

Chapter Sixteen

Use of the conjunctive *kai* translated as “and” gives a clear impression that this new chapter flows immediately from the conclusion of the last one where Jesus gets into a boat and lands at Magadan. It is as though the almost inescapable presence of the Pharisees and scribes climbed into the same boat with Jesus, they being impossible to avoid. While not true literally, this seems to be an essential part of the story which Matthew wishes to convey.

This time both groups (whether or not they came from Jerusalem as in 15.1 isn't specified but could be presumed) have the intention of testing Jesus, *peirazo* (S *nasa'*, both +). This verse is noted last with regard to the devil who actually goes by that name as in 4.3. With that in mind, we could say that the Pharisees, scribes and devil/tempter are similar and perform the same function. Here the temptation takes the form of asking not just a sign or *semeion* (S *'ata'*, both +) but one from heaven which means they expect it to come down to earth from above at once.

Instead of acceding to their request as he had done with the devil, Jesus turns the tables on them. He gives an example familiar to everyone with regard to telling the weather reflected in the ditty “Red sky in morning, sailors take warning. Red sky at night, sailors' delight.” In the case at hand, when it's evening = fair weather and morning = stormy weather, both depending upon the color in the sky. Jesus continues by saying that yes, the Pharisees and scribes can interpret the sky's appearance, *diakrino* (S *baqa'*: to examine, inquire) literally as to judge through (*dia-*).

This ability based upon common sense fails, however, when applied to signs of the times, *seimeion* and *kairos* (S *'ata'* and *zavan*, all +). Jesus equates this failure to the current generation being evil and adulterous, *poneros* and *moichalis*, both + (S *byesh* + and *gor*). Actually this is the second time Jesus describes the current generation, the first being in 12.38. To be evil is one thing but adulterous is another...worse...a fact which wasn't lost on the Pharisees and scribes. We can assume they or some of their party were the same addressed earlier. As for the sign, only one applies, that of Jonah. Jesus didn't have to elaborate because it was so obvious. Also it was driven home by the fact of Jesus both leaving and departing, *kataleipo* and *aperchomai* +. Note the two prepositions: *kata-* or down and *apo-* or from.

The departing and leaving of vs. 4 carries over into the next verse with the disciples having gotten into a boat, their destination being the other side of the lake. Nothing is said about Jesus accompanying them. The point stressed here is how to escape from the Pharisees and Sadducees as quickly as humanly possible. The same applies to the destination. This hasty departure is enhanced by the fact that the disciples forgot to bring along any bread. Jesus knew this from the outset but said nothing. It would provide an occasion to perform not so much a miracle but a teaching moment for the disciples away from the Pharisees, scribes and crowds.

Upon disembarking, Jesus reminded the disciples of the recent encounter with the religious authorities. He bade them to both take heed and beware of the leaven belonging to them. The verbs are *horao* and *prosecho* (*S chaza'* and *zahar*, all +), a kind of double warning all the more meaningful due to the passage across the lake. That, if you will, gave time for the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees to rise in the sense becoming a warning. Surely thoughts of that encounter had to be held in check else it would poison the minds of the disciples.

The disciples had discussed among themselves their failure to bring along bread, *dialogizomai*, the preposition *dia-* suggestive of through-ness. In other words, they were bothered and accusing themselves and one another. In the course of their *dialogizomai* they must have brought up the two instances when Jesus provided bread for huge amounts of people. That was fine for such a multitude, but for us? This caught Jesus' attention which made him exclaim that they had little faith, *oligopistos* +. At the same time the disciples must receive due credit as with many earlier occasions when they bumbled. They continued to remain with Jesus even though it must have been painful at such occasions.

Jesus confronts the disciples with five rapid-fire rhetorical questions they couldn't answer, not so much to shame them but to teach them. Afterwards again he warns them to beware (*prosecho* and *zahar*, both +), something he can't drill home enough:

-Why are the disciples engaged in discussing among themselves, *dialogizomai*?

- Why haven't they yet perceived or *noeo* (S *sakal*, both +)?
- Why don't they remember (*mnemoneuo*; S *hehad*) the five loaves Jesus had multiplied?
- Why haven't they remembered (*mnemoneuo*) the seven loaves which Jesus had multiplied?
- Why have they failed to perceive (*noeo* and S *sakal*, both +) that Jesus didn't speak about bread?

To round out the importance of all this with regard to the relationship of Jesus and his disciples vis-à-vis the Pharisees and Sadducees, vs. 12 concludes with a straight-forward observation. In essence it said that the disciples got Jesus' message.

There seems to be an unspecified time gap between Jesus' location and his coming into the district of Caesarea Philippi noted in vs. 13. Now he asks his disciples what they think about his identity as the Son of man. Note that he's specific, the generic "men" asking this question. Although the title is used a number of times, we can trace it back to 11.19 in connection with John the Baptist. Perhaps some of the disciples weren't quite sure as to his identity even though Jesus had been with them for some time now. Despite this, they held him in respect and were fearful to probe too much. The same must have applied among themselves. They didn't want to get nosy but by reason of their closeness to Jesus, they had to have a clearer identity of him.

In one accord in vs. 14 the disciples put forth their response, John the Baptist being chief among them followed by Elijah and Jeremiah. They throw in "one of the prophets" which means at least they regarded Jesus in a prophetic role. Although afraid to admit it, the disciples were just as blind as everyone else. Jesus was asking about what people thought of him and was equally curious to get his disciples' opinion. They knew, of course, this was coming and felt they were being put on the spot. While the others held their silence, Peter pipped up, that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. Note that he recognizes Jesus as Christ or Messiah, not one of the prophets as several of the disciples had proposed. Addition of "living" (*zao*, to live physically speaking) suggests immediacy. How Peter came to this realization isn't stated, just given. It's one of those mysterious instances where we're left with something important and must figure it out for ourselves, that is, how it can relate to our own lives.

Jesus responds at once, delighted that Peter had made this confession, “blessed” or *makarios* (S *tu*v, both +) being the first word out of his mouth and rightly so. Between that response and Jesus having called Peter in 4.18 there’s a nanosecond where time has collapsed. Jesus knew when calling Peter that he would respond positively. This was true even though awareness of his response was far dimmer. Now regardless of the various exigencies bound to follow, Jesus’ mission was on solid ground. He can take comfort that from now on his mission will take root after Pentecost and beyond.

As for Peter’s confession, Jesus puts the matter up front and center so it will be clear not just to Peter but to the other disciples. Flesh and blood had not revealed that Jesus is the Christ and Son of the living God, *apokalupto* (S *galal*, both +) implying the uncovering of a reality that always has been present but not recognized. Actually Jesus attributes such uncovering to his Father who is in heaven even though he was fully aware of this. As for Peter, if we could slow things down, he would feel a peeling-away of several layers of ignorance. Once done, the other disciples could not help but be aware of it though as yet they had not the same revelation or uncovering. That again is something that would have to wait for Pentecost. At the same time they must have been jealous because Jesus had favored Peter over the rest of them. Even if Jesus had picked someone else, jealousy would have been unavoidable.

In response to Peter’s confession, in vs. 18 Jesus calls him *Petros* or rock (*petra*) upon whom he will build his church. The verb is *oikodomeo* or more literally, to build or construct a house, *demo* + *oikos*. That house, if you will, will be called an *ekkleseia* (S *hedtha*’) which connotes a calling from, *ek* + *kaleo*. Incidentally, vs. 18 is the first mention of *ekklelesia* in the New Testament. Those within it will be recognized as having been summoned to this place where they will take up permanent residence. As for the act of building, Jesus says that it doesn’t take place now but will in the indeterminate future which must have disappointed Peter. Naturally he as the literal foundation of this new entity would like to know right now. Also Jesus calls this building *ekklelesia*, not a synagogue nor even a temple, terms familiar to the disciples. Since its members will be called-from in the literal sense, it will be an order wholly different from anything in existence at the present. As far as Peter goes, it could even include political elements, an organization that could challenge and overcome Roman authority.

As for the ever-present Roman influence in the political sense, Peter's ears as well as those of the other disciples must have perked up when Jesus said that the powers of death won't prevail against it or literally, the gates of Hades. What could be better than that? As for the gates or *pule*, this noun more specifically means one side of a double gate, not a single gate. Such double-doors are a form of added protection behind which a formidable concealed power lays. It's waiting to burst through and overcome the *ekklesia* which is deceptively defenseless, for Jesus doesn't speak of any matching fortifications. The verb for this pressing against by the gates of Hades, if you will, is *katischuo* (S *chasan*: to be strong, to subdue), *ischuo* or to be strong prefaced with the preposition *kata-* which here means down or against.

While Hades has gates for defense and *ekklesia* lacks such protective measures, the latter's ability to prevail rests not on the display of might but upon the authority of Jesus Christ symbolized by the keys. While they don't belong directly to the *ekklesia* proper, they do belong to the kingdom (*basileia* +) of heaven, and the very nature of a *basileia* suggests fortification which here is not disclosed. That's deliberate, a way to keep the enemy guessing. Peter is to use these keys for binding loosening, *deo* and *luo* (S '*esar* and *shara*') on earth. As soon as he does one, its effect will reverberate at once in heaven. Obviously Peter hadn't a clue what this meant. As noted several times earlier with regard to difficult-to-understand things, it will have to wait until Pentecost. One thing he does know, that the gates of Hades are ever present as they press against that realm to which he has keys. Much of his *deo* and *luo* will depend upon how hard those gates will press against the *ekklesia*. Also later when he looks back on his denial of Jesus, that will steal his resolve, making him an unshakable defense of the *ekklesia*.

After this rather sudden and unexpected occasion but one Jesus had anticipated for a long time and now was glad it has been done, he strictly charges his disciples to keep quiet as to his identity of being the Christ. That would be equivalent of making him known as Messiah and thrust him into the political realm which he wants to avoid at all costs. However, he knew the vast majority of people would see it otherwise. The verb used to drill this home is *diastello*, to make clear in no uncertain terms as by the preposition *dia-* as through. This must have struck fear into the disciples, Peter included, especially since he had just uttered his confession of faith in Jesus as the Christ. So if Jesus is the

Christ, how and when will this be made public...or will it? That was the burning question in their minds.

In vs. 21 Jesus continues to get down to business with his disciples. This is conveyed by the verse's opening words which read literally as "from that then" or *tote +*. With the new *ekklesia* out of the way at least temporarily which essentially means for the rest of Jesus' ministry, he speaks of the need to go to Jerusalem. Apparently to date neither he nor the disciples seem to have gone there but had less than pleasant encounters with religious representatives from the capitol. That's part of why Jesus uses the verb *deiknumi* (S *chua'*: also to manifest, both +) instead of saying of speaking. *Deiknumi* connotes far more than presenting information no matter how precise or meaningful it might be. It's more descriptive which here involves details of the suffering Jesus is going to endure. Then he speaks about rising on the third day. Apparently this is the first time they've heard about the resurrection and admittedly were clueless as to what Jesus meant. This and other related matters don't seem to have been part of any discussions between Jesus and the twelve. Throughout it all the master-disciple relationship endured where the latter doesn't question the former.

Emboldened by Jesus having acknowledged him as the foundation of this new yet barely understood entity called church or *ekklesia*, Peter begins to take Jesus aside, *archo* here as to take the initiative in speaking. This along with the preposition *pros-*, indicative of direction towards-which prefaced to the verb *proslambano*, serves to intensify the sense of being rebuked (S *maka'*: to humble, to lay down). Also it's a clear sign of Peter's impulsiveness. He throws in the adjective *hileos* usually rendered as merciful and here forms part of his address where he wishes the Lord well. This word, politely inserted, disguises Peter's real fear. Should something happens to Jesus, the same would befall him and the other disciples. The verb *epitimao* (S *ka'a'*) or to rebuke has the preposition *epi-* prefaced to the verbal root (*timao*: to estimate, to hold in honor or to regard), another sign of the intensity involved. Surely more words were uttered in a fairly heated discussion but are not recorded here.

Just as quickly as Peter began his rebuke, Jesus wastes not a second as indicated the verb *strepheo* or to turn around. This verb implies that Jesus had his attention directed forward, if you will, with Peter coming up from behind. Given the context as in vs. 21, we could say that Jesus was focused upon what would

happen to him in Jerusalem. All at once Peter came up from behind as if to stop him in his tracks. However, it didn't surprise Jesus who outrightly calls him Satan or more accurately, that Peter get behind him. Actually Peter had been walking behind Jesus for some time but now Jesus meant that he get way, way behind.

Jesus couldn't help but be reminded of his temptation: "Begone, Satan! for it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.'" Jesus continued by saying that Peter was a hindrance to him, *skandalon* + (*S tuqalta'*) or a cause for tripping or snare. Then he throws out words which must have devastated Peter, so contrary to being lavishly praised a moment ago. That is, Peter is not on the side of God but of men. The verb *phroneo* + (*raha'*, both +) or to think, to understand is used, that Peter thinks just like any other person despite his confession of Jesus being the Christ.

Obviously the other disciples heard Jesus rebuke Peter and if they were honest enough, would admit to taking a certain delight in it. Now Peter had been cut down to size as he has deserved, so they thought. At this point (vs. 24) Jesus tells them all to take up their respective crosses if they wish to follow him. This, of course, makes sense in Jesus going to Jerusalem but doesn't to those close to him. Chances are they had passed several crucifixions along the way, nothing really new to them despite the horror involved. Jesus elaborates on these words for the rest of this chapter. Perhaps Peter felt some consolation for his recent interjection in that he along with his fellow disciples were put in their places.

Vs. 25 has Jesus put this talk about a cross in perspective. He offers two sets which contradict each other deliberately so: saving one's life = losing it and losing one's life = saving it. The three verbs are *sozo*, *apoluo* and *heurisko* (*S chaya'*, *'evad* and *shakach*, all + except the last Syriac verb): save, lose and find. The first or *sozo* is presented in a negative sense almost as hoarding. This has the immediate opposite effect to which we can be blind, *apoluo*. This verb fits in well in that it connotes a loosening-from, *apo-*. On the other hand, *apoluo* freely done results in its opposite, *heurisko* with regard to one's life. All this does not make any sense except when it comes to Jesus, that is, "for my sake."

In vs. 26 Jesus seeks to clarify this by asking two rhetorical questions:

The first consists in asking what profit a man would have if he gains the entire world while at the same time forfeiting his life. Note the interplay of the three verbs: *opheleo*, *kerdaino* and *zemioo* (to benefit or to help, to win or to profit and to suffer confiscation; S *hana'*, *qana'* and *chasar*). Focus can be on the second or to profit which automatically results in the third, the taking away of one's very life or *psuche* +, soul. It'd come as no surprise that while saying this Jesus thought of another temptation by the devil, that is, when he was shown all the kingdoms of the world. The devil would grant this provided he worship the devil (cf. 4.10-11). At the time Jesus quotes Dt 6.13, that what counts is to worship the Lord God.

The second rhetorical question in the same verse pertains to what a man will give in return for his life or *psuche* +, *antallagma* being the noun. Because *psuche* is one's very existence, there can be nothing worth giving for it except in the context at hand, *heneken enou* +, "for my sake" of vs. 25.

After these sobering words to his disciples, in vs. 27 Jesus shifts his tone where he speaks of himself objectively, again as Son of man. He had just used this phrase with his disciples which prompted Peter to respond by saying that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God in vs. 16. Surely those words echoed strongly in Peter's ears. Jesus says that he will come with his angels in the glory or *doxa* (S *shuvcha'*: also pride, pomp; both +) of his Father. That is, he won't come alone but be accompanied by these ministering spirits. However, Jesus doesn't give a time frame or more precisely, comes close to teasing the disciples by saying that some standing there with him won't taste death.

Despite the immense appeal of such words, to a man the disciples didn't fathom what he meant. Each one thought, will what Jesus had said apply to me and not the others? Who among us will be so privileged? As for seeing this coming or *erchomai* +, most likely it refers to the Transfiguration to be described in the following chapter. Again with reference to Pentecost as the most important event for bringing into focus all what Jesus had said, at that point the disciples can look back and say that all Jesus' words fit in perfectly. Furthermore, the disciples have gained the valuable lesson of not being hard on themselves.

Chapter Seventeen

This chapter begins with the conjunctive *kai* ('and') along with an interval of six days or after the remarkable words concluding Chapter Sixteen. That is to say, Jesus claims that some who are now with him will not taste death. Although the twelve disciples remained with him, we can be assured that they dare not ask him as to what he meant. Secretly, of course, they hoped to be counted among that group. Jesus, of course, knew what they were discussing along with Peter's new role as the foundation of this previously unheard of entity called *ekklesia* or church. By reason of his position most likely the eleven would give precedence to his opinion even if they disagreed with him.

Without any explanation Jesus decides to take Peter, James and John up a high mountain, the verb being *paralambano* + where the preposition *para-* or beside connotes special-ness along with the phrase *kat' idian* literally as "according to own." Unlike other the other reference to the mountain where Jesus had preached to the crowds and did some healing, the one at hand is "high" (*hupselos*) and not identified. The text gives no reason why Jesus chose these three disciples nor why the other nine were left alone, let alone giving them instruction as what to do or how long he'd be absent. Again, it may be because of Peter; also James and John are brothers. After all, the three had in common that they were fishermen.

The disciples were used to being accompanied by people in need of healing which wasn't the case at hand. Actually it was a relief to enjoy this freedom, albeit temporarily. Besides, the mountain was high, perhaps way too high for such people to lug up the ill and disabled. On this mountaintop Jesus would be holding forth with Moses and Elijah followed by his Father's voice saying that he was his beloved son. The height prevented the nine disciples below from hearing it which at the stage of the game would be too much. It would be up to the three to explain to the other nine what they had just witnessed.

Since Jesus recently had spoken about "some standing here" [16.28], the three thought that this might be an occasion when they along with Jesus would be assumed into heaven like the prophet Elijah. If that were true, the high mountain would make perfect sense. They could practically see the chariot waiting just above. Perhaps too they might be swept away.

Vs. 2 begins with the conjunctive *kai* where Jesus gets right down to business, not allowing the three with him to linger once on the mountain top. The text

simply says that he was transfigured, *metamorphoo* (S *chalaph* also to change, to exchange). Literally it means to change after (*meta-*) or to alter the fundamental character of something. Regardless of our familiarity with the English word, it's one of those mysteries difficult to comprehend let alone articulate. Jesus takes pains to be transfigured before (*emprosthen*) Peter, James and John. It's more along the lines as in front of them or literally, to place his (human) form after or *meta-*. In this way Jesus assumes a new one or better, one that he already is yet not made visible until now.

The clearest indication that Jesus is putting his human form after, if you will, is that he face shone as the sun, *lampo* (S *nahar*: to be light, to shine) or to gleam in the sense of emitting rays of light. Similarly his garments became white as light which seems to be the same whiteness associated with the sun. The text gives no time frame as to how quickly this *meta-* took place, but we can assume it was instantaneous. Reading into it, we could say that Jesus felt relieved in the sense that he could be—to be in the precise sense—himself without a human *morphe*.

Because of the naturalness of being as such, it was equally natural that Moses and Elijah appear in a similar state although we have no details as their respective appearances. They did so suddenly as inferred by *idou* + or “behold” with regard to the verb *horao* + here in the sense of to catch notice. Thus all three were speaking with each other, *sullaleo* also as to hold converse with. Since Moses is present, there comes to mind the way he used to speak with the Lord as in Ex 33.11: “Thus the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend.” This reads literally and somewhat humorously as “faces to faces” which is suggestive of an intense, familiar free-for-all.

Matthew gives no hint as to the subject of the discussion taking place within blinding white light, if you will. Although the verb *sullaleo* for speaking is used, there was no exchange of words because while Jesus is transfigured, the same is happening to Moses and Elijah. Keeping in line with the verb *metamorphoo*, they had their physicality put after or *meta-* their inherently divinized form. The form of each remained visible enough for no other reason than for the three disciples.

Peter decides to barge in on this conversation despite the fact that he couldn't hear a word being spoken. He asks Jesus to make three booths, *skene* or tent which infers a temporary dwelling simply because it's good (*kalos* + or

beautiful) to be where they are. The problem with building tents is that they are on a high mountain and couldn't get the proper material. Perhaps that was a delaying tactic on Peter's part, that Jesus, Moses and Elijah wouldn't mind waiting. If so, he could milk the situation for what it's worth.

No doubt, the three didn't pay attention to Peter butting in. They tolerated him by reason of his newly established position as head of the church. Jesus had to explain what that meant to Moses and Elijah since it was a new reality with unfamiliar to them but of which they had premonitions of during their lifetime. At this juncture a bright (*photeinos* also as shining, radiant) cloud came over the three. Most likely Moses asked for this, he being very familiar with a cloud as a place for intimate communication with the Lord. Also the cloud had the benefit of excluding the disciples' prying eyes. Even if the three could understand the heavenly conversation, they wouldn't have a clue as to what was being communicated.

Chances are the conversation between Jesus, Moses and Elijah continued on a more intense level within the cloud. Finally they decided it was time to let in the three disciples as to what was going on. After all, Jesus was responsible for having brought them to the summit of this high mountain no so much for their personal benefit but for his future church. So why not all twelve? That sounds ideal, but something of the order of the transfiguration can be communicated only to a select few. They had the responsibility not of explaining but of teaching it at a later time. Hence it's fully appropriate for them to hear an unidentified voice saying that this man Jesus is my son who is beloved or *agapetos* + (S *tava'*: to make ready, to prepare). They knew this unidentified voice (*phone*) was the Father of whom Jesus spoke so often simply by calling him son. Certainly Moses and Elijah concurred as what the Father had just said. In essence it was what they had been teaching all their lives.

The disciples' response to hearing this voice? Fear and adoration equally combined or the verb *phobeo* along with the adjective *sphodros* (both +) connoting that which is excessive. While flat on his face Peter must have wondered if he was going to be rebuked or even put to death by reason of being so importune. Jesus saw this as an opportunity to step outside the cloud, if you will, and approach the three disciples. However, first it was necessary to bid farewell to Moses and Elijah who undoubtedly would keep a keen eye on what

soon was to befall Jesus. Surely their conversation continued or rather, is continuing.

Without knowing it, Jesus touched Peter, James and John, the verb being *hapto*; *qarev* is the Syriac verb meaning to be near and also as “came,” both +. He said what the situation demanded, namely, not to fear. Their response? Vs. 8 says that they lifted up their eyes, *epairo* (*epi-* or upon). This is the second verb with regard to lifting up, the first being *egeiro* in vs. 7 meaning to rise. Implied is that the three remained on the ground but partially as such or in the act of getting up. When they did stand on their two feet they saw no one but Jesus. The text leaves it as that but we can assume they must have missed Moses and Elijah and obviously were too afraid to ask about them.

Vs. 9 begins with the conjunctive *kai* translated as “and” to show the close connection of what had transpired on the mountain top and how their relationship with Jesus had changed. Surely it had been transfigured. Jesus’ human *morphe* or form had been put after or *meta-* which is accurate but in a way awkward to express, but they were at a loss to express it adequately. In the course of their descent Jesus knew that Peter, James and John were confused. It was obvious by the expression on their faces. He commanded them (*entello*; *S paqad*: also to entreat, to visit; both +) not to broadcast this vision or *horama* (from the verbal root *horao* +) which humanly speaking was impossible. Jesus makes it conditional, if you will, by the word *eos* + or “until” which suggests duration, that being when the Son of man is raised from the dead. This really threw them for a loop. It’s one thing to enjoin a close to impossible command, but raising from the dead? How can the three keep this from the other disciples whom they were about to meet? Obviously they would press them with all sorts of questions.

The three don’t know how to respond adequately but ask Jesus about Elijah, having recourse to what the scribes claim, that he must come first. It’s no coincidence they bring him up after their encounter with him on the mountain. Interestingly they are silent with regard to Moses. After all, Elijah was assumed into heaven while Moses died as is the case with any other person. However, the Lord himself buried him and kept the place secret.

As for Elijah, the scribes had taught what the three echoed about his return. This is in reference to the conclusion of the Book of Malachi at the threshold of

the New Testament. The last two verses (4.5-6) run as follows: "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes. And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the land with a curse." The excerpt begins with *hineh* or "behold" which serves to introduce the prophet Elijah before the day of the Lord described as being great and awesome (*gadal* and *yare'* +, the latter as to fear). When it arrives, the Lord will turn the hearts (*shuv* also as to return and *lev* +) of fathers to their children and their hearts to their fathers. And so Malachi concludes with a rather sudden ending and threat of a curse. Should the people not convert, the Lord will strike the land with a curse, *cherem*.

To this question posed by the three disciples—after all, it's rooted in Jewish tradition—Jesus responds that indeed, Elijah does come. The present tense of *erchomai* + is used but with the intent of restoring all things. Compare with the future tense of the same verb in the next verse. The second verb is *apokathistemi*, the root *histemi* + or to stand prefaced with two preposition, *apo-* and *kata-* (from and according to)...to stand-from-inaccord-with. Implied is that all things (*ta panta*) will stand first from or *apo-* and then (or simultaneously) with *kata-* or in accord. To the limited minds of the disciples this applies to the restoration of Israel, but it seems Jesus has a much larger picture in mind.

Perhaps this talk about Elijah is taking place while Jesus and the three, Peter, James and John are still descending from the mountain and have not yet come to the other nine down below. However, Matthew is fuzzy on this point. Despite Jesus' asking the three to keep quiet as noted in vs. 10, most likely he wouldn't mind if all twelve knew about it. After all, they will share in the same mission as time goes on.

Jesus continues speaking about Elijah, again Moses not mentioned which may sound as though he were left in the dust. Although Moses is the most important of Israel's holy men, it is Elijah who has captured the popular imagination down through the ages due to a chariot whisking him off into heaven. Jesus capitalizes on this by applying it to himself, namely, that Elijah has already come, the past tense of *erchomai* + compared with the present tense of the same verb in vs. 11. Indeed such talk must have been confusing. Even though he had come (in the person of Jesus), people did not know him, *epiginosko* (S *yadah*, both +) where the preposition *epi-* (upon) suggests more intimate knowledge.

To have this *epi-* prefaced to *ginosko* suggests that people would recognize Jesus as fulfilling the role of Elijah, something even his close disciples failed to do.

As a result of the lack of *epiginosko*, people pretty much manhandled Elijah. The same will happen with the Son of man, that is, he will suffer (*pascho*) at the hands of the same people. This is followed in vs. 13 by the important connective *tote +* or “then.” It serves to clear up any confusion the disciples had with Jesus and Elijah. Although Jesus didn’t say so directly, they understood (*suniami*; *S sakal*, both +) that he was speaking of John the Baptist. In other words, they were able to put together the *sun-* or “with” prefaced to *hiemi* or to put into motion) the relationship just presented. Obviously Jesus, Elijah and John the Baptist are three distinct persons. Jesus is alive, Elijah had been assumed into heaven a long time ago and John recently was beheaded. That means Elijah is just as much alive as Jesus, the two sharing the same plane of existence with Moses as indicated by their presence and free exchange that took place on the mountaintop.

Vs. 14 begins with the conjunctive *kai* where we have a complete shift in the action, that is, Jesus and his disciples coming to the crowd or *ochlos +*. Actually *kai* as well as *de +* both translated as “and” occur a lot in this incident dealing with the epileptic child. It’s a way of showing the fast-paced action as well as Jesus’ frustration with regard to those whom he’s addressing, a “faithless and perverse generation.” Apparently he and his little had managed to escape being surrounded by people wanting to be cured, etc., for 15.32 is the last time *ochlos* is mentioned. The way vs. 14 is presented you get the impression that yes, Jesus and three of his disciples had withdrawn to the mountaintop. Perhaps their coming (*erchomai +*) is with respect to the base of the mountain where the nine disciples remained and had attracted people looking for Jesus. They had taken great pains to restrain anyone from ascending the mountain, even threatening them by reminding of what would happen if they tried to break through. This they did by citing Ex 19.12: “Take heed that you do not go up into the mountain or touch the border of it; whoever touches the mountain shall be put to death.” An exaggeration of sorts but a useful ploy to safeguard Jesus.

Also in vs. 14 a man approached Jesus, the *pros-* of *proserchomai +* indicative of resolve, who sought to be healed of some illness or was making intercession on behalf of another person. It turned out the latter, a father pleading for his epileptic son, asking Jesus to have mercy on him, *eleo* (*S racham*, both +). The

noun epileptic is rendered by the verb *seleniazomai*, literally to be moon struck. The Syriac is the noun ‘*egara*’ or stretching out on a rooftop. The idea comes from worshipping such demons on the rooftop, the moon above being implied. With regard to the illness at hand, the father’s added words seem irrelevant, “he suffers terribly,” the verb being *pascho* and the adverb *kakos*, both +. He does this by falling into fire and water.

In vs. 16 the father claims to have approached the disciples who were unable to heal the boy, *therapeuo* (S ‘*asa*’; both +). That must have made them feel quite inadequate in light of Jesus having earlier commissioned them to go out to teach and heal as he had been doing. Their inability to help the man and his son made Jesus exclaim aloud using two rhetorical questions intended for everyone around him to hear. He wonders how long can he be with the current generation which he calls both faithless and perverse. That really hit home with the disciples, for it must have embarrassed them to no end. Again, they are to be credited with not leaving Jesus but remaining with him despite all this. The adjective *apistos* and participle of *diastrepho* are used (S the verbal root ‘*eman* with negative and *haqal*). As for the latter, it is the verbal root *strepho* + or to turn around prefaced with the preposition *dia-* (through) and connotes turning from an accepted standard.

The second rhetorical question also in vs. 17 uttered with frustration is how long will Jesus be able to bear with this generation, *anecho* literally to lift up. Right after both questions he asks that the epileptic boy be brought to him. Apparently the father approached Jesus without his son, preferring to leave him in the custody of others so he won’t hurt himself. The time waiting for the boy to be brought must have dragged on, putting everyone in an awkward position. In the meanwhile we have the father waiting along with bystanders trying to absorb Jesus’ harsh words. Will Jesus refuse instead? They couldn’t wait until the boy had come to get this over with. However, Jesus said nothing about healing.

We get a sense of Jesus’ frustration in vs. 18 when he rebukes the child, *epitimaō* (S *ka’a*’, both +) in order to expel the demon or *to daimonion* + (S *sha’da*’) within him. At the same time he wishes to expel those of little faith, a fact which had been bothering him for some time and now comes to light. We could take this as a kind of “defect” (for lack of better words) in Jesus who had just been transfigured or reverted temporarily to his native state. Now he was back in his

“human form” (again for lack of better words) and hence naturally felt frustrated by those around him which started to get at him. Perhaps he saw in the epileptic child something of what it means to be in the form of a human being while at the same time being divine. St. Paul would reflect on this later, for example, Phil 2.6-7: “who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped but emptied himself.” As for the epileptic child, he was healed (*therapeuo*, S ‘asa’; both +) instantly or literally, “from that hour.”

Vs. 19 begins with *tote +* or “then” which is equivalent to a connective. The way it’s presented is that the disciples, obviously present, were waiting for a chance to chime in with regard to his harsh words. The child had been cured, the demon expelled, and the child went home with his father whose response is unrecorded but presumably overflowing with gratitude. The disciples had been bothered...very much so...ever since the father brought his epileptic son to them because they were unable to cure him. If they were honest enough, cure of the child was secondary. What really got under their skin was their inability to make a show of themselves which led to public embarrassment. Also the father, despite his son having been healed, would return home and spread the word about the disciples’ inefficiency. Their state of mind was reflected on their faces as they watched the father walk away with his son, both with huge smiles on their faces.

This attitude of the disciples which they tried to keep hidden from others is as clear as could be by their eagerness to ask Jesus why they were so impotent. In fact, they took pains to approach him nonchalantly so as not to draw attention. The directness of *pros-* prefaced to *proserchomai* and the phrase *kat’ idian* (both +) say a lot. Jesus could read their faces before speaking with him as clear as could be. He responded to their question as to why they couldn’t cast out (*ekballo +*) the demon because of having little faith, the noun being *oligopistia*. Jesus then expounds on this, seeing a valuable opportunity for teaching since the disciples will be engaged in healing, teaching as well as passing both on to their successors once they’ve founded churches. All that, however, wasn’t on their minds right now.

As for the example countering *oligopistia*, Jesus speaks of a grain of mustard seed, this being the second reference, the first found in 13.31-32 which grows so big that birds can build their nests in it. In the process of recalling it the

disciples began to cut off, as it were, the *olig-* from *pistia*. Not only did they restore it but enhanced it. Jesus continues by saying that such faith has the capacity to move mountains. Note the way he articulates this. Obviously there are no records of such a miraculous event. Rather, attention is to be put on the spontaneous, almost child-like exaggeration when it comes to faith confronted with an impossible situation symbolized by a mountain. It is precisely this spontaneity that Jesus wishes to convey and restore confidence to his disciples. Thus nothing will be impossible (*adunateo*, lacking *dunamis* + or the capacity to do something). With the example in mind, it will allow a person to do the *meta-* of *metabaino* + or the going-across from one place to another.

While various places are secondary to Jesus' mission, vs. 22 shifts location to Galilee, Caesarea Philippi in 16.13 being the last specific place mentioned. Here the text says that "they" were gathering, *sunstrepho* literally as to turn with (*sun-*), presumably the disciples along with Jesus. Implied is that each of the twelve had gone separate ways, perhaps to their families where they had a lot of explaining to do. Some may have been met with hostility and as a result, found that like Jesus they had no where to go. Thus their lot was cast with him in a certain irrevocable manner.

A bit later the disciples were hit with more unpleasant news from Jesus who spoke of himself as of another person, namely, that the Son of man will be handed over to men. The preposition *eis* is used which makes this *paradidomai* + all the more ominous, "into the hands of men." Such men are unidentified but given what the disciples had heard in 16.21, Jesus' message was clear. However, he will be raised on the third day. The response? The disciples were "greatly distressed, *lupeo* also connoting sadness along with the adverb *sphodra*. The Syriac verb *karah* means to fall sick, to suffer pain and *tav* + means good or great which implies like the Greek, connotes excessive-ness. End of story. Jesus must have broken this off at once without giving any explanation or consolation, somewhat concerned that Peter again might try to rebuke him. We don't have his reaction but judging by the harsh look on Jesus' face, we can assume that he held his anger in check.

Beginning with vs. 24 through the end of Chapter Seventeen we have a different twist in the narrative which involves paying the temple tax. At Capernaum a collector of the half-shekel tax approached Peter, asking if his master (*didaskalos* +, *S ravuna'*) pays the tax or not. This man must have known

Peter or at least knew about him as having a certain prominence among the twelve disciples. Note that he didn't ask Matthew, the former tax collector. Although Matthew had worked for the Roman authorities while this man was in the service of religious ones, the two don't seem to have had an occasion to meet earlier on. Right away Peter responded in the affirmative, presumably knowing that Jesus had paid the tax. The conversation ends here. Perhaps it was time or near the time to pay the temple tax or perhaps the man was tempting Jesus through Peter to see where he stood on this matter. Actually he could have been in cahoots with the Pharisees and told to act accordingly.

Note that vs. 25 has Peter coming home. Given the earlier encounter with his mother-in-law and wife, the two weren't present or had moved away, not wanting to see someone who essentially had abandoned them. There Jesus asked Peter about his encounter with the tax man. The question he posed was whether or not those in authority demand toll or tribute from their sons or from those who aren't family members. Peter knew Jesus was getting at something deeper by posing this simple question, fearful to blurt out irresponsible words as he had done a short while ago when Jesus was speaking of being handed over to be killed.

In order to test Peter, Jesus bade him to go to the sea and after having caught the first fish, he will find a coin in its mouth to pay the temple tax. Nothing more about this is said. Presumably Peter complied, found the coin and paid the tax. He did this all in silence, having learned his lesson but still bothered by the fact that Jesus spoke a second time of his impending arrest, death and resurrection. It was simply a lot to take in not only for Peter but for the other disciples.

Chapter Eighteen

This chapter begins with "at that time" found last beginning Chapter Fourteen along with the noun *kairos* which is indicative of a special event. The text at hand has *hora* or hour, an unidentified period of time in a given day. With this in mind, what takes place now is at Capernaum (cf. 17.24) or right after the incident of paying the temple tax. Vs. 1 has the disciples coming to Jesus, attention being upon the *pros-* (direction towards-which) of *proserchomai* which suggests they may have been scattered but in were close proximity with each

other. They wanted to know who'd be #1 in the kingdom of heaven, something that must have frustrated Jesus to no end.

Ever since Jesus chose Peter to be head of this new religious body call a church (*ekklesia*) in 16.19, the disciples kept quiet but count on it. Underneath they were stewing with jealousy. Finally what was foremost on their minds burst forth. While knowing that Jesus had favored Peter—and Peter had a hard time since then relating to his fellow disciples—they wanted in on a piece of the action. To them position is out of the question. What counts is who is greatest in that kingdom.

Jesus, of course, knew it was futile even trying to respond to this question. As soon as the twelve saw him reaching for the nearest child, they knew that they never should have asked the question. Actually Jesus calls a child (*paidion*) to him, *proskaleo*. It's as though the *pros-* in this verb is intended to counter the *pros-* of *proserchomai* noted above. To make it worse from the disciples' point of view, Jesus puts this child in their very midst, *mesos +*. This is as uncomfortable as it can get. We can assume that the child's parents concurred at once, pleased that Jesus should single him or her out. What did that child think later in life? It must have profoundly affected those who heard of the incident. Did her or she or the parents eventually become what was later call Christians?

Jesus seems to be enjoying himself here, milking this for what it's worth but having in mind an opportunity to teach a valuable lesson to his closest followers. He begins with the solemn words “Truly I say to you” which contains the word *amen*, a strong affirmation found last in 17.20 with regard to the disciples not being able to cure the epileptic boy by reason of their little faith. As for the solemn declaration at hand, Jesus speaks of the necessity of turning or *strepho +*(*S haphak*). The intent, of course, is to become as a child in order to enter the kingdom of heaven. The verb is *eiserchomai +* with the preposition *eis*; i.e., a double *eis* or double into.

So this *strepho* or turning is to be directed not so much to copy a child's behavior but as the text says, be like a child and certainly not in a feigned sort of way. Actually it's more along the lines of a transformation to a permanent way of behaving. Such is how Jesus conceives humility, *tapeinoo* (*S mak*: to lay prostrate) also as to lose prestige or status, the chief prerequisite of becoming free. As soon as this *tapeinoo* kicks in, one ends up—almost without knowing

how or why—to be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven, *meizon* being the adjective.

Not only does that happen, whoever receives (*dechomai* +) in the sense of welcoming a guest such a child is receiving Jesus provided this *dechomai* is done literally upon (*epi*) his name. That name would be Son of man. This can be outlined briefly as such: *dechomai* → a child → *dechomai* → Jesus. The two instances of *dechomai* work as one and is not a fusion of Jesus and the child but one where each is respected as a person. The requirement for such *dechomai* is being like or after the manner of a child, and if one is like a child, one is like Jesus himself. While there's an obvious difference between Jesus and a child on the physical level, on the spiritual level both are the same. Jesus has more to say about this, but now the disciples have learned the hard way that they've been put in place.

Vs. 6 is a continuation of the previous verse, the two forming one extended sentence. The importance of “but” or literally “who yet ever” serves to introduce a dire warning—the opposite of *dechomai*—with regard little ones (*mikros*), another way of speaking of a *paidion* or child. That warning pertains to causing *skandalizo* (S *kashal*, both +), literally to stumble. Because a child is involved, this stumbling is severe and unfortunately could involve sexual abuse. Actually the *mikros* at hand is not a *paidion* but represents a person who believes in Jesus, literally “into (*eis*) me.”

Jesus says it would be better for a person responsible to have fasted around his neck a great millstone (*mulos*) hung around his neck and cast into the sea. *Mulos* in and by itself is huge. To it he adds two more characteristics:

1) The adjective *onikos* makes it far worse because it means anything referring to a donkey or ass which moves the millstone round and round.

2) *Pelagos* translated as depth but means more the open sea compared with *thalasse* which is a more general term. Combining the two, and you get an image of complete or total disappearance with regard to the person responsible for *skandalizo*.

This image of mistreating a child is more than the usual implied abuses that come to mind. Rather, a child represents a believer in Jesus which makes the situation far worse. Because of this, it leads Jesus to continue this theme in vs. 7

which begins with *ouai* or “woe,” an interjection indicative of pain as well as distress. Here it isn’t directed as one would suspect to an individual responsible for tripping up a child-like believer in Jesus. Rather, it’s toward the world or *kosmos* (S *halma*’, both +) which is as general as it gets. Instead of thinking this as too vague in actuality it’s all-inclusive by reason of the gravity of what’s involved. The **RSV** has “temptation to sin” whereas the Greek reads literally “from the snares it is necessary to come snares,” the noun *skandalon* as derived from the verbal root *skandalizo*. In the same breath Jesus adds that *ouai* or woe applies to whomever is responsible for such *skandalon*.

Vs. 8 gets down to the nitty-gritty details about causing scandal or tripping up as Jesus had just presented it. He speaks of cutting off one’s hand or foot if circumstances should lead to this. The **RSV** uses the word “sin” but the Greek text has *skandalizo* which as noted just above, is more to the point. To preserve the integrity of a person with child-like faith in Jesus radical surgery is required even should it result in being maimed or lame. Such permanent physical injury is far better than not being able to enter life or *eis ten zoen*, literally “into life,” *zoe* +. This noun refers to life in the physical sense which has a direct correspondence to life in the kingdom of heaven.

The first thought that comes to mind when speaking of children is, as noted above, some sort of sexual molestation. While that may be part of what Jesus is saying, the *skandalizo* at hand is a tripping up of belief in Jesus by a person with child-like faith. Implied is such persons already are *eis ten zoen*, “into life.” While we have two very different types of persons, victim and perpetrator, ultimately Jesus wishes to bring the two together. This is far more preferable than ending up in the fire of Gehenna +. Note that it reads literally “into (*eis*) the fire of Gehenna,” this *eis* being the opposite of the *eis* with regard to entering life.

Vs. 10 continues with Jesus speaking of the so-called little ones (*mikros* +) which means it’s of great importance to him. We can imagine the disciples listening in both in awe and fear. They are being taught a vital lesson for later when they will be leaders of local churches. Now Jesus moves from tripping up the so-called little ones to not despising them, *kataphroneo* + (S *basa*’ also to neglect). While this doesn’t fall under the same category of tripping them up, it can have more long-term harm by reason of not paying attention to them. After all, among all those following Jesus they are the most dear. This warning not to

have an opinion nor to form a judgment (the root *phroneo* +) which is down (*kata* +) is of special importance. *Aggelos* +, of course, means messenger which means that each little one has such a messenger assigned to him or her whose function is to deliver information. Thus they're bridging two realities as they shuttle back and forth. All the while their focus of attention (*blepo* +, the common verb to see) is upon the face of the Father. This focus isn't one way. The Father in turn has his *blepo* upon the messengers, reading their reports as they come in or as they enter heaven. Then he changes, revises or keeps the message the same, depending upon each circumstance.

In vs. 12 Jesus stops for a moment to insert a rhetorical question, asking his disciples what they think about all this, the verb being *dokeo* + (*S chaza'*, also to see) which here leans more in the direction of supposing. He doesn't wait for a response because he knows they can't give one, so he moves on with an example relative to the subject at hand. Jesus speaks of one sheep that has gone astray or *planao* which means more to wander and has a connotation of being deceived, that is, deceived to leave the flock. In other words, what's left unsaid is that something has attracted this sheep to act accordingly. And so the shepherd abandons the ninety-nine. He's curious to know what caught this sheep's attention. He knows they can be trusted or perhaps aren't as smart as the one at hand. Hence, there's no need for protection while he goes off tracking down the lost sheep.

Interestingly, vs. 13 begins with "if" ...if the shepherd finds the lost sheep, leaving open the possibility that he may not. However, he does which prompts Jesus to use *amen* + or "truly" which captures his joy, *chairo* (*S chada'*, both +). Not only that, Jesus takes pains to say that he rejoices over this lost sheep more than he does with the ninety-nine. However, that doesn't forebode well for the lost sheep once back in the pen. How they will treat this so-called prodigal son is left to our imagination.

Jesus now brings in his Father who obviously is the shepherd at hand. It's his will (*thelema* +) that this sheep and the others do not perish, *apollumi* (*S 'evad*) connoting complete and utter destruction). And so this lost sheep represents one of the little ones, *mikros* +. When using such a word as *thelema* it refers to a faculty belonging to a person which in this case is the Father. It's a more direct and personal way of speaking of him that if Jesus says "My Father in heaven wills" (etc.).

In vs. 15 Jesus goes into some detail with regard to sin on a personal level, the verb being *hamartano*. The Syriac verb is *sakal* mentioned a number of times earlier with several different meanings. Both the Greek and Syriac bring this home more directly by the preposition *eis* (S *b-*) literally as “into you.” Jesus proposes handling it in three ways, but before getting into that he proposes a one-on-one contact. He lays this out through the verb *elegcho* and the adverb *metaxu*, to cross examine or to question and between. In other words, Jesus is encouraging the need for dialogue. Whether or not this *elegcho/metaxu* works is described by an outline of the following three verbs. They are presented as such in order to obtain a better handle on what Jesus is communicating, especially because it’s so familiar:

-*Akouo* + or to hear. The successful outcome put in terms as “if,” depends upon not just hearing but taking to heart. The result? Through a one-on-one contact you have gained your brother, *kerdaino* (S *yetar*, both +) as to acquire.

-*Akouo* + or in this instance, not to listen. This is another instance of the contingency signified by “if.” Failure to listen requires taking one or the others, *paralambano* +. Hopefully this *para-* or being-beside will serve to confirm not just the word (*rhema* +) but every word of those who are *para-*. The verb is *histemi* (S *qum* both +), basically to stand. Jesus is quoting in part from Dt 19.15: “A single witness shall not prevail against a man for any crime or for any wrong in connection with any offense that he has committed; only on the evidence of two witnesses, or of three witnesses, shall a charge be sustained (the Hebrew verb is *qum* much like the Syriac).”

-*Parakouo* or to refuse, the *para-* here suggesting that one is beside the hearing or *akouo*, not present with it. Such refusal necessitates bringing in the church or *ekklesia* +. It’s helpful to be reminded that this type of assembly is brand new, actually revolutionary. The person so accused will be as a tax collector or Gentile should he not listen to the *ekklesia*, that is, he will be a foreigner...an outsider...with regard to this body. Still, *ekklesia* will take some time getting used to in light of the Jewish synagogue and temple.

In vs. 18 Jesus begins with *amen*+, another indication of what he’s about to say is of great import. He uses the same words as he did with Peter in 16.19 regarding the keys to the kingdom of heaven though he doesn’t mention keys. In the verse at hand Jesus seems to be shifting the *deo* and *luo* (both +) or binding and loosening to the other disciples, that is, by way of participation. While all

twelve have equality, Peter is inferred as holding the keys with regard to heaven.

As for the *deo* and *luo*, both are to be seen with regard the threefold way of handling difficult relationships discussed above. It gets a bit fuzzy here, for Jesus seems to extend the *deo* and *luo* to the *ekkllesia* as a whole though doesn't mention it. That is to say, in vs. 19 he speaks of two or three "of you." If they agree on anything, this being literally "upon (*epi*) earth," such upon-ness will be transferred immediately to the Father or *para* (beside) the Father in heaven. In sum, the *sumphoneo* (*S shaqa'*, also to be even, sufficient) at hand which is a fitting or more accurately a matching of (*sum-*, with) of earth and heaven. Jesus stresses this further by saying that even when such a small number is assembled, he will be in their midst, *mesos* +. The verb is *sunago* + and has application to the church or *ekkllesia*.

Tote + or "then" which opens vs. 21 is a loaded word insofar as it introduces Peter who proceeds to act in his typical impulsive manner. This is backed up by the *pros-* (direction towards-which) of *proserchomai* +. Peter had just heard the threefold way of handling problematic relationships and seemed quite bothered by it. Keep in mind too that he just heard Jesus repeat words of binding and loosening not so much in reference to him but to the other disciples. Most likely that's what is behind his question as to how often he's to forgive "my brother," this phrase implying membership in the *ekkllesia*. Thus Peter is interpreting or better, misinterpreting binding and loosening in terms of forgiveness. So, he says to himself, where does this *deo* and *luo* stand with regard to me? Jesus knows Peter quite well by now, so he came off with a spontaneous seventy times seven. It's an astronomical number pretty much telling Peter to back off. The other disciples couldn't agree more but kept it to themselves not discussing it with Peter in their midst.

Vs. 23 begins with *Dia touto* or "therefore," literally as "through this" to show that Peter's sudden yet typical way of butting in uninvited enabled Jesus to present an important lesson. While reading this, it's helpful to keep in mind that binding-on-earth and loosening-in-heaven mentioned a few verses ago. The parable of a king settling accounts with his servants fits in quite nicely because Jesus straightaway compares it with the kingdom of heaven. Obviously that imagery was on top of the disciples' minds, eagerly wanting to know how the king would act. Would he bind or would he loosen? Indeed, the way it goes

would give insight into the mind of their master. *Sunairo* or literally to raise with (*sun-*) and *logos* +mean to settle accounts (S *nashav* or to take, receive and *chushvana'* or money with regard to computation). *Logos* is appropriate here, for it means more than just a transaction but an issue of a personal and pressing nature.

Jesus takes his time, wanting his disciples to be attentive to every word which is why vs. 24 starts off the parable with “When he (the king) began his reckoning,” *archo* as to take the initiative and *sunairo* (both +). Will it work? Superficially no by reason of human weakness. However, their collective memory was strong enough not just here but with all the other things Jesus had said in order to pass it on to future generations. As for the parable itself, a servant who owed the king a huge amount of money is brought in but gets off Scott-free from being sold as a slave along with his family, etc. The king must have known or knew about him, so why not give him a chance? The servant was cunning and if he play his cards right by appealing to the king’s merciful side, his debt would be canceled. The verb for showing mercy here is *splagchnizomai* (S *racham*, both +).

The next verse (28) begins ominously with “but” or *de* + where the servant promptly forgets the mercy shown not just to him but his family, goes out and throttles a fellow servant who owed him a pittance by comparison. Despite the plea for patience, the single-minded servant throws him into prison. By no means did this escape notice. Virtually everyone got wind of what had happened, including the king, *lupeo* + (S *kara'*: to be short, narrow) signifying great distress and grief. Actually the way Jesus presents this is quite distressful, almost hard to read.

Immediately the king summoned the servant, the *pros-* or *proskaleo* + indicative of this urgency, calling him wicked or *poneros* +. Note that the king makes him remember when he had besought him, *parakaleo* +, the *para-* or beside contrasting with the *pros-* of the same verbal root. First the king throws out in justified anger a rhetorical question as to showing mercy (*eleeo* +) and then dispatches him to prison. Yet there’s a glimmer of hope even for this man. Vs. 34 says that he’ll remain in prison until he pays his debt. The time frame isn’t given, presumably very long, but still there’s light at the end of the tunnel. The conclusion? Jesus looks his disciples in the eye and speaks directly to them. The king represents the Father described as heavenly or *ouranios* + instead of being

in heaven will do the same if you...each disciple...don't forgive your brother (again, one who belongs to the new entity called the *ekklesia*) from your heart or *kardia* +. End of discussion. Both Jesus nor his disciples can add any further to something which is so clear.

Chapter Nineteen

This new chapter begins with the conjunctive *kai* translated as “now” to show as it usually does the close connection between an action just completed and one about to take place. The verb *teleo* (S *shelam*, both +) or to end has the sense of bringing to completion with regard to Jesus' *logoi* or plural of *logos* +. That's an understatement of sorts because he concluded with a harsh parable about the servant pardoned by his king who did not show it in return to a lesser servant. Surely these words will echo in the ears of the disciples more than most of what Jesus had communicated to them thus far.

Jesus now leaves Galilee for Judea beyond the Jordan, the reason for which isn't given. This time larger crowds (*ochlos* +) followed him. The impression from the previous chapter is that Jesus had withdraw from them, but as always they were hovering nearby. How he managed to control them isn't spelled out, but the people generally held him in respect and left him along when he wanted it. Vs. 2 simply says that upon arriving in the region of Judea he healed them, *therapeuo* (S 'asa'; both +). When reading this Gospel account or the other three we get the idea that Jesus has no battle plan laid out...that's secondary...as long as people hear what he has to say. He's counting his disciples other unmentioned followers to keep a record which they do, contributing to what we have now as the four Gospels.

Just as ever present as the crowds, so are the Pharisees. Vs. 3 says that they came up to test him, *peirazo* (S *nasa'*, both +), having gotten word of Jesus' whereabouts by their agents who were tracking his every move. Easily we can imagine them trying to listen in when Jesus was speaking with his disciples, trying to decipher what he was saying from watching the expression on their faces. In the meanwhile, they were busy jotting down every bit of information to bring back to their superiors in Jerusalem. If these observations and notes could be collated and worked into an account of Jesus' words and actions, we'd

have something of an anti-Gospel or record that just might be more accurate than the existing Gospels which we'd consider it valuable information.

This time the Pharisees caught Jesus just after he had done some healing and asked about divorcing one's wife. Note that they threw in the words "for any cause," *aitia* being a broad a terms as it gets. As for the verb, *apoluo* + is more telling: to loosen (*luo*) from or *apo-*. Without missing a beat Jesus quotes the most fundamental scriptural verse pertaining to marriage, first putting it as a rhetorical question ('Have you not read?') as a means to shame the Pharisees on the spot.

With reference to the creation of the first man and first woman Jesus is careful to add that God (not mentioned except as 'he') has made them from the beginning or *arche* (S *reysheytha'*) which is the first principle of anything. That is to say, this *arche* consists of two genders, part of what Jesus says being a quote from Gn 1.27 which runs in full as: "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." Here, of course, is the single "man" or 'adam followed by the two genders. Note the word *tselem* or image found twice in succession, "in his own image" and almost speaking as though this *tselem* belonged to God in the objective sense, "in the image of God."

So right away the Pharisees were faced with something they were powerless to refute. We don't know if this group or some of them had encountered Jesus before, but if so, they would have warned their compatriots that Jesus would simply walk all over them. Jesus then adds a verse from Gn 2.24 which runs in full as "Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh." The two operative verbs conveying a sense of immediacy are *hazav* and *davaq*, to leave in the sense of abandon and to cling; the Greek words are *kataleipo* + and *kollao*, the latter implying a glue-like adhesion. For emphasis, in vs. 6 Jesus repeats the fact that the two become one flesh.

Jesus has just recounted one of the most basic tenets of marriage by attributing the *hazav* and *davaq* of Gn 2.24 as being rooted in God. This bond is designated as *sunzeugnumi*, literally a yoking-with which human intervention cannot break, *chorizo* or separating, parting (S *zaoeg* and *parash*). The Pharisees saw an opening here. They cite the provision for divorce established by Moses, the reference

being Dt 24.1-4: quoted in full as one extended sentence: “When a man takes a wife and marries her, if then she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a bill of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, and she departs out of his house, and if she goes and becomes another man's wife, and the latter husband dislikes her and writes her a bill of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, or if the latter husband dies, who took her to be his wife, then her former husband, who sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife after she has been defiled; for that is an abomination before the Lord, and you shall not bring guilt upon the land which the Lord your God gives you for an inheritance.”

Two things are striking. First, blame is upon the woman, not the man. Secondly, the provision of divorce and remarriage (the latter to the first husband) is tied up with a third marital partner if we may put it as such. That consists in the necessity to preserve the integrity of the land or *'erets* which is more than a physical place but the nation which lives upon it. Thus husband, wife and *'erets* are intimately connected.

By no means were the Pharisees ready to concede. In vs. 7 they posed another question as to the certificate of divorce as it pertains to the unceremonious words putting away the wife, *apoluo* +. No luck yet again, for in vs. 8 Jesus comes down upon them with the plain, unvarnished truth referring to your hardness of heart, *sklerokardia* being an exceptionally vivid noun whose root is *kardia* + prefaced by the adjective *skleros*, rough, difficult to the point of being impossible (S *qashyuth* and *lev* +). It is precisely this *sklerokardia* that prompted Moses to allow divorce though from the beginning or *arche* + it wasn't the case. Jesus of course is referring to the Genesis quote above, especially with regard to the binding force of *davaq* or the man and wife clinging to each other. Moses had to contend with this *sklerokardia* all the time and unfortunately seems part of the human condition as depicted in Ex 32.9 when the Lord himself addressed Moses: “I have seen this people and behold, it is a stiff-necked people.” The adjective is *qashah*, also as severe, fierce.

In his concluding remarks to the Pharisees intended to put them in their place but done so while appealing to tradition, Jesus uses the solemn words not unlike *amen*, “I say to you.” Again in accord with what Moses had laid down (this coming from the Lord), divorce is permitted only in the case of unchastity, *porneia* (S *gor*+) also as fornication or prostitution.

In vs. 10 the disciples don't waste a second responding to Jesus, presumably after the Pharisees had departed. What bothered the disciples was that if such difficulty is part and parcel of marital relations, it seems best not to marry at all, the verb being *sumphero* (S *paqach*, also to be advantageous) literally as to bear or to carry with. Obviously they were thinking of their own situation, most of whom presumably were still married. What troubled them or rather, continues to trouble them is that they have left their wives to follow Jesus. These women are essentially abandoned and left to their own devices even though their husbands may pop in now and again. Talk about strained marital relationships.

Jesus expands upon the disciples' question knowing that for them it has personal ramifications, he being fully aware of having called them from their families and livelihoods. He gives a kind of warning which understandably not everyone can accept, the verb *choreo* or to make room which is putting it quite vividly along with regard to *logos*, word-as-expression (both +). The Syriac has *saphach* or to suffice, to be capable with the noun *malal* +. Because Jesus realizes that *choreo* represents a gap that has opened up and unable to be filled, he used the passive of *didomai*, "it is given." The Greek text lacks "only" as in the RSV. That means the hole of *choreo* can be filled only by non-human intervention as inferred by divine grace.

Jesus gives the example of eunuchs made by men compared with those who have made themselves as such. Although such words run the risk of being taken literally, making oneself a eunuch means refraining from marriage on a voluntary basis, not coercion. The only goal is for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Jesus realizes the difficulty involved and concludes his words on the subject with a certain take-it-or-leave-it approach. He uses the verb *choreo* + which as noted above with regard to refraining from marriage, suggests making room. That means living with the decision once it's made, simple as that.

Vs. 13 shifts gears to children which are brought to Jesus most likely due to when word got out of how earlier he took the initiative of setting one in the midst of the disciples (cf. 18.2+). It'd come as no surprise later that people discovered a unique peacefulness about this child and knew it was from having come in contact with Jesus. In the verse at hand parents wanted Jesus to lay his hands upon them as well as to pray, *proseuchomai* (S *tsalal*, to intend, lean

toward, both +). No specifics are given with regard to this praying which most likely consists of a blessing. It'd be interesting to interview these children later in life to get their take on the experience. Also, how many, if any, ended up by joining the church?

The disciples recall the last incident where a child had set the standard for entering the kingdom of heaven. Indeed, they recalled Jesus placing him or her in their midst (*mesos* +) and were smarting from this embarrassment ever since. However, they were too chicken to reveal it to Jesus. Everything would have been fine if Jesus hadn't reminded them of this, indirectly of course. It prompted them as a group to behave as immature bullies by rebuking *epitimaō* (S *ka'a'*, both +) those who brought the children out of ear-shot of Jesus. The parents must have been taken by surprise, even dismayed, that followers of Jesus were behaving unlike their master. They were quick to inform him which must have made him felt as being put on the spot. In actuality the twelve were taking out on others a deficiency they had seen in themselves.

However, in vs. 14 Jesus intervenes by having read what was on their faces as plain as day. Today we'd call it a nightmare in not being able to communicate properly. Now Jesus says with some anger that the children should be left to approach him without hindrance, *koluo* +. (S *kalal*). The reason is obvious though seems to have been lost on the disciples, namely, that to such children belongs the kingdom of heaven. As in vs. 13, Jesus lays hands on them and apparently leaves by himself with the disciples holding the bag. Again they had to face the angry parents who took some delight at Jesus having publicly rebuked those closest to him. At least they knew when to back off and for now to leave Jesus alone.

As for this talk about children and the kingdom of heaven, all is not lost for the disciples even though on occasion they did have to suffer rebuke, often publicly, at the hands of Jesus. By nature the twelve were locals who lived pretty much from mouth to mouth. They were close to the soil and in some cases, the water by reason of being fishermen. While essentially poor, they had a built-in humility and no nonsense approach to life that enabled them to adapt more readily to being chastised when it was needed. That was an essential bond between them and Jesus though it may not have come up in any discussion. Most likely it came closer to the surface later when the disciples had founded churches, etc.

Vs. 16 begins with the conjunctive *kai* where the action shifts to an unidentified person who approaches (*proserchomai* +) Jesus, having been attracted by the way he had interacted with the children. Apparently he had some familiarity with Jesus' preaching which compelled him to ask about what good deed is necessary for eternal life, the adjective *agathos* (S *tav*, both +). Surely his intent was sound, but instead of receiving a response he got a rebuke of sorts. Jesus asks why he has posed such a question followed by the claim that one (person) alone is good. There was no need to identify this person because it was clear that Jesus was speaking of the Father. Then Jesus simply says that in order to have eternal life one is to keep the commandments, *tereo* also as to keep watch or guard with respect to *entole* (S *natar* and *puqeydana'*, both +).

This brusque response didn't deter the man who in vs. 18 asks which commandment he's to keep. Jesus comes off with a litany of prohibitions right from the Ten Commandments of Ex 20.12-16. However, it's minus vs. 17 which is about coveting one's neighbor's house, wife, etc. As for the first (honoring one's parents), Jesus puts it as last in vs. 19. Then he adds one commandment from Lev 19.18, the most important of them, all which reads in full as "You shall not take vengeance or bear any grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the Lord." The Greek *agapao* + (S *chav*, also as to kindle, to set on fire) is equivalent to the Hebrew '*ahav* +, to breathe after. Although Jesus doesn't mention the concluding words, surely he had them in mind.

Jesus continues his discussion with this person who now in vs. 20 is identified as a young man, *neaniskos* which also can be taken as a servant. He responds quickly and confidently (and somewhat naively) that he has observed all which Jesus had quoted from Deuteronomy and Leviticus, *phulasso* (S *natar* +) or to protect in the sense of keeping guard. Not only that, he asks if he's lacking in anything, *hustereo* (S *chasar* +) or to miss out on something.

In order to fill up this *hustereo* Jesus says that to be perfect (*teleios* +, S *gamar*) requires selling one's possessions and giving them to the poor. Right away this will result in having treasures or *thesauros* + in heaven. Such is the condition for following (*akoloutheo* +) Jesus. Unfortunately the young man's eagerness dissipated on the spot. He leaves in sorrow (*lupeo* +) because he was well off or as the text puts it more vividly, has many possessions. The disciples possibly

looked at this man with a certain smugness which they didn't reveal because they were relatively poor and had nothing to lose when Jesus had called them. This is an important contrast, namely, instead of approaching Jesus voluntarily or freely, he had called them.

Jesus was aware of this rather lengthy dialogue's effect upon his disciples whom he addresses in vs. 23 and continues to do so to the end of this chapter. He begins in solemn fashion with *amen* +, that he means business. Actually this is the first time a rich man (*plousios*) had approached Jesus with the possibility of following him...more than that, it is the first example of anyone doing so. Thus the incident was something novel both for him and for the disciples. However, it wasn't a good track record, given that to this point Jesus has done a lot preaching and healing. No small wonder, then, that Jesus uses *amen*. And so what follows is more out of the ordinary since it doesn't pertain to most people with whom Jesus interacts. He gives the example of it being easier for a camel to pass through a needle's eye than someone who's rich to enter the kingdom of heaven. An exaggeration, of course, and admittedly rare for anyone entertaining the idea of being disciple of Jesus.

Such an example evokes astonishment by the disciples, *ekplesso* (S *tahar*, both +) where the last example in Chapter Seven speaks of the preposition *ek-* or "from." As prefaced to the root *plesso* (to strike) brings this home in a forceful manner. It prompts them to ask spontaneously, who can be saved (*sozo* and S *chaya'*, both +). Actually they shouldn't be surprised, this being a case pretty much out of the ordinary.

Jesus responds in vs. 26—actually he does more than respond—by looking straight at the disciples, *emblepo* (S *chor* +), the preposition *em-* or "in" clearly intended to penetrate them. In sum, with God everything is possible, the exact opposite when it comes to human intervention. The verse is a play on *adunatos* vs. *dunatos*, the verbal root *dunomai* meaning to be able or to show the capacity for something. The preposition *para* which connotes being beside is used with regard to both God and man to show how these two words operate.

Vs. 27 has another intervention by Peter but this one sanctioned, if you will, by his fellow disciples. Using the first person plural he says and rightly so that we have left everything for Jesus and asks bluntly what we will have. It seems that he was barely away of having been entrusted with the keys to the kingdom of

heaven. In other words, Peter as well as the eleven, had short term memory in the extreme. Yes, they were witnesses to all sorts of miracles and healings, but still that left them insecure.

To Peter's request Jesus uses a phrase for the first time, that is, "new world" or *paliggenesia* (*halma'* + modified by *chadeth*) or better, a state of being renewed, a complete change along the lines of rebirth, the first part of the word being *palin*, "again." That along with *ekklesia* must have unnerved the disciples to some degree, for to them both don't tie in with their experience of conservative Judaism. Not just that, they are essentially peasants compared with those living in Jerusalem.

Within this *paliggenesia* the Son of man will sit on his throne which Jesus describes as glorious, literally "throne of glory" or *doxa* +. Again, Jesus is speaking of himself as another person something by now which is familiar to the disciples. Now their ears perk up. Jesus says that they too will sit on similar thrones. Since they number twelve, they will judge the twelve tribes of Israel. While such words are indeed heady, they are being informed more as to what their role will be in the *paliggenesia/ekklesia*.

To top this off, Jesus says that everyone—presumably he has others in mind who go unrecorded—who has left possessions and more importantly, family, will receive far more than could be imagined. Not only that, they will inherit eternal life. However, Jesus concludes this with a caveat, the last verse in Chapter Nineteen. Those who are first will be last and visa versa. Perhaps this is in reference to Jews vs. Gentiles. Regardless, attention should be on *kleronomeo* or inheriting. That means both already have a share in eternal life, theirs by right before entering it. In other words, a done deal.

Chapter Twenty

This new chapter starts off with a bang, getting right into a parable which follows on the heels of Jesus' encounter with the rich man. That had bothered Peter who asked what was in store for those who've left everything to follow him. Indeed, it has direct relevance to him as well as the other disciples. As for the parable at hand, we have *homoios* or "like" with regard to the kingdom of heaven, the last time it being used is in 13:52: "the kingdom of heaven is *homoios*

a householder who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old." Although this isn't the time nor the place, it'd be fun to go through this Gospel and the others drawing up a list of all the "likes" with regard to the kingdom of heaven and see the result. Actually it would be just as interesting to see how *homoios* or a similar word is used in the Book of Revelation which compares earthly reality with the transcendent sphere.

In vs. 1 Jesus identifies the kingdom heaven...likens it...literally to the lord of a house (*oikodespote*, *S mare' baytha'*), *despotes* as master or one with supreme authority over which he governs, the house or *oikos* which is broader in meaning such as a household. In other words, we're dealing with someone who has considerable power over an estate which involves more than family members and includes hired and/or indentured servants. This man seems to be directly under the paterfamilias and is directly responsible to him and no one else. While his power is almost absolute, it's over a limited area and group of people. Still, it's an integral part of the local economy. Note that two other terms referring to two other men are used in vs. 8 of this parable, *kurios* and *epitropos* owner and steward.

One morning (*proi* meaning early) this lord of the household went out to hire laborers for (literally, 'into' or *eis*) his vineyard or perhaps more to the point, the vineyard of his master. Actually it's the first of five times he does this. For the first group he didn't have to go far, actually just outside the gate where people in need of work had lined up hoping to earn some money. Many had taken up their position much earlier or even had spend the night waiting to be first in line. This seems to be a fairly regular occurrence depending on the harvest, pruning and other agricultural endeavors related to it.

This fellow in charge of the household decided upon a denarius for each of the laborers, this apparently a fairly good daily wage for such work. It seems he was more generous than other stewards, a sign of this being the large number of people outside the gate waiting to be hired. Just the mention of a denarius implies an agreement the steward reached for that given day since most likely the daily wage changes depending upon the work at hand.

Exit number two by the lord of the household to hire workers in vs. 3 which is around nine in the morning or some three or four hours later. This time no one was outside the gate so he he had to go to the local marketplace or walk some

distance to hire them. Obviously that consumed precious time on his part. Both parties agree to whatever is right (*dikaiois* +) according to vs. 4 which is pretty much open-ended.

Exit number three takes place at the sixth hour or around noon followed by exit number four at the nine hour or three in the afternoon. In both instances the *oikodespotes* had to walk into town which took a considerable amount of time. This need for additional laborers means one of two things. Either work in the harvest is going better than expected or his subordinate is not managing the job properly. With so much on his mind, the steward is working just as hard if not harder than those in the vineyard by keeping watch over them plus going back and forth to the marketplace. About half way through this parable most of Jesus' listeners suspect the conclusion to these successive hirings. That, of course, is spelled out in the next paragraph.

Finally or at the eleventh hour or around five in the afternoon, that is, towards the end of the day, the *oikodespotes* makes his last trip to the marketplace. By now he's pretty exhausted and glad things were starting to wind down. The sun was getting low and unlike the reapers in the Book of Ruth who worked the threshing floor at night, those in the vineyard could not function for much longer. Still, the *oikodespotes* found others standing around the marketplace. Obviously he saw several men idling around but not expecting to be hired. If they did, it's be for a few pennies mostly to clean up after the day's work in the vineyard. He asks what seems a naive question in vs. 6, "Why do you stand here idle all day?," the adjective being *argos* + (*S batel*).

One way of looking at this situation is that these men were essentially loitering (that connotes the possibility of being a cause for trouble) while having watched other being hired throughout the day. However, apparently they made no move to step forward. Because of the urgency to get work done in the vineyard, the *oikodespotes* hired them. We can assume that they weren't as reliable as the others, actually far from it. Because this took place in the marketplace, getting to the vineyard took some time, so that cut back on the length of their work in the field.

Finally evening came which was shortly after these last men started working. Their mere presence roused anger among those who were already in the vineyard, especially the ones who had been hired early on. Because money was

involved, the owner of the vineyard stepped in, *kurios* + also being the word for lord. As was the usual procedure, the *kurios* told his steward to summon the workers to receive their wages, *epitropos* or foreman, *epi-* or “upon” indicative of his role. And so this man proceeded to hand out wages, he presumably sitting at a table with the laborers all lined up, the first being hired at the head and so forth. However, they weren’t told that a very different method of payment was involved, something nobody expected. Instead of the first hirings receiving their expected full day’s payment, they ended up with exactly the same payment as the last who came in during the evening. In sum, each man received a denarius.

When vs. 11 says that the laborers grumbled, that’s an understatement which the verb *gogguzo* (S *raten*) conveys well; it also implying murmuring. This they directed at the *oikodespotes* who was responsible for hiring them. As expected and rightly so, they lodged their complaint which needs no spelling out because it’s so obvious. Then the *oikodespotes* reminded them that all had agreed to one denarius for their work. Such was the verbal contract. On the other hand, in a way he was deceptive, not informing each group of men that they’d get the same amount as the others. All three-*oikodespotes*, *kurios* and *epitropos*—knew what was involved, so discreetly they positioned guards or other servants nearby just-in-case.

In vs. 13 the *oikodespotes* who had borne the brunt of all this from the beginning is targeted as the one for causing such grief. He addresses one man who seems to be the spokesman or *hetraios* (S *chavar* implies a certain intimacy) also as comrade, companion. It can be taken in two ways. The first is through him in order to put the others at ease whereas in the second instance it can manifest a definite uneasiness at having been put on the spot. In the meanwhile everyone else was looking on in a silence you could cut with a knife.

Next the *oikodespotes* tells the representative deliberately within ear-shot of all the laborers to take what belongs to him so everyone else could hear it after which basically they could get lost. He adds two rhetorical questions in vs. 15 spoken with authority but tinged with a certain restrained fear. He claims to have the authority to do as he pleases, that is, with what belongs to him. True, especially in charge of a sprawling household. In the second question he throws out a challenge which according to the **RSV** reads that the laborers are

begrudging his generosity. The text says literally “or is your eye evil because I am good (*poneros* and *agathos*, both +)?”

To wrap up this tense situation as quickly and as neatly as possible the *oikodespotes* says that the first will be last and visa versa. End of story, end of parable. If it were in real life, indeed there'd be an open revolt as intimated earlier. So who in the end is responsible for this fine mess, at least from the laborers' point of view? Not the *oikodespotes* who is simply carrying out orders. Blame rests with the owner of the vineyard, the *kurios* who indeed is responsible and has devised what seems to be a crafty, almost diabolical plan to get the most from his workers. As for the disciples listening to this, they were left wondering if like the laborers just described the effort they've put in thus far following Jesus was worth it. Once more they deserve credit for persevering despite all the challenges.

Vs. 17 represents a definite shift in gears at this stage of the entire Gospel. It begins with the conjunctive *kai* or “and” which shows that the shift consists of Jesus going up to Jerusalem (*anabaino*). He had prepared the disciples for this in 16.21, namely, that in Jerusalem he will be handed over to suffer death and rise on the third day. That was the occasion when Peter rebuked Jesus who in turn put him in his place. Now Jesus doesn't have to worry about that from Peter nor from the other eleven, for en route he took them aside (*paralambano* +) to lay out as plainly as possible what lays ahead. He says that a twofold delivery or *paradidomai* + or handing-over is in store for him. The first will be with regard to the religious authorities and the second, the secular ones which, of course, means the Romans. So associating with Jesus had become a huge risk. Even should the disciples decide now to abandon him they remained marked men and most likely will be hunted down to suffer the same fate. Still they still hung in there. What intrigued them was Jesus' claim to rise on the third day (whatever that vague idea meant), and they were simply too afraid to ask him to flesh it out. There was no turning back now.

Vs. 20 begins with *tote* + or “then” which introduces a somewhat rude interruption by the mother of the sons of Zebedee, that is, the disciples James and John. We don't have her name, but the bold, even reckless way she butts in suggests that she, along with other relatives and friends of Jesus' disciples, were going up to Jerusalem as well. They may not have been going specifically to be

with Jesus but to celebrate the Passover there. Why not latch on to this party as was common under such circumstances?

Note that this woman doesn't approach Jesus alone but is fortified by the presence of her two sons. Talk about an overt display of rashness. In their desire for gain and recognition James and John decided they would hide behind their mother. She would do all the speaking not just with Jesus but in the presence of the other disciples, a way of putting them in place. Obviously a mother wants the best for her sons, so she complied readily thinking that Jesus will listen to her.

And so the mother of the two sons came up and at once knelt before Jesus with some intended dramatic flair. She along with her two sons thought they would succeed admirably. After doing her obeisance—perhaps James and John joined in for added effect—Jesus saw right through her by saying in vs. 22 simply and directly, “What do you want?” It'd come as no surprise that he had to refrain from manifesting contempt. Although she proceeded with her request, then and there she and her sons knew they were put on the spot. No small wonder that afterwards she felt profoundly embarrassed which is why later we find her at the crucifixion of Jesus in 27.56.

In a begrudging way we have to admire this woman's panache. She begins her requests in vs. 21 with *eipon* rendered by the **RSV** as “commanded” but more along the lines of to speak. Just before continuing she gestures toward her two sons standing there who suddenly adopted a sheepish look. She wants them to have a place of honor with each sitting on both sides of Jesus, a throne being implied since he had been speaking a lot about the kingdom of heaven. Jesus puts it mildly though with barely concealed sarcasm, that she hasn't a clue...not the slightest...of what she's asking for. The same applies to James and John.

Jesus then puts a question right to this mother of two disciples in vs. 22 after she was hit with an unexpected response. In sum, can she drink the same cup as Jesus is to drink? Cup or *poterion* is a symbol for destiny or what lies in the future, mostly negative. All three respond immediately that they can drink this cup even though they're unaware of the consequences. Jesus responds positively which must have thrilled them momentarily until he adds that it isn't up to him as to who sits at his left or his right. That's reserved for his Father who has prepared it in advance, *etoimazo* + (S *tov*). As a footnote—a kind of statement

after-the-fact—vs. 24 has the other disciples being indignant upon hearing this request, *aganakteo* being transposed, not translated, as something like being pissed off.

This incident which otherwise would seem to be of a lesser import is far from it because it's shortly before Jesus is handed over to be put to death. Everyone knew that something momentous is about to happen but were uncertain as to the details. That means it's time for a serious consultation to put matters right. Without going a step further to Jerusalem Jesus halts then and there and gives an example with two ways as to the way rulers of the Gentiles (*ethnos* also as nation, people) usually govern. First, they like to lord it over others, *katakurieuo* (S *mará*'), this verb being the root for *kurios* or lord plus the preposition *kata-* prefaced to it, that is, down in the sense of oppressing. Obviously everyone is affected by that, Jesus referring to the Roman occupiers to whom they are getting uncomfortably closer as they approach the capitol. The second way is a verb also with the preposition *kata-* prefaced to it, *katexousiazo* or to exercise (*exousia*) authority in a similar downward fashion, if you will.

With this immediate, oppressive and all-pervasive reality in mind because it affects every detail of daily life, Jesus says that what *katakurieuo* as well as *katexousiazo* represent, they are not to have any place literally “in (*en*) you.” Jesus counters this all-pervasive exercise of domination with a very different “in you.” He gives two examples. First the person wishing to be great (*meGas* +) “in you” must be a servant or *diakonos*, more specifically, one who serves as an intermediary which is signified by the preposition *dia-* or “through.” The second example is a person wishing to be first (*protos*) “in you” such as by reason of virtue, outstanding character or seniority has to take the exact opposite of being *protos*, that is, a slave or *doulos* +.

Although it has just been presented, an outline is added for the sake of simplicity. *Diakonos* and *doulos* are combined though the service rendered by each remains distinct:

- 1: *thelo* → *meGas* → *in humin* → *diakonos*
wishes → great → in you → servant
- 2: *thelo* → *protos* → *in humin* → *doulos*
wishes → first → in you → slave

This twofold nature of service is followed through in vs. 28 which begins with *hosper* + or “even as.” It serves to introduce Jesus where he speaks of himself as an example though indirectly as he is wont to do, “Son of man.” Instead of using the verbal root for *doulos*, he prefers *diakoneo* which as noted above with regard to *diakonos* is more along the lines of functioning as an intermediary. Jesus takes up our human *thelo* or wishing and shifts it over to *diakoneo* in the active sense instead of the passive sense. Then he adds something unexpected, namely, to give his life as a ransom or *lutron* for many. “Many” here means a lot though this doesn’t include every single human being who ever existed, is existing now or will exist. Picture the mother and her two sons James and John listening to this. By now they were reduced to complete silence.

Vs. 29 is more specific as to this final trek to Jerusalem, that is, Jericho or better, when Jesus, his disciples and presumably the mother of the sons of Zebedee as well as others had just left that city. The text points out that a great crowd or *ochlos* + was in tow, something by now which is not unusual. Just outside the city two blind men who most likely were taking advantage of Jerusalem bound pilgrims for alms heard that Jesus was passing. Obviously it came from the commotion produced by the “great crowd.” Apparently they had heard of Jesus being called the Son of David, the last time the phrase found in 15.22 with regard to the Canaanite woman.

It wasn’t so much the din from the *ochlos* that caught Jesus’ attention but those trying to squelch cries for help coming from the two blind men. Nevertheless, he went over and asked what he could do for them. When they heard this question, they must have thought something like this guy must be kidding. He sees we are blind, so why bother asking when our condition is so obvious? Nevertheless, they felt obliged to come off with an equally obvious response, that is, for Jesus to open their eyes. Out of pity or *splagchnizomai* (S *racham*, both +) he touched their eyes, and they could see. While that is wonderful in and by itself, even more so is the fact that they got up and followed Jesus. *Eutheos* + or “at once” is added for emphasis. If taken to its logical conclusion, this means the two blind men went with him, the disciples and others to Jerusalem, celebrated the Passover and most likely witnessed Jesus’ crucifixion. Similarly they heard of his resurrection shortly afterwards and perhaps even were present at the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Taking this one step further, it’d come as no surprise that they became members of the early church.

Chapter Twenty-One

The conjunctive *kai* beginning this chapter is one of the most consequential in Matthew's Gospel because it introduces what has traditionally become known as Palm Sunday followed by Holy Week. *Kai* is followed by the verb *eggizo* + or to draw near which adds a note of finality as it pertains to Jesus coming to Jerusalem. That, of course, means from now on we're going to deal with the last week of Jesus' earthly life followed by his resurrection and the brief conclusion. Because of this, what he says within the temple precincts or through Chapter Twenty-Three has special import. However, he continues through Chapter Twenty-Five, all what he says there is presumably on the Mount of Olives.

Upon reaching Bethphage or the outskirts of the capitol Jesus sends two unidentified disciples into that place. This, of course, was not done in isolation but with the coming Passover, all roads and paths were thronging with pilgrims. In Bethphage the two will find an ass and colt which they are to untie and bring to him. Jesus said nothing about renting them out, if you will, which means they ran the risk of being accused of stealing. However, the disciples will find the two animals immediately (*euthus* +) and once they do, they are to say to the owner that the Lord (*Kurios* +) has need of them, nothing more. That should do the trick which means the owner who might not have the slightest clue whom the two are talking about will simply comply. It'd come as no surprise that many others sought to rent out these two animals as a means to carry their belongings on the last leg of their pilgrimage. The owner knew not to rent them out but was clueless as to why. Nothing is said about the return of the ass and colt though that's presumed.

So the two disciples went off on their mission wondering why Jesus requested these two animals. They were so close to Jerusalem that there was really no need to ride on one of them. Anyway, they did as they were told, but their speculation of what all this was about came up empty. As vs. 5 shows, it was to fulfill a prophecy, one of many which the two disciples as well as the others hadn't a clue as pertaining to a current situation. Later after Pentecost they must have spent considerable time reflecting on all these incidents to see how they fell so neatly into place. So to them as well as for the early Christians there was a seamless connection between Judaism and the person of Jesus

Christ...both different yet the same. Nevertheless, they had a strong hunch it would remain as such.

Vs. 4 has this command with regard to the two animals by Jesus as fulfilling the words (*pleroo* and the verb *lego*, both +) of the prophet who goes unnamed but actually consists of two, Isaiah and Zechariah. Both are quoted in full respectively, the following lifted from a text pertinent to two other documents posted on this homepage:

“Behold, the Lord has proclaimed to the end of the earth: Say to the daughter of Zion, ‘Behold, your salvation comes; behold, his reward is with him and his recompense before him’” [Is 62.11]. This verse contains three instance of *hineh* + or “behold.” The first sums up what has just been proclaimed or *shamah*, that that is, what was heard or literally “has caused to hear.” *Qets* or ends include the circular boarder, if you will, beneath the dome of the sky as it touches the earth. With this in mind, the phrase “daughter of Zion” is a way of speaking about the center of this dome, the Jerusalem temple. The second *hineh* draws attention to the people’s salvation or *yeshah*. The third *hineh* draws attention to the divine reward and recompense, *sakar* and *pehulah*. Note that the first is with the Lord whereas the second is before the Lord, the latter suggestive of him carrying it as a present for all to see.

“Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Should aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on an ass, on a cold the foul of an ass.” [Zech 9.9] Note the two commands which the Lord gives: with regard to the daughter of Zion, *gyl* or rejoice and the adverb *me’od* which connotes excessiveness and with regard to the daughter of Jerusalem: *ruah* or to shout aloud. The reason for the two? The king of both (which are one and the same) is coming as triumphant and victorious, the adjective *tsadyq* and the verb *yashah*. In addition to these, the king is humble or *hany*. Once this king arrives in Jerusalem, vs. 30 has the Lord acting of his behalf, that is, removing weapons, etc. from her midst and having him commanding peace for the nations, that is, *davar* with *shalom* (cf. vs. 8 for the latter). Thus he will work from outside in and from inside out. The result is a widespread dominion, *mashal* (cf. Mic ch 5) also as rule.

As for the Greek text, in vs. 5 we have the verb *epibaino* or to mount with the preposition *epi-* or “upon” prefaced to it along with two free-standing

prepositions of the same with regard to ass and colt.¹¹ As for riding both, one explanation is that Jesus started off with the older animal and when he came to one of the gates of Jerusalem or just before it, he shifted to the younger animal.

Vs. 6 says that the disciples carried out Jesus' wishes, *suntasso* (S *paqad* +), the verbal root *tasso* or to order prefaced with the preposition *sun-* or with. This intimates that something is to be carried out in an organized manner. To make his short journey more comfortable the disciples spread their cloaks on one of the animal's back followed by a similar gesture by the crowd (*ochlos* +). Many were thrilled to see Jesus and chances are quite high that some of them had been healed by him while many more had heard him teach. By no means was Jesus an unknown entity. Those from the crowds who recognized Jesus and the disciples, especially when the latter prepared one of the animals, spontaneously decided to copy them out of respect. Others didn't have the chance to do this, so they cut off olive branches and spread them on the road.

So this spontaneous procession into Jerusalem has Jesus in the middle of the *ochlos*, vs. 9 saying that some were before him and others were after him. Everyone was in a joyous mood, to be sure. However, we have no record of Jesus' response who knew all too well this fanfare would dissipate at once. Also the Romans and religious authorities looked on with both fear and satisfaction: fear in that the crowd might become unruly and satisfied that at last Jesus was coming into the trap which would spring upon him very soon. They would have to act quickly and decisively in order not to cause a riot or worse, an open rebellion.

Note that this threefold alarming acclamation is just outside the walls of Jerusalem implying that the secular and religious authorities are keeping a close watch on what was happening below them. There was special fear of the Romans who could dispatch at once as many soldier as needed:

Hosanna which is Hebrew for something like "Please save," the *na-* indicative of a heart-felt spontaneous desire or wish. This is addressed to Jesus as Son of David used last by the two blind men in 20.21. Obviously that title is in reference to Israel's most beloved king, a reason for genuine concern by the above mentioned authorities.

11 Colt: a young male donkey less than four years old. Ass: an older donkey.

Jesus is called blessed as he comes in the name of the Lord, *eulogeo* +, name as being a representative of the Most High. Coming right after David makes this even worse for the authorities who are looking on. This is a partial quote from Ps 118.26: “Blessed be he who enters in the name of the Lord! We bless you from the house of the Lord.” The verb *barak* is used twice, fundamentally as to kneel.

The second mention of Hosanna which here is in reference to God (‘most high’). So this attribution of blessedness or reverence applies to an earthly as well as a heavenly king.

The spontaneous welcome of Jesus didn’t stop at the gate but continued within the city which was stirred by the commotion, *seio* (S *zuh*) as to shake or to stir as by an earthquake. Compare with *tarasso* of 2.3 which connotes shaking but being troubled as well: “When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled and all Jerusalem with him.” Apparently those within Jerusalem didn’t know about Jesus because they asked who he was. This infers that apart from the Pharisees, Sadducees and other religious officials Jesus was an unknown figure. So those inside asked some from the crowd who identified Jesus from Nazareth of Galilee. With Jesus now in Jerusalem we can appreciate better the vast difference between religious life in the capitol dominated by the temple and life as lived in the countryside. Already we can feel that the temple is on the verge of being superseded.

Vs. 12 begins with the conjunctive *kai* or “and” which shows an immediate shift from Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem, more precisely, his going to (*eiserchomai* + with the preposition *eis*, two ‘intos’) the temple²². It is followed by a second *kai* where he engages in two actions in one go: he drives out vendors present there, *ekballo* + more as to put it colloquially, kicks them out (*ek-* or from) and overturns the tables of money changers. The time it’s even more dramatic by reason of being shortly before Passover which means these vendors were taking advantage of the busiest time of the entire year. Also involved were various sorts of animals for sale as offerings in the temple. The text says nothing as far as any reaction from the crowds which had accompanied Jesus into Jerusalem. Some were thrilled whereas others were horrified. As for the political and religious leaders, they may not have been present though we can certain that their informants were keeping track of all this.

22 The RSV has “temple of God” which isn’t in the Greek text.

Vs. 13 starts off with “he says” which certainly is an understatement after what Jesus had done, having upset a key element in the temple’s economy just before Passover. Despite the drama, it’s likely they waited a bit and simply set up shop a short time afterwards. With regards to this incident, Jesus comes off with two quotes from two prophets, Isaiah and Jeremiah, which he fuses into one sentence. The verse at hand has *oikos* + or house as belonging to God, that is, as set aside for prayer, *proseuche* (S *tslutha*’) often as petition. The two texts run in full as follows:

“These (those who keep the Sabbath and covenant, including foreigners) I will bring to my holy mountain and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.” [Is 56.7] Judging by Matthew’s account of Jesus in the temple, this lengthy verse from Isaiah shows that the Lord is taking the initiative, this being comprised of two parts. Emphasis is upon bringing foreigners (*nekar*, more forceful than *goy* or a non-Israelite) to the Lord’s holy mountain. Once there the Lord will make them joyful (*samach*, also to take pleasure) in the temple which here is designated as a house of prayer or *tephilah*. This is the first of two references and usually is along the lines of supplication. Is the Lord who makes their offerings acceptable (*ratson* also as favor). In addition to this which deals with sacrifices, the Lord reiterates the need to hold his temple or house as one for prayer, the second mention of *tephilah* which emphasis upon (*l-* or ‘to’) “all peoples.”

“Has this house which is called by my name become a den of robbers in your eyes? ‘Behold, I myself have seen it,’ says the Lord.” [Jer 7.11] Possession of the house or temple by the Lord is emphasized by the literal reading of “my name upon (*hal-*) it.” This enables the gradual take-over by robbers which essentially fits the bill as far as those whom Jesus drove out. However, the Lord has seen this transformation which is introduced by the exclamation *hineh* + or “behold.” This is a suddenness which takes the robbers by surprise and fits in with Jesus’ action.

Vs. 14 presupposes an interval between Jesus having driven out the vendors and healing (*therapeuo* and S ‘*asa*’, both +) the blind and lame. Chances are some already were present in the temple, the outer courtyard being implied, for such crowds are prohibited from entering the building itself. These who are in need

are equivalent to the foreigners of whom Isaiah had spoken. Still, all this was bound to create a less than pleasant reaction by the religious authorities who were watching Jesus' every move from the time they saw his triumphant entry into what they considered their home turf. With the so-called cleansing of the temple done and people having been healed, it was time to step in. Although Matthew rightly calls such action wonderful (*thaumasios*; S *tedmurtha'*, noun) in vs. 15, to the chief priests and scribes it was not at all as such. Also included are the children who had exclaimed Hosanna to the Son of David though vs. 9 says nothing of such children. Perhaps the religious authorities were further alarmed by the fact that these young children had been duped or worse, brainwashed by Jesus. Vs. 15 concludes almost with an afterthought, that the religious authorities were indignant or *aganakteo* + (S *bes*, to do harm, to displease).

Both the chief priests and scribes couldn't contain themselves anymore, so they approached Jesus and asked him directly if he was aware of being called Son of David. This is the equivalent of being acknowledged as the successor of this beloved king. It was one thing for him to be called such in the countryside, but here he was smack in the capitol where King David had his throne. Always they had their attention focused upon the Roman authorities who at any moment could come down on them with an iron fist.

In vs. 16 Jesus acknowledges those asking him about what these children are saying but instead of giving a direct answer which would go nowhere, he presents a rhetorical question. This time it's phrased in terms of a verse from Ps 8.2 which actually begins with the previous verse, the two forming a complete sentence as follows: "Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You whose glory above the heavens is chanted by the mouth of babes and infants, you have founded a bulwark because of your foes, to still the enemy and the avenger." In the Greek text, the verb *kartizo* is translated as "have brought" and more specifically means to put in order (*kata-*, according to; S *taqen*, to establish).

The name (*shem*) of God is located in all the earth. It is majestic or '*adar* which means to swell and aptly applies to being in the earth or hidden within it much as a fetus in a womb. To become aware of God's presence in creation requires assuming the attention a woman about to give birth has towards her unborn child. Note the contrast: God's name is present in all the earth whereas his glory is above the heavens. Furthermore, only in the heavens is his glory

chanted, *natan* being a common word meaning to give, to appoint with the preposition *hal* as upon (heavens).

The association of God's glory or *hod* with babes (*hol'lym*) or infants is reminiscent of 19.14 already discussed: "Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them; for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven." And, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to babes" [Mt 11.25]. As for the second part of this verse, the Hebrew reads, "for the same of our enemies you have caused to cease the enemy," the verb being *shavath*. This word is the root for Sabbath, day of rest; the psalmist implies that the babes and infants who praise God's glory are instrumental in effecting such Sabbath rest.

After the tense confrontation with the chief priests and scribes, their resolves to do away with Jesus simply hardened, knowing that they were about to succeed in this matter. As for Jesus, the best thing for him to do now is to leave at once for Bethany and remain there. In 26.6 Bethany is identified as belonging to Simon the leper which is interesting in that Jesus stays (*aulizomai* connotes a temporary stay) with a person identified with that disease. Chances are that at some earlier time Jesus had cured Simon and if true, somehow the name stuck. Also before his entry to Jerusalem, Jesus could have made arrangements as he had done with his disciples who procured the ass and colt.

In vs. 18 Jesus returns from the house of Simon the leper in Bethany to Jerusalem. Although his stay was overnight, one can't help but wonder what the conversation between them must have been like. Though the disciples aren't mentioned as being with Jesus, we can presume they were. So in a way, if Jesus had cured Simon earlier, this would be the only recorded follow-up on record as to a cure. On the following day Jesus returns to Jerusalem which is about two miles or so. Being hungry, he saw a fig tree and thought he grab a quick snack. With this in mind, presumably Simon the leper didn't offer him much of a breakfast. So upon closer inspection Jesus cursed the fig tree, telling it never again to produce fruit after which it withered. Over time this fig tree became a kind of memorial or until it simply dissolved back into the earth.

The disciples, of course, were both amazed and admittedly somewhat frightened. If Jesus could make a fig tree wither away, he could do the same with anyone who would cross his path. During this second day of their presence

in Jerusalem they knew the tension between Jesus and the religious authorities was coming to a head very soon. Although these authorities looked like they had the upper hand, surely the disciples thought that Jesus would instantly make them wither away like the fig tree. That's what was behind their questioning of Jesus which gave him an opportunity to talk about faith. They were taken by surprise at having been put on the spot like this, for Jesus said that if one has faith and doesn't doubt, that person will be able to do far greater things than make a fig tree wither. He gives the example of moving a mountain, casting this in light of prayer (*proseuche*; S *tslutha'*, both+). In the days to come real soon when Jesus is in the hands of those about to crucify him, these words will come back to haunt the disciples. At the time, having such faith was the furthest thing from their minds since they had become pretty much paralyzed by fear.

Indeed, one could call Jesus a glutton for punishment, for vs. 23 has him entering the temple yet again. This time the outer court must have remained clear of money changers and vendors he had chased out the day before or if some came back, they scooted as soon as they saw Jesus. In the short term, there was no real effect because it was too lucrative a business to let go. At least temporarily the court area was functioning as it should to accommodate the throngs coming for Passover. However, quite a few pilgrims for the Passover must have been disappointed since they were accustomed to find these merchants doing their thing. Even if they charged an exorbitant fee for temple related items, it was the convenience of having them there that many people liked.

The chief priests and elders knew Jesus would return to the temple so they were already waiting for him. This is the first time the elders are mentioned along with the chief priests; they will appear shortly later on when Jesus is arrested. They put a question that had been burning within them for some time now and centered around a major concern for their legal-minded outlook. That is to say, they wanted to know by what authority (*exousia*; S *shultana'*, both +) Jesus is doing these things. Note that the verb *poieo* + or to do is in the present tense which implies that what Jesus had done the previous days is just as present in the minds of the chief priests and elders as it happened a minute ago. Also it suggests that Jesus was about to do it all over again.

In typical fashion, Jesus doesn't respond directly to a question posed by the chief priests and elders but comes off with one not unlike theirs to catch them off guard. While he is speaking with confidence that his mission is right, he knew that his days were numbered, so might as well make the most of it. First he states his intent to put a question to them and should they respond, he will answer theirs about the question of authority. Jesus refers to the baptism performed by John...does it come from heaven or from men? Obviously mention of John the Baptist brought up all sorts of memories. Perhaps some of those confronting Jesus at the moment had gone out to spy on John. Regardless, in their eyes both men are highly suspect. So instead of objecting or countering with another question, the chief priests and elders squabbled among each other (*dialogizomai* +; *S rah* and *nepshesh* +), the preposition *en* being used literally as "in themselves."

The next two verses (25-26) have these religious authorities at odds with each other which Jesus must have enjoyed immensely. They knew this which irritated them to no end yet were so caught up in their squabbles that they couldn't break loose. Finally they came up with two options: if they ascribe John's authority as having come from heaven, Jesus would then ask why they didn't believe in him. If they ascribe it to men, they'd be afraid of the crowd or *ochlos* +. The second was what really concerned them, prompting them to say that they don't know. Chances are this is the first time they had ever been refuted and would be something personal they'd hold against Jesus. He, in turn, said that he will not disclose the authority or *exousia* he exercises. With this, Jesus was left alone most likely with his disciples quietly relieved the confrontation was over.

Vs. 28 shifts gears immediately to Jesus and the ever present crowds as well as his disciples. He does so to draw attention away from the chief priests and elders who by now were skulking away so as not to create further attention. After all, he had just come to the temple...early in the morning...and this was no time to start off the day. Jesus begins with a short rhetorical question intended to draw in his listeners, not necessarily to provide any answers. That is to say, what do they think or *dokeo* (*S chaza'*, both +) about a parable of a man with two sons. To the first he asked simply to do some work in the vineyard, keeping in mind the last parable was of a vineyard which takes up half of Chapter Twenty. The son responds right away that he won't do as asked but after a short while, he repented and headed off to the vineyard. The verb is *metamelomai* (*S toa'*) or

to have regrets about something. The verbal root is *mello* or to think of doing something prefaced with the preposition *meta-* or after...to think after, if you will. The father knew this would be the case, the son showing a burst of resentment which he got over at once.

In vs. 30 the father addresses the second son who apparently had no knowledge of his brother's change of heart. This one agreed to work in the vineyard but didn't go. Most likely in both cases it was a matter of doing manual work with laborers who were considered virtual slaves. With these two brothers in mind, Jesus asks which one carried out the father's will, the answer being obvious. The parable doesn't go into how the second son related to his father afterwards. Indeed, he had a lot of back-tracking to do, so better leave it unsaid.

After the unanimous consent that the first brother did the father's will (*thelema*, *S tsevyana'*, both +), to the delight as well as surprise of his listeners Jesus says that tax collectors and prostitutes will enter the kingdom of God. He adds the clincher, "before you," that is, you who are listening to me right now. The verb to enter is *proago* or to go before with the preposition *eis* or into. At once that deflated his listeners who wondered if he was referring to them. So while it's customary to think of most people listening to Jesus as ready and willing to do what he says, he comes off with a warning that such is not always the case.

In vs. 32 Jesus again refers to John the Baptist as he had done just recently with the chief priests and elders. Many of his listeners were aware of that but were taken aback somewhat when he brought up John in reference to them. The Baptist had come to you...not necessarily "you" as those present but to people in general in the way of righteousness, *hodos* and *dikaiousune* (*S zedqa'*, all three +). However "you" did not believe John whose message was one of repentance. That would place the people listening to Jesus in the same position as the Pharisees and Sadducees who had come to John (cf. 3.7). In contrast to them—essentially everyone if this is taken literally—Jesus presents the two groups of outcasts as acknowledging John's call to repent, *metamelomai* as used in vs. 29 with regard to the son who refused to work in the vineyard but mended his ways. It should be noted that *metamelomai* as the expression of regret isn't as thorough as *metanoeo* or repent as the core of John the Baptist's mission.

Vs. 33 introduces another parable right after the one discussed, this being the third reference to a vineyard which shows how important they were to the local

economy. In sum, everyone was familiar with them, for they offered a multitude of resources for analogies. Jesus starts off with a householder or *oikodespotes* mentioned last in beginning Chapter Twenty where he likens the kingdom of heaven to such a person responsible for hiring laborers to work in his vineyard. More specifically, it's the one which belongs to the owner (cf. 20.8). However, the parable at hand doesn't liken the *oikodespotes* to this image of heaven but pertains directly to Jesus' impending fate.

Apparently in the parable at hand the *oikodespotes* is the owner ('his vineyard') who takes considerable pains to fortify it presumably against wild animals, even to the point of building a kind of watchtower. That suggests that what he is about to cultivate is a special type of grape distinct from all others in the neighborhood. The description of this vineyard is lifted from Is 5.1-2 which runs in full as "Let me sing for my beloved a love song concerning his vineyard: My beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill. He dug it and cleared it of stones and planted it with choice vines; he built a watchtower in the midst of it and hewed out a wine vat in it; and he looked for it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes." Surely most of Jesus' listeners were familiar with this image which refers to the nation of Israel. Later in this chapter the Lord removes the vineyard's defenses and let it be trampled down.

Once work on the vineyard is complete...no mean feat...the *oikodespotes* hires it out to tenants or *georgos*, that is, a tenant farmer which here refers to a group of people settling in for the time being and running the place. Just the mere mention of that word doesn't forebode well for the vineyard and owner. However, they moved in and after having settled down, the householder doesn't simply depart but heads off for another country, *apodemeo* more specifically as to travel from one's one country or *demos*. Surely he knew of the risks involved with such a risky venture but had to take the chance.

Vs. 34 says that when the season or *kairos* + of fruit came, the *oikodespotes* sends his attending servants to check up on how things are going. Apparently the distance isn't terribly far, but those who had been sent met an unexpected terrible fate. One was killed and another stoned. This prompted the *oikodespotes* to sent a second group of servants, more than the first which seemed to have consisted of just two men. However, they met the same fate. Finally he sends his son thinking somewhat naively that the tenant farmers will respect him,

entrepo (S *baheth*: to be ashamed, stand in awe) as to show reverence or respect, *trepo* as to turn prefaced with the preposition *en-* or “in.”

This of course didn't work, for the tenants decided to kill him and get his inheritance. That, of course, was impossible, but it showed how wicked they were thinking the fortified vineyard was all theirs. You'd think by now or having received word of the second failed attempt at dealing with the tenant farmers the *oikodespotes* would send an armed force. However, that would defeat the purpose of the parable, that the son refers to Jesus himself whom they slay. Not only that, they added insult to injury by killing him outside the vineyard, his very inheritance.

Jesus asks an obvious question in vs. 40, that is, what do his listeners think the *oikodespotes* will do to the tenants? As one voice they respond that he will inflict a miserable death upon them, *apollumi* with the adverb *kakos* (both +), this being more along the lines of complete destruction. After this, he will let out his vineyard...Israel...to other tenants who at the appropriate season or *kairos* + will be responsible for the vineyard yielding fruit. Some of those tenants will be taking over in the near future, that is, at Pentecost with the descent of the Holy Spirit. The irony of this parable is that a few days later some of those present who vehemently denounce the evil tenants will find themselves in the crowd demanding that Jesus be crucified.

In vs. 42 Jesus continues with this theme of the son-as-inheritor being rejected by quoting from Ps 118.22-23 as a rhetorical question. It runs in full as “The stone which the builders have rejected has become the head of the corner. This is the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes.” A key word here is *pala'* for marvelous which refers to something extraordinary as a miracle. That, of course, ties in literally with the “head of the corner.” As for this rejection, we have no information what was going on among the builders, presumably of the temple. As for their rejection, the verb *ma'as* is quite vivid in that it connotes a defect. As for the Greek text, the preposition *eis* or “into” is used with regard to the cornerstone, literally “into the cornerstone.” As for the word “marvelous,” it's rendered literally as “beside (*para*) the Lord it was.”

In vs. 41 Jesus says that the vineyard which belonged to the *oikodespotes* or better, the superintendent, will be taken away and given to other tenants. Now in vs. 43 he speaks very directly, that is, the kingdom of God. The parable of the

vineyard was not explicit about this but as pointed out above, is more with regard to the son-as-inheritor who is killed. This very kingdom...vineyard...will be taken from you-as-listeners and given to a nation producing fruit. As for vs. 44 the **RSV** translates it in a footnote as “And he who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; but when it falls on anyone, it will crush him.”

The chief priests and Pharisees are mentioned as hearing this parable in vs. 45 though vs. 23 has the former with the elders. To say that they perceived (*ginosko* and *S yedah*, both +) this parable as referring to themselves is a clear understatement. Their first urge was to arrest Jesus on the spot but they backed off but with the certain knowledge that soon Jesus would be in their grip. Obviously these figures of authority weren't alone in the temple courtyard. The *ochlos* + (plural is used, suggest of a lot of people) which caused them to be fearful, they holding Jesus out to be a genuine prophet. Yet in a very short time many of these same people will soon denounce Jesus.