 – 17 Jesus gives a rubric for the reconciliation of brothers in the assembly when there is sin to be dealt with. However, if a sinful brother remains recalcitrant, they are to be removed from the circle of trusted fellowship, and dealt with as though they were an unbeliever – that is, with love and kindness, being entreated to repent and come to Christ, not to be rejected and cut off, as some have practiced in the church.

Mt.18.18-20 Following on from Jesus' words to Peter earlier after his confession, of being given the power of binding and loosing, Jesus now gives this authority also to the rest of His emissaries. This is a wonderful, releasing power, to be used for the freeing of people – not primarily for their hindrance.

Mt.18.21-22, Lk.17.3b,4 The nature of forgiveness is that it is inexhaustible. There is no keeping of scores with Christ, since He keeps none with us. In His cross there is power to release us and those who offend us from every failure and hurt for all of our lives. However, repentance is entailed in forgiveness also.

Mt.18.22-35 Jesus tells a further parable concerning the nature of the kingdom, this time concerning forgiveness. The vast sum owed by the king's servant was far more than he could ever hope to repay, more than a lifetime's wages. The king forgives his servant this impossible burden. The servant then pursues a fellow servant for a very small amount, and has him put in jail until he pays. When the king hears of this injustice, in view of his mercy to the first servant, he rescinds his pardon of the debt, and insists that the unmerciful servant pay his whole debt.

Here is Jesus' clear teaching on the nature of releasing one another from the moral indebtedness we have to each other, forgiving one another 'from the heart.'