

CHAPTER 28: The Gospels Part 6

A few days go by following the Jew's attempt to kill Jesus. Things cool down a bit. Once again Jesus and His disciples are out walking in the streets of Jerusalem. They pass by a blind man who is begging on the street. It's common knowledge that this man has been blind since birth. The disciples ask Jesus why the man was born blind. Was sin the root cause? **Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but he was born blind so that the acts of God may be revealed through what happens to Him. We must perform deeds of the One who sent Me as long as it is daytime. Night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world."** (John 9:3-5) Jesus knows what He's about to do. He is going to heal this man. As the "light of the world" Jesus is about to shed light into this man's eyes for the very first time.

Jesus spits on the ground and makes some mud with His saliva. He takes the mud and smears it on the blind man's eyes. He then instructs the man to go wash in the pool of Siloam. The man exercises his faith in Jesus by going to the Pool of Siloam and doing exactly as Jesus instructed him. The result – he can see! What a miracle!

You can imagine the shocked look on the faces of all the people who know this man. They've seen him for years blind and begging. And now, well, just look at him! Some of the people are in disbelief. They think that he must be another guy, someone that just looks like the blind man. There's no way this can be the same guy. But the man insists, "No, I'm the guy you remember who used to be blind! Now, I can see!"

So they asked him, "How then were you made to see?" (John 9:10) He recounts what happened to him: **"The man called Jesus made mud, smeared it on my eyes and told me, 'Go to Siloam and wash.' So I went and washed, and was able to see."** John 9:11 The Gospel writer, John, adds that it is on the Sabbath that Jesus heals this man, which becomes an important part of the story.

The man's friends take him to the Pharisees. They know how their religious leaders feel about Jesus. The Pharisees question the man who again tells the story about how Jesus healed him. And what's their reaction? **Then some of the Pharisees began to say, "This man [Jesus] is not from God because He does not observe the Sabbath." But others said, "How can a man who is a sinner perform such miraculous signs?" Thus there was a division among them.** (John 9:16) After

intensely questioning the man and his parents, the Pharisees still don't know what to think. So they call the man back in for another round of questioning. It goes like this...

Pharisees: "Admit it. We know that this man Jesus is a sinner."

Man: "I don't know whether or not He is a sinner. What I DO know is that I was blind, but now I see."

Pharisees: "How did He heal you? What did He do?"

Man: "I already told you all that, but you would not listen to me. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become His disciples too?"

Pharisees: "How dare you! WE are disciples of Moses. We know God spoke to Moses, but as for Jesus, we have no idea where He came from!"

Man: "Why, this is a truly amazing thing! You do not know where Jesus came from and yet HE opened my eyes!"

The man then says something that the religious leaders cannot refute. He says that the gift of eyesight Jesus gave him is something only God can do. He concludes, **"If this man were not from God, He could do nothing."** (John 9:33) In other words, what Jesus did proves that He IS from God, whether you choose to believe it or not! Having lost the argument... **They replied, "You were born completely in sinfulness, and yet you presume to teach us?" So they threw him out.** (John 9:34)

Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, so He found the man and said to him, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" The man replied, "And who is he, Sir, that I may believe in Him?" Jesus told him, you have seen Him; He is the One speaking with you. [The man] said, **"Lord, I believe," and he worshiped [Jesus].** (John 9:35-38)

Jesus points out the irony of this situation. Here you have a man who, when the day began, was blind. Now, not only can he see with his physical eyes, but his spiritual eyes have been opened as well. Meanwhile the Pharisees who have been given all God's light through divine revelation, the Scriptures, remain spiritually blind!

It is to a small group of Pharisees standing outside the temple complex that Jesus delivers one of His greatest teaching moments – the Good Shepherd Discourse (John 10). Jesus presents Himself as the good Shepherd, the true shepherd of the sheep standing in stark contrast to the false shepherds of Israel. This message is filled with profound truth.

Jesus uses two metaphors to describe Himself. The first is that of a door. **So Jesus said to them again, "I tell you the solemn truth, I am the door for the**

sheep... I am the door. If anyone enters through Me, he will be saved, and will come in and go out, and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come so that they [the sheep] may have life, and may have it abundantly." (John 10:7,9-10) The shepherd literally becomes the door. He lies down across the entrance of the sheepfold protecting his flock. None of the sheep can go out except through Him. Likewise nothing harmful from the outside can enter the fold.

Jesus next identifies Himself as the shepherd who leads His sheep. He says, **"I am the good Shepherd. The good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep... I am the good Shepherd. I know My own and My own know Me – just as the Father knows Me and I know the Father – and I lay down My life for the sheep."** (John 10:11,14-15) Jesus is a Shepherd who loves His sheep enough to die for them!

His last statement leaves all who are listening to Him scratching their heads. Jesus says, **"This is why the Father loves Me – because I lay down My life, so that I may take it back again. No one takes it away from Me, but I lay it down of my own free will. I have the authority to lay it down, and I have the authority to take it back again. This commandment I received from My Father."** (John 10:17-18)

Another sharp division took place among the Jewish people because of these words. (John 10:19) Some in the crowd think that Jesus is crazy. Others believe He is demon-possessed. Still others aren't quite sure what to make of Jesus. With that, Jesus departs Jerusalem and heads home with His disciples back to Galilee.

After a few months in Galilee, Jesus and the Twelve make their way back to Jerusalem for the Feast of Dedication (another name for Hanukkah). This time they take the most direct route due south through Samaria. If you recall, the first time Jesus visited Samaria He had a very positive experience. The entire town of Sychar had embraced Him. But this time Jesus is not received as well. The people of one Samaritan village (unnamed) shun Jesus and refuse to welcome Him to their town. **Now when His disciples James and John saw this, they said, "Lord, do You want us to call fire to come down from heaven and consume them?"** (Luke 9:54) Jesus rebukes them for their wrong attitude and they continue on their way.

After they cross the border from Samaria into Judea, Jesus commissions 70 of His followers for a task. We are not told much at all about who these 70 are. They are apparently from the region of Judea and are convinced that Jesus is the promised Messiah. Jesus sends the 70 out in pairs just as He had done previously with the original twelve. He gives them the same instructions that He had given to His disciples before. Their mission is to go to various towns throughout Judea and Perea and prepare the way for Jesus. They are to preach that the kingdom of God is close at hand. Jesus warns them that not every town is going to accept their message. Whenever they are

rejected they are to pronounce judgment on that place. The 70 go off for a short period and return at a pre-determined time to a designated location. They are filled with much joy and they all give Jesus a positive report.

As Jesus nears Jerusalem He is approached by a scribe, an expert in the Jewish religious law. The scribe is aware of Jesus' reputation. The two engage in a theological discussion. **Now an expert in religious law stood up to test Jesus, saying, "Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" [Jesus] said to him, "What is written in the Law? How do you understand it?"** (Luke 10:25-26) The scribe gives a really good answer. He summarizes the law as follows: **"Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and strength"** (Deuteronomy 6:5); and **"You shall love your neighbor as yourself"** (Leviticus 19:18).

Jesus said to him, "You have answered correctly; do this and you will live." (Luke 10:28) In other words, if he will keep the law perfectly as God requires, then he will inherit eternal life. Well, rather than admit his inability to keep the Law perfectly and confess his inadequacy, the scribe tries to justify himself. He asks Jesus, **"Who is my neighbor?"** (Luke 10:29) Jesus' answer to his question is the Parable of the Good Samaritan...

A traveler is attacked and beaten up by robbers. They take everything the man has and leave him to die. Two religious Jews, a priest and a temple assistant, walk by at different times. They both see the injured man but keep right on walking. They don't want to get involved. The robbers might still be around. And besides they have other important things that need tending to. A third person, a Samaritan passes by. As we have noted before the Jews and Samaritans hate each other. This Samaritan sees the helpless man. He has compassion on him and stops to render aid. He bandages the injured man's wounds and loads him onto his donkey. He then takes the man to a nearby inn and pays the innkeeper to give him a room and to take care of him until he returns.

Jesus asks the scribe, **"Which of these three, do you think became a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?"** The expert in religious law said, **"The one who showed mercy to him."** (Luke 10:36-37a) Again he is correct. **So Jesus said to him, "Go and do the same."** (Luke 10:37b) According to Jesus, then, the answer to the scribe's question, "Who is my neighbor?" is ANYONE we come in contact with in the course of our everyday lives. It could even be a total stranger!

Jesus and His disciples enter the village of Bethany. It is located just east of Jerusalem on the backside of the Mount of Olives. They are invited into the home of two women, Mary and Martha. Martha busily prepares the food and serves her guests. Mary, on the other hand, sits intently listening to Jesus. When Martha voices her

displeasure about Mary not helping her out... **But the Lord answered her, “Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things, but one thing is needed. Mary has chosen the best part; it will not be taken away from her.”** (Luke 10:41-42) In other words, Mary is doing the right thing by focusing on Jesus.

While in Bethany Jesus and His disciples find a secluded spot on the edge of the Mount of Olives overlooking the city of Jerusalem. There Jesus teaches His twelve disciples. He provides a basic pattern for prayer and then tells them to persist in their prayers. **“So I tell you, Ask and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and the one who knocks, the door will be opened.”** (Luke 11:9-10) Jesus assures them that God really is listening.

Jesus and the disciples make their way down the Mount of Olives and into Jerusalem. Crowds of people are arriving for the Feast of Dedication. When they see Jesus, they gather around Him. Jesus continues to heal people. He casts out a demon from a man. He heals a woman who had been bent over for 18 years – straightens her up. This second miracle is done on the Sabbath. Once again, it stirs up the Pharisees.

During the Feast of Dedication Jesus teaches many important truths and parables. Let me summarize just a few: He teaches against hypocrisy and materialism. In the Parable of the Rich Fool Jesus illustrates that an abundance of material possessions will not provide life with real meaning. He teaches not to worry – **“And do not be concerned about what you will eat or drink. Do not worry about it.”** (Luke 12:29) He talks about seeking first the kingdom of God – **“Seek the kingdom of God above all else, and He will give you everything you need.”** (READ Luke 12:31) He then illustrates the kingdom of God in the Parable of the Mustard Seed. So Jesus does a lot of teaching during this festival in front of large audiences.

While outwardly things may seem to be going well, inwardly Jesus’ heart is breaking. He laments over Jerusalem: **“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those who are sent to you! How often I have longed to gather your children together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you would have none of it! Look, your house is forsaken!”** (Luke 13:34-35) Despite Israel’s failure to heed the many warnings by her prophets and her rejection of Jesus, by and large, He is filled with compassion for the nation. He grieves over the people’s lost condition.

Later that week Jesus is walking by Himself in the temple complex. The crowds have dissipated. **The Jewish leaders surrounded Him and ask, “How long will You keep us in suspense? If You are the Christ, tell us plainly.” Jesus replied, “I told you and you do not believe. The deeds I do in My Father’s name testify about**

Me.” (John 10:24-25) Where have these guys been? Jesus has been showing them signs that He is from God over and over again. He has claimed to be the Messiah and strongly implied that He is equal with God. The Jewish religious leaders know all of this. But they have rejected Jesus’ claims and even tried to silence Him.

It is in this setting, talking to these religious leaders, that Jesus delivers one of His most well-known discourses... **“But you refuse to believe because you are not My sheep. My sheep listen to My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish; no one will snatch them from My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all, and no one can snatch them from My Father’s hand. The Father and I are one.”** (John 10:26-30)

When they hear Jesus say that, the Jewish leaders have had enough! They pick up stones to throw at Jesus. For a third time they conclude that Jesus is committing blasphemy claiming equality with God. And for the second time they try to kill Him. But God’s hand stops them and Jesus gives them this parting admonition: **“If I do not perform the deeds of My Father, do not believe Me. But if I do them, even if you do not believe Me [My words], believe the deeds, so that you may come to know and understand that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me.”** (John 10:37-38) The Jewish leaders try to seize Jesus but He escapes their clutches and is gone!

From Jerusalem, Jesus and His disciples head east into the region of Perea. This is the same wilderness beyond the Jordan that John the Baptist had ministered in years before. When the people discover where Jesus is located... **Many came to Him and began to say, “John [the Baptist] performed no miraculous sign, but everything John said about this man [Jesus] was true!” And many believed in Jesus there.** (John 10:41-42) Unlike the earlier crowds, this group is not going out to Jesus just to watch the show. They are not there only to see Jesus perform miracles. They really want to hear what Jesus has to say. Many of them express a sincere desire to become Jesus’ disciples.

Jesus offers His potential followers full disclosure: **“If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his own father and mother, and wife and children, and brothers and sisters, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple. Whoever does not carry his own cross and follow Me cannot be My disciple.”** (Luke 14:26-27) Jesus is NOT advocating a spirit of hatred. Rather, He is stressing the importance of not having divided loyalties. The cost of discipleship, of following Jesus, means changing one’s priorities. It may require giving up other relationships and other commitments. For some it might even mean giving up their own life. In other words, Jesus is telling them, “Before you follow Me, be sure to count the cost.”

Jesus travels around to various towns in the region of Perea teaching in parables. These parables primarily deal with the character of God. This is in response to the lack of love that Jesus sees in the Israelite people and in their leaders. He contrasts their lack of love with the compassionate and forgiving love of God. He does this in the Parable of the Prodigal Son. Here's how it goes...

A wealthy man has two sons. The younger son, lured by the things of the world, tells his father goodbye and leaves the love and comfort of home. Satisfied for a season, he eventually becomes empty. He finds himself in a spiritual drought, bankrupt and abandoned by his so-called friends. He gets a job feeding the pigs – the worst job for a Jew. While in the pig pen he comes to his senses. He realizes he would be much better off working as one of his father's hired hands than to be here. So he comes up with a plan. He'll return home to his father, confess his sin and ask to be hired on as one of his father's servants. The young man rehearses his speech and heads for home.

“So he got up and went to his father. But while he was still a long way from home his father saw him, and his heart went out to him; he ran and hugged his son and kissed him.” (Luke 15:20) The father's reaction to his younger son's return is not one of condemnation or reprimand. The father welcomes his son home. It doesn't matter to him what his son has done in the past. He's just thrilled to see that he's made it home safely. The father doesn't even consider making his son one of his hired hands. He is still his father's son. So the father celebrates his son's return and restores him to full fellowship. A happy ending, right?

But the story does NOT end there. The father has two sons.

When the younger son left, the older son had remained loyal to his father. So when the older son hears all the commotion and finds out that his younger brother is back, he becomes angry and resentful. He refuses to embrace his younger brother and to join in the celebration. The older son is so self-absorbed that he doesn't care that his younger brother has returned home safely. He basically tells his father, “You never threw a party for me!” The father explains that day in and day out he has poured out his blessings on his older son. But the son never appreciated all that he had. He had just taken it all for granted. The parable closes with these words... **“Then the father said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and everything that belongs to me is yours. It was appropriate to celebrate and be glad, for your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost and is found.’”** (Luke 15:31-32)

The real focus of this parable is not the two sons, but the father. He represents God. Both of his sons went astray in different ways. The father welcomed back his runaway younger son with open, loving, and non-condemning arms. And the father initiated an attempt at fellowship with his ungrateful older son. Just like God, the father

in this parable pours out his blessings on two undeserving recipients of his love. Here again Jesus teaches the very heart of a loving God for His faithless children.

Jesus teaches many more parables while in Perea. One of these is the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus. Lazarus is a poor beggar who daily stations himself at a rich man's gate. The rich man ignores Lazarus' plight and does nothing to help. Eventually both men die. Lazarus is carried by the angels to Abraham's side in heaven. The poor man winds up in hell in a place of torment. In this parable we find out why the rich man is in hell – he did not believe God. He would not listen to the prophets who proclaimed God's truth. He refused to follow God's plan for salvation. Instead he placed his faith entirely in himself and in his wealth.

While Jesus is teaching He suddenly receives word that His friend Lazarus has fallen deathly ill. This real life Lazarus is the brother of Mary and Martha whose home Jesus and the disciples had visited earlier when they were in Bethany. Lazarus and his two sisters apparently come from a well-to-do family. We know this because they live in a large house. So, while Jesus' friend Lazarus has the same name as the poor beggar in the parable, they are NOT the same person. Given this bad news, Jesus decides to remain in Perea for two more days before heading to Bethany.

The disciples know it will be dangerous for them to return so soon to the close vicinity of Jerusalem. The Jerusalem Jewish leaders had just tried to kill Jesus again. But Jesus is not at all concerned. He knows that God will protect Him until His mission has been completed. Jesus tells His disciples the reason they **MUST** go to Bethany: **“Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep. But I am going there to awaken him.”** Then the disciples replied, **“Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover.”** (Now Jesus had been talking about his death, but they thought He had been talking about real sleep.) Then Jesus told them plainly, **“Lazarus has died, and I am glad for your sake that I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.”** So Thomas (called Didymus) said to his fellow disciples, **“Let us go too, so that we may die with him [Jesus].”** (John 11:11-16) And with that they head to Bethany.

By the time Jesus arrives in Bethany, Lazarus has been in the tomb for four days. Martha hears that Jesus is approaching Bethany. She rushes off to meet Him. Mary, unaware of this, remains in the house. When Martha sees Jesus she expresses remarkable faith in Him. **Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that whatever you ask God, God will grant You.”** (John 11:21-22)

Jesus replied, “Your brother will come back to life again.” (John 11:23) Martha thinks Jesus is talking about a future resurrection in the end times. But that is not what Jesus is talking about. **Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. The**

one who believes in Me will live, even if he dies, and the one who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?" [Martha] replied, "Yes Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God who comes into the world." (John 11:25-27)

When Mary finds out that Jesus has returned, she, like her sister, rushes off to meet Him. Mary falls at Jesus' feet weeping and, like Martha she expresses her belief that Jesus could have prevented Lazarus' death by healing him. But Jesus doesn't answer Mary. Instead He surveys the scene.

When Jesus saw her [Mary] weeping and the people who had come with her weeping, He was intensely moved in spirit and greatly distressed. He asked, "Where have you laid him?" They replied, "Lord, come and see." Jesus wept. (John 11:33-35) Here we can see the humanity of Jesus on display as He mourns the loss of His friend. Some of the Jews standing around interpret Jesus' tears as tears of regret for not having healed Lazarus. But that is not what is going on here!

As Jesus looks around, He sees the devastating result of mankind's sin. Death and the sadness, grief, pain and suffering it causes are evident all around. The crowd gathered is a mixed group. Many of them, like the Pharisees, have rejected Jesus and even been hostile toward Him. Some, like Martha and Mary and the disciples, have believed in Jesus. But most of the people here are apathetic about Jesus. These are the nameless, faceless people on the periphery. But they are not unknown to Jesus. They all matter to Him. Jesus has come from heaven to earth on a divine mission to save sinners. And so here in this place filled with death, Jesus weeps for broken people everywhere who are spiritually hurting or dead.

Jesus orders that the stone covering the entrance to Lazarus' tomb be removed. Martha states the obvious. In the sweltering heat the decomposition of Lazarus' body will be quite advanced and give off a foul odor. But Jesus calms her concerns. **So they took away the stone. Jesus looked upward and said, "Father, I thank You that You have listened to Me. I knew that You always listen to Me, but I said this for the sake of the crowd standing around here, that they may believe that You sent Me."** (John 11:41-42)

Consider the crowd standing there. Many of them do NOT believe in Jesus. What they are about to witness should change that! **When He had said this, He shouted in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!"** (John 11:43) Lazarus steps out of the tomb covered in burial cloths from head to foot. **Jesus said to them, "Unwrap him and let him go."** (John 11:44)

Lazarus is the third person to be raised by Jesus from the dead. The first two, the widow of Nain's son and Jairus' 12 year old daughter, had both been dead less than a

day. This time Jesus raises a man who has been dead for four days! This is truly remarkable! Hundreds of people witness it and many of them believe in Jesus.

But the Pharisees, what can we say about them? Despite this latest incredible miracle, one that many in them personally witnessed, they still refuse to believe in Jesus. **So the chief priests and the Pharisees called the council together and said, “What are we doing? For this man is performing many miraculous signs. If we allow Him to go on in this way, everyone will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away our sanctuary and nation.”** (John 11:47-48) They obviously fear the Romans more than they fear God. But the Pharisees’ reaction is not at all surprising, at least not to Jesus. He actually predicted this would happen.

Let’s go back to Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus. At the end of that story the rich man begs father Abraham to send someone from the dead, maybe even Lazarus, to his brothers to warn them so that they will not end up like him, in the flames of hell. **[Abraham] replied to him, “If they do not respond to Moses and the prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.”** (Luke 16:31) And so it is with the Pharisees. They have Moses and the prophets. They have all those Old Testament passages about the Messiah, which Jesus has been fulfilling right in front of their eyes for the past three years. They’ve heard all of Jesus’ claims. And yet, they remain unconvinced even though Jesus has just raised a man, ironically named Lazarus, from the dead!

Then one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said, “You [Pharisees] know nothing at all! You do not realize that it is more to your advantage to have one man die for the people than for the whole nation to perish.” (John 11:49-50) Basically what Caiaphas says is, “If we kill Jesus, we will save the nation. Jesus will be the substitutionary atoning sacrifice that will save our nation.” As we will see later, Caiaphas’ words here will actually end up being prophetic.

So from that day they (the Jewish religious leaders) planned together to kill Jesus. (John 11:53)