

## The Story of the Life of Christ – Lesson 21 The Ministry of Christ in Galilee –28 AD and 29 A.D.

In the last lesson we continued with the incidents and teaching that were scattered throughout Jesus' second Galilean ministry. This lesson is a continuation of the study of that period.

**Matthew 13:1-3a** **That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the lake. Such large crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat in it, while all the people stood on the shore. Then he told them many things in parables, saying:**

**Mark 4:1-2** **Again Jesus began to teach by the lake. The crowd that gathered around him was so large that he got into a boat and sat in it out on the lake, while all the people were along the shore at the water's edge. He taught them many things by parables, and in his teaching said:**

**Luke 8:4** **While a large crowd was gathering and people were coming to Jesus from town after town, he told this parable:**

As was Jesus' usual practice, He found teaching along the shore of the Sea of Galilee <sup>1</sup> was most practical. It provided a flat open space for the crowds to gather and unusually good acoustics in the early morning or early evening when the wind was usually still. There was also a road along the shore which provided easy access. First, He told the parable of the farmer sowing seeds.<sup>2</sup> For the many farmers in His audience the physical problems of getting seeds to take root and produce a harvest was an everyday problem. However, the real lesson Jesus was trying to teach was about spiritual things they didn't understand. First, He got them engaged in what He was saying by referring to a problem they faced every day. Jesus taught nearly every day in Galilee for two years, often to different audiences. This was almost certainly not the only time He told this parable.

**Matthew 13:3b** **“A farmer went out to sow his seed.**

**Mark 4:3** **“Listen! A farmer went out to sow his seed.**

**Luke 8:5a** **“A farmer went out to sow his seed.**

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<sup>1</sup> *It was also known as Lake Tiberius and Lake Gennesaret.*

<sup>2</sup> *Parables were not new to the teaching of God's word. Examples from the Old Testament can be found in Hosea 12:10, Proverbs 1:1-6, and Ezekiel 17:1. The Greek word translated “parable” is παραβολή {pä-rä-bo-lā'}. It comes from the combination of two Greek words which mean “to cast beside.” According to the Outline of Biblical Usage it is “a comparing, a comparison of one thing with another, a likeness, a similitude.”*

It might be useful to remember the importance of “the seed” in Scripture. In Genesis 3:15 the LORD promised that “the Seed of the Woman” would crush Satan’s head. Repeatedly afterward in Genesis the Messiah to come was spoken of variously as “the Seed of Abraham, the Seed of Isaac, and the Seed of Jacob.” Finally, in 2 Samuel, He was spoken of as the Seed of David. In this parable, the seed spoke of the Good News about Jesus Christ, who was the promised Seed.

**Matthew 13:4** As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds of the air came and ate it up.

**Mark 4:4** As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds *of the air*<sup>3</sup> came and ate it up.

**Luke 8:5b** As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path; it was trampled on, and the birds of the air ate it up.

The first problem with physical seeds was the birds. They would eat the unburied seed before it had a chance to germinate. Jesus would explain the spiritual application later.

**Matthew 13:5-6** Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root.<sup>4</sup>

**Mark 4:5-6** Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root.

**Luke 8:6** Some fell on rock, and when it came up, the plants withered because they had no moisture.

The next physical problem was when the seeds fell on infertile ground.

**Matthew 13:7** Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants.

**Mark 4:7** Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants, so that they did not bear grain.

**Luke 8:7** Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up with it and choked the plants.

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<sup>3</sup> The Greek words *τοῦ ὀὐρανοῦ* which mean “of the air” are in the *Textus Receptus*. They are not in the faulty *Codex Sinaiticus*.

<sup>4</sup> *Isaiah 11:1* “A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.”

The third problem was where the seed fell in ground which was full of competing plants.

**Matthew 13:8-9** Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop--a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. He who has ears, let him hear.”

**Mark 4:8-9** Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up, grew and produced a crop, multiplying thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times.” Then Jesus said, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”

**Luke 8:8** Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up and yielded a crop, a hundred times more than was sown.” When he said this, he called out, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”

That which fell on good soil bore much fruit.

**Matthew 13:10** The disciples came to him and asked, “Why do you speak to the people in parables?”

**Mark 4:10** When he was alone, the Twelve and the others around him asked him about the parables.

**Luke 8:9** His disciples asked him what this parable meant.

His answer was not only to the Twelve, but also to those others who were Jesus’ close followers. These other close followers included both men and women. By the time of His resurrection there were at least 500 who were true believers in Galilee. According to 1 Corinthians 15:5 that was the number that saw the resurrected Christ at one time. However, there were probably more than that, but not more than a few multiples of that. There were probably less than ten thousand believers in Galilee. According to estimates based on the histories of Flavius Josephus, the population of Galilee was probably about half a million people. That would have made about one out of fifty. The bulk of Jesus’ crowds on these occasions must have come from Galilee although we have already seen in the last lesson that others came from as far as a hundred miles away.

**Matthew 13:11-12a** He replied, “The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you (*believers*), but not to them (*unbelievers*). Whoever has will be given more, and he will have an abundance.

**Mark 4:11a** He told them, “The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you (*believers*).

**Luke 8:10a** He said, “The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of God has been given to you (*believers*),

Faith in the promise of the Messiah who was Jesus Christ was the key to unlocking the meaning of the Old Testament and its promise of the Kingdom of God.

**Mark 4:11b-12** **But to those on the outside (*unbelievers*) everything is said in parables so that, “they may be ever seeing but never perceiving, and ever hearing but never understanding; otherwise they might turn and be forgiven!”**

**Luke 8:10b** **but to others I speak in parables, so that, “though seeing, they (*unbelievers*) may not see; though hearing, they may not understand.’**

**Matthew 13:12b-15** **Whoever does not have, even what he (*even so-called experts in the Scripture like the Pharisees*) has will be taken from him. This is why I speak to them in parables: “Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand. In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah: “You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving. For otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.”**

Without the key of faith in the Redeemer, which the LORD had promised to send, nothing of the rest of the Scripture would be understood.

Below is the passage from Isaiah which the Lord Jesus quoted. The LORD had sent the prophet Isaiah to a rebellious and hard-hearted people were much like the Jews of Jesus’ day:

Isaiah 6:9-13 “He (*the LORD*) said, ‘Go and tell this people: ‘Be ever hearing, but never understanding; be ever seeing, but never perceiving.’ Make the heart of this people calloused; make their ears dull and close their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed.’<sup>5</sup> Then I said, ‘For how long, O Lord?’ And he answered: ‘Until the cities lie ruined and without inhabitant, until the houses are left deserted and the fields ruined and ravaged, until the LORD has sent everyone far away and the land is utterly forsaken. And though a tenth remains in the land, it will again be laid waste.<sup>6</sup> But as the terebinth<sup>7</sup> and oak leave stumps when they are cut down, so the holy seed will be the stump<sup>8</sup> in the land.”

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<sup>5</sup> This was also quoted by Paul in Acts 28:26-27.

<sup>6</sup> This seems to be speaking of the double destruction of Judah when after the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians, the remaining Jews left in the land by Nebuchadnezzar turned on each other and completed the devastation Jeremiah 40-43.

<sup>7</sup> This long-lived tree is the *Pistacia terebinthus palaestina*. It is common enough in Israel growing to a height of 35 feet - Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible.

<sup>8</sup> Isaiah 11:1 “A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.”

The generations after Isaiah's day kept getting worse and worse until, during the succeeding hundred and fifty years, the LORD had to destroy both the Northern Kingdom of Israel and Southern Kingdom of Judah. The generations of Jesus' day would meet a similar fate as Jesus' quotation of the passage seemed to prophesy.

**Matthew 13:16-17** **But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear. For I tell you the truth, many prophets and righteous men longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it.**

Jesus told His disciples that they were blessed to be eyewitnesses to “the key to the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven.” Many previous generations of believers would have envied them.

The meaning of the parable that Jesus told was only discernable to those who had the key. That key was that the material and physical things of this world were not nearly as important as a spiritual relationship with God. As Jesus then explained, the parable described four types of hearers of the Gospel of Christ:

**Matthew 13:18-19** **“Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is the seed sown along the path.**

**Mark 4:13-15** **Then Jesus said to them, “Don't you understand this parable? How then will you understand any parable? The farmer sows the word. Some people are like seed along the path, where the word is sown. As soon as they hear it, Satan comes and takes away the word that was sown in them.**

**Luke 8:11-12** **“This is the meaning of the parable: The seed is the word of God. Those along the path are the ones who hear, and then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe<sup>9</sup> and be saved.**

Here, the seed never took root in the heart of its hearer because Satan (the birds of the sky) had snatched it away with his lies about the nature of God. The hearers represented here clearly never believed.

**Matthew 13:20-21** **The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away.**

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<sup>9</sup> *The verb πιστεύσαντες {pis-too-antes} translated “believe” is an aorist active participle of the verb meaning believe. As an aorist it signifies the punctiliar nature of saving faith.*

**Mark 4:16-17** Others, like seed sown on rocky places, hear the word and at once receive it with joy. But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away.

**Luke 8:13** Those on the rock are the ones who receive the word with joy when they hear it, but they have no root. They believe for a while, but in the time of testing they fall away.

Here, the seed represented the Gospel which had been received by some with joy. However, because of lack of an enduring confidence, those who had received it had fallen away. The root they lack can only be provided by the Word of God. I have heard some Christian teachers dispute whether the people represented here were ever really saved, however Luke's account that they believed for a while indicates otherwise. In just the previous verse (Luke 8:12) Jesus flatly stated that those who truly believed at any point of time would be saved. I think any believer who has experienced a few years of observing almost any congregation of believers has seen those who fit this description.

**Matthew 13:22** The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful.

**Mark 4:18-19** Still others, like seed sown among thorns, hear the word; but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful.

**Luke 8:14** The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life's worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature.

The clear implication here is that the seed here (the Gospel) did germinate and take root in the hearer's life. The hearer became a believer but he never matured and bore fruit. However, he was a believer. The churches are also full of believers like this.

**Matthew 13:23** But the one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown."

**Mark 4:20** Others, like seed sown on good soil, hear the word, accept it, and produce a crop-- thirty, sixty or even a hundred times what was sown."

**Luke 8:15** But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop.

The fourth type of hearer of the Gospel firmly and persistently believed. Because of this they took firm root, matured and thus produced much spiritual fruit as a result.

For most of the crowd who had heard Jesus' parable, only the first part of the parable applied. They would always reject who Jesus was. For the disciples to whom Jesus explained the other three examples, they stood as a warning about what kind of believers they might be. They could be immature, worldly, and unfruitful. Or they could be mature, spiritual, and fruitful.

Jesus then told another parable.

**Mark 4:21-22** He said to them, “Do you bring in a lamp to put it under a bowl or a bed? Instead, put it on its stand? For whatever is hidden is meant to be disclosed, and whatever is concealed is meant to be brought out into the open.

**Luke 8:16-17** “No one lights a lamp and hides it in a jar or puts it under a bed. Instead, he puts it on a stand, so that those who come in can see the light. For there is nothing hidden that will not be disclosed, and nothing concealed that will not be known or brought out into the open.

In the context, Jesus had just disclosed the meaning of a parable to those of His listeners who pursued God's truth. By this parable, He was disclosing that all truth (light) was meant by God to be seen or understood by “those who come in” to the light. There were many mysteries in the Old Testament which could only be clearly understood by the light of Christ's life.

**Mark 4:23-24a** If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear.”<sup>10</sup> “Consider carefully what you hear,”

**Luke 8:18a** Therefore consider carefully how you listen.

This emphasized the importance of listening carefully to the Word of God. The intent of the listener should always be careful consideration and understanding.

**Mark 4:24b-25** he continued. “With the measure you use, it will be measured to you--and even more. Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him.”

**Luke 8:18b** Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what he thinks he has will be taken from him.”

The Greek word translated “measure” should be translated more specifically as “measuring cup.” They could either use the measuring cup of faith in which case they would be measured out more wisdom than they had ever expected. Or they could use the measuring cup of doubt in which case they would get nothing. This was the same principal that James taught in his epistle:

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<sup>10</sup> *Something like this had been part of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:15).*

James 1:5 “If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God,<sup>11</sup> who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That man should not think he will receive anything (*of wisdom*) from the Lord.”

Those who had ears that were eager to hear and understand would be blessed with understanding. Those who didn't have ears to hear were in danger of developing a hard heart which would become harder and darker.

**Mark 4:26a He also said, “This is what the kingdom of God is like.**

This was another parable that Jesus told to those disciples who had just heard His private explanation of the parable of the sower. It was only recorded in Mark.

**Mark 4:26b A man scatters seed on the ground.**

These disciples already knew from the previous explanation that the “seed” was the Word of God and the scattering was the preaching of the Word.

**Mark 4:27-29 Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. All by itself the soil produces grain--first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head. As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come.”**

The Word of God, planted in the soil of a willing heart, will grow and mature by the power of God in that heart until it brings forth fruit. The responsibility of the sower is to teach the truth. The result of that truth is the responsibility of God.

**Mark 4:30 Again he said, “What shall we say the kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it?**

Here was another parable with which Jesus explained the power of the Word of God in a willing heart. Again, in this parable the seed was the Word of God.

**Mark 4:31-32 It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest seed you plant in the ground. Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds of the air can perch in its shade.”**

**Matthew 13:31-32 He told them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all your seeds, yet**

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<sup>11</sup> Note Proverbs Chapters 1:20-3:35, particularly 2:1-6

**when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and perch in its branches.”**

Sometimes even just a very small word of truth can take root in a life and grow until it transforms it completely. I think the application for us is to never underestimate the power of even a small word or kindness from God’s love.

The question remains: To what are the “birds of the air” analogous? The term in Greek here is τὰ πετεινὰ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ. It can be translated two ways. It can be translated “the birds of the air” or it can be translated “the fliers from heaven.” I think the “birds” in this parable are analogous to the elect angels and the analogy refers to the principal described in Hebrews:

Hebrews 13:2 “Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it.”

I think that the analogy was saying that those who truly let that mustard seed of faith grow in their lives can not only have a testimony before men, but before angels.

**Mark 4:33 With many similar parables Jesus spoke the word to them (*the crowds*), as much as they could understand.**

In general, most of the numbers in the large crowds understood but little of the principles that Jesus was teaching through His parables. The problem was that they were mainly there for the healing and the miracles.

**Mark 4:34 He did not say anything to them without using a parable. But when he was alone with his own disciples, he explained everything.**

However, for those who had “ears to hear” (His disciples) He explained everything.

**Luke 7:1-6a When Jesus had finished saying all this in the hearing of the people, he entered Capernaum. There a centurion’s servant, whom his master valued highly, was sick and about to die. The centurion heard of Jesus and sent some elders of the Jews to him, asking him to come and heal his servant. When they came to Jesus, they pleaded earnestly with him, “This man deserves to have you do this, because he loves our nation and has built our synagogue.” So Jesus went with them.**

**Matthew 8:5-7 When Jesus had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to him, asking for help. “Lord,” he said, “my servant lies at home paralyzed and in terrible suffering.” Jesus said to him, “I will go and heal him.”**

This sets the scene in Capernaum on the northwest coast of the Sea of Galilee, which was Jesus’ home base during this period. The situation was that a centurion had a servant who was

suffering. Being a centurion made him an officer of the Roman occupation. That means the centurion would have been a Gentile. We know he must have been a Gentile because, although Jews would serve the Romans as mercenaries, they would not serve under the standard of the Roman Eagle. They considered that idolatry. The context also indicates that this man wasn't of the Jewish nation. This centurion could have originally been from any one of the numerous provinces under the Roman Imperium. Centurions customarily commanded about a hundred soldiers. This centurion was evidently very prosperous.

In reconciling these two accounts we run into a little bit of a problem. Matthew said that the centurion came to Jesus. Luke said that the centurion sent messengers to Him. Since we know scripture is accurate, how do we resolve this problem? Can they both be true? First, we need to understand the conflicting cultural currents and customs at play here. We must understand that the centurion was a man of authority who needed to preserve his dignity. He was used to people coming to him. We must also understand that according to the accepted Jewish practice of the time (though not in accord with the Law of Moses), if a Jew entered the house of a Gentile he would be defiled. Also, for a Gentile to enter the house of a Jew would defile the house. Also, we should probably understand that in close competition with the other considerations, the centurion was desperate to see the suffering of his beloved servant relieved.

The next thing to understand is Matthew and Luke wrote from two standpoints. Matthew had been an eyewitness of the event. Luke must have collected his broader account from other eyewitnesses when he visited Israel with Paul some twenty years later. Luke's witnesses might even have included the Centurion himself. I suspect that the centurion had become a believer, as he clearly was a Gentile who believed in who Jesus was. Luke may also have talked with him sometime during his other travels with Paul to Antioch or Rome.

With those facts in mind, this is my reconciliation of the account. I believe that first, the centurion, afraid that Jesus would not want to accept a petition from a Gentile, but mindful of his position of authority, sent the Jewish elders to lobby on his behalf. This is what Luke recorded. Then, after the Jewish elders had left, the Centurion, desperate for his servant, and deciding that he was willing to sacrifice his dignity on behalf of his servant, started off afterwards to plead with Jesus in person. This was the main thing that Matthew saw in person and recorded.

At that point, the centurion hurried back to his house to comfort his servant, but Jesus who was always surrounded by a press of people who wanted to touch him, came along much more slowly.

**Luke 7:6b-8 He was not far from the house when the centurion sent friends to say to him: "Lord, don't trouble yourself, for I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. That is why I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you. But say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I**

**tell this one, ‘Go,’ and he goes; and that one, ‘Come,’ and he comes. I say to my servant, ‘Do this,’ and he does it.”**

While the centurion was returning to his house to wait for Jesus to come he seems to have thought it over. He knew that he could extend his authority and power beyond his personal presence. So, he concluded that anyone with the authority like that which Jesus had demonstrated could also exercise His miraculous power from a distance. In this way Jesus wouldn't have to expose himself to the ever-present criticism of the Pharisees for entering the house of a Gentile. As a centurion and official of the Roman government, he was surely made aware of their constant plotting.

**Matthew 8:8-9 The centurion replied, “Lord, I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. But just say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, ‘Go,’ and he goes; and that one, ‘Come,’ and he comes. I say to my servant, ‘Do this,’ and he does it.”**

The centurion was aware that Jesus would be subject to great criticism if He entered the house of a Gentile. He sent his friends (probably the Jewish elders mentioned in Luke) back to Jesus with this message.

**Luke 7:9 When Jesus heard this, he was amazed at him, and turning to the crowd following him, he said, “I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel.”**

**Matthew 8:10 When Jesus heard this, he was astonished and said to those following him, “I tell you the truth, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith.**

Although Jesus was relieved of the prospect of incurring disapproval by entering the house of the Gentile centurion, He immediately risked greater disapproval. What He said next risked the violent outrage of the Jews.

**Matthew 8:11 I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.**

He told the Jews that Gentiles with faith had just as much a part of the Kingdom of God as the Jews. Such a message had almost gotten Him killed by the Jews in Nazareth about a year and a half earlier (Luke 4:16-30).

**Matthew 8:12 But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”**

He went on to warn them that many of them were in danger of being separated from God and the light of truth and condemned to that darkness (absence of truth) which is often used to describe Hell.

**Luke 7:10** Then the men who had been sent returned to the house and found the servant well.

**Matthew 8:13** Then Jesus said to the centurion, “Go! It will be done just as you believed it would.” And his servant was healed at that very hour.

Both the messengers and the centurion returned to the house and found that the servant was healed.

**Luke 7:11-12** Soon afterward, Jesus went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a large crowd went along with him. As he approached the town gate, a dead person was being carried out --the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. And a large crowd from the town was with her.

According to customary Jewish burial rites, the body of the young man was to be washed, wrapped in grave clothes (usually white linen) with a napkin over his face. At the same time spices were to be added within the wrappings. According to Jewish tradition this was to happen quickly, within the 24 hours of the death.<sup>12</sup> Then the body was to be taken to the tomb which was always outside of town. As a widow, with no surviving son she was likely to be dependent on the charity of the synagogue. Being poor, she probably could not afford to have her son’s body covered with spices and wrapped in bandages. At most, he might have been covered with a sheet as he lay on the bier. In Israel, it was considered unacceptable not to join a burial procession if one passed you on the road.<sup>13</sup> Jesus didn’t join this one, He stopped it.

**Luke 7:13-17** When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her and he said, “Don’t cry.” Then he went up and touched the coffin bier,<sup>14</sup> and those carrying it stood still. He said, “Young man, I say to you, get up!” The dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus gave him back to his mother. They were all filled with awe and praised God. “A great prophet has appeared among us,” they said. “God has come to help his people.” This news about Jesus spread throughout Judea and the surrounding country.

Luke’s account is the only record of this miracle in the Gospels. It is one of three times recorded in Scripture that Jesus raised someone from the dead. According to the best information we have, the village of Nain lay about 8 miles south of Nazareth in the Jezreel Valley and about 15 miles southwest of the southern tip of the Sea of Galilee. The funeral procession probably included at least a hundred people. Jesus’ retinue likely had at least as many as a hundred people, including both men and women. It probably consisted of most of the 120 who later

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<sup>12</sup> Evidently this custom was based on Deuteronomy 21:23 which indicated burial the same day kept the land from being desecrated.

<sup>13</sup> Summarized from Edersheim’s *Sketches of Jewish Social Life*.

<sup>14</sup> This is more accurately translated “bier” as the KJV, NRSV, and ASV have it. The bier was a couch or platform, it was not a box like a coffin.

gathered in the upper room (Acts 1:15). Although this miracle took place in Galilee, it was done in public witnessed by probably as many as two to three hundred people, many of whom were not disciples of Jesus. As such, it was hard to dispute. The later raising of the daughter of the Capernaum synagogue leader was done in private (Matthew 9, Mark 5, Luke 8). The news of this resurrection spread like wildfire all the way to Judea and even down to the prison cell of John the Baptist in the Fortress of Machaerus in the wilderness on the southern border of Perea east of the Dead Sea.

**Luke 7:18-20** **John's disciples told him about all these things. Calling two of them, he sent them to the Lord to ask, "Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?" When the men came to Jesus, they said, "John the Baptist sent us to you to ask, 'Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?'"**

**Matthew 11:2-3** **When John heard in prison what Christ was doing, he sent his disciples to ask him, "Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?"**

As Jesus was to make plain, John was an extraordinary believer. God had even given to him the privilege of having the extraordinary sign of speaking to him from Heaven and allowing him to see the Holy Spirit descend on Jesus:

Matthew 3:16 "As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he (*John the Baptist*) saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.'"

However, when Jesus came back out of the desert, things hadn't gone as John had always expected. Instead of being welcomed as one of Jesus' disciples, he was left by the side of road and his own ministry was put in the shade. After about a year, John was arrested and at the time of this incident John had spent about a year in prison. Nothing had gone quite how he had thought it would and his faith was shaken in spite of the sign the LORD had given him. If John the Baptist went through this, I think we should cut ourselves and others a little slack when we are little shaken by things not going quite as we expected.

Possibly John, like most of the Jewish world and even Jesus' own disciples, did not understand that it had always been the LORD's plan that the promised Messiah was to have two Advents. Before He could come as the King, He had to come to the Cross as the Promised Sacrifice and Redeemer.

Although, after the prophecies had been fulfilled, it was easy to look back, after the fact, and see that the Cross was prophesied time and again in the Old Testament, it was not all that clear before the fact. That was God's intention. That was why Satan unwittingly played a large part in bringing about the Cross and his own condemnation. Satan actually thought if that if he could kill Jesus and thus prevent Him from becoming God's King, He could thwart God's plan:

1 Corinthians 2:8 “None of the rulers of this age (*Satan and his demonic forces*) understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.”

**Luke 7:21-23** **At that very time Jesus cured many who had diseases, sicknesses and evil spirits, and gave sight to many who were blind. So he replied to the messengers, “Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor. Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me.”**

**Matthew 11:4-6** **Jesus replied, “Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk,<sup>15</sup> those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor. Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me.”**

We know that Jesus wasn't yet ready to make a public proclamation of who He was. He hadn't even yet made it plain to His twelve disciples and, when He told them, He told them to tell no one.<sup>16</sup> If He had told John's messengers “Yes, I am the Messiah.” they might have kept that word to themselves, but they might not have. However any communication they returned to John in his prison cell would have been intercepted by the jailers who worked for Herod Agrippa. So, instead of responding to John plainly, Jesus told John in a way in which John would understand. He referred to three passages from Isaiah which described the signs of the Messiah. They were:

Isaiah 29:18 “In that day (*when the Messiah comes*) the deaf will hear the words of the scroll, and out of gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind will see.”

Isaiah 35:5 “Then (*when the Messiah comes*) will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped.”

Isaiah 61:1 “The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me (*the Messiah*), because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners,

He told the messengers to go back to John and tell them that they had seen Jesus perform these signs. John would know what it meant. For him it would mean that Jesus' answer was “Yes, I am the one.”

**Luke 7:24** **After John's messengers left, Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John: “What did you go out into the desert<sup>17</sup> to see? A reed swayed by the wind?**

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<sup>15</sup> *Isaiah 35:5.*

<sup>16</sup> *Matthew 16:13-20, Mark 8:27-30, Luke 9:18-21*

**Matthew 11:7 As John’s disciples were leaving, Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John: “What did you go out into the desert to see? A reed swayed by the wind?”**

Jesus reminded the crowds that John hadn’t been someone who bent with whichever way the winds of public or political opinion were blowing. He always stayed on message. That was what had made him a true prophet.

**Luke 7:25 If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear expensive clothes and indulge in luxury are in palaces.**

**Matthew 11:8 If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear fine clothes are in kings’ palaces.**

Jesus reminded them that John had never profited from his preaching. By contrast, the Pharisees were all well off, and most of the Sadducees were wealthy. John was clothed simply with a camel’s hair coat and leather belt. His diet was locusts and wild honey.<sup>18</sup> He never even had a house, but camped by the pilgrim roads.

**Luke 7:26-27 But what did you go out to see? A prophet?<sup>19</sup> Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written: “I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.”**

**Matthew 11:9-11 Then what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written: “I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.”**

John was more than just a great prophet (preacher) of the Word of God. He was **the prophet** who had been foretold by the Prophet Malachi five hundred years before. It was foretold that he would come as the forerunner of the Christ:

Malachi 3:1 “See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me (*the LORD*).<sup>20</sup> Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple;<sup>21</sup> the messenger of the covenant,<sup>22</sup> whom you desire, will come,”<sup>23</sup> says the LORD Almighty.

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<sup>17</sup> John ministered in the desert (uninhabited places) at the Ford of the Jordan along the eastern bank of the lower Jordan River valley or at Aenon south of the Sea of Galilee and Beth Shan.

<sup>18</sup> Matthew 3:4, Mark 1:6.

<sup>19</sup> A prophet was “one who had a message from God.”

<sup>20</sup> Quoted by Jesus Christ in Luke 7:27 and Matthew 11:10.

<sup>21</sup> It could be argued that the term “his Temple” as used here may refer to the incarnate body of Christ which was His real Temple. In other words “coming to His Temple” may refer to His incarnation and birth.

Luke 7:28 **I tell you, among those born of women there is no one greater than John; yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.”**

Matthew 11:11 **I tell you the truth: Among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.**

How could the least in the kingdom of heaven be greater than John? Here, we have to remember that there are always two ways of expressing status. There is the worldly viewpoint and the Divine viewpoint. Jesus had already given the Divine viewpoint of John: “There is no one greater than John.” Here, in this last phrase about who was least, He expressed the human viewpoint. From the human viewpoint at that time John was worth nothing. John was languishing in a dungeon of Herod Antipas, with no wealth, no power, no name, and no rights. Furthermore, He was about to have his life taken away. Here Jesus was teaching the lesson that He repeated over and over. He who would be greatest must be the least, the servant of all. As the Lord told Paul:

2 Corinthians 12:9 “But he (*the Lord*) said to me (*Paul*), “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”

Matthew 11:12 **From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force. NRSV**

This isn't in Luke 7. Jesus was commenting on the violence of imprisonment and suffering being inflicted on John. The violent had no answer to the truth so violence was the only weapon they had left. They would soon wield it against Jesus and then against His disciples.

Matthew 11:13 **For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John.**

The truth that John preached was just an extension of all the truth written down from the days of Moses and the Prophets. The Law and the prophets had prophesied about the Messiah that was yet to come. John prophesied about the Messiah that had come.

Matthew 11:14 **And if you are willing to accept it, he is the Elijah who was to come.**

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<sup>22</sup> The “messenger of the covenant” was universally interpreted as referring to the Messiah. I believe it was more specifically referring to “the prophet” that the Lord promised Moses (Deuteronomy 18:17-19) which the Jews were looking for (John 1:21b, John 6:14).

<sup>23</sup> Also quoted in Mark 1:2.

For that generation of Jews, John the Baptist would be the forerunner of the Messiah, just as Elijah will be the forerunner of the Messiah for the Jews during the Tribulation before the Second Advent.

**Matthew 11:15** **He who has ears, let him hear.**

They had been given the truth with the power of the Spirit. It was up to them to decide whether or not to listen to it.

**Luke 7:29-30** **(All the people, even the tax collectors, when they heard Jesus' words, acknowledged that God's way was right, because they had been baptized by John. But the Pharisees and experts in the law rejected God's purpose for themselves, because they had not been baptized by John.)**

This comment isn't in Matthew 11. All those in that crowd acknowledged the greatness of John whose message had touched all of them. This was with the exception of the scribes and Pharisees there who had always rejected John's teaching and with it had rejected the meaning of their own lives.

**Luke 7:31-32** **“To what, then, can I compare the people of this generation? What are they like? They are like children sitting in the marketplace and calling out to each other: “We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not cry.”**

**Matthew 11:16-17** **“To what can I compare this generation? They are like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling out to others: “We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn.”**

I love the comment by Edersheim <sup>24</sup> on this passage: “The children of that generation expected quite another Elijah and quite another Christ, and disbelieved and complained, because the real Elijah and Christ did not meet their foolish thoughts. They were like children in a marketplace, who expected their fellows to adapt themselves to the tunes they played. It was as if they said: We have expected great Messianic glory and national exaltation, and ye have not responded (‘we have piped unto you, and ye have not danced’); we have looked for deliverance from our national sufferings, and they stirred not your sympathies nor brought your help (‘we have mourned to you, and ye have not lamented’). But you thought of the Messianic time as children, and of us, as if we were your fellows, and shared your thoughts and purposes!”

**Luke 7:33-34** **For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine, and you say, ‘He has a demon.’ The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and you say, ‘Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and “sinners.”’**

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<sup>24</sup> From his *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*.

Matthew 11:18-19a **For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon.’ The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and “sinners.”**

An example of their determination to reject the truth was the superficial reasons they gave to reject the same truths presented by both John and Jesus Christ. Their rejection wasn’t based on the substance or truth of their teaching, but on the clothes in which those truths were dressed.

Luke 7:35 **But wisdom is proved right by all her children.”**

Matthew 11:19a **‘But wisdom is justified of her children.’”<sup>25</sup> KJV**

There were many unwise children of that generation who rejected the truth. However, there were also some who were children of wisdom in that generation. They had accepted God’s truth. They would be justified by the rest of time and eternity.

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<sup>25</sup> *This is the translation from the flawed Codex Sinaiticus which the NIV used: ‘But wisdom is proved right by her actions.’” The Codex Sinaiticus has ἔργων {ergon} which means “actions” or “works.” The Textus Receptus has τέκνων {teknon} which means “children.” Considering the text is talking the “unwise children” of that generation, I think it is obvious that the Codex Sinaiticus has it wrong again. Also notice that the Luke version of the same sentiment in the Codex Sinaiticus says “children.” I substituted the correct translation from the Textus Receptus translation of the King James Version.*