

Chapter Nine: Jesus and the Debate Over Israel's Wealth, Part 1

Old Testament Quotations

The very first Old Testament text to which Luke refers is Malachi. In the context of introducing John the Baptist, Luke describes him as Malachi's eschatological Elijah (Mal.4:5-6 quoted in Lk.1:16 – 17; Mal.3:1 quoted in Lk.1:76 and 7:27). Why quote this text from Malachi? Perhaps because it is the very last text in the Old Testament, Luke links his history with Old Testament history by quoting it. Fair enough. A glance at the larger thought from Malachi 4 gives us more to consider, however. Ominously, Malachi urged Israel to respond to this Elijah figure, 'lest [God] come and smite the land with a curse' (Mal.4:6). Earlier, Malachi insisted that Israel understand the thematic relation from Genesis between innocent blood and restoration to the land.

Both Malachi and Isaiah were immersed in the motifs of Genesis 1 – 4, particularly the thematic relation of blood and land. In Genesis, the slaying of animals when Adam and Eve were exiled from the land of Eden signified (i) the strange consequence of humanity's sin being related to bloodshed (the first bloodshed), (ii) protection during that exile related to the bloodshed of innocent animals, and (iii) a foreshadowing of how humanity would one day return to paradise (innocent blood will one day be shed for humanity to return). Adam, Eve, and all humanity were thus in exile from the land of Eden with strange tensions inserted into the relationship between humanity and the land. The tensions deepened with Cain's murder of Abel, which heightened the association between blood, land, and curse. Abel's blood cried out to God from the land and required Cain to wander. Cain linked the face of the land with the face of God (Gen.4:14) describing his alienation from one by his alienation from the other, and then built a city hostile to God in defiance of God's prohibition on settling. We find the same themes in Israel's history: The innocent blood of representative animals preserved Israel's place in the land, while the innocent blood of humans threatened Israel's place in the land with captivity in a foreign city.

Thus in Malachi, if Israel offered sacrifices obediently, then YHWH would 'open...the windows of heaven and pour out for you a blessing until it overflows. [YHWH] will rebuke the devourer for you, so that it may not destroy the fruits of the ground, nor will your vine in the field cast its grapes...And all the nations will call you blessed, for you shall be a delightful land' (Mal.3:10 – 12). By repeatedly using the Deuteronomic covenant terms 'bless' and 'curse' (Mal.1:14; 2:2; 3:9, 10, 12, 15; 4:6) in conjunction with the metaphor of human divorce, Malachi hints at God's divorce of Israel, an experience of the exile, a significant motif in relation to the land (Mal.2:3; 3:5). The reference to Elijah (Mal.4:5) invokes echoes of the original Elijah's ministry to the Northern Kingdom of Israel during the days of the divided kingdom. Significantly, the Northern Kingdom was eventually taken away into exile for judgment. Is Malachi suggesting that a similar fate could befall reunited Israel again? Is Luke suggesting that rejecting the contemporary Elijah figure, John the Baptist, will deepen Israel's already dire predicament?

The fact that Luke's earliest quotation from the Old Testament is Malachi 4:5 – 6 is significant. I believe that readers are intended to hear echoes of 'smite the land with a curse' even though that portion of the verse is not explicitly stated. Examples of this type of strategic quotation abound in Luke's writings.¹ Luke can quote a portion of an Old Testament text to invoke the text in its entirety. The curse on Israel's land will accompany Israel's rejection of John the Baptist because 'the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected God's purpose for themselves, not having been baptized by John' (Lk.7:30). Reinforcing this echo and tightening these thematic ties is Jesus' early identification of himself with both Elijah and Elisha (Lk.4:25 – 27), the prophets who ministered to the Northern Kingdom of Israel before its defeat and exile by Assyria. Jesus sees himself as parallel to them; he is the final prophet to the Israel of his day before Jerusalem is defeated and exiled by Rome.

Luke's use of Isaiah reinforces these themes. The overall message of Isaiah is of interest to us. Using motifs from Genesis 1 – 4, Isaiah called Jerusalem a violent, bloody city, linking the color of blood (scarlet) to the color of sin and echoing Cain's murder of Abel. Jesus also called Jerusalem a violent, bloody city. When he described the promised restoration from exile, Isaiah maintained the motif connecting blood, atonement, and restoration of the land in Isaiah 40 – 55, especially chapter 53 – the innocent blood of God's anointed Servant had to be shed in order for a guilty Israel to eventually be restored to the land. But Isaiah 56 – 66, in spite of its triumphant and universal tones, contains hints of further judgment and exile on those who somehow do not participate in that restoration. For instance, while Isaiah foresaw eunuchs and foreigners being fully welcomed into the covenant community even though they had been excluded from the assembly of God on the basis of the Law (contrast Dt.23:1

¹ This occurs many times in Luke, e.g. when Jesus quotes Isaiah 53:12 at his arrest in Lk.22:37, drawing our attention to the entire Isaianic servant song in Isaiah 52:13 – 53:12 during the narration of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection. For more examples about how small portions of Old Testament passages quoted in the New set up 'echoes' of broader thematic and contextual similarity, see Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* with N.T. Wright's qualification of Hays in *Climax of the Covenant*, p.264 – 5, as well as Robert Alter's excellent examples of Hebrew literary interdependence in *The World of Biblical Literature* and John Sailhamer's examples in *Introduction to Old Testament Theology*. Luke can quote a portion of an Old Testament text to invoke the text in its entirety.

– 6 with Isa.56:1 – 8), not all Israel would affirm this. Some are not disturbed by the disappearance of the righteous (into Gentile lands to ‘gather’ the dispersed, if 56:8 is the cause of 57:1). So God summons those who practice sin and idolatry (57:3 – 10) to hear a warning (57:11 – 21) culminating in Isaiah’s well-known refrain, ‘there is no peace for the wicked’ (57:20 – 21), the sure signal of a deepened exile.

Isaiah’s forerunner announcing the return from exile is identified with John the Baptist (Isa.40:3 – 5 quoted in Lk.3:4 – 6), invoking themes of exile and restoration. Restoration motifs from Isaiah 55 (seed, word, thorns) are woven into Jesus’ parable of the soils in Luke 8.² Isaiah 65:1 – 16 echoes many themes in Luke, such as God’s invitation to covenant outsiders (65:1), God’s frustration with Israel (65:2 – 3) due to violations of the covenant covered over by a hypocritical holier-than-thou attitude (65:4 – 5) meriting a long-delayed day of judgment (65:6 – 7). God will preserve a remnant, making an analogy to new wine (65:8 – 9), and promising to shepherd and feed them in the outdoor pasture-lands of Sharon and Achor (65:10 – 12). Isaiah then completes this section by distinguishing between that faithful remnant and the remainder of Israel:

Behold, My servants shall eat,
 But you shall be hungry,
Behold, My servants shall drink,
 But you shall be thirsty,
Behold, My servants shall rejoice,
 But you shall be put to shame,
Behold, My servants shall shout joyfully with a glad heart,
 But you shall cry out with a heavy heart,
 And you will wail with a broken spirit.
And you will leave your name for a curse to My chosen ones,
 And the LORD God will slay you.
 But My servants will be called by another name. (Isa.65:13 – 15)

Is this a thematic parallel and antecedent to Jesus’ Sermon on the Plain, particularly the beatitudes? The theme of reversal is very common in Luke, and Jesus also promises that his disciples, Israel’s faithful remnant, though they are at present poor, hungry, mournful, and cursed by others, will nevertheless be satisfied, joyful, and vindicated inheritors of the kingdom of God. By contrast, the remainder of national Israel, those who are at present rich, well-fed, joyful, and well respected, will find their situation reversed as well (Lk.6:20 – 26), fitting the above passage from Isaiah. Other passages, associating new wine with a faithful remnant (compare Isa.65:8 – 9 to Lk.5:36 – 39), the shepherding and feeding of the crowd in the wilderness (compare Isa.65:10-12 to Lk.9:10 – 17), and divine frustration with Israel due to the Pharisees’ holier-than-thou attitude resulting in a long-delayed judgment (compare Isa.65:4 – 5 to Lk.11:37 – 52), are uncannily Isaianic. Isaiah’s vision of the nations worshiping God is very at home with Luke. This gives us a basis for suggesting that Jesus’ saying ‘Go in peace,’ (Lk.7:50; 8:48) is a deliberate echo of Isaiah’s phrase ‘there is no peace for the wicked,’ a phrase which referred to Israel’s true restoration from exile (Isa.48:22; 57:20 – 21), *foreshadowed* by Israel’s physical return from Babylon and *actually* enacted by Jesus.

An assortment of Isaianic themes coalesce around Jesus and his mission to the church: Isaiah’s vision of the ‘new things’ surrounding the Servant’s teaching going out to the Gentile coastlands (Isa.42:1 – 9) and the Servant being a light to the nations (Isa.42:6; 49:6) is joined with the surprising Isaianic command to expand the traditional borders of Israel’s promised inheritance-land to include the nations (Isa.54:2-3). Jesus brings those themes together. He is proclaimed by the aging Simeon to be the Isaianic Servant (Lk.2:30 – 32); Jesus finally sends his disciples out into the world to proclaim repentance for forgiveness of sins, the ultimate restoration from exile. In a mission that bears some resemblance to Abraham’s call, Jesus’ disciples are to walk as pilgrims and strangers in this land that does not belong to them yet. But we have hope. We will inherit it in the age to come when God fashions for us the new heavens and new earth (Isa.65:17 – 25).

A brief foray into Malachi and Isaiah substantiates our claim that while the dialogue between Luke and the Hellenistic world is certainly a valuable consideration, grounding Luke’s writings in the dialogue between Jesus and Israel yields stronger literary unity than either Johnson or Green have proposed. If the land of Israel was about to be cursed, as Malachi 4:6 describes, perhaps even more severely than it had been during the intertestamental times, as Isaiah 56 – 66 suggests, then it must be abandoned. Jewish readers would have necessarily felt this after Luke associates John the Baptist with the quote from Malachi right away in Luke 1:16 – 17. Israel’s land was about to be cursed profoundly. This is why in Luke more than anywhere else, Jesus commands his disciples to extraordinary levels of financial sacrifice and uncertainty.

² N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Fortress Press: Minneapolis, MN, 1990)

We see this literary theme develop in Luke's writings. Beginning in Mary's Magnificat (1:46 – 55), the theme of reversal is evident. The proud, the rulers, and the rich are grouped together as those who will be humbled, brought down from their thrones, and sent away empty-handed. By contrast, the humble have been exalted, the hungry are filled with good things, and Israel the offspring of Abraham has been helped. The entire poem echoes the familiar idea from the worship traditions of Israel, that of YHWH reversing a situation by rescuing Israel from a situation unfavorable to them while frustrating their enemy. Though the entire poem resonates with the Psalms, the line that is a direct quotation, 'He has filled the hungry with good things,' (Lk.1:53) comes from Psalm 107, verse 9.

This quotation is surely not accidental. Taken in its entirety, Psalm 107 is a song about God restoring His people from exile. The fifth book of Psalms has the most hopeful and explicit Psalms about the Davidic king (Ps.110), the restored Temple (Ps.118, 125, 127), renewed observance of the Law (Ps.119), forgiveness of the sins meriting exile (Ps.130), the return from Babylon (Ps.137), and the restored sanctuary (Ps.149, 150). Psalm 107's position as the first in this group is suggestive of its importance. The first three introductory verses praise YHWH for being a loving God who redeems and restores His people. From that point, a crescendo of four examples of God's love is rhythmically woven in to support that contention. God satisfies the hungry and thirsty, particularly those who are lost in the wilderness (Ps.107:4 – 10), which is probably inspired by Israel's experience in her early wilderness period. He forgives the prisoners, those who had rebelled against God and incurred His wrath (Ps.107:11 – 16) and heals the rebellious, whose iniquities had brought misery upon them (Ps.107:17 – 22). These second and third examples could have been inspired by the pattern of deliverance set forward in the period of the Judges, when Israel would be overrun by the Philistines or some other Canaanite nation and God would deliver them by the hand of a judge-prophet. And He saves the storm-tossed, those who do business on the seas (Ps.107:23 – 32), which claims that even the sea-faring Gentiles see God's greatness in creation and are dependent on His mercy. As great as those examples are, they merely substantiate the fact that God regathers His exiled people, Israel (Ps.107:33 – 43).

He changes rivers into a wilderness,
 And springs of water into a thirsty ground
A fruitful land into a salt waste
 Because of the wickedness of those who dwell in it
He changes a wilderness into a pool of water
 And a dry land into springs of water
And there He makes the hungry to dwell
 So that they may establish an inhabited city
And sow fields, and plant vineyards
 And gather a fruitful harvest
Also He blesses them and they multiply greatly
 And He does not let their cattle decrease
When they are diminished and bowed down
 Through oppression, misery, and sorrow
He pours contempt upon princes
 And makes them wander in a pathless waste
But He sets the needy securely on high away from affliction
 And makes families like a flock
The upright see it, and are glad
 But all unrighteousness shuts its mouth
Who is wise? Let him give heed to these things
 And consider the lovingkindness of the LORD. (Ps.107:33 – 43)

The pictures of humanity in the original creation and of Israel in the Promised Land inform the Psalmist. Those who are restored by God will live in an abundant land, have many children, enjoy fruitful fields, vineyards, and cattle, and be free from oppressive princes and foreign rule. These motifs build the poetic claim that a restored Israel is God's true humanity, inheriting the original creational blessing that Adam and Eve lost in their exile from the garden that Israel also lost in their exile from the Promised Land. Thus the quotation of Psalm 107 by Mary is both credible and appropriate from a historical point of view: Jews in her day would have surely been meditating on this Psalm and others in the fifth book of the Psalter. They were longing for the exile to be truly over.

But like Malachi and Isaiah, does Psalm 107 contain within itself the threat of deepened exile? The phrase, 'He changes rivers into a wilderness, and springs of water into a thirsty ground,' speaks of the denial of supernaturally provided water (rains from the heavens or the supernatural rivers which originally flowed from Eden). And of course the phrase, 'A fruitful land into a salt waste because of the wickedness of those who dwell in it,' reminds us of the divine judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah. Although these lines might be construed to mean the past judgment that sent Israel into exile in Babylon, this same warning is taken up and amplified by Jesus in a new

and more dire way. A new judgment, a new exile, is coming upon those who do not believe in him. And Luke's quotation of Mary is appropriate not only to his purpose in writing, but also to his style of dealing with the Old Testament. The quotation of an isolated verse does not set off a scavenger hunt for fragmentary verses that legitimate Jesus' claims. Rather, by quoting a verse, Luke is invoking echoes of the entire section in which that verse is located and the major themes it involves. The whole of the Hebrew Scriptures have been pointing to Jesus all along, have required Jesus all along, and can now be interpreted in reference to him thematically. Not just Israel, but the whole world is invited back to a restoration of sorts. Those who believe in him will be blessed like the original humanity in the creational blessing, but even more so. We will inherit an even greater land, we will experience an even greater blessing, etc. But correspondingly, a greater exile will come upon those who resist Jesus. Unbelieving Israel's latest exile away from their blessed land and from God's presence is a mere hint of the greater judgment to come on the unbelieving world.

The Teaching of John the Baptist on Wealth (Lk.3:7 – 14)

The first time the word 'repentance' is found in Luke, it is on the lips of John the Baptist preparing people for Jesus' public ministry. Three different audiences approach him: the Jewish crowds, the tax collectors, and Roman soldiers. All ask what they must do to prepare for the dawning of the kingdom. To each of these groups, John discusses material wealth and its use. Thus, the word 'repentance' appears in proximity to a dense teaching on the appropriate use of wealth. To the Jewish crowds he says, 'The man who has two tunics is to share with him who has none; and he who has food is to do likewise.' To tax collectors, he says, 'Collect no more than what you have been ordered to.' And to soldiers: 'Do not take money from anyone by force, or accuse anyone falsely, and be content with your wages.'

Of particular interest to us is Luke's treatment of tax collectors. Jewish tax collectors made their income by collecting more than what the Roman Empire required, so the tax collector collecting *nothing* beyond what was assigned would have no personal income at all; he would simply be dependent henceforth on the covenant community. The kingdom of God calls for this kind of action. Can both individual and faith community take such stands together against the pain of communities and structural injustice? For we, too, must confront deep structural problems in the relations between peoples, resulting for instance in prostitution, child indenture, etc. but stemming from oppression, despair and hostility. John the Baptist addresses people in various professions, just as we must. He does this publicly, in the hearing of all, just as Christian reflection on the various segments of the marketplace should happen in the hearing of all. Although the precise form of obedience does not look the same for all, I believe we are on firm ground in saying on the one hand that the underlying principles of the kingdom – repenting from materialism, being generous with others, even addressing structural injustice – must be present, and on the other, there must be context-specific forms of obedience, usually involving self-restraint, sacrifice, and community.

A word must be said about 'systemic' or 'structural' forms of injustice. Often in our contemporary context, we address people as part of but distinct from a 'system' of injustice. This has some accuracy, and Scripture demonstrates sensitivity to such issues, not least with the tax collectors in Luke's Gospel. We will spend much time discussing ideologies and institutions in chapter four because I think it is valid to critique such things from a Christian standpoint. However, as totalizing and rigid we may feel a system is, ultimately Scripture does not allow people to blame a 'system.' In their preaching, John the Baptist and Jesus personalize injustice. Tax collectors perpetrate injustice, not because the Roman government sets up these conditions which make it inevitable that some Jews become tax collectors and skim off the top of their own people. No: tax collectors perpetrate injustice because *they choose to do so*. Some people are oppressed because other people *choose* to oppress them. This approach, while not blind to the complexities of systemic incentives, tendencies and abuses, personalizes the injustice so that the person addressed by the word of God must choose to obey or disobey, but she cannot fundamentally place the responsibility elsewhere. She must acknowledge her culpability and repent. And she is called, not to find another profession and thereby to simply open the door for another tax collector to take her place, reinforcing the power of the 'system,' but to absorb the injustice *within her own person*. The tax collector is called to stay and make nothing. Among North American evangelicals, this is a generally underappreciated point. The example of the tax collectors shows us that while injustice *can* indeed be mitigated by systemic policy change, injustice *must* be personalized. A person's professional life is still a part of his or her *person* and the preaching of the gospel treats people not as dichotomous entities with private versus public personas but as one integrated whole. Christian leadership must bring theological and sociological analysis together to disciple not only *people* – implicitly pulling them out of certain jobs and roles when the tension becomes too great – but *people within structures*.

This theme continues and deepens as Jesus amplifies this teaching on wealth. But presumably, Jesus agreed with his cousin's teaching here. Similarly, Luke's Gospel will climax with Jesus commissioning his disciples to proclaim 'repentance' to the nations (Lk.24:47). Christian mission is of permanent value, and permanently carries this message. Luke defines 'repentance' very clearly throughout his Gospel. Alongside ethnocentric exclusivism,

the only other major sin Jesus targets for repentance is materialism. Not even pride, which is more commonly made the target of repentance in the individualistic Christianity of the West, gets mentioned with any comparable frequency. Luke means something much more social, tangible and concrete by this expression, so this misreading of Luke, shaped by the long accommodation of materialism and ethnocentric exclusivism by Christians, is unfortunate. While ‘repentance’ in Luke 24 may very well mean more than repenting of materialism in its many dimensions, it certainly does not mean less.

The Teaching of Jesus on Wealth: The Twelve (Lk.6:12 – 49)

The next major occurrence of the theme of wealth is Jesus’ Sermon on the Plain. After the Pharisees were ‘filled with rage’ over his healing on the Sabbath, Jesus prepares his twelve disciples to give up their financial mooring in national Israel. Jesus teaches his followers to expect persecution and extreme forms of sacrifice, at least in part because the full-scale rejection of Jesus by Israel’s leadership is now beginning.

Jesus therefore says, ‘Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God’ (Lk.6:20). This is quite different from Matthew’s ‘poor in spirit.’ Without question, Luke has in mind people who are materially poor. But Jesus’ benediction falls not on ‘the poor’ as a general class of people, but on his particular audience – the disciples, the ‘you’ – who were poor ‘on account of the Son of Man’ (6:22), i.e. *because they followed Jesus*. It is appropriate for Jesus to call his disciples ‘you who are poor.’ Both the fishermen and Levi ‘left everything’ and ‘followed him’ (5:11, 28). This fact is mentioned again in 18:28 concerning the twelve. Jesus makes that benchmark an explicit challenge for all in 14:33, ‘None of you can be my disciple who does not give up all his own possessions.’

Jesus is inviting others to leave the multitude and join his community of disciples. Although he addresses the disciples, he speaks within hearing of ‘a great throng of people’ who are distinguished from the disciples (6:17-19). Initially, he praises his disciples for leaving behind their wealth, and even their ancestral lands, to follow him. Jesus bestows on them the long-awaited ‘kingdom of God.’ The four beatitudes climax with a comparison of Jesus’ disciples with ‘the prophets’ (6:23) of old, Israel’s heroic men and women who suffered immensely at the hands of Israel’s unrepentant leaders. He then pronounces four woes on those in the crowd who are rich, well-fed, laughing, and honored. Jesus is presumably addressing those who are not yet his disciples who fit aspects of that description.

However, hostile pressure from outside the community is not the only reason the disciples will suffer. Regardless of whether persecution breaks upon them or not, disciples will suffer because of Jesus’ radical ethic of giving. Jesus commands his disciples to love their enemies, do good to others regardless of how they treat them, give without demanding a return, and lend without expecting a return on the human level (6:27-38). Jesus does not say this to merely convict people of sin and emotionally drive them to the atonement. He delivers this amazing relational ethic because he expects it to characterize his community.

During this discourse, Jesus names two reference points as benchmarks for this type of self-giving life. Jesus’ first reference point is our own needs and desires; we are to treat others ‘as you want people to treat you’ (6:31). This is a helpful benchmark since we are usually more in touch with our own desires rather than the desires of others. We are often driven by a profit motive, whether the return is financial or comes in the form of emotional or social commodities, like status. It is challenging, however, since we are more inclined to treat others as they treat us and relate on the level of mere reciprocation. Jesus’ call is high because he calls us to treat others not as they treat us but as we would wish to be treated by them, even when they are treating us badly. Jesus’ second reference point is God’s character of mercy: ‘as your Father is merciful’ (6:36). Jesus calls his disciples to live in light of God’s mercy, which means not judging, giving and lending without expectation of return, doing good, and loving enemies. Jesus calls his disciples to manifest God’s character of mercy in them. We are to become both recipients and vessels of God’s mercy.

Because of this teaching of Jesus against lending at interest, but also because of other cultural and metaphysical views, Christians in the early and medieval periods took a strong stand against usury, the cornerstone of banking and the driving force of wartime and non-wartime technological and economic development. I will elaborate on that history in Part Three.

A comment on how we interact with this text is in order. Some Christians set aside Jesus’ teachings by separating the public and private roles that we play. Hence a Christian who is a credit card representative may feel she need only be willing to give to the homeless person on the street, because that is a private decision. But she feels that when she sits behind her desk, she is not a person who can or should listen to Jesus’ teaching and apply it. She feels instead that she can charge high rates of interest even of low-income families, claiming that Jesus’ teaching is absolutely infeasible in the ‘real world’ and impossible on a professional level. There is little serious wrestling with Jesus’ teaching in the arena of work. So too a Christian involved in military action against another people might be willing to apply Jesus’ teaching on loving enemies to his wife when they are having hard times, and his friends when he experiences some friction with them. But he feels he can set aside Jesus’ teaching on loving enemies and live by a different set of ethics when it comes to his role as a military professional.

We must not only remember the fact that today's professional institutions began as yesterday's personal initiatives, but that the main question is whether Jesus intended for us to compartmentalize our lives and apply his teaching merely to our 'private' lives. While the ultimate solutions to these situations are by no means simple, we will find ample reason to challenge this dichotomy. And it will cause us to struggle enormously with the current political and economic environment, but ultimately move us towards constructive engagement. The bottom line issue is whether there are areas of our lives that Jesus intended to remain beyond his teaching, and to that the answer is emphatically 'no.' No one is likely to gain new wealth by living out Jesus' teaching. In fact, no one living like this is likely to maintain a comfortable, predictable lifestyle. Yet this is exactly the type of life Jesus expects; it is the life he himself lived all the way up to his crucifixion. Jesus underscores the seriousness of his teaching by exposing as false those who call him, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what he says.

The Teaching of Jesus on Wealth: The Seventy (Lk.9:51 – 62)

In a narrative sequence involving the seventy (-two?) disciples, as distinct from the twelve, Jesus reiterates his teaching on wealth. Luke 9:51 – 62 seems to reflect a brief period of higher activity and recruitment before Jesus sends out of the seventy in Lk.10ff. While recruiting for the seventy, Jesus tells would-be followers that he, unlike the birds and the foxes of the original creation, has no place to lay his head (9:58). In other words, he has already disinherited himself from his tangible investment in national Israel, his family's land, and expects his disciples to do the same. If the references to 'birds of the air' and 'foxes' are political references to Gentile rulers and Herod's household,³ the meaning is only reinforced. Jesus expects his disciples to be at home *nowhere*, in no country whatsoever. In this passage, he suggests that one's family and inheritance must also be given up (9:59 – 62). In the mission within Israel, Jesus and his disciples are dependent upon hospitality. From town to town, that hospitality may or may not be offered (9:4 – 5, 53; 10:4 – 11, 38). While the same dependence on hospitality does not seem to be required among the Gentiles (after Lk.22:36?), the high level of vulnerability and flexibility demonstrated in the mission in Acts is still remarkable.

It is significant to see a thematic similarity between the calling of the twelve and that of the seventy. Prior to the calling of the twelve, John the Baptist calls people to repent of materialism (3:7 – 14) and Jesus does the same with regards to ethnocentrism (4:14-30), then the twelve disciples leave everything to follow Jesus (5:11, 28). The cycle involving the seventy is much shorter but nevertheless repeats the same themes. Prior to the calling of the seventy, Jesus calls people to repent of both materialism and ethnocentrism (9:51 – 62), and then the seventy leave everything to follow Jesus and proclaim the kingdom of God (10:4 – 8). Other patterns repeat in the experience of the twelve and the seventy as well.

This pattern suggests that Jesus' ethical teaching has a non-negotiable role in the evangelistic act, and must continue to do so in our speech today. The point is all the more telling in Lk.14:7 – 35, where Jesus tells the multitude that they must radically relativize family and forsake wealth in order to be his disciples. Jesus established the core values of his 'kingdom of God' community, and these became the pre-conditions people had to accept to become his disciples. This reverses the common Protestant tendency to proclaim 'the benefits of the atonement' first, leaving Jesus' ethics for later.

The Teaching of Jesus on Wealth: The Good Samaritan (Lk.10:25 – 37)

Jesus' familiar parable of the good Samaritan follows on the other side of the mission of the seventy. It appears to reflect the major question being asked after Jesus confronts the nation of Israel in a concerted and organized way through his seventy disciples. That question concerns the relation between Jesus and the foundation of Jewish society, the Law of Moses. Jesus' response, in short, is that he and his new movement stand in fundamental continuity with the Law and the expectation of the Prophets, though in a way that surprises his contemporaries.

Within the simplicity of the parable, Jesus touches on several major themes. First, Jesus once again provides another example of ethics being a necessary component of evangelism. The lawyer asks what he must do to inherit eternal life, which is synonymous with entering the kingdom. Jesus' response is multi-layered, but he first raises the ethical question of who a 'neighbor' is. Jesus radically extends the nature of covenant ethics. His portrait of being a 'neighbor' takes what Moses taught concerning relations within Israel (in Lev.18 – 19 or perhaps Genesis 42:18⁴) and extends it beyond Israel. To Jesus, political affinity, ethnicity, proximity, and personal familiarity have

³ T.W. Manson, *Sayings*, points out that during the intertestamental period, 'birds of the air' were a reference to the Gentile nations, perhaps beginning in Ezk.31:6, 13, and the 'fox' was a symbol for the Ammonites and Herod's family due to its Idumean origins. Thus, Jesus' labels Herod Antipas 'that fox' (Lk.13:32). See also Bailey, *Through Peasant Eyes*, p.24 – 25.

⁴ Preston Sprinkle raises the question of whether the phrase 'do this and you will live' is not a quotation from Leviticus 18:5 which is in the context of Israelite sexual holiness (Lev.18) and neighborliness (Lev.19) but a quotation from Genesis 42:18,

nothing to do with being a neighbor, since the Samaritan was not a political supporter of first century Israel in any meaningful way, was not regarded as ethnically akin to the Jewish man, did not live anywhere near him, and had never even met him before. Jews did not even regard Samaritans as part of their covenant community, so Jesus essentially takes what was to be the guiding ethic within the covenant community and makes it the guiding ethic facing outward as well. Jesus is saying, 'Love your enemy' in yet another way. Jesus says that whether one accepts this ethic is one major determinant (integrated into Jesus' overall kingdom teaching, of course) of whether one inherits the 'eternal life' of the kingdom of God.

Second, Jesus challenges the Jewish lawyer to embrace this hypothetical Samaritan as a full member of the covenant community. Jesus thus raises a larger ethnic question, whether Samaritans can fulfill the requirements for Jesus' kingdom as well as any Pharisaic lawyer can. This further confirms Jesus' commitment to breaking down ethnocentrism and nationalistic interpretations of the kingdom. It is part of a repeated pattern where Jesus explicitly challenges Jewish ethnocentrism by favorably holding up a Samaritan or Gentile (4:14 – 30; 17:11 – 17).

When contextualized into our world, and especially in the complex field of work, the parable of the good Samaritan has significant ramifications. Technology and organization have made it possible for Christians to assist people who are radically different from us, on the other side of the world, whom we have never met before. It is possible for us to be 'good Samaritans' in a way that other generations never had the opportunity to before. We can make contributions to relief agencies coping with natural disasters or diseases, no-interest loans to microbusinesses and communities struggling to survive, funds for medical and educational supplies for children in poverty, etc., without creating further entangling dependencies on the wealthy benefactor, usually for the benefactor's future benefit. Unlike the World Bank, or to a greater extent the U.S., which has given and continues to give 'aid' to developing countries with entangling economic, political, or military agreements, the Samaritan gives the injured Jewish traveler help that is directed purely towards getting him back up on his feet. It comes unconditionally. He writes a blank check, so to speak, to bear any expense necessary for the wounded man to receive care. This is how Jesus defines being a 'good neighbor.'

The Teaching of Jesus on Wealth: The Disciples and the Multitudes (Lk.12:13 – 34)

Jesus progressively brings about a division in Israel, accentuating his dissociation with national Israel's economic concerns by refusing to arbitrate the paramount financial dispute, the land inheritance between two brothers (12:14 – 15), delivering instead a surprising message against materialism (12:16 – 34). It is almost certain that the inheritance spoken of by the aggrieved brother is the family land inheritance.⁵ This episode is not explored thoroughly by Green and Johnson, who position the request within the context of Hellenistic-style (or even contemporary) materialism. They make this petitioning man seem merely over-acquisitive. This reductionism misses the point. The native context of this man's request is Jewish-style Mosaic justice involving one's legitimate portion of tribal land which would in turn demonstrate one's membership in God's true humanity, the humanity that inherits God's good land. This man is invoking nothing less than the Mosaic Law. And he is asking Jesus to uphold it as any good rabbi or teacher would. Yet Jesus sets this request aside. He uses it to springboard into his sternest sermon against materialism recorded in the Gospels (12:15 – 34), directed not only at the brother, but at 'them,' the entire crowd.

In this sermon, Jesus takes aim at 'every form of greed' (12:15). Whereas in 6:27 – 38, Jesus taught his disciples how to give, here in 12:13 – 34, Jesus teaches them how to acquire, and more impressively, how not to acquire. He calls a fool the hypothetical man who tried to build bigger barns so he could live a life of ease; he interprets anxiety over possessions as both the sin of greed and a lack of trust in God as the provider in His creation. Much more could be said about these things, but let us presume that Jesus includes in his critique the acquisitive greed that drives today's capitalism in all its forms. Jesus does not seem to think generosity in one's personal finances justifies lucrative acquisitions gotten through one's career, for he addresses the right ways of acquiring and not just giving. While Jesus does not advocate irresponsibility, and while he does not advocate doing away with barns and work altogether, neither does he seem to think highly of the desire to expand such things and such activities.

which is in the context of Joseph, disguised as an Egyptian, speaking to his brothers. In this story, Joseph is challenging his brothers to repent of their earlier sin of betraying a brother out of envy and for gain. Preston M. Sprinkle, *The Use of Genesis 42:18 (Not Leviticus 18:5) in Luke 10:28: Joseph and the Good Samaritan* (Aberdeen University, Program Unit: Scripture in Early Judaism and Christianity). If Jesus is alluding to Genesis 42:18, then he was speaking about being reconciled to long-lost brothers, which was certainly relevant to the Jewish-Samaritan situation of Jesus' day.

⁵ Moses stipulates the practice of inheriting tribal land from one's father. One's 'portion' was one's land inheritance in national Israel. This gave rise to the term 'my portion' in the Psalms. Conversely, when David was in exile and without an inheritance he spoke of YHWH Himself being his 'portion.'

Furthermore, Jesus again does not recognize a difference between public and private life, between professional interaction with money and private interaction with money, between the way we privately receive money (through family and gifts) and the way we professionally receive money (through work). His cultural context did not allow for such a division; a barn (12:18) was both professional and personal; anxiety to acquire and maintain (12:22 – 29) was both professional and personal. Of course, we might respond to Jesus' teaching here by introducing such distinctions, accusing Jesus of practicing a village sociology that no longer applies today. Yet any methodology that honors the text of Scripture must allow that tendency to be critiqued by Jesus in turn. The truth be told, the division between public and private life is an artificial cultural construct of the industrialized economy; it is what enables us to hide our acquisitive greed behind institutional and impersonal rationales like 'the market' or 'the invisible hand,' reducing the authority of Jesus to the 'private' realm of sex, intellectual ideas, and a few friendships.

We are not to ignore the physical world and physical needs, yet we are not to idolize financial security either. How are we to do this? First, we are to accept uncertainty. Surely Jesus' original disciples had to recognize that Jesus makes our relation to the creation different from Mosaic Israel's. In Luke 12:13 – 34 (and Mt.6:25 – 34), Jesus uses the language and concepts of the creation and Israel's sabbath (see the above chapter). We are not to be anxious about food and drink, but are to be like the ravens or sparrows who do not save anything but work for the food God makes available day by day (Lk.12:22 – 24, Mt.6:25). The argument goes even further in regards to clothing since lilies don't even work to be clothed so beautifully (Lk.12:25 – 29, Mt.6:28 – 30). What is challenging for us is that Jesus brings believers into a new sabbath-type state with new and slightly different implications about work pertaining to the old creation, as well as work pertaining to redemption. He says that God will provide for our needs like He did with Israel on their seventh day, their seventh year, and their jubilee year, with modification: God will do this *all the time*, and not necessarily through traditional agricultural provision alone. Our attention and energy is to now be riveted on the kingdom of God bursting forth through Jesus Christ (Lk.12:30 – 32, Mt.6:33), which is God's new work of redemption.

In light of this, we are, on some level, to be in a constant state of sabbath, having faith that God as our Father will provide for us (Lk.12:30 – 31, Mt.6:30). In both Matthew and Luke, the commands to store up treasure in heaven and not on earth are coupled with admonitions against anxiety, not because the church community can make guarantees to its members, but because we regard uncertainty as a normal way of life. We must accept the uncertainty of tomorrow, even when today has 'troubles' (Mt.6:34). If this word 'troubles' was indeed used by the Jews to describe the occasional storms that wiped out their crops, then we must conclude that although on a day-to-day basis our flow of provisions might be interrupted, nevertheless over the long haul, God will be faithful. Commands like these have to do with the adoption of a particular world-view, a world-view that does not reject the material world as unimportant. To the contrary, it is very important and our physical survival hangs on it! Otherwise Jesus would not have spoken at length about how God can be trusted to provide for our basic needs for survival. Rather, the world-view has to do with adopting an ethic of surprising sacrifice on behalf of others, especially those who ordinarily have nothing. These themes point us in a certain direction: a pilgrim outlook involving financial sacrifice and acceptance of uncertainty.

Second, we are to center our attention on *the poor* (Lk.12:33), in this case, any physically needy people we know about. We saw Jesus' concern for people's plight in the parable of the good Samaritan and we see it here once more. Jesus' affirmation of the physical created world leads, not to an affirmation of human civilization, but to a radical ethic of care for the poor at the expense of notions of 'civilization' and our participation in it. In this, Jesus is in fundamental agreement with the main thrust of Genesis 1 – 11, that 'creation theology' serves as a radical critique of 'human civilization' and the accumulation of wealth. 'Creation theology,' precisely because it is a concern for *all* humanity, focuses on the plight of the poor, that segment of humanity that is consistently forgotten. Thus, the bottom line of Christian ethical action in the marketplace and the political realm is the poor, which leads to a different orientation and different questions for the Christian to struggle with. How are the poor being served by this business plan? How can we bring and maintain employment opportunities to the poor? And so on. Serving the poor is more important than maximizing profits or stock value because civilization, and certainly the corporation, has no permanence. Our tendency to seek guarantees for ourselves by maintaining institutions like the corporation or the nation-state runs against embracing uncertainty and being committed to the poor. This is what a biblical 'creation theology' always requires.

This leads to the third principle: Jesus' disciples are to be, as much as possible, *conduits*, not *recipients*, of physical wealth and resources. Jesus clearly challenges savings here, and his language of storing up heavenly treasure by helping the poor indicates that he wanted his followers to give and sacrifice. It is not simply a matter of 'having one's heart right,' while holding onto all one's wealth in actuality. It is a matter of actual *giving*.

The question that must be asked at this point is: Can Jesus' teaching become an ethic that stabilizes the socio-economic order? Or an ethic that undergirds a 'public theology'? I will take the contemporary Catholic social teaching of seeking the 'common good' as representative of a theological tradition that attempts to do this. Seeking

the ‘common good’ of humanity is Catholic language for framing the church’s involvement in the world. In later chapters, we will more thoroughly evaluate this concept put forward by contemporary Catholic social ethicists. I admire it for many reasons: it invites Christians into action using love as a motivation; it seeks to broadly impact the world and bring about progressive change; it presents humanity as a community; it portrays God as being concerned for the world; it attempts to prioritize the human over the economic, the moral over the material, etc. However, I find two difficulties with this concept. First, the definition of the ‘common good’ is rather amorphous; it tends to be a term that is filled with varying content and direction. For example, what is the ‘common good’ from a corporate or political standpoint, when scarce resources need to be allocated between competing needs, when the unborn may need to be weighed against the elderly, the individual may need to be weighed against the family, when historic injustice has not been adequately addressed, when conflicting definitions of injustice are present, or when the physical, emotional, social, and spiritual needs of people need to be weighed against each other even though they cannot truly be compared? In fact, by definition, seeking the ‘common good’ is an attempt to maximize both the amount of good we experience and the number of people who experience it. The problem, as all mathematicians and thoughtful decision-makers understand, is that it is impossible to maximize two variables at once.

Secondly, and more significantly, seeking the ‘common good’ can lead to a consequentialist, ‘the end justifies the means’ approach to Christian ethics. For example, many Christians attempt to justify war by superficial ‘calculations’ of what act of mass destruction will produce the ‘common good,’ despite Jesus’ call for his disciples to love their enemies. So too, work in industrialized and post-industrial societies can take on too much importance in this framework, since it offers new levels of power and wealth to humanity, which most will surely consider ‘good.’ It can also lead to an insistence on institutional stability and permanence, or even tampering with humanity’s genetic make-up. But it is doubtful that Jesus saw socio-economic progress on the global level and its upkeep to be a charitable goal or even ‘the common good.’ He knew that this, too, is what ‘the nations of the world seek’ (12:30). Instead, it is much more likely that Jesus would say that what is good for his disciples is good for all: an attitude towards work as an activity needed for daily self-sustenance, in whatever working arrangements we find ourselves in (perhaps corresponding with ‘give us each day our daily bread’ in Lk.11:3), selling, giving to the poor, storing up spiritual treasure through acts of generosity and sacrifice, and dependence on God as provider (12:28 – 34). That is, to Jesus, the ‘common good’ for humanity is to witness and embrace the *absolute good* he demonstrates through his disciples. He calls his disciples to live out the *absolute good* he has taught. He calls us to allow him to manifest the *absolute good* through us, that others may embrace his life and ethic as well.

The Teaching of Jesus on Stewardship: The Disciples and the Multitudes (Lk.12:35 – 48)

The language of ‘stewardship’ now appears in 12:35-48. In anticipation of a more thorough study of ‘stewardship’ in the New Testament, let us briefly examine this passage. After delivering this lengthy sermon on sacrificing wealth, he warns of his coming as the Son of Man into Jerusalem (12:40). He warns every Jew of his day in Luke 12:35 – 48 to be an alert steward. It is significant that this passage occurs immediately after the teaching on material wealth in 12:13 – 34, just as those themes are linked together in 16:1 – 31. This passage and others like it have been interpreted as references to the second coming of Christ, thus putting Christians in the position of the steward. Recent scholarship, however, has identified this passage as having in mind Jesus’ immediate vindication as Yahweh’s anointed king, once again putting *the Jews* in the position of the steward,⁶ in agreement with our interpretation of Lk.16:1 – 8.

Since Jesus’ identity as the Son of Man of Daniel 7 will be vindicated by the destruction of Jerusalem prophesied in Daniel 9:26, Jesus likens his sudden arrival in Jerusalem to a master coming back from a wedding feast and a thief breaking into a house at night (Lk.12:35 – 40, note the prediction of his foot washing in the upper room in v.38), and *Israel* will thus be divided along their response to Jesus. There will be Jesus’ own apostles who are faithful stewards among the Jews that will be put in charge of all Jesus’ possessions (12:42 – 44) and there will be those Jews who were not ready for Jesus who will be assigned a theological place with the unbelievers, who will be dealt punishments appropriate to the magnitude of their disobedience (12:45 – 48), suggesting that the more revolutionary the Jewish resistance to Rome is, the more devastating will the consequences be.

While this passage has commonly been taken to refer to false Christians in leadership roles being cast into disgrace or even hell, N.T Wright has argued persuasively that Jesus is referring to Jews who do not heed him, who launch revolutionary activity against Rome against Jesus’ admonition to desist. The Romans will cut them into pieces and take their nation away. They will be assigned a place with the Gentile unbelievers. We can be confident that Jesus is referring to his Jewish contemporaries because ‘on the same occasion’ (13:1), Jesus makes a comparison between a past catastrophe and one coming *upon Jerusalem*. Thus he compares the insurrectionist Galileans, not to

⁶ N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*. (Fortress Press: Minneapolis MN. 1996).

Christians who were yet future relative to Jesus, but to all Jesus' own contemporaries 'who live in Jerusalem' and need to 'repent' (13:1 – 5). Clearly Jesus has the people of Jerusalem in mind. Their fate hinges on their response to Jesus in the most immediate sense. He later warns the disciples, 'When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then recognize that her desolation is at hand...and Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled' (21:20). The destruction of Jerusalem would be the vindication, or proof, of Jesus' claim that he was indeed its appointed and rejected King. All this is to say that Jesus' label of 'steward' in Luke 12 and 16 refers to his Jewish contemporaries. His warning, 'From everyone who has been given much shall much be required, and to whom they entrusted much, of him they will ask all the more,' (12:48) suggests a stripping away of Israel's national privileges.