

Chapter Ten: Jesus and the Debate Over Israel's Wealth, Part 2

The Teaching of Jesus on Wealth: The Pharisees and the Multitude (Lk.14:7 – 35)

Jesus' invitation to voluntary sacrifice and financial uncertainty could not be clearer when he says, 'No one of you can be my disciple who does not give up all his own possessions' (14:33). It follows on the heels of Jesus' most expansive teachings on table fellowship. In his table fellowship practice throughout the Gospel of Luke, Jesus is laying a foundation for his disciples' *communal life*, not simply their individual devotion. We will see the disciples in Acts follow Jesus' pattern; their meals will embody his teachings and become settings in which his teachings are enacted, reinforced and transmitted.

In Lk.14:1 – 24, Jesus teaches disciples and Pharisees about being guests (v.7 – 11), hosts (v.12 – 14), and invitees (v.15 – 24) of the kingdom banquet. Jesus confronts two major social issues in table fellowship practice: social honor and materialism. While a guest of the Pharisees, and after challenging his fellow Pharisee guests about their own status-seeking (14:7 – 11), Jesus challenges his Pharisee host in this public luncheon. Despite the unwritten code against such public statements from a guest, Jesus invites him to shed both social honor and materialism: 'When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, otherwise they may also invite you in return and that will be your repayment. But when you give a reception, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, since they do not have the means to repay you; for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous' (14:12 – 14). Consistent with 6:20 – 36, Jesus wants to move relationships beyond mere reciprocation; such relational patterns keep people separated from each other, keep some marginalized and stigmatized, and keep some in places of power. Jesus' kingdom program decidedly runs against these patterns of relationship.

One can imagine an awkward silence. Someone raises his cup to say a blessing that he thinks everyone, including Jesus and the host, can affirm. He says, 'Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!' (Lk.14:15) But Jesus does not allow the tension in the room to dissipate so quickly. Instead, he increases the awkwardness in the room by implying that the Pharisees in his current company will not be there. He does this by telling the stinging parable of the banquet, where the invited guests choose not to come for three half-serious, half-ridiculous reasons (Lk.14:16-24). Through these excuses, Jesus reveals that he did not think too highly of people's reasons not to join his own community of disciples. He makes the first invitee out to have an attachment, significantly, to land. The second invitee is either materialistic or a workaholic, or both; he feels he must try out a team of five oxen – a sure sign of wealth, since most landowners had only one or two oxen¹ – without a moment's delay. The third invitee is either too bound to family even in the extreme case of having just gotten married (as Jesus will challenge family attachments in v.26, even to 'wife') or simply incapable of seeing overlapping opportunities (why not bring one's wife to the banquet, too?). Those excuses involve attachments to material wealth (land, harvest) in two cases and family (wife) in the third, concerns that Jesus repeats in v.25 – 35. As a result, the banquet host in the parable gives up on his original invitees and instead invites 'the poor and crippled and blind and lame,' the same group mentioned in 14:13.

Demonstrating social inclusion is the ethical thrust of 14:12 – 14 if not also 14:15 – 24. Jesus' social inclusiveness is so radical that he welcomes people who have been labeled 'sinners,' as poverty and physical handicaps were often thought to be divine punishment for individual or family sin (cf. blindness in Jn.9:2, so too calamity and misfortune in Lk.13:1 – 5). Jesus' table fellowship practices modeled in real life the inclusiveness of the kingdom of God. That is, Jesus ate with sinners as a physical picture of how God desires to restore sinners to right relationship with Himself. The very act of eating, so strong a literary theme in Israel's Scriptures (see below) and so scrutinized by the Pharisees, provided Jesus with the opportunity to demonstrate the invitation of the kingdom. Jesus provoked awkwardness, embarrassment, and not a little hostility. Clearly, Jesus' sense of love and urgency about this matter is so great that he causes public tension with the Pharisees.

The next scene (Lk.14:25 – 34) develops the seriousness of Jesus' teaching on wealth and elaborates on Jesus' concern to gather disciples who can surrender this aspect of their lives to him, for immediately following, Jesus addresses 'large crowds' and calls them to radically separate themselves from family and wealth. Jesus' call to forsake both family and wealth is suggested in 5:1-11 and made explicit in 9:51-62, 12:13-34, 14:15-24, and 18:15 – 19:10. This is a stark call to discipleship, but a logical one in the context of Jesus teaching his disciples to be hosts who display the inclusive, generous and sacrificial ethic of their master's kingdom banquet. Throwing parties for people who cannot pay one back will surely drain resources. Also, inviting people who are social outcasts will surely be costly to one's own social reputation, just as it was for Jesus, who was regularly sneered at by people who disdained his eating with 'sinners' (Lk.5:30; 7:34; 7:39; 15:2; 19:7). Jesus appears to intend table fellowship to be one way to live out the 'love your enemy, give without expecting return' teaching of the Sermon on the Plain in Lk.6:20 – 49.

¹ Joachim Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*. (SCM Press: London. 1972) p.176-77.

Indeed, this remarkable table fellowship practice quickly became the hallmark of the community of Jesus' disciples in Acts. In Acts 2:42 – 46 and again in 4:32 – 35, Luke demonstrates their ongoing commitment to it: They were 'continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread ...all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. Day by day...breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart.' Taking this glance ahead, we confirm that Jesus clearly intended his table fellowship practice to continue into his disciples' community life in the Spirit. Why else would he have taught in Lk.14 on how one can be a proper guest, host, and invitee of *future meals*? His teaching was a standard for his disciples as much as they were a rebuke to the Pharisees. Jesus therefore needed to prepare his disciples to be a community absorbing the cost of such table fellowship: Their material resources and social capital were utterly at the disposal of Jesus and his kingdom mission. Unfortunately, many Western evangelical commentators, who tend to emphasize 'individual devotion' over communal practices, have missed Jesus' intent for his disciples to continue his table fellowship practice in actual community.² This is of course due to the individualistic bias that has been hard to overcome in their exegesis. Correspondingly, such commentators have not seen much logical relationship between Jesus' table fellowship teaching in v.6 – 24 and why Jesus would also call for such sacrifice from the multitudes in v.25 – 35.

We make three points here that impact our evaluation of occupational work. First, we reiterate a point made concerning Lk.9:51 – 62 and 10:25 – 37, that evangelistic proclamation must include Jesus' mission and ethics for a person to make an informed, and perhaps authentic, conversion. Jesus' teaching is not meant to merely burden consciences to heighten our need for the cross, making the actual following of Jesus' commands a secondary matter. The clear pattern in Luke's writings is that Jesus establishes ethical norms for his community of disciples, and then welcomes individual people into it, empowering them to live out his teaching by making them (as Paul and John, and, as I believe, Luke would say) new creations via union with his Spirit and through his death, resurrection, and ascension. This establishes an explicit continuity, not a subtle discontinuity, between Jesus' teaching and his crucifixion. In fact, the cross expresses as much ethical value representing Jesus' ethical teaching as it does atoning significance. Hence, Jesus can invite the uncommitted multitudes to join him in 14:27 with the radical statement, 'Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.' Separation from family and wealth are merely applications of this general principle, since one must be willing to be shamefully considered a traitor to family and economy, and by implication, nation and empire.

Moreover, Jesus' commission to preach 'repentance' to the nations (Lk.24:47) is of permanent value, and takes concrete ethical forms shaped by the narrative of Luke's Gospel. Jesus did not start with a series of propositions concerning the divide between God and the individual leading up to the logical necessity of his death. He most certainly did not slip in ethics through the back door after people's conversion.³ He articulated and modeled what he expected of people and called them to join him. Thus, Christian mission and ethics is a non-negotiable part of evangelism. This point is vital because it makes clear why Christian reflection on the world of money and power must be done publicly.

Second, Jesus focused on those who are normally excluded and given morally lesser status, and expected his community of disciples to act in the same way. Christian concern with occupational work should keep this issue

² e.g. I. Howard Marshall, *Luke: Historian and Theologian* (IVP: Illinois. 1970); Darrell Bock, *IVP New Testament Commentary Series: Luke* (IVP: Chicago, 1994)

³ Paul did not use that method either, contrary to popular Protestant belief. To suggest that would be a gross oversimplification of Paul's dictum to the Corinthians, 'I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified' (1 Cor.2:1). In Acts, Paul clearly preaches more than simply 'the cross.' But there is no need to play off the Paul of Acts against the Paul of the Epistles. 'The cross' in 1 Cor.1:18-25 exemplifies the ethical challenge Jesus consistently gave during his earthly ministry, namely, that Jesus did not do the particular 'signs' of power the Jews wanted (e.g. the expulsion of the Romans from Jerusalem). Rather, to proclaim the cross meant, in tandem with Jesus' explicit teaching on loving enemies, why prejudices and factions must give way to unity in the body of Christ, exactly Paul's point in 1 Cor.1 – 4. Nor did Paul offer the kind of 'wisdom' that the Greeks were accustomed to (e.g. the supposed irrelevance of the physical body). Rather, the cross exemplifies Jesus' sacrifice on behalf of others, explains why other people's needs are relevant, even to the point of voluntarily sacrificing for them, exactly Paul's point in 1 Cor.8-10, especially 9:3-27. Paul saw the cross as the thematic culmination of Jesus' life and teaching, exemplifying Jesus' kingdom teaching and the responses of various people to him, not least the powers that be (1 Cor.2:8; 15:24-25; Col.2:15), but it was decidedly not an event that could be isolated and made to stand on its own. The cross is an absolutely essential point of evangelistic preaching, but it has as much ethical value as atoning value, since it exemplifies Jesus' life and teachings. The cross contains the central challenge of evangelistic proclamation, but not its starting point; the life and teaching of Jesus is. People are invited to join Jesus' community with the forewarning that doing so will cost them their prejudices and materialism. With respect to our inquiry here, people must be invited, as they consider Jesus, to re-enter afresh their work and activities according to the purposes of Jesus.

in mind, such that decisions about work should consider the impact of one's work on the poor. The principle of inclusion is significant. Jesus turns table fellowship, which the Pharisees used as an exclusive expression of their community life, into an inclusive expression of his kingdom community. If inclusive table fellowship becomes an acted parable of the inclusive kingdom, it seems reasonable to me to suggest that other exclusive social-political conventions can also be aggressively challenged in order to demonstrate inclusive concern towards the poor. Most capitalist institutions (corporations and banks, as we will focus on in a later chapter) conceive of decision making as an exclusive matter: Shareholder interest is narrowly defined to those who hold shares in the company, despite the impact a corporation or bank has on the local community, economy and natural environment. Why should the wider community not be included in those decisions? This is where both the uncritical Reformed and the more thoughtful Roman Catholic endorsements of capitalism lack teeth. It is unclear why, from the standpoint of theological ethics, the ability of the rich to make decisions that impact others without their consent should be preserved as a special prerogative. Ownership of land, labor, or capital is one thing; the ability to deploy such resources in whatever manner one chooses, regardless of its implications on others, is quite another. The inclusive nature of God's kingdom demands that Christians actively question exclusivist practices in the socio-political realm. Such acts of inclusion are not themselves the kingdom, but they are concrete pointers demonstrating the principle of kingdom inclusion; they point to a welcome into Jesus' community of disciples.

Third, Christian community must take Jesus' table fellowship seriously, for evangelism is the act of inviting people into a real community. Decisions about work and within work situations should therefore take into consideration whether work strengthens or weakens the Christian community and its witness. There are an unlimited number of variations on this theme. Some relationships are contained within one organization: power relationships in a firm between employer and employee, racially discriminatory practices or unintentional practices that have a racializing effect and exacerbate historic injustice, the justifications for greatly differentiated pay scales between people, the treatment of the custodial staff, sensitivity to languages and cultural symbols among marginalized peoples within the firm, the working conditions of basic laborers, etc. Other relationships are not contained within one organization but reach far beyond it: the responsibility of a Christian to communities affected by the activities of her bank or corporation, the responsibility of a Christian to her employee's family, the responsibility of a Christian to people who do not yet have the skills to be employed, the ethical value of 'professional secrecy' in situations where people's lives are affected without their consent, the responsibility of a Christian to people affected by products manufactured at work (e.g. tobacco, alcohol, guns, armaments, television, computers, etc.), etc. We will comment on this further in the next chapter. While perhaps not an ultimate criterion, this consideration should nevertheless be a factor.

Thus, we must provide three vital pieces of information to the non-Christian world that will help them respond to the message of Jesus: (1) the basic ethical teaching of Jesus; undergirded by (2) the special role social inclusion of the marginalized plays in a believer's witness to Christ; (3) in a community that is experiencing Jesus in these ways and growing in its sense of real commitment to each other, often in opposition to other economic or social-scientific factors, like profit and power relations.

The Teaching of Jesus on Wealth and Stewardship: The Disciples, the Multitude, and the Pharisees (Lk.16:1 – 13)

When we come then to chapter 16, Jesus warns *the disciples*, with the Pharisees still within hearing distance, about the change befalling national Israel because of the obstinacy of Israel's leadership (v.1). I believe Jesus is teaching that God (the rich man) is disappointed with the way Israel (his steward) has been handling what was entrusted to them: land, nationhood, the Temple, the oracles of God (cf. Rom.3:2). Just as the steward recognizes that hard work and begging somewhere else are impossible, Israel must recognize that their survival is precarious. And as the steward recognizes that the debtors can take him in to their homes (v.4), so Jesus' immediate disciples must recognize that outsiders and Gentiles can take them in to eternal dwellings (v.9). That dwelling is the Messianic community that Jesus is extending beyond the boundaries of Israel itself, and certainly beyond the boundaries of the Pharisees' comfort zones. So, while the debtors believe that the steward is still acting under the authority of the rich man, the steward summons them and reduces their debt. The steward takes advantage of a peculiar time after his rejection but before the public has been notified about this. In the same way, Jesus' immediate disciples must take advantage of this peculiar time where Israel has already been rejected, since the Law and the Prophets were in effect only until John the Baptist (16:16, see below). Nevertheless, they can reclaim their privileged status as God's people by sharing what they have already lost: their privileged status as God's people and their privileged status in relation to their land and material wealth. They must align themselves with Jesus' extraordinary mercy as the kingdom of God spreads to all humanity.

The parable must be located in the context of Jesus in a dispute with the Pharisees over the relation between Israel and her historic land-wealth blessing. The steward in the parable uniquely represents Jesus' first disciples, the ones who were leaving behind national Israel because their stewardship of land and wealth was over. They now have

to join Jesus' Messianic Israel. So important and urgent is Israel's crisis in Jesus' mind that even planning is not that important, since planning clearly is not important to the steward of the parable: He reduced the debts hastily and disproportionately, requiring eighty percent from one debtor but only fifty percent from another. Likewise, the disciples' logical response should be to use any and all financial resources they have to win friends among the lost, since their separation from national Israel will mean expulsion from the synagogue and departure for Gentile countries. Jesus henceforth sends out his own followers as the true children of Abraham to the ends of the earth to gather all Abraham's children. This agenda informs Jesus' poem of God and Mammon in v.10 – 13, the seemingly contradictory statements on the Law in v.14 – 18, and the parable of the rich man and Lazarus in v.19 – 31. Finally, the anxiety surrounding the issue of salvation unravels fairly easily because the primary application of the parable is for Jesus' immediate disciples making the transition from the national Mosaic Israel to the international Messianic Israel.

This literary analysis disarms the objection that can be raised: Is it unnatural for Jesus to segue into an interpretation of Israel's material wealth just after 15:11 – 32? Not necessarily. Israel's wealth and land were one of the focal points of concern in Jesus' day, and wealth was already a point of serious contention between them because Israel's nationhood and national livelihood were at issue. Jesus seems to have taught on material wealth on numerous occasions beforehand, so the Pharisees would have been familiar with his teaching by now. The quotes from Malachi and Psalm 107 suggest that Jesus himself taught out of these passages as well. This explains why Jesus can teach on wealth via the parable of the unrighteous steward right after challenging the 'older brother' Pharisees to celebrate the lost 'younger brother' returning home: While 'restoration from exile' for the Pharisees meant enjoying Israel's wealth again, for Jesus it meant forsaking Israel's wealth in favor of worldwide mission to all humanity. The disciples must leave their sacred and precious land, the ultimate basis for their financial and material security, and the tangible manifestation of their historic covenant relationship with God. *This* provides the basis for challenging all Gentiles to serve Jesus Christ at the expense of their financial and economic security.

This understanding of the word 'stewardship' in Luke's Gospel – both here in 16:1 – 13 and earlier in 12:35 – 48 – coincides neatly with our assessment of Genesis 1:1 – 2:3 and Genesis 2:4 – 4:26 in the previous chapter. Humanity in general has become alienated from the land, characterized instead by patterns of broken relationships between husband and wife, parents and children, brother and brother, humanity and the natural environment. The Gentile world was alienated from the creation. Israel was a special 'steward' of God's good land, but that privilege and responsibility ended with Jesus. Jesus located the proper use of material wealth in the realm of a struggle between two warring masters, God and Mammon. Therefore, the primary framework for understanding the Christian's use of material resources is not 'stewardship' but 'spiritual warfare.' Our engagement with wealth is not a simple calling in an otherwise neutral world. Rather, there are forces at play aggressively and constantly undermining the church's commitment to properly obey Jesus' teaching, that is, to sacrifice wealth on behalf of others. We will pursue these ideas more in the next chapter.

The Teaching of Jesus on Wealth: The Rich Ruler and Zaccheus (Lk.18:15 – 19:10)

Luke teaches more about wealth through a brilliant pairing of the rich ruler and Zaccheus, along with two minor contrasting characters, the children and the blind man. Literarily, this is one of the most impressive of Luke's sections, notable especially because we have Matthew and Mark's use of the rich ruler periscope as contrasts. Threading its way through this section and intersecting with the theme of wealth is the motif of childlikeness. Luke begins this section with Jesus affirming 'infants.' By selecting this word 'infants' over Matthew and Mark's less specific word 'children,' Luke heightens the contrast. Those who would enter the kingdom must enter like 'infants.' By using contrasts with the rich ruler, the blind man, and Zaccheus, Luke highlights qualities of a disciple like teachability (the rich ruler is not teachable), persistence (the blind man calls out like a child), and status-unawareness (Zaccheus, who incidentally is short, and climbs a tree like a child). Luke also uses the term 'infant' to suggest that one enters the kingdom community as an 'infant,' i.e. by being 'born again' into it.

The rich ruler is not an 'infant.' Luke does not describe the rich ruler as 'young,' as Matthew does; rather, Luke suggests a greater physical difference in age between the rich ruler and the children. So when the ruler answers how long he has kept the Mosaic Law by saying, 'since my youth,' Luke gives us the impression that this may have been a long time ago. This ruler is no longer young, and the physical portrait is an outward reflection of the spiritual one. Furthermore, the ruler is invested in the Mosaic system; he has built up lots of 'currency' in which he is 'an adult.' This is partially evidenced by his adherence to the Mosaic commandments; however, Jesus does not criticize the rich ruler for actually failing to live according to the commandments and for being self-deluded, or for doing it with improper motives, or for lying about the matter. Jesus' strategy is not to raise the rich ruler's awareness of his shortcomings relative to the commandments. Rather, Jesus' strategy is to break his real tie to the Mosaic system: his property and wealth. The ruler is unwilling to part with his ancestral land inheritance, and other forms of wealth, which is given legitimacy by Moses. The cost to the ruler would not only be exacting on himself, but would also

have profound repercussions on the ruler's relationship with his parents and his children. Selling his property would mean no land to pass down to his sons, no dowry to give to his daughters, and a renunciation of the wealth passed down to him by his own family. Jesus is once again calling for an utter break from traditional family and land ties that can only be called 'disinheritance.'

Jesus did not see this challenge as a unique one tailored to the particular materialism of this particular individual. Five aspects of this episode demonstrate this. First, Jesus warned about the rich universally having difficulties entering the kingdom (18:24 – 25). Second, the disciples understood Jesus' conditions to be universal (18:28). Third, Jesus' affirmation of his disciples' disinheritance requires a universal reading (18:29 – 30). Fourth, the coupling of the rich ruler with Zaccheus (19:1 – 10), who as a tax collector did not gain his wealth through the Mosaic system, who was indeed able to renounce what he had in favor of Jesus' larger kingdom concern, makes clear that this episode was aimed for a wider audience than merely the rich ruler alone. And fifth, Jesus has already made it clear in Luke's Gospel that materialism must be renounced as a pre-condition of discipleship; that language and concept are repeated here. While it is possible to casually read Matthew's and Mark's rich ruler episodes and conclude that Jesus understood this conversation as pertinent only for the rich ruler, with Luke this is much more difficult.

Jesus calls the rich ruler into his own community, a community that shares wealth generously with one another as it follows Jesus' teaching to do so. This is apparent in 18:29 – 30, when the disciples recall their own precarious situation: 'Behold, we have left our own homes and followed you.' Jesus' response is affirming and reassuring. He does not offer a pious metaphysic about God providing nor does he promise supernatural signs as a reward for such disinheritance. Instead, he speaks of a tangible community and tangible support. When his disciples are concerned about their own homes and means of social support, Jesus promises them 'many times as much at this time.' He says, 'Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who will not receive many times as much at this time and in the age to come, eternal life.' This does not necessarily mean that Christians formally own property communally, but that resources are to be generously shared to a significant degree across the Christian community.

Zaccheus represents one who surely knows the teaching of Jesus on these matters and responds in kind. Although separated from the rich ruler episode by the story of the blind beggar outside of Jericho, Zaccheus is a contrast to and counterpoint of the rich ruler. Zaccheus, as a chief tax collector who sits atop the entire tax collecting bureaucracy and profits from it, is probably the richest person mentioned in the New Testament. His correct perception of Jesus is foreshadowed literarily by the healing of the blind beggar – the one who sees Jesus outside Jericho signifies the one who sees Jesus inside Jericho.

One significant difference is that Zaccheus' wealth did not come from the Mosaic system. It came by oppression. Since he has 'pimped' his own community, Zaccheus must also deal with alienation from his native Israel. This might be why Zaccheus is more willing to part with his wealth than the rich ruler was, and why he offers fourfold to anyone he has defrauded. Zaccheus cares about setting matters aright with Israelites who could lodge complaints against him. He becomes a person who cares about the reputation of Jesus and the community represented by Jesus; he seeks to be reconciled with anyone for Jesus' sake. Much could be said about this. Perhaps those who think that God blessed them with wealth are sometimes the slowest to part with it? Furthermore, if we recognized the injustice and oppression through which much of our wealth comes, I suspect that Christians in the U.S. would be much more willing to give it away. And if we cared about being agents of reconciliation and Jesus' table fellowship practice as much as Jesus would have us care about it, much would change about us.

As challenging as these statements are, they are still more positive and reassuring than certain other statements about forsaking everything at once; one way to reconcile the two statements is to regard our entrance into the body of Christ as entailing that we hold all our possessions loosely and regarding them as everyone's. In this way, one's household and kin will be multiplied, not just immediately stripped away, because of one's membership in Jesus' body of followers. This statement by itself cannot be taken that absolutely everything is to be held in common in the church community, nor can it be taken to mean that resources distributed by the church is the exclusive means by which God rewards us for our own giving, it is an indication that the church is to share its life with others in various forms and in various degrees. Christians are not automatically entitled by some divine law to other Christians' resources, though individuals in the community do have the responsibility to share, and extreme poverty among some must always elicit a response from others.

Therefore, we must read Jesus' promise of 'many times as much' in 18:30 a bit cautiously. Jesus was probably envisioning a dramatic increase in how many people became his followers and demonstrated this kind of care for one another, but not permanent financial stability as such. And any discussion of Jesus' community must take into consideration how that community was to be similar or different to that of the rest of Mosaic Israel. Mosaic Israel was once a stationary community with ties to its ancestral land. The church is not a stationary community and it has no such ties to a geographic area, which perhaps explains why Jesus promised food, drink, and clothing

(Lk.12:22 – 29), but not shelter and stability. Furthermore, Israel's sabbaths were to testify to God's *abundant* material provision for them (Lev.25). The dependence of the Christian on God, however, will certainly result in abundant spiritual provision, but probably in *minimal to adequate* material provision. This, I believe, properly considers Jesus' earlier teaching, 'Blessed are you who are poor' (6:20).

At this point, a glance ahead at the church community in Acts is appropriate. Although a Christian enters a believing community that has certain resources available, one is not to approach others with an attitude of entitlement, demand, or dependence. That would contradict other statements taught by Jesus. Even Peter respected Ananias' and Sapphira's decision to not sell everything they had (Acts 5:4). This arrangement is somewhat different from the Law of Moses, which instituted various means for ensuring the relatively egalitarian use of Israel's land, including the kinsman-redeemer law, the jubilee law, and the emphasis on justice in the court. And here is the crux of the issue: Israel had a blessed land unique among the nations, but the church does not. Aside from caring for people's basic needs, there is therefore no comprehensively normative arrangement of economic resources to reference, and correspondingly, no fixed system by which to arbitrate all financial disputes. This is the probable reason why Jesus refused to arbitrate between the brothers fighting over their family land inheritance.

We also know that land and property, the most valuable commodity of ancient times, were not simply kept within the Christian community and redistributed. When we glance at Luke's portrayal of the early church, we find that many early Christians demonstrated a very surprising attitude towards land, possessions, wealth, and work. The first converts sold their *property* and possessions (Acts 2:45), the apostles and surely other Christians had *nothing* of their own, even to give away (3:1 – 10), more converts sold their *lands* and houses (4:34), Barnabas sold his plot of *land* in order to give the money to the apostles to use as they saw fit (4:36 – 37), and Ananias and Sapphira sold a portion of their *property* for the proceeds (5:1). Presumably many other Christians did as well. A new attitude towards wealth and stability had emerged.⁴ If the *Didache* reflects in any way the practices of the early church, then we have in early Christianity a very fluid, mobile community.⁵ What explains this type of behavior? It is true that Jesus commanded an ethic of sacrifice on behalf of others in the church community; the reasons he gave were often pragmatic, for instance, that there were people in need. But even this does not totally explain the phenomenon. Jesus' commands also seem to go beyond these situational instances because needs could have been met in other ways that developed a more stable church community. Certainly the early Christians took Jesus as meaning more than that. One scholar notes that in ancient Greece, *sharing*, not selling, of property did happen on those occasions when the rich were afraid of revolt or social unrest by the poor.⁶ These actions served to stabilize Greek communities. What we find in Acts, however, goes beyond this and in a real sense threatens it.

In Luke's writings, which are supposedly oriented primarily to Hellenistic apologetics and Gentile Christian communities, we find a model for assisting the poor that would have surely come under a sharp critique: This selling of property to give away the proceeds tends to de-stabilize communities! If Jews in Israel, who were known as *rarely* voluntarily parting with their ancestral lands, sell their property and give away the proceeds, what would this mean for Greeks and Romans? It means that since Jesus effectively severed the unique relation between Israel and her land, by extension, and *precisely from this moment of historical-theological transition*, Jesus challenges everyone else's desire for material security and stability, Greek, Roman, or otherwise. Because Israel was the chosen people, uniquely selected to partially live the life intended for humanity from the creation, they were given a taste of the abundance and the *shalom* all other nations tried to acquire by cities and planning, warfare and bloodshed, oppression and labor. When Jesus stripped Israel of this privilege and declared its end, he did not just overturn Israel's claim to its land, although he did at least that. He also reiterated and reinforced God's judgment on every other people's attempt to secure their place in creation, for Gentiles attempt it by tooth and nail, walls and laws, whip and assembly line; they resist God's curse on creation by building their great civilizations, which is what Genesis 1 – 11 tells us if we perceive its polemical nature. Jesus challenges Gentiles because he first challenged the Jews, for both salvation and judgment occurred with the Jew first. Jesus was a homeless pilgrim, a sojourner without any place to lay his head, an alien in a foreign land that should have been his homeland, and he calls his people to be the same, wherever they are. *That* is the starting point for all Christians to think about their relation to money, financial

⁴ We must be careful of the popular view that overstates the impact of these practices in order to neutralize their relevance. The popular view suggests that the Christian 'community of goods' described in Acts created an economic crisis for the Jewish Christians later. Justo Gonzales (*Faith and Wealth*) ably refutes this view.

⁵ For those scholars in favor of an early date for the *Didache*, i.e. 120 A.D., see G. H. Box,

⁶ Alexander Fuks, *Social Conflict in Ancient Greece* (E. J. Brill: Leiden, Holland, 1984), p.52-189. Beckaert may be correct that Fuks exaggerates the occurrence of this phenomenon, but the point in relation to Luke's writings still stands: Jesus' followers sold their property and land on behalf of the poor, something that was unknown in both the Jewish and Greco-Roman worlds and impractical if the church's only concern was to empower the poor.

security, patron-client relations, the equality of believers, 'kingdom economics,' and, as we shall see, our social vision and occupational work.

The Teaching of Jesus on Wealth: The Widow (Lk.21:1 – 4)

Wealth was given *by* the poor, not just *to* them. Within Luke's writings themselves, the main witness is the widow who gave her last coins in the Jerusalem Temple. This widow was affirmed by Jesus as a model of devotion to God (Lk.21:1 – 4). The use of wealth, for Jesus, is not a private matter. Jesus says, 'This poor widow put in more than all of them, for they all out of their surplus put into the offering, but she out of her poverty put in all that she had to live on.' The episode contrasts the piety of the widow and the stubbornness of Israel's leaders: Those who want to hold on to the last vestiges of national Israel (land, wealth, Jerusalem, etc.) are impious and ungodly.

Green attempts a different analysis. Jesus condemned the Temple, he suggests, because it robbed widows like this of their life savings; it was a means by which the Sadducean Temple authorities 'devoured widows' houses.' Green is no doubt correct about the Temple system in general. However, he tries unconvincingly to play down Jesus' affirmation of the widow for her devotion to God. He argues that Jesus does not actually praise her; he merely sympathizes with her tragic lot as a victim of the systemic oppression of the Temple law and leadership. However, the most natural way to take Jesus' words is as an affirmation of the widow for her sacrificial generosity. He contrasts her with people who were less generous relative to what they had. As Mark's parallel makes even more forcefully through the repetition, 'all she owned, all she had to live on' (Mk.12:44), Jesus holds her up favorably to everyone else in the Temple precinct because she gave out of her poverty rather than her surplus. Her victimization, if any, is not mentioned. Moreover, it is uncertain – and unlikely – whether this Passover offering was mandatory by accumulated Israelite tradition (it certainly was not mandatory by Mosaic Law), a question that, if further research answers in the negative, would fatally undermine Green's interpretation, since her offering would not have been required at all. The correct attitude, corresponding to Jesus' teaching and exemplified by this widow, is to give up all one has for God.

The fact that this episode appears in Mark and Luke (but not in Matthew, where a Jewish context would be quite natural) is even more significant. Mark and Luke wanted the widow to be recalled in *Gentile* churches so that her portrait would inspire great generosity towards God among the rich and poor alike. All Jesus' disciples are called to give to him all we own, all we have to live on. Apparently, Green carries an a priori commitment to a simple redistribution of wealth. In reality, the poor are more generous than the rich as a proportion of their income and total resources. Yet Green opposes any praise of a poor person actually giving wealth away because his theory could not assimilate that strange outlying data point. To our eyes, Green's rejection of Jesus' praise for the widow sounds like an attempt to validate his own prior commitment. Hence, as I have argued above, the words that best summarize Jesus' teaching on material wealth are not 'redistribution of wealth' but 'disinheritance' and 'universal giving.'

The Great Commission (Lk.24:44 – 52)

Luke's version of the Great Commission permanently links Jesus' ethical teaching to the disciples' mission to the world. This passage affirms the use of Jesus' ethical teachings by the church in its mission to the world. It is also significant, not only for our understanding Acts, but also our original question of how Jesus understood his own Scriptures in relation to the people of Israel, Israel's land, the nations, and the destiny of the world.

The final words of Jesus in Luke's Gospel bring 'the nations' into view (24:47), just as Matthew's version does. Luke is obviously concerned to root the movement of Christian world evangelization in the Hebrew Scriptures, as shown by his reference to Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms (24:44). Luke claims that the Old Testament, properly understood, is being revealed and fulfilled in the Christian mission to the world. This is a significant, and much debated, claim. Once again, a full defense of this position would require more space than is appropriate here, but a few cursory observations are profitable.

The broadest theme in the Pentateuch is that of Israel and the nations. The Pentateuch is, in fact, concerned to discuss the destiny of Israel and the nations. It begins with a diagnosis and explanation of 'the nations' in Genesis 1 – 11. God's call to Abraham involved a commitment to 'bless' and 'curse' those who do such to Abraham, and an overarching commitment to make Abraham a blessing to 'all families of the earth' (Gen.12:1 – 3). The two major poems of the Pentateuch, Jacob's in Genesis 49 and Moses' in Deuteronomy 32, are concerned about the future of Israel. The prediction of Israel's covenant failure and future exile in Deuteronomy 28 – 29 already start to build the expectation of a 'prophet like Moses,' who will lead Israel through deliverance again to a return from captivity and exile. This would have implications for 'the nations,' for they are called to rejoice alongside Israel (Dt.32:43).

A second concern in the Pentateuch is a coming ruler from Israel. The prophecy of Jacob over Judah involved a 'scepter' arising from a descendant of Judah (Gen.49:10). The scepter is a common symbol for kingly royalty and sovereignty. The prophecy of Balaam saw the 'king' of Israel being higher than other kings, in an

‘exalted’ kingdom (Num24:7 – 9). In this prophecy, Balaam also referred to the ‘scepter’ in Num.24:17 to indicate kingly royalty, and the author/redactor of the Pentateuch retained this word to invoke the prophecy concerning the tribe of Judah; this king of Israel will come from the loins of Judah. The nations, again, will be affected: ‘He will devour the nations who are his adversaries’ (Num.24:8). But he will take other nations as his ‘possession’: ‘Edom shall be his possession; Seir, its enemies, also will be a possession...One from Jacob shall have dominion.’ Apparently ‘the Kenite’ will have an enduring dwelling place but neither Amalek nor Kain would (Num.24:20 – 22). Interestingly, in Num.24:9, the Abrahamic covenant apparently would re-center on this kingly figure, as he becomes the one that brings ‘blessings’ and ‘curses’ on the nations based on their response, not merely to Abraham and his descendants in general, but to himself. Thus, as the Pentateuch narrative unfolds, Israel’s Scriptures already start to focus on a Messianic figure from within Israel as the focal point of the covenant to Abraham. Integrating these two themes together, as the Pentateuch does, yields the logical conclusion that the kingly figure from Israel will deliver Israel from exile and bless or curse the nations based on their response to him. He will re-center the Abrahamic covenant around himself.

Once the Davidic dynasty was established, prophetic expectation subsequently looked to the reign of the kingly Messiah proclaimed from Jerusalem outward. This was foreshadowed by Solomon, the son of David, receiving praise and honor from Gentile rulers like the Queen of Sheba in Jerusalem; this is especially significant to the Book of Chronicles. Within the Prophets, on the one hand there are passages indicating how the Messiah’s reign over the Gentiles would bring destruction against those Gentiles who resist him (e.g. Joel 3:1 – 17). On the other, there are passages indicating that his reign will bring peace, at least to those who bow the knee to him (e.g. Isa.2:1 – 4; Mic.4:1 – 5). In both cases, Israel and her covenant with YHWH would be vindicated before the world.

Moreover, the Psalms view ‘the nations’ as the ‘inheritance’ or ‘possession’ of the king of Israel. Psalm 2, a psalm recited at the coronation of every Davidic king in Jerusalem, picks up the language of ‘possession’ begun in the prophecy of Balaam. God encourages the king of Israel to ‘ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Your inheritance, and the very ends of the earth as Your possession’ (2:8). Psalm 2 thematically anticipates the Messianic king of Israel, expecting his rule over the world to be fully enacted. Similarly, Psalm 110 picks up the word ‘scepter’ and envisions the king of Israel ruling in the midst of his enemies and simultaneously being a priest in the order of Melchizedek, the first priest-king. These two Psalms are especially significant to Luke. Jesus himself crafts a riddle from Psalm 110 concerning his claim to the Davidic throne (Lk.20:42 – 43). Luke records God Himself quoting from Psalm 2 at Jesus’ baptism (Lk.3:22) to designate Jesus as the ‘Son’ anointed king over Israel. Luke also records the original disciples quoting from Psalm 2 to describe the impact of Jesus’ lordship engaging the Gentile political powers (Acts 4:25 – 26). And both Peter and Paul discuss Jesus’ kingship in their very first recorded speeches (Acts 2:13ff. and 13:33ff.).

First century Israel expected their Messiah to bless some nations and destroy others. A certain amount of ambiguity therefore existed in first century Israel about how the Messiah would actually do these things. Typically Pharisees expected the Messiah to use military force, against Rome in particular, to establish his reign in Jerusalem, a reign that would eventually encompass the entire Gentile world. Jesus’ understanding of how this would happen was, of course, different. He understood the rejected prophet pattern as normative and embraced the suffering Messiah passages – including Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53 – as part of his vocation. He postponed Israel’s claim on its own land inheritance in favor of his disciples going out to the nations to proclaim his lordship among them; Jesus is now claiming his inheritance, his possession of ‘the nations’ through his disciples. They are to welcome them into the Messianic community, including its mission and ethics, continuing in the trajectory of his suffering as well. The time for ultimate blessing and cursing, as appropriate, of Israel and the nations was set for the future, when Jesus returns. It was left to Paul and John to clarify that Jesus promised an entirely renewed, garden world to his renewed people after their resurrection; such is consistent with the prophecies of Isaiah and Ezekiel about the consummated new creation. Ethnic Israel will not inherit a freshly abundant land, but the new humanity of God in Jesus will inherit a freshly abundant world (e.g. Rom.4:16 – 17).

Thus, Jesus told his disciples to proclaim ‘repentance for forgiveness of sins...in his name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem’ (Lk.24:47). ‘Repentance’ takes concrete forms revealed by the narrative of Luke’s Gospel, especially Jesus’ call to repent from materialism and ethnocentrism. This clarifies the disciples’ mission and contextualizes the reason why Jesus gave this surprising ethic towards wealth and enemies: He expects the disciples, empowered by the Spirit (24:49), to engage the world with his lordship over Israel and the world. He calls them into a transnational reconciliation movement bearing witness to the unity and peace under his kingly rule. He calls his disciples to have a pilgrim ethic in relation to material wealth in order to testify to the pilgrimage of the new creation people awaiting their new creation land. These ethics are a permanent feature of the church’s life and teaching until Jesus comes again.