

LUKE 19–20

Luke 19:1–10. Meeting Zacchaeus on the Road and in His Home

The following is adapted from S. Kent Brown, The Testimony of Luke (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2015), 857–858.

A subtle yet visible emphasis rests on family when the Savior evidently stays in the home of Zacchaeus from Friday afternoon through the Sabbath before He begins the uphill walk to Jerusalem on Sunday morning. To spend so much time with this man and members of his household signals clearly the value that Jesus places on marriage, spouse, children, and home, a point unsubtly underlined by calling Zacchaeus “a son of Abraham” (Luke 19:9). Jesus intentionally focuses attention on Zacchaeus rather than passing the tree where he is perched without a glance, an act that discloses a plan to interact meaningfully with this chief publican: “I must abide at thy house” (19:5). Thus, Jesus’s last act in His public ministry away from Jerusalem is to spend time with a family.

We also need to notice that Jericho is certainly packed with pilgrims and travelers who, among thousands, are making their way to Jerusalem. Hence, places to rest indoors are at a premium, but Jesus finds a place in Zacchaeus’s home.

At this point we are left to imagine what the next day consists of—Jesus, His disciples, and Zacchaeus’s family will all attend the local synagogue service, “as his custom was” (Luke 4:16). Of course, Jesus will spend time discussing gospel principles with any and all. Relatives and neighbors will visit Zacchaeus’s home on this Sabbath to meet his guest of honor. We can also imagine that at the end of the Sabbath, as on an earlier occasion, “when the sun was setting, all they that had any sick with divers diseases brought them unto him; and he laid his hands on every one of them, and healed them” (4:40). It was a most memorable day in Jericho.

On the other hand, some insist on harmonizing Luke’s report with John’s account of Jesus staying in Bethany before walking to Jerusalem on Sunday. This would mean that He arrived in that town at least by Friday afternoon because He would not travel on the Sabbath. In that case, still Jesus would have spent a night with Zacchaeus and his family—an extraordinary event for them—as He makes His way toward the capital city.

In addition, within the story of Zacchaeus, preserved only by Luke, lies proof that rich people can receive salvation, for “he was rich” (Luke 19:2). The fact that Zacchaeus gives “half of [his] goods . . . to the poor” and makes amends “fourfold” illustrates that this man forsakes “the things . . . of this world” and thus can “enter in” the kingdom (19:8; Joseph Smith Translation, Luke 18:27). Plainly, his wealth has become a vehicle for doing good and does not impede his spiritual progression. Further, when an opportunity to see Jesus presents itself, he makes the effort to climb a tree, demonstrating his genuine interest in “who [Jesus] was” (19:3).

Jesus’s encounter with Zacchaeus effectively concludes His merciful ministry to the outcasts of society. To be sure, such people will mix with the throngs in Jerusalem for Passover. But no stories of Jesus’s interaction with these people in the last week of His life survive. Instead, at Jericho we witness His gracious outreach to the blind man and to Zacchaeus, both of whom stand on the margins of society. Although their circumstances differ markedly, each presents a counterweight to the rich ruler: the blind man demonstrates what a person with real sight does, he “followed [Jesus]” (Luke 18:43), and Zacchaeus demonstrates by responding honestly and genuinely to the Savior that wealth need not be an impediment to salvation (19:9).

Luke 19:11–27. Parable of the Pounds

The following is adapted from S. Kent Brown, The Testimony of Luke (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2015), 866–870.

The challenges in understanding this parable match the difficulties in interpreting the parable of the unjust steward (Luke 16:1–8). In the parable of the pounds sits a nobleman of a nasty disposition. The range of suggested interpretations flits around many notions. One holds that the master represents Roman officials who exploit their subjects and that the enslaved people stand for Jewish leaders who must decide whether or not to join Rome as exploiters of their people. Another says that the parable joins two stories about the end-time, one about a man who receives a kingdom and rewards his faithful servants and the other about Archelaus, son of Herod, whose actions remind hearers not to adopt “a false sense of security.”¹ Another holds the view that the parable is about the Savior and the Twelve, offering a blueprint for events that will soon come to pass, including the rejection of Jesus by Jerusalem authorities and the need for the Twelve to be equipped for the future.

These do not exhaust the matter. Some hold to an opinion that as a variant of the parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14–30) and as a parable with no link back to the story of Zacchaeus, the account stands as a partial allegory that portrays the responsibilities of believers to employ properly the benefits of the earthly kingdom until the end-time. Others maintain a concept that as the disciples’ expectations for Jesus rise as He approaches Jerusalem, He sets the record straight to the effect that “the kingdom of God” will not “immediately appear” (Luke 19:11); but the days ahead will be filled with judgment that offers both rewards and punishments. This last view holds the most promise for grasping this parable.

Many commentators agree, though not in individual details, that Luke’s account of the parable of the pounds and Matthew’s report of the parable of the talents go back to a common source. Even so, a number hold out the possibility that, perhaps, they are independent stories that Jesus repeats on different occasions for different purposes.

In Luke’s hands, both Jesus’s approach to Jerusalem—His objective since the beginning of His historic journey (Luke 9:51)—and the popular misconception that “the kingdom of God should immediately appear” when Jesus reaches the capital city (19:11) frame the parable and its purpose. According to Luke, Jesus repeats the parable to correct the misconception because with His presence, the kingdom of God already resides among them. Moreover, He does not come as a militant Messiah to establish an earthly kingdom complete with heavenly trappings, as Pilate discovers (23:3–4, 13–16). Although a person might frivolously conclude that Luke muddies the waters by introducing and then repeating the parable in its current form because of the challenges in grasping both its parts and its full meaning, we have to reckon that the entire account, as it stands, makes sense to Luke and his audience.

One of the complaints is that if the nobleman represents Jesus in some way, the actions and character of the man do not match Luke’s portrait of Jesus throughout the Gospel, thus arguing for an adjusted understanding of how the parable reveals the Savior’s future actions. But we cannot simply degrade the parable on such grounds. We must be willing to entertain the possibility that the incidents and teachings that come to Luke from his sources carry varying impressions about Jesus that even he, in his portraiture, cannot reshape or reconfigure. Does Jesus condemn wickedness or not? Does He not warn against eternal consequences of evil behavior? Will the final judgment be harsh on some or not? In Luke’s efforts to offer an accurate picture of Jesus’s ministry (Luke 1:3), even with his own overlying emphases by which he seeks to set Jesus’s ministry into proper perspective, elements that do not fit exactly will certainly pop into view. And the nobleman’s drastic actions with his enemies in the parable may qualify for this sort of understanding.

In this light, we notice that Jesus regularly lifts an incident or custom from life and, with reshaping or restating, fits it to His teaching, whether it be the parable of the sower, the parable of the good Samaritan, or something else (Luke 8:4–8; 10:29–37). Hence, it is reasonable to see the rise to power of Archelaus, son of Herod, informing elements in the story, particularly those that have to do with the nobleman who receives his authority in “a far country” (19:12)—namely, in Rome—and who then must deal with detractors who seek to undermine his appointment (19:14). But the similarities are few and limited.

The main story has to do with stewardship and accountability at the master's return, particularly as highlighted by the inaction of the slothful servant. A strong subtheme, of course, draws attention to the gap in time between the nobleman's departure and return, for it is during this period that the servants' activities will uncover their commitment to obeying the commands of their master. Thus, Jesus not only corrects the mistaken belief that the kingdom is to "immediately appear" in dramatic fashion but also sketches out a picture of responsibility: that His disciples are to engage themselves in His work until His return (Luke 19:11). At that point, they are to report to Him (Doctrine and Covenants 104:11–13, 15–16). Otherwise, matters will turn out as they do for the complacent servant—he is released from his master's service and, worse, severed from him.

But what about matching the nobleman with Jesus in ways that bend away from Luke's prior portrait of Jesus as the one who reaches out compassionately to all people, specifically to the master's admission that he takes what is not his and his slaughter of enemies before his eyes? (19:22, 27). Can we reconcile this portrait of overreaching and cruelty? About the former, the accusation of the master's intimidation comes from the lips of the slothful servant and therefore has to be reckoned as a form of hyperbole (19:21). Even though the master repeats the words of the servant, we need not think that he is affirming their truth. In fact, he holds the words at arm's length and keeps them in the servant's mouth: "Thou knewest" (19:22). Instead, he makes the point that the servant knows he will need to account for his actions before a strict master and yet does not perform his duty.

Concerning the latter point about the master's cruelty, the fate of the master's enemies mirrors what is in store for those who oppose the Lord's work. And some of these people will soon confront Jesus in Jerusalem. This view is not new. Does not Jesus speak of God avenging "his own elect" in speedy fashion? (Luke 18:7–8). Does He not draw His hearers' minds to the day of the Son of Man and the days of reckoning, terms that carry enormous weight as pointers to judgment and punishment? Accordingly, we are justified in seeing the nobleman as only an approximate, though perhaps imprecise, representation of the Lord and His doings at the time of judgment.

The relationship between the parable of the talents reported in Matthew 25:14–30 and this parable has invited discussion and debate. Many hold that the two are mere variants of one another with editorial adjustments, naturally. The similarities are many, including the master who spends time away, the three main servants to whom varying amounts of money are entrusted, the dismissal of the lazy servant, and the statement at the end about rewards and depletions.²

But the numbing number of differences weighs densely against the similarities. For example, (1) in Luke, Jesus narrates the story in Jericho; in Matthew, He tells it on the Mount of Olives (Luke 19:1; Matthew 24:3). (2) In Luke, the master travels to "a far country to receive for himself a kingdom"; in Matthew, he goes for no stated purpose (Luke 19:12; Matthew 25:14). (3) In Luke, ten servants receive money; in Matthew, only three do (Luke 19:13; Matthew 25:15). (4) In Luke, the ten receive a *mina* each, a relatively modest amount; in Matthew, the three servants each receive an ample fortune (Luke 19:13; Matthew

25:15). (5) In Luke, the master gives his servants a charge to multiply the money entrusted to their care; in Matthew, the master gives no such instruction, though it is implied (Luke 19:13; Matthew 25:15, 19). (6) In Luke, the two faithful servants multiply their funds by ten times and five times; in Matthew, the two servants double the monies entrusted to them (Luke 19:16, 18; Matthew 25:20, 22). (7) In Luke, the slothful servant keeps the money in a napkin, a dubious place to hide it; in Matthew, the lazy servant buries it, a much better hiding place (Luke 19:20; Matthew 25:18). (8) In Luke, the faithful servants are rewarded with stewardships over cities; in Matthew, they enter “into the joy of [their] lord” (Luke 19:17, 19; Matthew 25:21, 23). (9) In Luke, the neglectful servant is dismissed; in Matthew, this servant is thrust “into outer darkness” (Luke 19:24; Matthew 25:30). (10) In Luke, the master faces enemies; in Matthew, no such persons appear (Luke 19:14, 27). Thus, it is a fair conclusion that the two parables are independent though similar, Jesus sharing them on different occasions for different purposes.

Luke 19:28–40. Climbing the Mount of Olives from Jericho

The following is adapted from S. Kent Brown, The Testimony of Luke (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2015), 878–881.

At first, it is important to grasp the sense of Luke’s brief notice that Jesus “went before, ascending up to Jerusalem” (Luke 19:28). Months earlier, in reference to His always looming suffering, Jesus had almost complained that “I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened [distressed] till it be accomplished!” (12:50). Evidently, He was not fully settled in His own mind about taking on this frightful experience. But when Luke writes that Jesus “went before,” walking ahead of both His own disciples and the other pilgrims leaving Jericho that morning, it becomes plain that in Jesus’s mind and soul, He was ready to face whatever awaited Him in the capital city.

Now we turn to His words. The Savior’s last statement during His journey up to Jerusalem presents the key for what follows, a key which He now firmly wraps in His fingers. Not only does He arrive in the city as its king but also, infinitely more, He comes as the absolute lord of nature: “If these [disciples] should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out” (Luke 19:40; also Doctrine and Covenants 128:23). The astonishing breadth and length of His realm, carved out during past months by stunning miracles and riveting teaching,³ now come sharply into view: the One who sits astride a young donkey rides into the city under a canopy of joyful song that announces His kingship; that celebrates His powers over nature; that binds Him to the holy city; that hymns the chords of justice in Zechariah’s prophecy, “he is just . . . and riding upon an ass” (Zechariah 9:9); that lifts His people’s hopes as God now speaks “comfortably to Jerusalem” and pardons “her iniquity” (Isaiah 40:2); and that hails the “coming one” of prophecy: “Blessed be he that cometh” and “thy King cometh unto thee.”⁴

The reemphasis on the “coming one” of the Baptist’s prophecy (Luke 3:16) and of Jesus’s words on the fate of Jerusalem (13:35) draws in the frightful specter of judgment. It is both the disciples’ evident singing of Psalm 118:26 (a passage associated with the Feast of Tabernacles) and its close link to Jesus’s dire words about the looming fate of Jerusalem that underscore in dark hues this sense of warning (Luke 19:38, 42–44). But the coming one does not reach the city simply to judge, “to send fire on the earth,” and to bear witness that its peace will soon depart (12:49; 19:41–44). He also comes to destroy the devil’s kingdom, to “preach the kingdom of God,” to call “sinners to repentance,” to befriend the outcasts of society, to force choices that will draw people into hard and life-changing decisions, “to seek and to save that which was lost,” and to offer salvation through His death, as the hymn following the Last Supper promises.⁵ Thus, the expression “the King that cometh” recalls all of these functions of the coming one.

Almost more than any other recorded incident in the Gospels, save for events that begin with the Last Supper, the approach of Jesus to Jerusalem blows in a windstorm of topographical detail, turning us to face Jesus’s every movement as He sends the two disciples forward to fetch the colt, as they interact with the colt’s owners in the village, as they bring the colt to Him and assist Him to mount, as the crowd continues the ascent with Him to the crest of the mount, and as the throng bursts into song and praise. Plainly, the sequence of a simple half hour packs itself, almost minute by minute, into a few verses, ringing the whole with a broad, bright line that underscores the importance of this moment—the King finally approaches; He comes earnestly and fearlessly; He arrives in humility, transported on a donkey; He allows His movements to be trumpeted in the adoring songs of His followers. His time has come.

As a steady drumbeat, Jesus has repeatedly drawn the attention of His disciples to this destined time. It is His time. A few months into His ministry, after feeding the five thousand, He informs the disciples that the “Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders and chief priest and scribes, and be slain, and be raised the third day” (Luke 9:22). Within days, on the Mount of Transfiguration, the three chief Apostles overhear the Savior’s discussion with Moses and Elijah about “his decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem,” giving geographical place to Jesus’s initial prophecy about His death (9:31). Following their descent from the mount, Jesus says to His disciples, almost as a point of emphasis, “The Son of man shall be delivered into the hands of men” (9:44). Then, later He turns toward Jerusalem: “When the time was come that he [Jesus] should be received up, he steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem” (9:51). Do the disciples know that He is going to Jerusalem? Of course. And a few among the Twelve, from repeated experiences, know that He faces death there. Finally, as Jesus approaches Jericho and the last leg of the journey to the city, He takes the Twelve aside and utters the ominous words, “We go up to Jerusalem, and . . . the Son of man . . . shall be delivered unto the Gentiles, and . . . they shall scourge him, and put him to death: and the third day he shall rise again” (18:31–33). Here, in the city that He moves toward, all the prophecies about His suffering, death, and Resurrection will come to pass; here, He meets a destiny that is set out for Him “before the foundation of the world.”⁶

Not surprisingly, Jesus's approach to Jerusalem begins with a miracle: He rides an unbroken donkey up over the crest of the Mount of Olives and down the steep slope into the Kidron Valley along a trail that would be extremely difficult even for a seasoned mount. He and the donkey arrive at the city walls after another climb to a gate that leads into the temple grounds. To be sure, most in the huge accompanying multitude do not pay attention to what has happened. But for the two disciples who fetch the colt, and for the owners, the miracle stands in plain sight. Those who have eyes to see "have seen [the Lord's] salvation."⁷

Turning to another matter, Luke does not write of Jesus's Sabbath stay in Jericho at the home of Zacchaeus, though his source carries a strong hint when Jesus says to the publican, "To day I must abide at thy house" (Luke 19:5). But neither do the other Gospel writers notice this brief visit. Instead, all bind Jesus's trip through the town directly to His ascent to Jerusalem, as if one immediately follows the other (Matthew 20:29–21:1; Mark 10:46–11:1). Luke alone inserts the parable of the pounds (Luke 19:11–27). But a reader still comes away with the sense that Jesus's stroll through Jericho is interrupted briefly by the exchange with Zacchaeus and the recitation of the parable before He begins the ascent to the capital city. This set of observations opens the question: How much does Luke follow Mark's report? The short response is that except for the riding of the donkey and the singing of the throng, little else matches.

In a word, it appears that Luke's report stands separately from Mark's. The differences outweigh the similarities: only Mark records that Jesus instructs the two disciples whom He sends for the colt to promise that Jesus will "straightway . . . send him" back (Mark 11:3); Luke alone, in concert with his emphasis on Jesus's prophetic powers, writes that the two disciples "found even as [Jesus] had said unto them" (Luke 19:32); singularly, Luke notices that those who challenge the two disciples are "the owners" (19:33); by himself Luke reports that disciples assist Jesus to seat Himself on the colt (19:35); only Mark portrays that "others cut down branches off the trees, and strawed them in the way" in front of the donkey (Mark 11:8); Luke alone fills in the picture that one reason for singing and shouting is "all the mighty works that [followers] had seen" (19:37); by himself Mark introduces the praise for "the kingdom of our Father David" (Mark 11:10); and only he repeats the Hebrew expression "Hosanna" (Mark 11:9, 10), a term unfamiliar to Luke's gentile audience. Moreover, as an additional piece, Luke alone rehearses the scene of Jesus weeping over the city when it at last rises into view (see Luke 19:41–44).

Luke 19:41–44. Jesus Weeps over Jerusalem

The following is adapted from S. Kent Brown, The Testimony of Luke (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2015), 883–885.

At last, the Savior comes face to face with His last week of life, gazing down on the capital city while perched on a donkey, ready to descend to its gates. He already knows that here, in Jerusalem, He will

thrash sellers in the temple; here He will teach His last gospel lessons; here He will greet throngs of disciples and admirers; here He will gather His beloved Apostles for a last meal together; here He will suffer and bleed in one of the city's olive orchards; here He will be accosted by an arresting band led by one of the Twelve; here He will face an angry group from the Sanhedrin that will seek grounds to execute Him; here He will be judged guiltless three times by the Roman procurator who thereafter will bow to pressure to execute Him; here He will die; here He will rise from the dead on "the third day" (Luke 18:33).

Luke alone preserves these verses that shelter the inner conflict that rages in Jesus's bosom—He desperately seeks to bring peace and salvation to His people but, painfully, through tears, knows that their representatives already conspire against Him. Now at the mount's crest, sitting astride a young donkey, He painfully mourns that the people whom He will meet in coming days do not know "the things which belong unto [their] peace," not only a peace of heart but also a peace free of conflict with their Roman overlords (Luke 19:42). Both kinds of peace will be lost within a generation. Visible to history and archaeology, Jerusalem's "enemies shall cast a trench about [it], and compass [it] round, and keep [it] in on every side," a plain allusion to the two surrounding walls that the Roman general Titus will order to be constructed around the city (19:43). What is worse, after Titus's troops breach the temple walls and storm the edifice and then capture the city, they will "lay thee [Jerusalem] even with the ground" (19:44). In the less visible realm, one line of Jesus's words captures the rupture of people's peace of heart: the soldiers shall also lay "thy children within thee" even "with the ground" (19:44). The city's citizens, especially the children, will suffer "great tribulation . . . such as was not before sent upon Israel, of God, since the beginning of their kingdom" (Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:18).

In this section, the verb "come near" and the nouns "day" and "time" (19:41–44) all frame the citizens' opportunities at this critical and promising moment to correctly answer God's call to His kingdom as His Son rides to the temple and makes Himself available during the coming week. Painfully, and maliciously by week's end, the framework of promise will be bent and gnarled to show a wave-like landscape of missed opportunities and wrong decisions, of clear choices and bungled judgments.

Some commentators charge that Luke writes much of this scene with the benefit of hindsight; they effectively dismiss all or parts of Jesus's words as His own and attribute them to Luke or his source. Why? Because Luke knows the outcome of the Jewish war against the Romans (AD 66–70) before writing his Gospel. But an impressive array of sayings about the destruction of the city lies in the Gospel of Mark before the city was leveled, underscoring the strong tradition that Jesus really did prophesy about those dim days to come.⁸ In fact, Jesus's predictions were so clear that Christians abandoned the city and its environs for safety, escaping the horrors of war that visited Jerusalem, long before Luke and the other Gospel writers put pen to papyrus (Matthew 24:21–22; Mark 13:14–16).

Luke 19:45–48. In the Temple

The following is adapted from S. Kent Brown, The Testimony of Luke (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2015), 889–891.

The Savior now controls the temple; He now holds Jerusalem in His hand; He now sets the agenda for His message; He now forges His destiny. No one dares to push Him from the temple; no one is able to keep Him out of the city; no one drives Him from His message; no one stands between Him and the Atonement. In short, Jesus is master. And Luke stitches together this commanding tapestry by following Jesus directly into the temple where He takes charge, not insisting that He ride through part of the city on His way.⁹ By itself, Jesus's direct entry into the sacred precinct elevates Him above followers and detractors alike. From this metaphorically elevated place, He will become more direct and forthright in His pronouncements and teaching in an effort to reach people's souls during His last days (Luke 20:19).

Undetectable to modern readers, a stunning miracle occurs at Jesus's entry into the temple grounds. On top of the porticoes that surround the temple area stand Roman soldiers who are staying in the Antonia Fortress at the northwest corner of the temple's enclosing walls. They are to look for disturbances in the packed throng of worshipers inside the temple's barriers and to alert their comrades inside the fortress to deal with the problem. But notably, they see nothing even as Jesus creates a ruckus by tossing "out them that sold therein, and them that bought" (Luke 19:45). Somehow Jesus's actions remain invisible to the soldiers.

According to Luke's reporting, Jesus returns to Jerusalem for the first time since His visit as a twelve-year-old youth. On that occasion, also at Passover (Luke 2:41), He spends time "sitting in the midst of the doctors, and they were hearing him, and asking him questions" (Joseph Smith Translation, Luke 2:46). In those days, He was a curiosity, a clever and bright curiosity to be sure, but a curiosity nonetheless. After all, He was from a poor family of Galilee and presented no challenge to temple and civic authorities. But all changes, of course, when He arrives as an adult, even in light of hints that He had come more than once as an adult.¹⁰

That arrival pulls in the language of prophecy: "The Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant" (Malachi 3:1). This language, of course, recalls prophecies about the "coming one."¹¹ More than this, Jesus's appearance in the temple underscores His respect for the law of Moses, whose apex is the temple, a dimension that appears elsewhere (Luke 16:16–17). Further, He pulls a celestial presence into this holy place, a presence that the temple, here and now, does not fully possess on its own, as Jesus's harsh actions remind us (19:45). In keeping with the temple's degraded state, the authorities' plotting that will take His life continues to ferment on its sacred grounds, seeking to seize Him and grind Him down.¹² But for the moment, during daylight hours, He is in charge. When He is ready and only when He is ready, He will relinquish control to "the power of darkness" (22:53).

The question stands and discussion continues on whether Jesus engaged in two cleansing actions at the temple or one. The fourth Gospel reports that early in His ministry during a Passover festival, Jesus expels from the temple grounds “those that sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the changers of money” (John 2:14). The three Synoptic Gospels narrate a cleansing that occurs only at the end of His ministry as He begins His last week in Jerusalem. In the view of some, all four accounts go back to a single incident recorded with differing details. For others, Jesus twice drives merchants from the temple, once at the beginning and once at the end of His ministry. When we compare the accounts, particularly that of Mark, the earliest Gospel, and that of John, we are left with the impression that the two incidents are completely different. To be sure, in each case Jesus’s acts galvanize His conspirators into action against Him. But the differences overwhelm the similarities, leading us to see two cleansings, not one.

Luke 20:1–8. By What Authority?

The following is adapted from S. Kent Brown, The Testimony of Luke (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2015), 898–899.

All the noxious smells from the conspiracy against the Savior pour out of these verses, daubing His last days with the sticky gasses of hate and loathing. Naturally, if left unchecked Jesus presents a direct challenge to both the status quo and the powers that rest comfortably and luxuriously on temple authorities. Jesus chooses the temple as the field of contest over authority, bringing the fresh aromas of God’s word and presence onto the grounds of His house, where odors of smoke and blood always linger. The authorities quickly grasp that Jesus’s authority grows out of the presence of the multitudes that gather to Him as well as from His own domineering presence. They feel that they must respond to Him with force. Hence, following an informal meeting, either during the evening after Jesus rids the temple area of its merchants or the morning before Jesus gathers a crowd about Him, the officials come out of a room located on the temple’s sacred grounds, screw up their courage to confront the Son of God, and forcefully challenge His actions of the prior day and His teaching pedigree by demanding of Him, “By what authority doest thou these things?” (Luke 20:2). From this moment, they will snap at His footsteps, setting snares to clamp Him in their deadly grip.

Jesus’s deft turn toward “the baptism of John” when pushed to declare the source of His authority links Him and His work to the one person whom many in the crowd see as a prophet (Luke 20:4). By doing so, Jesus anoints His own actions with the same divine fragrance, the same divine authority. Moreover, as readers of Luke’s Gospel know, John’s birth is announced by an angel (Luke 1:13); he receives “the word of God . . . in the wilderness” (3:2); he baptizes Jesus (3:21); and John’s ministry fulfills prophecy and renders him a “prophet” (7:24–28). Thus, Jesus, even though He refuses to answer directly the question about His authority, actually supplies a response merely by pointing to John. But Jesus will answer the challenge more concretely in the following parable, a minor delay that recalls His slow reply to the devil’s

demands about His authority wherein He refuses to answer on the spot but later responds by word and deed in the synagogues of Nazareth and Capernaum.¹³

Luke 20:9–16. Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen

The following is adapted from S. Kent Brown, The Testimony of Luke (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2015), 904–906.

Like bad breath, the Savior’s parable—termed an allegory by some—exhales the bruising odors of rejection and eventual judgment, featuring a bruising contest for control of a vineyard between a distant owner and those who lease the ground. In a word, Jesus’s story points to Him, complete with a preamble about the persecution of earlier prophets amid God’s tender yet unsuccessful efforts to reach out to His people. When the “beloved son” finally appears (Luke 20:13), the response of the hearers mirrors that of the lord of the vineyard: they hope that this last effort will bring the wanted positive results. But it fails, tragically, with the murder of the son and the attempt by the husbandmen to seize the vineyard for themselves. Because of the reprehensible actions of the husbandmen, the master’s choice is to “destroy these husbandmen” and to “give the vineyard to others” (20:16).

This narration is the second in a row wherein Jesus adds to a portrait violent colors that paint a scene of horrible destruction in the final panel (Luke 19:27). We get a sense that He is stepping up the intensity of His warnings, perhaps because He walks into the place—not incidentally, a holy place—where deadly rejection already lurks in the corridors and halls that temple authorities frequent, but certainly because He has only a few days in which to make lasting impressions that will bring hearers closer to His message and to the Church that will survive His mortal term. Earlier teachings of His ministry, particularly parables and illustrative stories, are couched in language that requires explanation (8:10). But now His words come out blazingly clear, possibly because they deal with past, present, and future events rather than with eternal gospel truths, as people’s responses disclose: “God forbid” (20:16), and “they perceived that he had spoken this parable against them” (20:19). This observation demonstrates that Jesus knows what is immediately ahead for Him. The next short parable will secure this conclusion (20:17–18).

One question that rises regularly centers on the relationship between Luke’s rehearsal of this story and those found in Matthew and Mark. Scholars generally conclude that Luke lifts his account from Mark but tailors it so that it fits more closely the contours of Jesus’s last days. Another path leads to the *Gospel of Thomas*, saying 65, whose simpler form of the parable resembles that in Luke more than in the other Gospels, inviting a conclusion that Luke and the *Gospel of Thomas* rest on common ground. It reads:

He [Jesus] said: A good man had a vineyard. He gave it to husbandmen so that they would work it and that he would receive its fruit from them. He sent his servant so that the husbandmen would give him the fruit of the vineyard. They seized his servant, they beat him; a little longer and they would

have killed him. The servant came, he told it to his master. His master said: “Perhaps he did not know them.” He sent another servant; the husbandmen beat him as well. Then the owner sent his son. He said: “Perhaps they will respect my son.” Since those husbandmen knew that he was the heir of the vineyard, they seized him, they killed him. Whoever has ears let him hear.

Now we ask the question, does a possible relationship exist between Luke’s record of this parable and the version in the *Gospel of Thomas*, saying 65? In response, the differences are decisive against borrowing. For instance, in Thomas, the owner simply owns a vineyard, whereas in Luke’s rendition he plants a vineyard before departing (Luke 20:9); when narrating the ill treatment of the first servant, Thomas writes that “a little longer and they would have killed him,” a detail missing in all the Synoptic reports; moreover, in Thomas the first servant is said specifically to report to the master: “The servant came, he told it to his master,” to which the master said, “Perhaps he did not know them,” sentences missing from both Luke and Mark; in Thomas, the lord sends only two servants, in Luke’s version he sends three (Luke 20:12); in Thomas, the husbandmen do not cast the heir out of the vineyard—instead “they seized him, they killed him,” whereas in Luke’s record “they cast him out of the vineyard, and [then] killed him” (Luke 20:15); in Thomas, Jesus is quoted as saying at the end, “Whoever has ears let him hear,” and, in contrast, Jesus asks in Luke’s record, “What therefore shall the lord of the vineyard do unto them?” (Luke 20:15). Hence, although a common story lies at the base of both accounts, Luke does not borrow from Thomas or vice versa.

But what about Luke borrowing from Mark? Again, the differences are too many to hold that Luke depends on Mark’s account. For example, Mark’s report models the master’s planting of the vineyard after details in Isaiah 5:2 (Mark 12:1), none of which sit in Luke’s record; the third servant whom the master sends is killed in Mark’s account, whereas in Luke’s he is simply beaten (Luke 20:12; Mark 12:5); after the sending of the third servant, Mark’s narration mentions many others sent by the lord who are beaten and killed (Mark 12:5); in the foul treatment of the heir, Mark’s version specifies that he is killed and then cast “out of the vineyard,” whereas in Luke, by contrast, the heir is first cast out and then killed (Luke 20:15; Mark 12:8); the more literary arrangement in Luke has three servants beaten and turned away, with the heir murdered at the end, whereas in Mark two servants are beaten and a third servant and the heir are killed, offering little of the “perfect symmetry” that Luke’s version seems to reproduce.¹⁴

Luke 20:17–19. The Rejected Stone

The following is adapted from S. Kent Brown, The Testimony of Luke (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2015), 909–911.

Rejection as a noxious odor billows to its full strength in the Savior’s saying about the stone, a rejection that virtually stains the air in the temple mainly because the discarded stone becomes the all-important

carved cornerstone (Luke 20:17). Constantly giving off a bad smell, the authorities hound Jesus so that “they might take hold of his words” and “deliver him unto the power . . . of the governor” (20:20). Their conspiracy takes firm form, passing from an airless, conceptual stage to concrete action. Jesus knows this and effectively warns them that their enterprise “shall be broken” to their everlasting detriment, pummeling them to powder (20:18). Jesus has now brought up this theme three times in the past few days, including twice in the last few minutes, and each warning reeks of horrible consequences for the perpetrators (19:27; 20:16, 18).

Jesus’s appeal to stones draws up a rich imagery. It not only points far backward to the devil’s insidious invitation to Jesus to expend power by creating bread from a stone (Luke 4:3) but, in a positive sense, also points to the living rock from which dressed stones are quarried, including cornerstones. In its earliest mention in scripture, this rock, called “Rock of Heaven, which is broad as eternity,” is identified as the Messiah and, symbolically, becomes the route by which people climb up to a spiritually secure loft from which they “shall never fall” (Moses 7:53; also 2 Nephi 4:35). In a different vein, this bedrock is to serve as the foundation for one’s house and, by extension, for one’s household or family. This point is not trivial, for it is one of the messages in Jesus’s Sermon on the Plain: “He is like a man which built an house [family], and digged deep, and laid the foundation on a rock” (Luke 6:48). Such language enfolds the creation of a family whose foundations rest on spiritual bedrock.¹⁵

The Joseph Smith Translation adds important interpretive information to this saying and the prior parable—not to Luke’s report but to Matthew’s record, coming at the end of chapter 21 (Joseph Smith Translation, Matthew 21:48–56). The information is relevant because it preserves not only what Jesus’s opponents and His disciples are saying and thinking in this temple setting but also a long explanation from Jesus Himself. Specifically, after hearing Jesus’s saying about the stone that becomes “the head of the corner” and falls upon the wicked, pulverizing them to powder, the chief priests and their allies both perceive that the saying is aimed at them and, more significantly because of the concrete detail about their spoken response, “they said among themselves, Shall this man think that he alone can spoil this great kingdom? And they were angry with him,” portraying Jesus as a political troublemaker (Joseph Smith Translation, Matthew 21:47–48). This account exists in no other source. Further, the disciples, in embarrassing contrast to everyone else, do not understand Jesus’s saying about the stone. So “his disciples came to him” for an explanation, at the end of which they come to comprehend “the parable . . . that the Gentiles should be destroyed also, when the Lord should descend out of heaven to reign in his vineyard, which is the earth and the inhabitants thereof” (Joseph Smith Translation, Matthew 21:50, 56).

Most importantly, the Joseph Smith Translation preserves Jesus’s long, clarifying explanation that He offers to His followers. First, He makes plain to the disciples that “I am the stone” and “I am the head of the corner.” Ominously, He says, “These Jews shall fall upon me, and shall be broken” (Joseph Smith Translation, Matthew 21:51–52). Then in words that unite the parable of the wicked husbandmen—Jesus says that the lord of the vineyard will “give the vineyard to others” (Luke 20:16)—and the saying about the

stone, Jesus predicts that “the kingdom of God shall be taken from them [the Jewish leaders], and shall be given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof; (meaning the Gentiles).” More precisely, He “will destroy those miserable, wicked men, and will let again his vineyard unto other husbandmen, even in the last days” (Joseph Smith Translation, Matthew 21:53, 55). This entire explanation arises from the earlier parable of the wicked husbandmen. Woven into this dark tapestry are Jesus’s dire words that derive from His saying about the stone and complete the unification of the parable and the saying: “Wherefore, on whomsoever this stone shall fall, it shall grind him to powder.” The officials’ rejection of Jesus will bring terrible consequences that will roll on for centuries, to “the last days” (Joseph Smith Translation, Matthew 21:54–55).

Luke 20:20–26. Render to Caesar

The following is adapted from S. Kent Brown, The Testimony of Luke (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2015), 914–915.

In one moment of astute brilliance, the Savior cuts through a debated and potentially destabilizing issue—What loyalty do we owe to Caesar?—that will come to engulf His people less than forty years later in a war to the death with Rome (AD 66–70). As the eventual breakout of the war will show, Jesus’s words do not turn away the heated tide of battle that will wash over the land and its people. Nevertheless, He sets the standard for those who choose to follow Him: pay that which is due to Caesar without complaint, just as we pay to God what He requires. Jesus’s words fix the standard ever after for His disciples’ relationship to the state.

Moreover, His declaration warns His followers against tagging along with those who will eventually lead the ill-fated charge against Rome. To be sure, the warning voiced in His sermon on the Mount of Olives will ring the tone even more clearly (Luke 21:20–24) and, before the war engulfs them, will lead Christians away from battle zones into places of safety. But His words spoken in the temple will both contribute to His followers’ physical safety during the war and anchor their spiritual moorings to tides untouched by sudden civil and military surges. His principle of dealing with earthly governments will not change (see Doctrine and Covenants 63:26–27).

Luke 20:27–40. Marriage and Resurrection

The following is adapted from S. Kent Brown, The Testimony of Luke (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2015), 920–922.

The Sadducees’ riddle about the wife in the next life is so important that the Savior addresses it in modern scripture (see Doctrine and Covenants 132:16–17). Why? Because it is misunderstood across the

Christian spectrum. This situation arises, presumably, either because the Gospel writers do not have the full response of Jesus, with nuance and clarity, or the hearers' memory of Jesus's answer is faulty and thus lacking when it is handed on. The result is the same. Perhaps oddly, the Joseph Smith Translation adds little. However, what does come through clearly in Jesus's answer is His forceful response to the main thrust of the Sadducees' riddle—it concerns the Resurrection. He does not respond fully to the issue of the eternal nature of marriage.

The first gap in understanding occurs when grasping the intent of Jesus's words in Luke 20:35: "They which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that [eternal] world . . . neither marry nor are given in marriage." From this verse, many scholars conclude that marriage in this world does not persist into the next, a clear misconception. The second blank is found in 20:36, wherein it appears that the angels are the same as the children of God. But they are not equivalents; a person's messengers or agents (Greek *angelos*) are never on the same legal or social continuum, in this life or the next, with one's children. But a casual reading may not draw up this crucial distinction. In another place, the Savior clarifies that when "the children of *this world*" "are out of the world they neither marry nor are given in marriage; but are appointed angels in heaven" (Luke 20:34, emphasis added; Doctrine and Covenants 132:16). How so? Because "these angels did not abide my law; therefore, they cannot be enlarged, but remain separately and singly . . . to all eternity" (Doctrine and Covenants 132:17). The others, the children of God, "shall pass by the angels, and the gods . . . to their exaltation and glory." Specifically, their marriages continue into eternity: "If a man marry a wife by my word . . . and by the new and everlasting covenant, and it [their marriage] is sealed unto them by the Holy Spirit of promise, . . . it shall be . . . of full force when they are out of the world" (Doctrine and Covenants 132:19).

What more can we say about Jesus's statements to the Sadducees? In Luke's report Jesus appears to agree that marriage does not continue into "that world" (Luke 20:35–36). The answer perhaps rests on a subtle yet firm distinction that Jesus makes in His reply. He first speaks of "the children of this world" who "marry, and are given in marriage" (20:34). Though Jesus repeats the expression "the children of this world" in 16:8, a different context, in 20:34 He evidently means those who are currently living in this world. That is to say, marriage properly takes place among the inhabitants of this world. The other part of the distinction rests with those who "shall be accounted worthy to obtain that [celestial] world" (20:35). Among them the rules are different, for in "that world" they "neither marry, nor are given in marriage," activities that are normal in this world. That is to say, in that world no marriages are performed.

But this observation does not disqualify marriages performed in this world, as the Sadducees' question unwittingly implies: "In the resurrection whose wife of them is she?" (Luke 20:33). The only marriages that work in that world are those that continue from this. The point? Although the issue turns on a small base and receives its form from an interpretation informed by Latter-day Saint doctrine, Jesus clarifies the notion that marriage—especially eternal marriage—is an earthly ordinance and must be performed here. There are to be no marriages performed in that world. Nevertheless, single people and those who

die without hearing the gospel message are promised that no blessing will be withheld from them in that world as long as they are faithful in this world. The mechanism of a lasting marriage for them rests in earthly temples where sacred, eternal marriages are performed for those who have passed from this life.

In this connection, we must take a very careful look at all of Jesus's words that have to do with marriage. One significant passage occurs in John 4, where Jesus engages a Samaritan woman in conversation. In the course of their exchange, Jesus promises her an inner "well of water springing up into everlasting life" (John 4:14). After she expresses a desire for this water, He replies that she is to call her husband (John 4:15–16). Most commentators believe that at this juncture, Jesus is simply setting her up so that He can tell her that she "had five husbands; and he whom thou now hast is not thy husband" (John 4:18). But there is surely more at work here. It is virtually certain that here Jesus brings forward an eternal principle: she can possess the water that He promises only with her husband. Moreover, this water brings her, and him, to everlasting life (John 4:14). The conclusion? Jesus's promise of everlasting life to the woman comes to fruition only when she and her husband are in partnership with each other. It is a family affair.

Concerning the case that the Sadducees present (Luke 20:28–33), it must form a classic example for them full of absurd twists and turns that, in their view, undercut the doctrine of the Resurrection and therefore one of the fashionable pillars of Pharisaic belief. Importantly, in his rendition of this account, Luke adds dimensions to Jesus's response that do not appear in the versions reported in Mark 12:18–27 and Matthew 22:23–33. For example, Luke 20:34 on marrying and giving in marriage has no counterpart, and 20:35–36 adds aspects missing in the other reports—namely, notes about worthiness and about those who cannot die. Contrarily, Luke omits Jesus's blunt condemnation of the Sadducean view (Matthew 22:29; Mark 12:24, 27). Remarkably, the Joseph Smith Translation changes Luke's account but little and only in small details.

In sum, Jesus's main aim in His response, in my view, is to point His questioners to the "God . . . of the living" and thereby to Himself who will soon prove the reality of the resurrection (Luke 20:38).

Luke 20:41–44. David's Son and Lord

The following is adapted from S. Kent Brown, The Testimony of Luke (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2015), 924–925.

The solution to the scriptural dilemma that the Savior sets before His hearers resolves two competing views of the coming Messiah held in the Judaism of His day—namely, an earthly Messiah who descends from David in contrast to a heavenly personality such as the Son of Man (Luke 20:41–42). He is both. A helpful way to recast Jesus's question is, "If the Messiah is David's Lord, how is he David's son?" rather than "If the Messiah is David's son, how is he David's Lord?"¹⁶ If we accept the first form of the question, then we acknowledge that Jesus is David's Lord long before He appears on earth (1:76; 2:11). To be sure,

Jesus's Resurrection brings Him onto center stage as Messiah and Lord, a point that Luke records later (see Acts 2:32–36). But the Resurrection is only one of the decisive moments in Jesus's long, personal history that makes Him Lord and God, as modern scripture illustrates.¹⁷

Luke 20::45–47. Beware of the Scribes

The following is adapted from S. Kent Brown, The Testimony of Luke (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2015), 928.

The Savior's complaint centers on the self-importance of authority and achievement that gives off the noxious odors of high-handed backroom dealings. This human characteristic of self-aggrandizement has no place in His kingdom. In its place stands humility, draped in the modest robes of hard, honest work, and perfumed by the disciplined yet reassuring aromas of integrity. In another setting, with the devil looking on, Jesus turns His back on worldly importance and flashy gimmicks that might draw attention to Himself (Luke 4:5–12). His words about the scribes illustrate that He still holds to this course for Himself as well as for His followers.

More than this, Jesus's deep well of compassion for the downtrodden and vulnerable opens beneath our feet, inviting us to drink with Him from its waters, sharing His concerns and acting as He does to lift the burdens of these people, especially women and in this case widows. We need think only of His efforts for the widow of Nain and the woman afflicted long with an issue of blood (Luke 7:11–16; 8:43–48). But pointing to these gracious acts of Jesus does not exhaust the catalogue of His generosity. The scented fragrances of a sweetly perfumed compassion that seeks the welfare of others follow in His wake throughout His entire ministry. What is recorded about the public part of His ministry now comes to a close.

Notes

- 1 Joachim Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus* (New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1963), 59.
- 2 See, respectively, Luke 19:12, 15 and Matthew 25:14, 19; Luke 19:13 and Matthew 25:15; Luke 19:24 and Matthew 25:28, 30; and Luke 19:26 and Matthew 25:29.
- 3 See the comments on Luke 4:38–39; 5:1–11; and 5:17–26.
- 4 Psalm 118:26; Zechariah 9:9; also Malachi 3:1.
- 5 Matthew 26:30; Mark 14:26; Luke 4:34, 43; 5:32; 7:33–34; 12:51–53; 19:10; see Luke 4:18; 9:56; the comments on Luke 22:14–20.
- 6 1 Peter 1:20; Revelation 13:8; Moses 7:47.
- 7 Luke 2:30; also 10:23–24; 19:42.

- 8 Mark 13:2, 19–20; also Matthew 24:2, 21–22; John 2:19–20; Doctrine and Covenants 45:18–21; Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:3, 12–20.
- 9 Matthew 21:10; Mark 11:11; Luke 19:45.
- 10 See the comments on Luke 22:7–13.
- 11 Luke 13:35; Matthew 3:11; Mark 1:7; Acts 13:25; Malachi 3:1; Doctrine and Covenants 133:2, 10, 17, 19, 66; the comments on Luke 3:7–20; 19:28–40; 22:39–46.
- 12 Luke 19:47; 20:1–2, 19–20; 22:2.
- 13 See the comments on Luke 4:1–13.
- 14 Joachim Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus* (New York, NY: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1963), 71–72.
- 15 See the comments on Luke 11:14–28.
- 16 I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978), 745.
- 17 See Ether 3:14; Doctrine and Covenants 93:7–10; Moses 1:6; 4:1–4; John 1:1–5, 10; the comments on Luke 6:1–5.

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