

CHAPTER 10

JESUS' LATER PEREAN MINISTRY

Part 9: The Ministry of Christ in and Around Perea

[*Harmony*, Part 9, pp. 149-167]

Before Jesus' final conflict in Jerusalem, he spent several months ministering in Perea, the territory of Herod Antipas on the east side of the Jordan River. Luke's gospel is the main source of information for this period of Jesus' life. John does speak of a few events of this period, most notably the raising of Lazarus. Matthew and Mark mention a few of the teachings and conflicts of Jesus during this time. But we must associate this part of Jesus' ministry primarily with Luke.

Principles of Discipleship

During most of Jesus' Perea ministry he was teaching his disciples what was required to be a follower of Jesus. He emphasized our relation to all kinds of other people, to money, and to life in general. This section ends with Jesus temporarily leaving Perea to go and raise Lazarus from the dead.

Sec. 112: From Jerusalem to Perea

John tells us that after attending the feast of Dedication in Jerusalem, Jesus left and crossed the Jordan to Perea, to the place John the Baptist had been laboring earlier. John says that many there believed on him (John 10:42).

Sec. 113: Question about salvation and entering the kingdom, Anticipation of Jesus' coming death and his sorrow over Jerusalem

Luke picks up the narrative as Jesus was about to return to Jerusalem and was touring through the towns and villages of Perea, teaching as he went. Jesus reminded the people that in the coming kingdom Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob would be feasting with many from all over the world, but that those who knew Jesus personally but did not trust in him would be excluded.

Luke 13:31-32 takes us to the time three days before Jesus left Perea to go raise up Lazarus. It is instructive to read this section in conjunction with John 11, which speaks of Jesus' delay of four days before arriving in Bethany (John 11:17). During this brief interval of about two days Jesus continued to teach the people in Perea, and some of those teachings are preserved in several chapters in Luke (Luke 13-17).

As he thought about his soon going to Jerusalem, Jesus foresaw his own death, and lamented over its continual unbelief and rebellion and spoke of his compassion for the city and its people. He then declared their final doom (Luke 13:33-35).

Sec. 114: Healing of a man with dropsy while eating with a prominent Pharisee on the Sabbath, and three parables suggested by the occasion

This is the last of the six Sabbath controversies recorded in the gospels (see the list in the previous chapter, under Section 110). The Pharisees were unable to convict Jesus of any sin; the only grounds they could bring forward were charges that he and his disciples had failed to observe their cleanliness rituals, had associated with people of low reputation, and that Jesus did work on the Sabbath. Of these three charges, the third was the most serious, since the Pharisees could use Scriptural commands against working on that day. As he had done on previous occasions, Jesus healed on the Sabbath day, this time a man with dropsy. Luke records that this was done in a Pharisee's house, who had invited him for the express purpose of finding some sin in him. Jesus again told them that works of mercy are acceptable and good on the Sabbath, employing the figure of pulling a son or an ox from a well.

At the same dinner, Jesus noted the jockeying for position among the guests, and used the occasion to give two additional parables which taught the importance of humility and service in the kingdom of God: the guests at the wedding feast, and the wealthy man's banquet.

Sec. 115: Cost of discipleship

Jesus used several figures to show the dedication required to be a disciple of his. The first is forsaking all one's family (not usually literally, but in terms of first love), then carrying Jesus' cross. He added the illustrations of a man building a tower and of king going to war. He concluded with the comparison of a disciple to salt with saltiness. We must count the cost to be a disciple of Jesus.

Sec. 116: Parables in defense of association with sinners

When the Pharisees and teachers of the law criticized Jesus for associating with tax collectors and “sinners,” who were flocking around him in Perea, Jesus responded with a series of beautiful and famous parables, which all have the theme of being lost and then found. They are the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son (often called the prodigal son). These are recorded in Luke 15; it is noticeable that Luke emphasizes women and children, the poor, Gentiles, and the outcasts of society. The lesson in each was the same: Jesus came to recover sinners and bring them to salvation; this work should bring forth praise to God, not criticism.

Sec. 117: Parable to teach the proper use of money, Story to teach the danger of wealth, Four lessons on discipleship

Jesus required his disciples to follow God, and not to love the world, especially money. The parable of the rich man’s shrewd manager illustrated how money should be made subservient to fostering human relationships, ending with the famous dictum, “You cannot serve both God and Money” (Luke 16:13). Then followed the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, showing how the love of money can blind people to the real needs of themselves and others. It is interesting to note how Jesus selected the name Lazarus for the beggar, even as he was traveling to raise up his friend Lazarus from the dead. Note that the Pharisees were known to love money (Luke 16:14; cf. the testimony of Paul, who speaks of his sin of covetousness when he was a Pharisee, in Rom 7:7-8).

Note also the high esteem in which Jesus held the OT Scriptures (Luke 16:31).

This section in Luke is concluded by Jesus’ other lessons to his disciples (Luke 17:1-10). They are to be careful not to lead others astray, to forgive those who sin against them, to exercise increasing faith, and to expect no special treatment from the Father, realizing that they are only servants or slaves of God.

Sec. 118: Sickness and death of Lazarus, Lazarus raised from the dead

Luke’s narrative of Jesus’ ministry is interrupted by the account in John of Jesus’ trip from Perea to Judea to raise Lazarus from the dead and the Sanhedrin’s subsequent reaction (John 11). Luke will resume the narrative with Jesus’ ministry in Samaria and Galilee in Section 120.

John relates how Jesus heard of the sickness of Lazarus, and delayed going to see him until he knew that Lazarus was dead. Note how Jesus loved this family in Bethany, Mary and Martha and Lazarus; this was the warm human love of friendship and shared spiritual interest. Jesus was already wanted for arrest in Jerusalem. Notice Thomas’ resigned attitude, “Let us also

go, that we may die with him” (v. 16). The delay in going to Lazarus, as recorded in John, is parallel to the delay in leaving Perea, as recorded in Luke 13:31-32.

Jesus’ dialogs with Martha and Mary show their spiritual understanding and faith. By weeping at the tomb of Lazarus, Jesus showed his hatred of sin and its consequent death. Jesus prayed to the Father so that all might know that it was through the Father’s will that these miracles were done; Jesus possessed human faith, even as his apostles did. The raising of Lazarus is one of the great “signs” in John. Lazarus himself became a vivid witness to the power of God in Jesus (cf. John 12:9-11).

Sec. 119: Decision of the Sanhedrin to put Jesus to death

When the Pharisees and leading Sadducees heard what Jesus did, they did not turn to him in faith; rather, they plotted to eliminate him as a rival. This proves their total depravity. Caiaphas, the high priest that year, said, “It is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish” (John 11:50). As John points out, unknown to Caiaphas, this was a theological truth designed by God to mean something entirely different than what Caiaphas had in mind. John adds that Jesus would die also for Gentiles as well as the nation of the Jews.

Because of this decision of the Sanhedrin, Jesus stayed away from Jerusalem and moved to Ephraim, a village probably in northern Judea.

Teaching While on the Final Journey to Jerusalem

Jesus was now about to make his final journey to Jerusalem. From northern Judea he probably traveled north through Samaria and part of Galilee, and then joined the pilgrims there traveling to Jerusalem for Passover. From Galilee the normal route was to cross the Jordan River and travel south through Perea, avoiding Samaria. It appears that Jesus followed this route. From southern Perea he crossed back across the Jordan to Jericho, and walked from there up to Jerusalem.

There is considerable space given in Luke to this part of Jesus’ ministry, and several events and teaching are recorded in Matthew and Mark. John’s gospel does not enter the narrative again until after Jesus reaches the outskirts of Jerusalem (John 12:1; Sec. 128).

Sec. 120: Healing of ten lepers while passing through Samaria and Galilee, Instructions regarding the Son of Man’s coming

Somewhere on his trip up to Galilee this event occurred. Jesus healed ten lepers, but only one returned to thank him. Luke characteristically points out that this one was a Samaritan. This passage shows that Jesus still supported the OT ritual priesthood in its rightful duties, and that we all should be more thankful to the Lord for our blessings.

At the same time Jesus told his disciples about the conditions that will prevail at his second coming. This message is a precursor to the great Olivet Discourse, given outside Jerusalem (Sec. 139). Jesus' final comment has always been a puzzle; it may refer to the final destruction of the evil forces of Antichrist (Luke 17:37).

Sec. 121: Two parables on prayer: the persistent widow, and the Pharisee and the tax collector

As Jesus continued his journey toward Jerusalem, he spoke of prayer with these two well-known parables in Luke 18. Prayer must be persistent and humble for God to hear and answer it.

Sec. 122: Conflict with Pharisaic teaching on divorce

By the time Jesus crossed the Jordan into Perea, Matthew and Mark have picked up the narrative, and the three Synoptic gospels all contribute to our knowledge of this "second" Perea ministry. Probably this time in Perea was shorter than before, since Jesus was traveling with others to Jerusalem and was just "passing through."

Quoting Deuteronomy 24:1-4, some Pharisees sought to make Jesus take a stand on the subject of divorce which would alienate him from some supporters. The Jews themselves were divided on this subject between various schools (Hillel vs. Shammai). Jesus answered by referring to the creation of marriage in Genesis 1-2, and its indissoluble nature. The "exception clause" in Matthew 19:9 allows for divorce in cases of marital unfaithfulness, but does not require it. Jesus' comments about eunuchs in Matthew show that the single state is not required, but is honorable for those God has equipped for it.

Sec. 123: Example of little children in relation to the kingdom

Jesus blessed the little children brought to him (Luke, "infants"). They had the key to entrance into God's kingdom, because they recognized their complete helplessness and dependency on God.

Sec. 124: Riches and the kingdom, Parable of the landowner's sovereignty

All three Synoptics record the story of the rich young ruler. Mark points out that “Jesus loved him” (Mark 10:21), probably a human love of compassion and natural sympathy. But Jesus required him to give up his first love—money. This he was unwilling to do, and went away.

Jesus then pointed out to his disciples how hard it was for the rich to be saved; indeed, no one can be saved except by the power of God (Matt 19:26). Whatever people give up for the Lord here on earth will be amply restored and multiplied, both in this age and in the coming age.

Matthew alone adds Jesus’ parable of the landowner who paid his workers all the same wage, that which the longest workers had agreed to. This shows that God is sovereign in salvation, and that we all receive far better than we deserve.

Sec. 125: Third prediction of Jesus’ death and resurrection, Warning against ambitious pride

The text now speaks of Jesus and his disciples’ being on their way to Jerusalem (Matt 20:17). Apparently they had passed over the Jordan again and now were in the territory of Judea. Jesus’ disciples “were astonished, while those who followed were afraid” (Mark 10:12). They knew that Jesus was wanted by the authorities there, and they could tell he was resolved to face death in Jerusalem. At this point he again told them of his coming trials—mocking, flogging, crucifixion, and of his resurrection three days later.

Then the mother of Zebedee’s sons James and John (probably Salome, Mary’s sister) sought high places for them in the coming kingdom. Jesus answered that they must suffer what he will suffer, and that regardless, the Father would decide. It is more important to serve, as Jesus himself served, “to give his life as a ransom form many” (Matt 20:28). This last verse (found also in Mark 10:45) shows that the substitutionary atonement was a teaching of Jesus himself, even in the Synoptic strain; note now Mark especially pictures Jesus as a servant throughout his gospel.

Sec. 126: Healing of blind Bartimaeus and his companion

The three Synoptic accounts of this miracle near Jericho can be harmonized easily. Apparently there were two men, led by Bartimaeus (Matthew notes both blind men; cf. the similar example of the two demoniacs mentioned by Matthew; Sec. 66); and apparently he met the men initially before entering the city (as in Luke) and healed them as he left the city (as in Matthew and Mark). See the note in the *Harmony*, p. 165, n. c.

Sec. 127: Salvation of Zaccheus, Parable to teach responsibility while the kingdom is delayed

Unlike Matthew, who was a tax collector, Zaccheus was a “chief” tax collector, with other people collecting taxes under him. His seeking Jesus by climbing the tree, and Jesus’ seeking him by calling to him and inviting himself to his house, are all the subject of a popular children’s song. His true faith is shown not only by his actions, but by his promise to restore what he had gotten unjustly, with appropriate compensation. Once again Luke is the writer who brings this story of the salvation of the despised tax collector to us, as he was received by faith and became “a son of Abraham.”

As Jesus continued his journey up to Jerusalem from Jericho, he told the famous parable of the noble who went on a journey “to have himself appointed king and then return,” apparently referring to himself. Two stories are woven together. One is the rebellious city, which is destroyed, speaking of Jerusalem. The other is the three servants and how they handled the nobleman’s money in his absence. Those servants who worked for him were rewarded with great authority, while the wicked servant who did not work for him was deprived of his reward. Jesus was preparing his disciples for the time he would be taken from them, before his second coming.