

LUKE

Chapter 12

Beware of the Leaven of the Pharisees

12 In the meantime, when so many thousands of the people had gathered together that they were trampling one another, he began to say to his disciples first, “Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. 2 Nothing is covered up that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. 3 Therefore whatever you have said in the dark shall be heard in the light, and what you have whispered in private rooms shall be proclaimed on the housetops.

12:1 *in the meantime* – ἐν οἷς—This might mean “in connection with which things” or “in which times, meanwhile” (cf. Acts 26:12). It establishes a connection between the growing hostility of Jesus’ opponents (Lk 11:37–54) and his instructions to his disciples here. (CC p. 495)

In connection with the events of vv 37–54. (TLSB)

many thousands of people – τῶν μυριάδων τοῦ ὄχλου/τοὺς μαθητάς—Throughout this chapter, there will be references to the crowds and the disciples. The discourse begins with Jesus speaking to his disciples while a vast crowd (thousands, a much larger crowd than the one at 11:29) gathers. (CC p. 495)

first – πρῶτον—Luke might be saying that Jesus addressed the disciples first, and then the crowd. However, R. Tannehill, *Narrative Unity I*, 240, suggests that Luke’s use of πρῶτον may indicate that this is the first in a series of topics Jesus will cover in the discourse recorded in 12:1–13:21. (CC p. 495)

Having sternly admonished the Pharisees, Jesus now turns to warn His own disciples (TLSB)

leaven of the Pharisees. The Pharisees’ main failure was a hypocrisy born of legalism. (TLSB)

The beginning of this discourse could be a fitting summary of Jesus’ criticism of the Pharisees and lawyers (11:37–54), now labeled as “hypocrisy.” The imperative “beware” (προσέχετε) governs the first section (12:1b–3), and “for yourselves” (ἑαυτοῖς) focuses the warning on the disciples. The phrase “the leaven, which is hypocrisy, of the Pharisees” calls attention to the *subtle and inexorable influence* that attitudes such as these of the Pharisees can have. The Pharisees cover up their inner wickedness with religiosity. They infiltrate Israel’s religious life and lead others to the grave too (11:44). Jesus will soon refer also to the crowds as “hypocrites” because they will not examine the signs of the times (12:56; cf. 13:15). But a more powerful “leaven” has also been introduced into the world: the kingdom of God (13:21, creating a frame with 12:1). (CC p. 498)

hypocrisy – Thus this word about hypocrisy must be seen in the context of Jesus’ woes against the lawyers for their cooperation in the persecution of the prophets (11:47–51) and the scribes and Pharisees’ response of plotting to kill Jesus at the end of those woes (11:53–54). Jesus’ harsh words earn the threat of persecution for him—and for all “prophets and apostles” (11:49), those who confess him before the world. The hypocrisy of the Pharisees results from the

sinful nature of fallen humanity, which rebels against the hard and difficult words of the prophets and in particular the words of the prophet Jesus. Therefore, Jesus' woes apply to the old Adam in every human being. The coming of the kingdom reveals and uncovers this hypocrisy—and the hypocrisy of all people. Jesus reiterates the principle four times by means of parallel statements as this structure illustrates:

- 12:2 That which is covered up will be revealed.
That which is hidden will be known.
- 12:3 That which is said in darkness will be heard in the light.
That which is spoken in private will be proclaimed from the roofs.

Lk 12:2–3 says both that the disciples' preaching will reveal hypocrisy (thus generating persecution) *and* that their own integrity (or hypocrisy) will come to light. (CC p. 498)

12:2–3 God knows everything and is not fooled by piety that is focused on externals. Jesus warns His disciples not to act one way in public and another way in private. In the end, such duplicity is exposed. (TLSB)

12:2 *nothing is covered that will not be known.* In this context the meaning is that nothing hidden through hypocrisy will fail to be made known. (CSB)

12:3 *inner rooms.* Storerooms were surrounded by other rooms so that no one could dig in from outside. (CSB)

12:1–3 Jesus warns His disciples about the pitfalls of religious hypocrisy. Though justified by faith, Christians still have a sinful nature and so struggle daily with the challenge of living the faith sincerely. Because we are frequently tempted to hypocrisy and sometimes fail in the struggle, it is comforting to hear that God knows us as we truly are, yet remains committed to our repentance and our salvation. • Lord, You know me better than I know myself. Though aware of my many failures, You still love me and continue to forgive me. Receive my heartfelt thanks. Amen. (TLSB)

Have No Fear

4 “I tell you, my friends, do not fear those who kill the body, and after that have nothing more that they can do. 5 But I will warn you whom to fear: fear him who, after he has killed, has authority to cast into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him! 6 Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? And not one of them is forgotten before God. 7 Why, even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not; you are of more value than many sparrows.

12:4 *My friends.* The disciples. (TLSB)

I tell you – λέγω δὲ ὑμῖν—This expression introduces the last two sections of this passage (12:8) and is used throughout this discourse. On λέγω ὑμῖν, see comments at 4:24. (CC p. 496)

do not fear – μὴ φοβηθῆτε—φοβέομαι governs the second section of this passage (12:4–7), in which it occurs five times. The first use is an aorist passive subjunctive with μὴ in a negative prohibition. The first occurrence in 12:5 is an aorist subjunctive with the force of an imperative. Then φοβέομαι occurs three more times in the imperative mood, twice in 12:5 and once in 12:7. It also occurs in the imperative later in this chapter: “Do not fear [μὴ φοβοῦ], little flock, because your Father graciously willed to give to you the kingdom” (12:32). Identifying with Jesus and his

words brings persecution and the temptation to hypocrisy. The confessor is encouraged not to fear his persecutors, but to fear God alone. (CC p. 496)

Jesus connects the disciples' fear and faith as regards their eternal condition to their current (denying or) confessing—precisely the activity that generates and is threatened by persecution! Jesus has already spoken about this (cf. 9:1–6; 10:1–20, especially 10:16). When a disciple “confesses” Jesus, he says yes to what God has revealed about Jesus and publicly acknowledges his trust in Jesus. This, it is understood, has temporal—but also eternal—consequences. To “deny” is to say no to Jesus, publicly and before God. The danger of hypocrisy is that it can lead to apostasy (cf. 9:26). The example of Peter will show that no disciple is immune to fear and hypocritical denial of Jesus. (CC p. 499)

after that have nothing more. Encouragement in the face of persecution (see Mt 10:28). (CSB)

Human beings can destroy the body but not the soul. (TLSB)

12:5 *cast you into hell.* God alone has this power. The Greek word for “hell” is *ge(h)enna*, not to be confused with Hades, the general name for the place of the dead. In the NT *ge(h)enna* is used only in Matthew, Mark, Jas 3:6 and here. *fear him.* Respect his authority, stand in awe of his majesty and trust in him. Verses 6–7 give the basis for trust. (CSB)

γέενναν—The word “Gehenna” comes from the Hebrew גֵּהֶנְזַיִם, “Valley of Hinnom.” This valley lies alongside the city of Jerusalem and empties into the Kidron Valley (Josh 15:8; 18:16). It was a place where children were burnt as offerings to the Edomite god Molech and to Baal. Later it became a place for the continuous burning of garbage. The association of fire and the abomination of child sacrifice made it a term for Sheol or punishment for sinners (hell). In the NT this term occurs only in James 3:6 and the synoptic gospels, and only here in Luke. (CC p. 496)

12:6 *five sparrows sold for two pennies.* God even cares for little birds, sold cheaply for food. Three words used for Roman coins are *denarius* (Mt 18:28), *assarion* (Mt 10:29) and *kodrantēs* (Mt 5:26), very loosely related to each other as are a 50-cent piece, nickel and penny. The coins here are *assaria*, so the transaction would be something like five birds for two nickels. (CSB)

12:7 *hairs...numbered* – αἱ τρίχες τῆς κεφαλῆς ὑμῶν πᾶσαι ἠρίθμηνται—This is a well-known saying of Jesus. He will also promise, “A hair from your head will not perish” (Lk 21:18), and St. Paul quotes that promise in Acts (27:34). The theological passive ἠρίθμηνται implies that God has done the counting. (CC p. 496)

God knows us down to the minutest detail. (TLSB)

more value. Vivid way of expressing God's boundless love and the incredible value His love bestows on those He redeems. (TLSB)

12:4–7 Jesus identifies fear as the root cause of hypocrisy. He assures us that His Father's children have nothing to fear from others. Today, if we are honest about the things that trouble us most, we will have to admit that fear and worry are near the top of the list. This leads us to see all the more clearly the benefit of the Gospel, which assures us of God's victory over everyone and everything threatening us. • “O little flock, fear not the foe Who madly seeks your overthrow; Dread not his rage and pow'r. And though your courage sometimes faints, His seeming triumph o'er God's saints Lasts but a little hour.” Amen. (LSB 666:1) (TLSB)

Acknowledge Christ Before Men

8 “And I tell you, everyone who acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man also will acknowledge before the angels of God, 9 but the one who denies me before men will be denied before the angels of God. 10 And everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but the one who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven. 11 And when they bring you before the synagogues and the rulers and the authorities, do not be anxious about how you should defend yourself or what you should say, 12 for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say.”

12:8 *acknowledges me.* When a person acknowledges that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God (Mt 16:16; 1Jn 2:22), Jesus acknowledges that the individual is his loyal follower (cf. Mt 7:21). (CSB)

ὁμολογήση—This means the public confession of the faith. The idea of creeds and confessions is a thoroughly biblical concept. As Jesus states here, it is vital for individuals and, by extension, for churches to make public confession of the faith. The verb usually takes the accusative case of the person or doctrine confessed. Here and in Mt 10:32, where it is followed by ἐν and the dative, and in Heb 13:15, where it is followed by a simple dative, the meaning is “to declare oneself in accord with, to make known one’s trust in, to confess one’s faith in.” With Jesus as subject, it means “to declare his unity with, to affirm solidarity with, to acknowledge as his own.” (CC p. 496)

12:9 *will be denied.* See 9:26; 2Ti 2:12; cf. Mt 7:21; 25:41–46. The same word is used in Peter’s denial (22:34, “deny”; 22:61, “disown”). (CSB)

Hence there is great comfort in the first of Jesus’ two statements: “Everyone who will speak a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven to him” (12:10). But does this not seem to contradict Jesus’ previous warning that the one who denies him will be disowned in eternity? Not if it is understood that the one who speaks against the Son is later turned by the Spirit to repentance and faith. This the Spirit can do if the person is not thwarting God’s purpose by blaspheming the Spirit. (CC p. 499)

Luke’s hearers, who know the end of the story, are particularly interested in Luke’s portrayal of the disciples and in making applications to situations in the life of the post-Easter, post-Pentecost church. In Luke’s gospel, no disciple fully understands or confesses the full truth about Jesus until after the breaking of bread at Emmaus (cf. 24:34–35; 53). During the passion, no one, not even Peter, can control his fear and withstand the temptation to deny Jesus before people (22:54–62). Inconstancy in confession is denial of Christ, and it remains unforgiven so long as there is no repentance and no faith (both worked by the Holy Spirit). In the gospels and in Acts many people, including disciples and apostles, do “speak a word against the Son of Man” (Lk 12:10). But the stories of Peter and Saul/Paul, among others, show that forgiveness is possible for those who speak against the Son. (CC pp. 499–500)

In a sense, all people are guilty of speaking against the Son. Since the fall, each person sins much and daily. All kinds of sins, including those of believing disciples (whom Jesus taught to pray, “forgive to us our sins” [11:4]), are in a sense “words” spoken against the Son. All people stand in need of daily repentance from sin and daily reliance on Jesus’ promise to forgive those who have spoken against him. That promise extends the comfort of salvation to all sinners—that is, to all people—who trust his word of promise. (CC p. 500)

12:10 Christians who fail to confess Jesus when facing persecution (e.g., Peter) and even avowed enemies of the Gospel (e.g., Paul before his conversion) can be forgiven. But whoever continually resists the Spirit and rejects the Gospel goes to eternal damnation. (TLSB)

blasphemes against the Holy Spirit. τῷ δὲ εἰς τὸ ἅγιον πνεῶμα βλασφημήσαντι—Jesus’ reference to blaspheming the Holy Spirit will be echoed in Stephen’s accusation that the Jews are a “stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in hearts and ears” who “always resist/oppose [ἀντιπίπτω, also in the LXX of Num 27:14] the Holy Spirit” (Acts 7:51). However, one of those who resisted and opposed God and was involved in the stoning of Stephen was Saul (Acts 7:58; 8:1; 22:20), who later was led to repentance, baptism, and faith (Acts 9:1–29; 22:3–21). Saul is an example of one who was forgiven. He did not *continue* to oppose the Holy Spirit. (CC p. 496)

Jesus then follows his statement of comfort for sinners with a stern warning that blasphemy against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven. What is this sin? And how does it differ from the previous “word against the Son of Man” that will be forgiven? Blasphemy against the Spirit is a conscious, informed rejection and reviling of the Spirit after the Spirit has provided ample testimony that Jesus is the Christ. As such, this sin is possible only where the Gospel has been present and the illuminating rays of the Spirit have been shining. It is saying that the divine Spirit, who has been upon John and Jesus—and who speaks today through all the Scriptures, revealing the forgiveness of sins provided by Jesus’ sacrificial death—is a *liar*, of the *devil*, the father of lies. This would be the sin committed by some in 11:14–23, giving Jesus reason to comment on the sin here. People had seen the power of the Spirit at work as Jesus was plundering the devil’s household. Yet some denied that the “finger of God” (11:20) was at work in Jesus, and what is more, they ascribed Jesus’ saving, Spirit-supplied power to the devil. (CC pp. 500-501)

The Sin against the Holy Ghost, therefore, is an intentional denial of evangelical truth, which has been acknowledged and approved by conscience, connected with a bold attack upon it, and voluntary blasphemy of it. For we must observe that this kind of sin was proved against the Pharisees by Christ; for, although they were constrained by the force of the truth uttered by Him, and were convicted in their consciences by its illumination, yet they raged against Him by their wicked impiety, to such a degree that they blushed not to ascribe His doctrines and miracles to Satan. (CC)

The sin of blasphemy against the Spirit may be more grievous than speaking a word against the Son. In God’s plan of salvation, the Son was sent to be the object of scorn and derision (Ps 69:9), quoted in Rom 15:3). He absorbed the world’s sin in order to procure forgiveness for all. But the Spirit was *not* sent to suffer abuse at the hands of the world. Rather, the Spirit is sent to work repentance and faith in the Son. Reviling the Spirit has no place in God’s plan. (CC p. 501)

Since repentance and faith in Christ are works of the Spirit, blasphemous rejection of the Spirit prevents one from being turned by the Spirit to repentance and faith. Therefore it cuts one off from access to the forgiveness of sins. As long as one persists in this blasphemy, the sin will continue unforgiven, and if one persists in it until death, there is no more opportunity to be forgiven. Jesus’ ominous warning carries a frightful implication of eternal judgment for the impenitent—an implication made more explicit in the parallels in Mt 12:32 and Mk 3:29. (CC pp. 501-502)

However, the ultimate purpose of Jesus’ two statements in 12:10 is not simply to terrify disciples with the prospect of unforgiven sin, but to lead to their salvation. The example of Saul/Paul shows that God can bring even a blasphemer to faith (1 Tim 1:13–16). Jesus’ statements are intended to fortify his disciples so that they might not deny him; but as for those who shrink back

in the face of persecution (as will all the apostles, notably Peter), Jesus' exhortations aim to restore them through repentance and faith. (CC p. 502)

12:11 *bring you* – Facing charges and possible punishment from hostile religious leaders. Not only Jesus (23:6-21) but also Stephen and Paul underwent this ordeal (Acts 6:8-7:60; 22:30-23:11) (TLSB)

ἐπὶ τὰς συναγωγὰς καὶ τὰς ἀρχὰς καὶ τὰς ἐξουσίας—As in 12:10, Jesus' words in Luke again anticipate Luke's record of the persecution of the disciples in Acts. (CC p. 496)

do not be anxious – μή μεριμνήσητε—The aorist subjunctive with μή is a prohibition. It balances (both structurally and grammatically) the injunction in the previous section not to fear and governs the thrust of Jesus' words in this final part. The theme recurs in the third pericope of this chapter (12:22, 25, 26). (CC p. 496)

defend yourself – Finally, Jesus returns to the imperative to encourage the disciples not to be anxious about those situations that are coming when, facing persecution, they must make a defense of their faith (ἀπολογήσησθε) and confess it before people (12:11). Clearly, Jesus here anticipates the disciples' ministry in Acts, for which he has begun to prepare them by sending them out (9:1–6; 10:1–20) and continuing their catechesis as they journey with him to his death in Jerusalem. The Holy Spirit will be their catechist, giving them the teaching (διδάξει; 12:12) they will need at the critical hour (cf. Jn 14:26). (CC p. 502)

12:12 *Holy Spirit will teach you* – They are warned *not to resist* the Spirit, and they have Jesus' promise that they *will be taught* by the Spirit (Lk 12:12). This is the only verse in Luke where anyone other than Jesus is said to teach (διδάσκω), but after the Spirit comes on the disciples at Pentecost, they will be found teaching often, showing the triumph of the Spirit over fear and anxiety as they confess Christ before people. (CC p. 502)

Does not promise some special revelation. Rather, the Spirit will bestow courage and clarity of expression to Jesus' witness as they face persecution. (TLSB)

12:8–12 Jesus teaches about the blessedness of confessing Him and the great dangers in denying Him and resisting His grace. In a culture increasingly hostile to traditional Christian belief, such warnings are timely, as the temptation to compromise our confession becomes more intense every day. Thank God for His Holy Spirit, who strives all the more for us and for the integrity of our faith. • Lord Jesus, give us a rich measure of Your Holy Spirit, that we boldly confess Your name before an increasingly faithless and hostile world. Turn the hearts of our enemies, that they receive Your salvation. Amen. (TLSB)

The Parable of the Rich Fool

13 Someone in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.” **14** But he said to him, “**Man, who made me a judge or arbitrator over you?**” **15** And he said to them, “**Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.**” **16** And he told them a parable, saying, “**The land of a rich man produced plentifully, 17 and he thought to himself, ‘What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?’ 18 And he said, ‘I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. 19 And I will say to my soul, ‘Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.’ 20 But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul is**

required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’ 21 So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.”

12:13 *divide the inheritance.* Dt 21:17 gave the general rule that an elder son received double a younger one’s portion. Disputes over such matters were normally settled by rabbis. This man’s request of Jesus was selfish and materialistic. There is no indication that the man had been listening seriously to what Jesus had been saying (cf. vv. 1–11). Jesus replied with a parable about the consequences of greed. (CSB)

He asks Jesus to mediate a family dispute. People often brought such problems to respected rabbis. (TLSB)

The evangelist’s introduction to 12:13–21 returns the reader’s attention to the crowds, who number into the thousands (12:1). Someone from the crowd makes a request about his inheritance. It was common for Jewish people to ask a rabbi or “teacher” (διδάσκαλε) to interpret and apply the Torah to specific cases; the Torah deals with inheritance matters in passages such as Num 27:1–11; 36:7–9; Deut 21:15–17. Jesus, however, refuses to act as arbiter in this worldly dispute. Soon Jesus will describe how he came not to bring peace but a sword, to divide families rather than reconcile them (Lk 12:51–53). Instead of granting the man’s request, (CC p. 504)

12:14 Seems ironic, because elsewhere Jesus is called the “one mediator between God and men” (1Tm 2:5) and pictured as the Judge (Mt 25:31–46). Yet vv 15–21 make Jesus’ judgment plain. Aug: “He asked for half an inheritance on earth; the Lord offered him a whole inheritance in heaven. The Lord gave more than asked for” (NPNF 1 6:437). (TLSB)

judge or arbiter – μεριστήν—K. Bailey, *Through Peasant Eyes*, 61, notes a possible play on words here between μεριστής, “divider,” and μεσίτης, “reconciler.” The man wanted someone to divide the property between himself and his brother, with whom he had a dispute, whereas Jesus comes as one who reconciles so that all might be brothers and neighbors (cf. 10:29) at peace. J. Nolland, *Luke 9:21–18:34*, 685, 688, sees in the word “divider” an allusion to Ex 2:14 that further suggests that Jesus is the prophet like Moses promised in Deut 18:15–18. (CC p. 503)

12:15 *be on guard against all covetousness* – pleonesdzia – This word contains pleon which means more. This is about an insatiable desire for more. John D. Rockefeller was once asked “how much money is enough.” The reply was “just a little more.” (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 11, Part 3)

Though greed may long lie hidden in one’s heart, it eventually manifests itself in a variety of destructive behaviors. (TLSB)

This first general principle warns against the antonym of the proper attitude toward possessions: greed (12:15; πλεονεξία). Greed is an obsession to hoard all things for oneself, blocking out any thought for God or for one’s neighbor. It is a close synonym of ἀρπαγή, “rapaciousness” (11:39), the desire to seize more even by force or violence. Possessions become one of the many imagined alternative means of salvation that fly under the banner of “works-righteousness.” After noting that the Pharisees were “lovers of money” (16:14), Luke records Jesus’ statement to them, “You are those who declare yourselves righteous before men, but God knows your hearts; because that which is high among men is a detestable thing before God” (16:15). The person who succumbs to the temptation of greed is trying to establish and measure his life by what he *has*. Such a person does not understand who he *is* in relation to God and others. Possessions are not the source of true

life or wealth in relation to God, as Jesus says, “Not even when it abounds to someone is his life derived from his possessions” (12:15). (CC pp. 505 - 506)

abundance of his possessions – In John 10:10 Jesus says he has come so that we may have life abundantly. Abundance of life is not found in having many possessions, but in having Christ. Abundance will always be a problem. A few years back there was a phrase that stated, “The man who dies with the most toys, wins.” To which someone added, but he still dies. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 11, Part 3)

12:16 parable. Jesus’ story about coveting responds to the man who asked for help in dividing the inheritance (v 13). (TLSB)

This general principle leads to a parable about a man who already has worldly wealth. The interpretation revolves around the concept of *gift*. To what he has, more abundance is added as a *gift*: his land is fruitful (12:16). The parable is framed by references to the abundant possessions that are a gift bestowed (12:16) and to the gift of life that is to be taken away (12:20). The gift of abundant possessions, like his life, comes to him apart from his own efforts. And so the question confronting him, and the catechumen, is this: What is he going to do with the gift (12:17)? Is he going to share it with his neighbor, as the catechumen in Christ would do? Or is he going to hoard the gift, as a proud and fearful Pharisee might do and thus be guilty of greed? (CC p. 506)

The center of the parable announces his decision concerning his gift. He acts on the basis of his greedy heart. Instead of sharing the gift with his neighbor, he will tear down his old barns and build new ones (12:18). Then the rich man goes even further. He congratulates himself on the “wisdom” of *his* plan. He pronounces his present, and his future, secure (12:19). What is tragic about his response is that he is so completely alone in his decision. He consults with no one—not with God in prayer, nor with family or community. He must speak to his own soul, and his speech concerns his mistaken idea that he is completely self-sufficient. Now that he has taken care of his future, he can only tell *himself* to “rest, eat, drink, be merry” (12:19). His greedy heart has sentenced him to celebrate *alone*. (CC p. 506)

produced plentifully – His abundance was not gotten by fraud or other negative means. He had simply been blessed with a very good crop. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 11, Part 3)

12:17 he thought to himself – διελογίseto – He was reasoning or debating with himself. He had a number of options including giving the Lord or to the poor. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 11, Part 3)

διελογίζετο—A similar use of the verb to denote the pondering of unbelievers in a parable occurs in 20:14. On Jesus’ ability to discern the thoughts of others, see textual note and commentary on 5:21–22. (CC p. 503)

what shall I do – τί ποιήσω—Luke records Jesus’ use of soliloquy as a literary device also in 12:45; 15:17–19; 16:3–4; 18:4–5; 20:13. (CC p. 503)

storge my crops – τοὺς καρπούς μου—The word μοῶ predominates throughout this passage: *my* fruits (12:17), *my* barns, *my* goods (12:18), and *my* soul (12:19). This is reversed when God demands “*your* soul” (12:20; τὴν ψυχὴν σου). (CC p. 503)

12:18 *my goods* – Note use of “I” and my in this verse. He totally fails to see that this is a blessing from the Lord. So, he builds more barns and keeps it for himself. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 11, Part 3)

12:19 *my soul* – ψυχή—Used three times in 12:19–20, this refers to the whole person, considered particularly in his self-conscious (inner) life—and in relationship to God. (CC p. 503)

Reveals this man’s heart. Use of “soul” is ironic, for in v 20 the Lord requires judgment of this man’s soul. (TLSB)

eat drink and be merry – He forgot the part of the phrase that says “for tomorrow we die.” He was just living for himself and for the present time. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 11, Part 3)

Not sinful acts in themselves, but here they represent misplaced priorities and values. (TLSB)

φάγε, πίε, εὐφραίνου—Cf. 1 Cor 15:32: “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die,” where Paul draws on Is 22:13; Eccl 2:24; 3:13; 5:18; 8:15. (CC p. 504)

His greedy heart has sentenced him to celebrate *alone*. (CC p. 506)

12:20 *but God said to him* – God has the last word. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 11, Part 3)

fool! A strong word (11:40; Eph 5:17). (CSB)

By depending on riches rather than God, this man does the opposite of what wisdom requires. Aug: “O, my Brethren, with how many fools does He speak here, when the Gospel is read! When it is read, are not they who hear and do not, fools?” (NPNF 1 6:438). (TLSB)

This man was foolish because he thought he could find security and meaning in possessions. He was foolish because he was not rich toward God. He was foolish because he allowed possessions to possess him. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 11, Part 3)

ἄφρων—Jesus also refers to the Pharisees as “foolish ones” in 11:40, the only other occurrence of this word in the synoptic gospels. “The fool says in his heart, ‘There is no God’ ” (Ps 14:1). “The fear of Yahweh is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction” (Prov 1:7). Both the Pharisees and the rich fool ignore the catechesis of Jesus. (CC p. 504)

your soul – God subpoenas him for judgment. (TLSB)

ἀπαιτοῦσιν—notes that the third person plural may be translated as a theological passive: “your soul is demanded back from you” *by God*. Cf. Lk 6:38. (CC p. 504)

But before he can rest in his self-pronounced security, the Giver of every good and perfect gift speaks to him. Uninvited, God now enters the dialog and shows that greed, like hypocrisy, leads to death: “Fool, on this very night your soul is demanded back from you [by me]. But the things you have prepared, whose will they be?” (12:20). This rich fool did not recognize that the gift of surplus goods was from God. He should not be surprised—but he is—that his very life is also a gift from God and that this gift may be “demanded back” by God at any time. He was so concerned with gaining the whole world that he loses himself and suffers loss (9:25). In this case,

he loses his own soul. This is why he is a fool, because the possessions that possessed him during his life are now meaningless when that life is demanded back by God. “Whose will they be?” echoes Eccl 2:18–21. The wisdom of how to use one’s life and possessions is as old as Solomon, and the fool need not have been foolish, if only he had learned from Scripture. But sadly, like the rich man in Lk 16:29–31, and like the Pharisees and lawyers in general (11:49–52; cf. 10:25–37), he failed to heed Scripture. (CC pp. 506-507)

whose will they be – Irony. While working so hard, this man thought only of himself. After his death, however, someone else will enjoy the fruit of all his work. (TLSB)

12:21 *himself* – ἐαυτῷ—He intends his wealth for himself and not for others. He does not show the proper use of possessions, because he does not love his neighbor as himself (Lev 19:18; Lk 10:25–37). (CC p. 504)

rich toward God – To be rich toward God is first of all to believe in Jesus and to trust in the riches he has earned for us in his death on the cross. Then we bring forth fruit of our faith, using our possession for the glory of God and in service of our neighbor. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 11, Part 3)

μὴ εἰς θεὸν πλουτῶν—“Blessed [you] poor, for yours is the kingdom of God” (6:20). To be rich toward God is to have “treasure in heaven” (cf. 12:33–34, providing a link to the next section of the discourse; see also 6:45; 18:22). (CC p. 504)

To be rich toward God is *to believe* that God is the giver of all things, including life and salvation. *To show that one believes* is to share with others the gifts God gives. This is the consistent teaching of Jesus in his various words about possessions. Behind it is the Gospel of grace: forgiveness is bestowed as God’s free gift in Jesus Christ. Yet a time of accountability will come when God will ask whether his free gift of forgiveness was appropriated through faith or was abused by the arrogant assumption that God’s gifts were personal possessions earned by one’s own efforts and therefore at one’s disposal to hoard or waste foolishly. (CC p. 507)

Obsession with money can crowd God’s ways out of our hearts. That is why Jesus warns so sternly against covetousness (v 15). “This is the most common idol on earth. He who has money and possessions feels secure [Luke 12:16–21] and is joyful and undismayed as though he were sitting in the midst of Paradise. On the other hand, he who has no money doubts and is despondent, as though he knew of no God” (LC I 7–8). Aug: “What is more perverse than a man who wishes to have ‘much goods,’ and does not wish to be good himself?” (NPNF 1 6:438). (TLSB)

12:13–21 Jesus underlines the great danger of being rich in earthly things but poor toward God. In a consumer culture, the dangers of covetousness are often downplayed; in fact, some even try to make greed a virtue. In love for us, however, Jesus warns us against the self-destructive nature of covetousness and gives us new hearts, which He, the very source of life and goodness, fills with joyful satisfaction through the Gospel. • Heavenly Father, keep my eyes from becoming envious and my heart from self-destructive greed. Move me to find satisfaction in Your promises and to trust that You will more than provide for me and my loved ones. Amen. (TLSB)

Do Not be Anxious

22 And he said to his disciples, “Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat, nor about your body, what you will put on. 23 For life is more than food, and

the body more than clothing. 24 Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds! 25 And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? 26 If then you are not able to do as small a thing as that, why are you anxious about the rest? 27 Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. 28 But if God so clothes the grass, which is alive in the field today, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you, O you of little faith! 29 And do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, nor be worried. 30 For all the nations of the world seek after these things, and your Father knows that you need them. 31 Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you. 32 “Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom. 33 Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. 34 For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

12:22 Though God provides for all, even unbelievers (Mt 5:45), Jesus esp urges His followers to trust Him for life’s necessities. (TLSB)

I tell you – This passage about possessions and the kingdom is catechesis specifically for the disciples (catechumens) and not for the crowds (12:22). The disciples here include the Twelve and the seventy (-two) as well as the larger group of followers for whom God is “Father” (12:30, 32) and to whom the Father has given his kingdom (12:32). Since the journey to Jerusalem began at 9:51 and Jesus called the seventy (-two) at 10:1–24, much of his teaching has been to prepare his disciples for their future proclamation after he has ascended into the heavens. Jesus used imperatives to instruct the disciples in the Sermon on the Plain. He used more imperatives when he taught them how to pray to the Father and showed them how the gifts from the Father are connected to the kingdom (11:2–4). (CC p. 510)

The ten imperatives here in 12:22–34 are urgent for those who are journeying with Jesus to Jerusalem since they soon will be heralds of the kingdom that comes through Jesus’ death and resurrection. They *must* be prepared to proclaim that kingdom in Acts. Of these ten imperatives, eight have to do with material possessions (the two in 12:29–30 deal with possessions in relation to the kingdom), and the remaining two are solely about the kingdom (12:31–32). Since possessions can become a significant distraction for the disciples, Jesus addresses their attitude toward them directly in relation to the kingdom. “Life,” Jesus says, “is more than food and the body more than clothing” (12:23). Using two imperatives from the language of catechesis (12:24, 27; *κατανοήσατε*, “consider”), Jesus instructs the disciples to study and ponder how God cares for the ravens and the lilies. He notes, “By how much are you more valuable than birds” (12:24; similarly 12:28). (CC p. 510)

do not be anxious – Worry, dread, and fear. (TLSB)

12:23 Physical needs are an important part of life, but they should not dominate a Christian’s thinking. (TLSB)

12:24 *consider* – *κατανοήσατε*—This word suggests careful study so that one might learn something. This compound intensifies the simple *νοέο*; it means ‘to immerse oneself in. This may be in the field of sensory perception, but critical examination is also denoted, and in literary Greek the idea is that of apprehension by pondering or studying. This is part of the catechetical

vocabulary of the gospel and is a characteristically Lukan word, since it is used only one other time in the other gospels (Mt 7:3). Careful observation of nature in order to glean natural theology or in order to illustrate revealed theology is characteristic of biblical wisdom literature such as Proverbs and the Song of Songs, both of which are by Solomon, a student of creation's wonders (1 Ki 4:33). The Song of Songs takes notice of the raven (5:11) and lilies, as does Jesus here. Solomon himself is likened to a lily in Song 5:13, and Jesus could be alluding to that passage in Lk 12:27. (CC p. 508)

12:25 Undue worry subtracts from life. (TLSB)

add a single hour – ἡλικίαν ... πῆχυν—ἡλικία can refer to stature (as at 2:52) or age (probably here), depending on the context. To preserve some of the ambiguity, πῆχυν is translated “cubit,” which could refer to height or (metaphorically) to time. A cubit is about eighteen inches long, and to add this much to one's height would not be a “little thing” (ἐλάχιστον), as 12:26 requires. If the reference were to age and not stature, one might have expected an unambiguous, short measure of time, such as ὥρα, “hour, moment, instant.” (CC pp. 508-509)

12:26 *rest* – Other things over which we have no control. (TLSB)

12:27 *spin* – Turn fiber into thread or yarn. (TLSB)

Solomon in all his glory – Cf 1Ki 10:14–25. Solomon's splendor could not compare to the beauty of a simple flower. (TLSB)

12:28 *clothes* – An argument from the lesser to the greater. If God adorns common plants with such beauty, how much more will He lavish good things on the crown of His creation? (TLSB)

grass – ἐν ἀγρῷ τὸν χόρτον—Wood was often scarce in ancient Israel, and thus grass would be used in place of wood in the fire of the ovens. (CC p. 509)

is thrown into the oven – Burned as fuel for heating and cooking. (TLSB)

O you of little faith – Calling the distracted disciples “you of little faith” (12:28), Jesus makes the transition to his teaching about the kingdom. Anxiety over possessions is a sign that one lacks faith. Jesus is so concerned about keeping faith strong that he reiterates his directive about food and clothing (“do not seek what you will eat and what you will drink” [12:29; cf. 12:22]) and employs a synonym of “worry,” which is the “catchword” of this section: “Do not be upset” (12:29). The disciples are not to waver between hope and fear over “all these things” (12:30), for then they would be like the Gentiles, anxious about mere survival and indifferent to the kingdom. Has not the Father shown that he knows the disciples need these things (12:30)? Did not Jesus teach the disciples in the Lord's Prayer to petition the Father for the things that are truly necessary (11:1–4)? The real question here pertains to the disciples' attitude: is what they “seek” food and clothing or the kingdom of God? Jesus directs them with a strong command to “seek [the Father's] kingdom, and all these things will be added to you” (12:31). This may not always be obvious to them, and so in another command, this one intensely pastoral and appearing only in Luke, Jesus speaks as a shepherd to his sheep: “Do not fear, little flock, because your Father graciously willed to give to you the kingdom” (12:32). As Jesus' “flock,” the disciples (12:22), beginning with the Twelve and the seventy (-two), will form the foundation for a reconstituted Israel, where, in the proclamation of the kingdom, Jesus will be present as their shepherd. (CC pp. 510-511)

This criticism typically comes after people underestimate God or His Son. (TLSB)

12:29 *do not seek* – Do not make this your priority. (TLSB)

nor be worried – μετεωρίζεσθε—BAGD gives appropriate references (Josephus, *Antiquities* 16.135 [16.4.6]; Thucydides 2.8.1) to support “worry,” “hover between hope and fear.” “Worry” is preferable to the alternative possibility, “rise up with pride.” (CC p. 509)

To the extent that worry manifests a lack of trust in God, it is a serious failing. (TLSB)

12:30 *these things* –The disciples are not to waver between hope and fear over “all these things” (12:30), for then they would be like the Gentiles, anxious about mere survival and indifferent to the kingdom. Has not the Father shown that he knows the disciples need these things? (CSB)

God, who created us, understands our needs better than we ourselves do. (TLSB)

12:31 *but* – πλὴν—This word signals a change in direction of the argument. (CC p. 509)

seek his kingdom. Since v. 32 suggests that Jesus is speaking to believers, who already possess the kingdom, this command probably means that Christians should seek the spiritual benefits of the kingdom rather than the material goods of the world (cf. Mt 6:33). (CSB)

God’s kingdom exists wherever He rules hearts and minds. We “seek” it by having Him and His ways hold sway in our lives. (TLSB)

added to you – Provided in abundance. (TLSB)

12:32 *little flock* – While a crowd of thousands had gathered their number was small in comparison with the entire nation of Israel. (CSB)

Affectionate term indicating ownership and tender care. (TLSB)

pleased to give you – Synonymous with “resolve, determination, choice.” (TLSB)

give you the kingdom – We are included in that realm ruled by God’s grace. This comes through faith in Jesus and results in abundant life both here and in heaven. (TLSB)

Ἰεὺδόκησεν ... δοῶναι— It is the gracious good pleasure of the Father, willed from all eternity, to *give* the kingdom as a gift. The giving has begun; the kingdom is already a present reality. The same verb denotes the Father’s good pleasure in his Son in 3:22, and the noun εὐδοκία denotes the Father’s good will in Christ toward humanity in 2:14; 10:21. The Father’s good pleasure rests upon his Son and upon those who are in his Son, and 3:22 suggests a baptismal connection. (CC p. 509)

12:33 *sell your possessions* – Throughout the ages Christians have asked just how literally these words of Jesus are to be understood. St. Francis of Assisi gave away all possessions including his clothing and lived a life of total poverty. Is this what Jesus wants every Christian to do? Hardly. We need to read these words of Jesus in the context of God’s total revelation. Jesus is saying something here which every disciple must hear and hear often. Jesus says it in a way which bold, which catches our attention. Disciples of Jesus need to distance themselves from the attitude of the world which glorifies this earthly life and its possession. (PBC)

give to the needy. The danger of riches and the need for giving are characteristic themes in Luke (3:11; 6:30; 11:41; 14:13–14; 16:9; 18:22; 19:8). (CSB)

A radical call to use our goods not only for ourselves but also to help other people. (TLSB)

Giving alms is described as an act of mercy. It comes from the same word family. (CC p. 509)

treasure in the heavens – The best treasure comes from living as God directs. His ways involve generously helping others. (TLSB)

no moth destroys – οὐδὲ σῆς διαφθείρει—In the ancient world, expensive clothing was an expression of wealth; hence the fear of moths destroying one’s highly valued possessions. (CC p. 509)

Thus Jesus’ final imperatives to “sell [πωλήσατε] your possessions and give [δότε] alms” (12:33) are simply ways in which the disciples/catechumens may show that they are servants of the one whose treasures are in the heavens, yet who also gives his flock the abundant treasures of the kingdom while they are journeying on earth. Get rid of earthly possessions; serve the kingdom by giving to others as a response of faith. Store up heavenly treasure! “Make for yourselves purses that do not wear out” (12:33). The purses that contain the unfailing heavenly treasure do not grow old or fall apart. (CC p. 512)

Now, what is this heavenly treasure, and what does Jesus mean when he concludes “for where your treasure is, there also your heart will be”? “Treasure,” θησαυρός, and “store up treasure,” θησαυρίζω, are more common in Matthew (Mt 2:11; 6:19, 20, 21; 12:35; 13:44, 52; 19:21) than in Luke. The first occurrence in Luke is in the Sermon on the Plain (6:45), where “the good treasure of the heart” consists of Christological treasure that flows from a heart that is filled with Christ. The treasure “brings forth the good” (6:45) of confessing Christ with the mouth. The next use of “treasure” is in the parable of the rich fool where “the one who treasures for himself ... is not rich toward God” (12:21). Now in 12:33–34, Jesus fills in the picture of that metaphor by describing the opposite of the treasure for oneself: it is heavenly treasure. In light of the parable of the rich fool, this section on possessions (12:22–34) shows what it means to be “rich toward God” (12:21). The catechumen already knows from the Sermon on the Plain that this heavenly treasure is Christ, and the heavenly treasures are Christ’s gifts that bring the catechumen into and keep him in Christ’s kingdom (catechesis, Baptism, the Lord’s Supper). To be rich toward God, then, is to be a recipient of Christ and his gifts, a member of his kingdom through catechesis, Baptism, and the Lord’s Supper. There are two alternatives: fleeting treasure on earth (12:21) or eternal treasure in heaven (12:33–34). The two-fold Gospel message of this pericope (12:22–34) is this: For those seeking the treasure of the kingdom, the Father will provide adequate earthly treasure as well to sustain them in their journey from earth to heaven, and even more precious, along the way while still on earth the “little flock” (12:32) will be graced with eternal heavenly treasures through Christ, the Shepherd who washes his flock in Baptism, feeds his sheep with the new Passover Lamb—his body and blood in the Supper (Lk 22:14–20; 1 Cor 5:7)—and tends them with the guidance of his Word. (CC p. 512)

12:34 *where your treasure is* – In the Bible the heart of the center of our being which includes our personality and priorities. We will treasure what has the highest priority for us. (CSB)

If one wants to see what is most important to another (where the heart is), it is most telling to look at where that person spends most of his money (where the treasure is). (TLSB)

12:22–34 Jesus encourages His disciples to trust in God, their heavenly Father, since He will provide for all their needs. We need to take this exhortation to heart, because our fallen nature makes it difficult to look past ourselves and depend on another. But God’s faithfulness far exceeds our needs. He provides as He sees fit, giving us an abundance that we may share with others. • “Grant us hearts, dear Lord, to give You Gladly, freely of Your own. With the sunshine of Your goodness Melt our thankless hearts of stone Till our cold and selfish natures, Warmed by You, at length believe That more happy and more blessed ’Tis to give than to receive.” Amen. (LSB 851:2) (TLSB)

You Must be Ready

35 “Stay dressed for action and keep your lamps burning, 36 and be like men who are waiting for their master to come home from the wedding feast, so that they may open the door to him at once when he comes and knocks. 37 Blessed are those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes. Truly, I say to you, he will dress himself for service and have them recline at table, and he will come and serve them. 38 If he comes in the second watch, or in the third, and finds them awake, blessed are those servants! 39 But know this, that if the master of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have left his house to be broken into. 40 You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.” 41 Peter said, “Lord, are you telling this parable for us or for all?” 42 And the Lord said, “Who then is the faithful and wise manager, whom his master will set over his household, to give them their portion of food at the proper time? 43 Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. 44 Truly, I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions. 45 But if that servant says to himself, ‘My master is delayed in coming,’ and begins to beat the male and female servants, and to eat and drink and get drunk, 46 the master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know, and will cut him in pieces and put him with the unfaithful. 47 And that servant who knew his master’s will but did not get ready or act according to his will, will receive a severe beating. 48 But the one who did not know, and did what deserved a beating, will receive a light beating. Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required, and from him to whom they entrusted much, they will demand the more.

12:35 *stay dressed* – In the KJV it reads “girding of the loins.” This meant that they needed gather the loose part of their robe and put under their belt so that they could move quickly. The one serving a meal normally girded himself. (CSB)

Stand ready to fulfill the Master’s command. The long robes worn in Jesus’ day had to be gathered up and tied before a person could move quickly. (TLSB)

αἱ ὀσφύες περιεζωσμένοι—C. Talbert, *Reading Luke*, 143, notes that the verb construction functions as “a perfect imperative which commands one to be already in a certain state.” The one serving a meal normally girded himself (as in 12:37; 17:8). The verb is used metaphorically in Eph 6:14, where St. Paul commands Christians to “stand with your waists girded with truth.” The glorified Christ and angels are girded in Rev 1:13; 15:6. (CC p. 513)

The first word of this section is an imperative; this sets the tone for the entire teaching of Jesus on watchfulness. “Let your loins be girded” (ἔστωσαν ὑμῶν αἱ ὀσφύες περιεζωσμένοι) echoes Ex 12:11, where the Lord gives Moses and Aaron careful instructions on how to eat the Passover: “your loins girded [αἱ ὀσφύες ὑμῶν περιεζωσμένοι], your sandals on your feet, and your staff in

your hand; and you shall eat it in haste.” To gird the loins is to lift up the heavy robes from around the feet and ankles so that one is ready to travel. It is also the way one prepares to work or serve (cf. 12:37). The image of this imperative brings to the fore the need for a *servant* posture and the journey motif. (CC p. 515)

From Ephesians 6:14 – Just as the ancient soldier held his clothes together about his loins with a girdle, in order to prevent their hindering his free use of his limbs, so the Christian, the soldier of God, puts on the girdle of truth, of moral purity, of the righteousness of life. Only he that is a Christian in deed and in truth will engage in the battle with all seriousness; only he will gather matters of every-day life and hold them together without hypocrisy, lest he be hindered in the great battle. (Kretzmann)

dressed for action – When we are ready to serve the Lord or are serving him we are also exercising our faith and growing stronger in him. (CSB)

Alert readiness for service, as evidenced by dress for work, rather than for recreation or sleep, and equipment – lamps, lit, rather than extinguished. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 2, Part 3)

lamps burning – Another sign of readiness.

Jesus also says, “let ... your lamps [be] burning” (12:35; καίόμενοι). This echoes his comments to the disciples in 8:16 and 11:33, where the lamp represents those within the Christian community who have been illuminated by the Gospel, catechized and baptized. This expression also suggests the context of the Passover and its preparations. The Passover took place at night and the Israelites needed lamps to search their houses for any hidden leaven, since anything with yeast in it was forbidden on the Passover (Ex 12:14–20). (CC p. 516)

12:36-38 The first parable mentions two different meals: the banquet (12:36) and the meal that the Lord serves to the slaves reclined at the table (12:37). The mention of meals in the parable might lead the hearers of Luke in a house church to think of themselves gathered around the Lord’s Supper. From that perspective, the first meal would not be like the final messianic banquet, since the Lord *returns from* the feast (12:36). This first feast would correspond to something like the joyful celebration in heaven at Jesus’ enthronement after the ascension. The illustration is focused, however, on the servants who are waiting for the Lord so that they might be ready to open for him when he comes and knocks. For those who are working and watching, there are two beatitudes (12:37a, 38) and a surprising, solemn (ἀμῆν, “truly”) promise (12:37b): the Son of Man, who brings the marriage feast at the end of time “will gird himself and make them recline at table, and after coming beside, he will serve them.” This second meal is more like the heavenly messianic feast. (CC p. 516)

Luke’s hearers would naturally envision the Christians (“slaves”) waiting in a house church context. As they wait, serve, and celebrate the Lord’s Supper, they would see their table fellowship as an anticipation of the messianic feast. The returning Lord reverses the normal practice. Instead of being served, he serves. While the slaves girded themselves in 12:35 (see textual note), the Lord girds himself in 12:37. Jesus’ table fellowship is marked by humble service. This is another example of Luke’s reversal motif. (CC pp. 516-517)

12:36 *men who are waiting for their master to return from the wedding feast* – Discipleship is depicted as servanthood. (TLSB)

Because wedding celebrations lasted for days, the servants could not know precisely when their master would return. (TLSB)

τὸν κύριον—In these parables, κύριος could mean “master.” But Luke refers to Jesus as τὸν κύριον, and Jesus intimates that the “master” of the parables is the Son of Man (12:40). Capitalizing “Lord” in the parables extends these hints. (CC p. 514)

γάμων—“γάμοι can also mean *banquet* without ref. to a wedding (Esth 9:22) Lk 12:36; 14:8” (BAGD, s.v. γάμος, 1 b; emphasis BAGD). (CC p. 514)

They shall be like servants whose master has gone to his wedding-feast and expects to return home with his bride. (Kretzmann)

12:37 *blessed are* – Objects of the master’s favor and approval. (TLSB)

dress himself to serve. The master reverses the normal roles and serves the servants (cf. 22:27; Mk 10:45; Jn 13:4–5, 12–16). (CSB)

The reward for those found ready is joining the master at His banquet table, a feast at which the master Himself will serve the servants. . (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 8, Part 3)

truly I say to you – ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν—See comments at 4:24. Jesus uses ἀμὴν with this expression only at 4:24, here, and at 18:17, 29; 21:32; and 23:43. Cf. ἀληθῶς at 12:44; 21:3; and in a different order, 9:27. (CC p. 514)

have them recline at the table – Note the role reversal—the master now serves the servants! (TLSB)

This lord does not seek his ease and retire for the night. He turns his slaves into lords, he makes as grand a feast for them as was the one from which he came, he has them recline to dinner and – wonders of wonders! – he does not order other slaves to serve them but makes himself their slave and ministers to them. Many waiters and helpers are needed at a great feast, but this lord needs none... letting the reality peep through, that this is the almighty, heaven Lord Himself ... Yet in this way this heavenly act need not surprise us. Did not Christ humble Himself unto death for us (Phil 2:7-8)? So, then, without laying aside His divine glory, He will gird Himself and serve us. (Lenski)

ἀνακλινεῖ—This is part of Luke’s constellation of words that relate to table fellowship. This verb denotes reclining at a festive meal (cf. κατακλίνω at 7:36; 9:14–15; 24:30; ἀναπίπτω at 22:14). ἀνακλίνω occurs also in 13:29, where many will recline at the table in the kingdom of God. It is also used in 2:7. (CC p. 514)

12:38 *blessed are those servants* – Blessed are those servants (KJV; NRSV and NASB). (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 8, Part 3)

Blessed – Objects of the master’s favor and approval. Having His gifts. (TLSB)

second or third watch. Night was divided into four watches by the Romans (Mk 13:35) and three by the Jews (Jdg 7:19. These were probably the last two of the Jewish watches. The banquet would have begun in the first watch. (CSB)

In the Jewish reckoning, the first watch of the night was 6 to 10 p.m.; the second, 10 p.m. to 2 a.m.; and the third, 2 to 6 a.m. (TLSB)

The Romans had four watches (6:00-9:00 PM; 9:00-12:00 midnight; 12:00 midnight-3:00 AM; and 3:00-6:00 AM) so that the third watch would begin at midnight. The Jews had three watches (6:00-10:00 PM; 10:00 PM – 2:00 AM; and 2:00-6:00 AM) with the third watch beginning at 2:00 AM. Either case it would be in the middle of the night. (CC p. 514)

12:39-40 The second parable is brief and easily understood. The example of a thief in the night is a common illustration in the NT for the abrupt arrival of the eschaton. (Cf. Mt 24:43; 1 Thess 5:2, 4; 2 Pet 3:10 Rev 3:3; 16:15) (Similarly, Ezekiel, who is often called “son of man,” dug through his house at night and fled to dramatize the sudden arrival of the exile [Ezek 12:1–16].) “The Son of Man” (ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου) is a title for Jesus in the three passion predictions (9:22, 44; 18:31), at the Last Supper during his passion (22:22, 48), and in the passion statement of the angels at the resurrection (24:7). “Son of Man” occurred in an eschatological context at 9:26 and 12:8 and will continue to be used frequently in the same way as it is here. (Cf. Lk 17:22, 24, 26, 30; 18:8; 21:27, 36; 22:69) The coming of the Son of Man in judgment at an hour the Christian community does not expect reinforces Jesus’ command for readiness, especially in view of the entangling problem of possessions. (CSB)

12:39 *what hour the thief was coming* – Ominous image of a burglar breaking and entering contrasts with the blessings of the master serving his faithful servants (v 37). (TLSB)

(“Thief in the night” – 1 Thess 5:2; 2 Peter 3:10; Rev. 3:3) – The unexpected timing of Christ’s return, the fact that it cannot be estimated or calculated by sinful, mortal men and women, causes these final words of the story to focus on preparedness. Advanced preparations are much more doable when the estimated time of arrival of the master is known. But when all one has is a promise that the return will occur and when chunks of time elapse with no such return, the one anticipating the return is tempted to fall into a state of un-preparedness. At all costs, such temptation, says Jesus, is to be avoided and resisted. . (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 8 , Part 3)

broken into – διορυχθῆναι – Literally “to be dug through.” A Palestinian house was made of mud. The sense is “to be broken into.” (CC p.514)

Ezekiel dug through his house at night and fled to dramatize the sudden arrival of the exile (Eze. 12:1-16). (CC p. 517)

12:40 Christ’s return is certain, but the time is not known (cf. Mt 24:36). (CSB)

must be ready – Like a burglary – an unforeseen disaster – the same event will mean disaster for those who are not ready when Jesus comes.

Faithfulness is defined as doing the work Jesus has given us while eagerly awaiting His return. (TLSB)

do not expect – No human being knows or can calculate the time of Jesus’ return (cf Mk 13:32). Beware of any teacher who claims such knowledge. Aug: “Our Lord Jesus Christ both came to men, and went away from men, and is to come to men. And yet He was here when He

came, nor did He depart when He went away, and He is to come to them to whom He said, ‘Lo, I am with you, even unto the end of the world’ ” (NPNF 1 6:440). (TLSB)

12:41-46 Only Luke records Peter’s question (12:41), once again marking Peter as a leader and spokesman for the disciples. Are the previous two parables directed toward the apostles or to all of Jesus’ followers? Jesus does not answer directly, but the third parable that he now tells and its emphatic conclusion suggest that the answer is “both”—a double yes! What is true for every Christian (the message of the first two parables) is of course true for the Twelve as disciples—and it is true in a heightened sense for the Twelve as stewards and apostles. (CC p. 517)

The theme is the faithful stewardship of the Lord’s gifts. The parable is about a Christian (“slave,” δοῦλος) who is also a “steward” (οἰκονόμος), appointed to serve other slaves. The two parts of the parable apply to the steward when he is faithful and wise (12:42–44) and when he is foolish (12:45). Like the slaves in the first parable, this wise and sensible steward is blessed (μακάριος) when he feeds the Lord’s slaves at the right time, so that when the Lord returns he finds him faithfully carrying out his appointed tasks. This faithful steward will be appointed over all the Lord’s possessions. (CC p. 517)

Although one cannot claim the “ration of wheat” (σιτομέτριον; 12:42) is a reference to the Lord’s Supper, the context suggests that Jesus is speaking of the apostles’ stewardship of the mysteries of the kingdom, which include the careful presiding at the Lord’s Supper. In the previous parable (12:37), Jesus anticipated his teaching about his own service at the Table during his final Passover with the disciples (22:24–27). But in this parable, Jesus anticipates his appointment of the Twelve to be stewards, presiding in his community and serving at his Table by his ordination. (CC p. 517)

The Twelve have already been active “serving at tables” in the feeding of the five thousand, where Jesus “was giving to the disciples” the loaves and fishes “to set before the crowd” (9:16). In 22:29–30, immediately after his words about his own service at the Last Supper, Jesus says to the Twelve: “I appoint [διατίθεμαι] for you just as my Father appointed to me a kingdom, in order that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and you will sit [καθήσεσθε] on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.” (CC p. 517)

They are stewards at the Passover meal of the new covenant and of the cup of blessing that Jesus will give as “the new covenant [διαθήκη] in my blood, which is being poured out on behalf of you” (22:20). (CC pp. 517-518)

The second part of the parable continues in the same vein. The steward shows himself unfaithful when he responds to the delay of the Lord by mistreating the slaves appointed him and when he misuses the table duties entrusted to him by eating and drinking in excess to the point of getting drunk (12:45). 1 Cor 11:17–22 gives testimony to such abuses in the life of a house church in Luke’s era. Jesus describes the Lord’s unexpected return “on a *day* on which [the steward] does not expect and at an *hour* at which he does not know” (Lk 12:46; cf. 12:40). When the Lord finds him an unfaithful steward of the gifts of the covenant of grace, he will do to him as to the covenant sacrifice: “he will cut him in two [διχοτομήσει] and he will appoint [θήσει] his portion with the unbelievers” (12:46). (CC pp. 517-518)

“To cut in two” is covenant language. A covenant was “cut” (קָרַץ) when an animal was cut in two pieces, and at least one party passed through the midst of the pieces to seal the covenant (Gen 15:9–18). If either one of the parties broke the covenant, that party could be rendered like the animal cut in two: he would be cut in two (Jer 34:18–19; cf. Gen 22:13–14. (CC p. 518)

Jesus' call to table fellowship results either in eschatological bliss or eternal punishment (13:28–29). His appointment of some to serve as steward-slaves among his other slaves is a responsibility with the same kind of entailments. (CC p. 518)

12:41–43 Jesus narrows the focus here and spells out the special responsibilities borne by Christian leaders. *manager*. Or, “steward”; the slave left in charge of a household’s administration. *their portion of food*. Not only food, but all the staff needs. Thus, a faithful steward not only takes good care of his master’s balance sheet, but also his human resources. (TLSB)

12:41 Jesus taught the people in parables but used a more direct approach with the disciples. However, he did not intend these warnings of watchfulness just for the disciples (see Mk 13:37). In the following verses he emphasizes the duty to fulfill responsibilities.

12:42 *wise manager*. An outstanding slave (v. 43) was sometimes left in charge of an estate (see 16:1). (CSB)

set over – καταστήσει—Jesus uses the future tense here to suggest the future appointment of the twelve disciples as faithful and sensible stewards in the church. (CC p. 514)

12:44 *set him over all*. Faithful service in God’s kingdom is rewarded (cf 19:11–27). (TLSB)

12:45 The delayed return leads the manager to abuse his trust, thinking he can get away with it. (TLSB)

12:46–48 *cut him to pieces ... beaten with many blows ... beaten with few blows*. Three grades of punishment that the judge will mete out in proportion to both the privileges each person has enjoyed and his response to those privileges (see Ro 2:12–16). (CSB)

cut him in pieces. Fearsome; implies eternal condemnation. *with the unfaithful*. With those who reject God and act wickedly. *severe beating ... light beating*. Abuse of fellow servants is punished with death; willful disobedience is penalized by a severe beating; involuntary dereliction of duty merits a light beating. *much will be required*. The privilege of leading makes leaders answerable to God for their greater responsibilities (cf Jas 3:1). (TLSB)

12:47–48 The conclusion that Jesus appends to this last parable is a stern warning of the heightened responsibilities of apostles and stewards. Those to whom God has given the privilege of being stewards of the heavenly gifts (the twelve apostles and the seventy[-two] and all the servants in the ministry who follow them) *know and believe that the kingdom has come in Jesus. And they know and believe that this kingdom entrusted to them is celebrated in worship with preaching and at the Lord’s Table—the Altar of the new covenant cut in his blood—where he is present to teach and to feed his people with his own self*. Those who are unfaithful in this stewardship of the mysteries will be more severely punished *since they hold the key of knowledge* (11:52; cf 2 Pet 2:21). (CC p. 518)

Make no mistake, the warnings in this chapter are for disciples-apostles-ministers. The “leaven, which is hypocrisy, of the Pharisees” (12:1–12) and an improper attitude toward possessions (12:13–34) may indeed cause disciples-apostles-ministers to mismanage the stewardship of the kingdom entrusted to them. Hypocritical Pharisees and rich fools might also rise up among

Christian disciples. Ever catechumens, the disciples are learning about the economy of God's household and their office as caretakers who one day must answer to their Lord. (CC p. 519)

12:47 *receive severe blows* – δαρήσεται—This could be another theological passive: “will be flogged many [strokes]” *by God*. (See also the next verse, “will be flogged with a few”). Or the passive may simply leave open the question of who will actually administer the excruciating punishment deserved by the unfaithful. (CC p. 514)

12:48 *given...demand* – ἐδόθη ... ζητηθήσεται—Two more theological passives: “from everyone to whom much is given” *by God*, “much will be required from him” *by God*. (CC p. 514)

entrusted much...demand more – παρέθεντο ... αἰτήσουσιν—The impersonal third person plurals may be understood as (theological) passives: “and from him to whom much has been entrusted [*by God*], even more will be asked him” *by God*.

12:35–48 Jesus urges those in positions of leadership to faithfully discharge their duties. Following worldly examples, Christian leaders sometimes see their positions more in terms of privilege than responsibility. Jesus' example of self-sacrifice, however, underscores the shallowness of such attitudes. We are moved to emulate His way of humble service because He was willing to endure all things for us, that we might share in His privileges. • “Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast Save in the death of Christ, my God; All the vain things that charm me most, I sacrifice them to His blood.” Amen. (LSB 425:2) (TLSB)

Not Peace but Division

49 “I came to cast fire on the earth, and would that it were already kindled! **50** I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how great is my distress until it is accomplished! **51** Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division. **52** For from now on in one house there will be five divided, three against two and two against three. **53** They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.”

12:49 *fire*. Applied figuratively in different ways in the NT. Here it is associated with judgment (v. 49) and division (v. 51). Judgment falls on the wicked, who are separated from the righteous. (CSB)

Proclamation of the judgment (cf 3:9; 9:5; 10:13–15). (TLSB)

Jesus longs to reveal the Kingdom, not only through judgment, but also and esp through the revelation of His grace and the deliverance it brings about. (TLSB)

εἰ ... ἀνήφθη—εἰ with an augmented indicative poses a contrary-to-fact condition. Not yet is it the hour for the fire to be kindled. (CC p. 520)

Jesus continues to explain to his disciples-apostles the foundation for their leadership as stewards of the mysteries and why hypocrisy and the love of possessions are dangerous distractions from waiting for the coming of the Son of Man. Their watchful service will be during a time of division. But the patient perseverance required of them and the anguish they may endure are put in proper perspective by the immeasurably greater anguish and perseverance of their Lord himself (12:49–50). Those who have been baptized into Christ undergo death and resurrection with him

(Rom 6:1–4; Col 2:11–13). Thus the hostility they may suffer is a consequence of their baptismal incorporation into Christ (cf. Jn 15:18–25). (CC p. 521)

“Fire” recalls John’s preaching and baptism, where fire refers to God’s wrath and eschatological judgment (3:9, 17; cf. 9:54; 17:29; 22:55). John’s baptism is preparation for the coming of God’s kingdom in Jesus, which entails the pouring forth of God’s eschatological wrath on the earth. Already with John’s baptism, the world is asking, “When and on whom will this eschatological wrath be poured?” Jesus, in his baptism (3:21), in his Nazareth sermon (4:16–21), and in his response to John’s disciples about his Messiahship (7:18–23), shows that he comes in solidarity with fallen humankind, bearing in himself the wrath of God against sin. The fire of God’s eschatological wrath, then, is to be poured out first and foremost on Jesus, the one who comes in solidarity with sinful humanity and in substitution for it (22:37). (CC p. 522)

Fire can either *destroy* or it can *purify*. The fire of God’s wrath laid on Jesus will lead to his death and will destroy the power of sin and hell. This fire is first laid on Jesus when he enters the waters of his baptism by John. From his baptism, Jesus stands under the Father’s wrath and continues to stand under the Father’s wrath until that wrath is satiated in his crucifixion. With every sickness Jesus heals, every sin he forgives, every dead person he raises, Jesus is both releasing creation from its bondage and absorbing into his body all sickness, sin, and death. This is how he puts himself in the position to receive God’s wrath against sin. From the moment he steps forward publicly in his baptism as the world’s Messiah, this process begins. For this he came. Jesus knows that he is to bear this fiery wrath and eschatological judgment, and his passionate plea (12:50b) expresses his wish that it were already accomplished. Jesus knows that the fullness of God’s wrath is yet to fall on him, and he yearns that his substitutionary atonement on the cross would come soon (12:49). (CC p. 522)

The lake of fire in Rev 20:10, 14–15 suggests a connection between the eschatological wrath of God, which Jesus suffered on the cross, and a kind of “baptism by immersion.” On the cross, Jesus is thrown into that lake of fire on our behalf; thus he underwent a “baptism by fire” on our behalf. When we are baptized into him, we are baptized into his death and resurrection (Rom 6:1–4; Col 2:11–13), so we too experience this fire. We endure the fire of God’s eschatological wrath as destructive in our death to sin, and we are purified by the holy fire of rebirth through the Spirit. See further the excursus “Baptism in Luke-Acts.” (CC p. 522)

12:50 *baptism*. The suffering that Jesus was to endure on the cross. (CSB)

Figurative way of referring to the cross. (TLSB)

For the early catechuminate, Jesus’ baptism in water and his “baptism” in the shedding of his blood show how Baptism and the Lord’s Supper are related.

God’s wrath poured upon Jesus resulted in his bleeding and so caused his blood to wash down his body. A similar bloody washing occurred when “the blood of the covenant” was sprinkled on the people by Moses (Ex 24:8). Isaiah describes the Messiah as one who “will sprinkle many nations” (Is 52:15). In the OT there is a connection between the blood shed in sacrifice and the application of this blood by sprinkling as a kind of washing of the people. After sprinkling the people with “the blood of the covenant,” Moses and the elders miraculously eat and drink in God’s presence on the mountain (Ex 24:9–11). The very blood that cleanses in baptism—the blood applied through water and the Word by the Spirit—is also the cup of the new covenant in Jesus’ blood “which is

being poured out on behalf of you” (Lk 22:20; cf. Eph 5:26; Titus 3:5–6; and Rev 7:14; 22:14 in light of Gal 3:27).

There are other OT themes that point toward a fiery “baptism” in Jesus’ blood. The red heifer combines the motifs of sacrifice by fire and washing (Numbers 19). This is a unique sacrifice different from the regular sacrifices prescribed in Leviticus. The red heifer is slaughtered outside the camp, just as Jesus is crucified outside Jerusalem. The blood of the heifer is sprinkled in the tabernacle, just as Jesus’ blood sprinkles many nations (Is 52:15). The red heifer, together with cedar wood, hyssop, and scarlet wool, is burned as a holocaust. The ashes from this burnt offering are mixed with water to make the water mixture used for cleansing various kinds of uncleanness caused by death. The cleansing waters allow unclean people to be reincorporated and regathered into the people of God.

Circumcision, a bloody ritual that incorporated one into the covenant people, rendered one clean (cf. Ex 4:24–26—“bridegroom of blood”). Baptism, the NT counterpart of circumcision, is a washing that incorporates into the new covenant (Col 2:11–13). Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross is the atonement that makes the cleansing waters of Baptism efficacious, and the benefits of his sacrifice are offered the communicant in the Supper (1 Cor 10:16–17). (CC p. 523)

Both are rooted in Christ’s ministry as humanity’s substitute. Jesus “came by water and blood” (1 Jn 5:6) as he identified with sinful humanity both in his baptism in the Jordan and in his table fellowship, especially at the Last Supper. Christian Baptism and the Lord’s Supper both flow from Christ’s atonement. Jesus appeased the Father’s fiery wrath both by his perfect life of obedience, attested by the Father’s approval voiced at his baptism (Lk 3:22), and by his suffering on the cross. The public messianic ministry into which Jesus was baptized and his passion are both completed at his death, when both water and blood flowed from his side—a fact of great significance for John the evangelist (Jn 19:34–37).

Augustine, for example, interprets the water and blood as representing the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper, by which the church is created and sustained. Augustine even compares the formation of the church through the water and the blood from Christ’s side to the formation of Eve out of the rib from Adam’s side, since Jesus is the second Adam. See Augustine, “Homilies on the Gospel of John,” IX, 10, and XV, 8, *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, first series, vol. 7, ed. Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956) 67, 101. (CC p. 524)

my distress – Verb implies being torn between two emotions. On the one hand, Jesus can not but dread His impending death on the cross. On the other, there is glory for Him and all humankind beyond the grave, thus His eager expectation. (TLSB)

συνέχομαι—Luke uses this word more often than other NT authors. (Lk 4:38; 8:37, 45; 12:50; 19:43; 22:63; Acts 7:57; 18:5; 28:8; the other NT occurrences: Mt 4:24; 2 Cor 5:14; Phil 1:23) H. Köster translates: “How I am totally governed by this” to reflect Jesus’ sense of inexorable movement toward the cross. (CC p. 520)

Thus, in speaking of both the fire Jesus came to cast and the baptism with which he must be baptized, Jesus speaks of his destiny in Jerusalem: “And how I am in distress until it is accomplished” (12:50). Here are echoes of his first two passion predictions (9:22, 44) and the programmatic sayings in 9:51 and 13:22–23. But there is also a hint of Jesus’ prayer to the Father

on the Mount of Olives, where he shows his distress over his imminent suffering: “Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; nevertheless, not my will, but may yours happen” (22:42). Already in Gethsemane, Jesus’ shedding of blood begins when “in agony, he prayed very fervently; and his sweat became as drops of blood falling down on the earth” (22:44). Jesus knows the outcome of his journey’s end and the horror that awaits him in Jerusalem. Like the whole burnt offering or holocaust (תָּלוּעַ) so frequent in the OT, Jesus is to be offered up for the sin of world as the fire of the Father’s wrath is laid on him. (CC p. 524)

until it is accomplished. The words from the cross would pronounce the completion (Jn 19:28, 30). Jesus wished that the hour of suffering were already past. (CSB)

τελεσθῆ—This is another theological passive; God is the agent who will cause Jesus’ baptism to be “accomplished.” See comments at 13:32. (CC p. 520)

12:51 *do not think* – Although the disciples probably expected opposition—even violent opposition—they anticipated a military victory and subsequent political peace during the Messiah’s reign. Jesus would indeed bring about a kingdom of peace, but not the earthly kind His followers envisioned. (TLSB)

peace – εἰρήνην—This is emphatic by position as the first word in the indirect discourse. (CC p. 520)

The presence of the Father’s wrath upon Jesus brings a result that the disciples would not have anticipated. This fire and baptism do not lead to peace in worldly life but to division. For fire cast *on the earth* (ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν; 12:49) parallels peace (not) given *on the earth* (ἐν τῇ γῆ; 12:51) because the baptism Jesus must be baptized with brings division. For the hearer, this seems ironic because peace is what Jesus was supposed to bring, as Zechariah (1:79), the angels (2:14; ἐπι γῆς εἰρήνη), and Simeon announced in the infancy narrative (2:29). Jesus brings peace to sinners and the sick throughout his ministry (7:50; 8:48), and the seventy (-two) disciples continue to herald his peace when they announce it from house to house as they heal and proclaim the kingdom of God (10:5–6). As Jesus enters Jerusalem, the crowds sing, “Blessed the Coming One, the King, in the name of the Lord! In heaven peace, and glory in the highest!” (19:38). But Jesus weeps over the city of Jerusalem because her people did not know “the things that have to do with peace” (19:42). After the resurrection, Jesus’ first words to the Eleven gathered in the upper room are “Peace to you” (24:36). (CC p. 524)

division. There is no middle ground with respect to Jesus and His rule. A person stands either with Him or against Him. (TLSB)

How does one reconcile Jesus the peace-bearer with Jesus the divider? Jesus does bring peace on earth for those who are members of his kingdom and who receive his heralds of peace in faith. This peace between God and humanity is made possible because God’s wrath against humanity has been placed on Jesus. But the means for administering this peace—a watery baptism, a baptism into death—will cause division and conflict among people. The theology of the cross brings peace with God and absolves those who are marked with the cross in Baptism (1 Pet 3:21–22), but the cross also brings enmity from the world. (CC p. 525)

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The hearer knows that Luke’s gospel contains other references to Jesus as one who brings division. Jesus will cause the downfall of some, the resurrection of others, and the thoughts of many hearts among the families of Israel will be revealed when God’s eschatological wrath is laid on him (2:29–35). Jesus’ entire ministry has been one in which division has occurred, particularly between those in the Jewish religious establishment which rejects his teaching and the sinners and tax collectors who receive him in faith (7:29–30). The parable of the vineyard (20:9–19) highlights that rejection. Those who would follow him may have to forsake their family ties (9:59–62). Jesus reiterates that forcefully in 12:51–53. (CC p. 525)

12:52 *from now* – ἀπὸ τοῦ νῦν—“From now on” includes Jesus’ ministry. (CC p. 520)

Families would be deeply divided over what to make of Jesus. (TLSB)

divided – ἔσονται ... διαμεμερισμένοι—The periphrastic future perfect suggests a state or condition that is in the future. *From now on* people who are confronted with Jesus in the Gospel message will be in a state of division (emphasized by the word order with διαμεμερισμένοι in last place). The idea is similar to 2:34–35. In 11:17–18 Jesus spoke of a kingdom or house being divided, but here it is the people in the house who are divided. (CC p. 520)

Opposition to Jesus may split families, pitting father against son, mother against daughter, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and vice versa, as prophesied in Micah 7:6. This division within families will be reiterated by Jesus after the banquet parable: “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters and even his own life also, he is not able to be my disciple” (14:26). Familial division reappears in the context of Jesus’ final apocalyptic discourse: “And you will be betrayed even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and they will put to death some of you, and you will be hated by all because of my name” (21:16–17). These further references show how division between the disciples and the world will increase as Jesus nears Jerusalem. And it will be no different during the time of the church, as the consummation of eschatological judgment draws near. Yet the disciples will not stand alone. Even if forsaken and persecuted by their biological families, they are part of the family of God through the new kinship of all who hear the Word of Jesus and do it (see comments on 8:19–21). (CC p. 525)

three against two and two against three – πέντε ἐν ἐνὶ ... τρεῖς ἐπὶ δυσὶν καὶ δύο ἐπὶ τρισὶν—This may be an attempt to capture the sense of the parallel in Micah 7:6, where the older generation is pitted against the younger one: parents (two) against their children (three). The unequal numbers suggest continuing conflict with disciples sometimes prevailing and at other times on the defensive, but the battle is not an even standoff or stalemate. (CC p. 521)

Families would be deeply divided over what to make of Jesus. (TLSB)

12:49–53 Jesus expresses a deep desire to fulfill God’s plan of salvation once for all, even though it means going to the cross. The depth of His commitment naturally forces His followers to decide what is most important for them, as well. As you wrestle with so great a challenge, take comfort in the One who calls you. He is faithful. • Lord Jesus, when earthly relations cause me to make You and Your kingdom anything less than my first priority, strengthen me and lead me back into the way of life everlasting. Amen. (TLSB)

Interpreting the Times

54 He also said to the crowds, “When you see a cloud rising in the west, you say at once, ‘A shower is coming.’ And so it happens. 55 And when you see the south wind blowing, you say, ‘There will be scorching heat,’ and it happens. 56 You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time?

12:54–56 Wind from the west was from the Mediterranean Sea; from the south it was from the desert. Although people could use such indicators to forecast the weather, they could not recognize the signs of spiritual crisis, the coming of the Messiah, the threat of his death, the coming confrontation with Rome, and the eternal consequences these events would have for their own lives. (CSB)

12:54 *crowds* – καὶ τοῖς ὄχλοις— Jesus is not addressing the crowds to the exclusion of the disciples but now includes the crowds along with the disciples. (CC p. 526)

cloud rising in the west – Rain-bearing clouds blow in from the Mediterranean Sea to the west. (TLSB)

it’s going to rain – Given the semiarid conditions of Israel, this would be a welcome event. (TLSB)

12:55 *south wind* – From the Negeb Desert to the south came dry, scorching winds. (TLSB)

12:56 *hypocrites* – ὑποκριταί— Another rebuke of the failure to discern the significance of Jesus’ words and deeds. (TLSB)

In 12:1 Jesus called the Pharisees hypocrites, here the crowds. The crowds are hypocrites because they clearly have the good sense to examine signs for future conditions but choose to ignore that good sense in the case of the critical time of Jesus’ earthly visitation. J. Nolland, *Luke 9:21–18:34*, 711, sums up 12:54–56: “Skilled in observing the ways of nature, people regularly examine the indicators of coming weather patterns and order their lives accordingly. It is nothing less than hypocrisy when the same skills are not brought to bear on the events of Jesus’ ministry, which, just as reliably, point to the coming day of answerability to God.” In Romans 1, St. Paul uses a similar argument: God’s majesty is visible in nature, so those who are “suppressing the truth” “evident to them” are “without excuse” (Rom 1:18–20). (CC p. 526)

The two sayings are here juxtaposed in such a way as to chide and warn the crowds about their failure to use their sign-reading, prognosticating ability (12:54–56) to discern how to behave wisely now (“on the way”) before having to appear before the Judge (12:57–59). The Lukan juxtaposition capitalizes on the picture of being *on the way* to *appear before the judge*, so the sayings apply to every person’s pilgrimage from birth toward death and judgment. While they consequently apply to unbelievers, they will apply all the more to Christian disciples in the post-Pentecost church who are making their pilgrimage from rebirth in Baptism (cf. 12:50) toward the resurrection with Christ inaugurated in Baptism (Rom 6:4–5; Col 2:12). Enlightened by catechesis, Baptism, and the outpouring of the Spirit, they especially should discern the signs of the present age that is quickly passing away. (CC p. 527)

present time – Jesus’ ministry ushered in the messianic age. That was obvious to anyone with eyes to see it (cf 5:22–26; 7:11–23). Nevertheless, some stubbornly refused to recognize Jesus. (TLSB)

Standing in the center of this passage is the word *καιρός*, “critical time.” In the original setting, this refers to the time of Jesus’ ministry *in the present*. *Already now* the last things are coming to pass in his teaching and miracles. Jesus is therefore suggesting to the crowds (and the disciples) that if they are able to interpret the signs of the heavens that suggest changes in the weather, then they surely should be able to *understand* Jesus’ ministry as the harbinger of God’s final, eschatological judgment. The time of salvation is at hand, but those who are rejecting Jesus and his signs are heaping up condemnation for themselves. For refusing to apply their ability to the *καιρός*, the “critical time,” they are branded “hypocrites” (Lk 12:56). (CC pp. 527-528)

The question here is a hermeneutical one. Jesus is asking the crowds: “How is it that you are not examining my ministry and reading it as a present sign of the kingdom of God?” Signs are important to the crowds. They have already demanded that Jesus perform signs in Nazareth as he did in Capernaum (4:23), and John the Baptist and his disciples requested confirmation that Jesus was the Messiah (7:18–23). Some among the crowds accused Jesus of casting out demons by Beelzebul and tested Jesus by asking from him “a sign out of heaven” (11:16), even though Jesus’ power over Satan was a sufficiently clear sign. Jesus announced to the people of Nazareth that he would perform miracles that testified to the presence *now* of the end-time gift of release, in fulfillment of the OT (4:18–21, where Is 61:1–2 and 58:6 are quoted). In response to John the Baptist and his disciples, Jesus pointed to the actual miracles themselves (7:18–23, where Is 29:18–19; 35:5–6 are summarized). And in response to the crowds, Jesus said the only sign he would give to them is the sign of Jonah (11:29–30): the preacher of repentance standing before them. Clearly, the people of Nazareth (Luke 4), John the Baptist and his disciples (Luke 7), and the crowds (Luke 11) have been shown that the present time of Jesus’ ministry, considered in light of the promises of the OT, is a portentous time, a sign of the imminent fulfillment of the eschatological reign of God. (CC p. 528)

12:54–56 Jesus condemns the unbelief of those beholding His miraculous signs who yet reject the obvious implications. Satan blinds the hearts of unbelievers even to this day. Only by God’s grace can we see clearly, as the Spirit opens our eyes through faith in Jesus Christ. • “Amazing grace—how sweet the sound—That saved a wretch like me! I once was lost but now am found, Was blind but now I see!” Amen. (LSB 744:1) (TLSB)

Settle with Your Accuser

57 “And why do you not judge for yourselves what is right? 58 As you go with your accuser before the magistrate, make an effort to settle with him on the way, lest he drag you to the judge, and the judge hand you over to the officer, and the officer put you in prison. 59 I tell you, you will never get out until you have paid the very last penny.”

12:57 *judge for yourselves*. Despite the insistence of the Pharisees, despite the Roman system, and even despite the pressure of family, a person must accept God on his terms. The signs of the times called for immediate decision—before judgment came on the Jewish nation. (CSB)

Jesus uses an earthly example to illustrate the need for repentance now—before the final judgment. (TLSB)

κρίνετε τὸ δίκαιον—“Judge what is righteous” or “decide what is correct”—the phrase can be read as neutral or as theologically freighted. (CC p. 526)

ἄφ' ἑαυτῶν—“From within yourselves” implies judging “by yourselves” without any outside help. This usage of ἀπό is classical (BAGD V 5). The signs are there to read; read them! Judgment is imminent! Act now, lest you wind up in prison! See also 21:30–31. (CC p. 526)

Jesus' exhortation to *read* his ministry for an indication of the presence of God's eschatological wrath and salvation is a prelude to his challenge to “judge what is righteous” (12:57). The theme of discernment is strong in the context. The connection between this passage and the previous one (12:49–53) involves “to judge” (κρίνω; 12:57) and “the judge” (κριτής; 12:58 [twice]). The logical sequence is this: Jesus casts fire on the earth because God's eschatological judgment has been laid on him at his baptism, is actualized during his ministry, and will be fulfilled at the cross and resurrection (12:49–50). As the crowds judge (discern) the future weather from the signs in the sky, so now they must judge (discern) future conditions by examining the present, critical time of Jesus' ministry for its eschatological signs of eternal salvation—a verdict of “forgiven”—and eternal condemnation—a verdict of “guilty” (12:54–56). When they understand and interpret this present age *Christologically*, they will judge (κρίνετε, “decide, discern”) what is righteous (12:57). *Jesus himself is the righteous one (23:47) and the one who brings forgiveness and righteousness for sinners.* (Cf. Lk 1:6, 17; 2:25; 5:32; 14:14; 15:7; 23:50; contrast 18:9; 20:20 *This is what people must discern from the signs of his words and deeds.* (CC p. 528)

12:58 *settle with.* Settle accounts before it is too late. (CSB)

δοῦς ἐργασίαν ἀπηλλάχθαι ἀπ' αὐτοῦ—This means literally “give business to be set free from him.” δοῦς ἐργασίαν is probably a Latinism (*da operam*, “take pains” [BAGD s.v. δίδωμι, 7]; cf. Josephus, *Antiquities* 3.35 [3.1.7]). (CC p. 526)

The facts, however, that 12:57 is a question, that 12:58 is a command (δοῦς, “make”) and that 12:59 makes a solemn and emphatic threat all suggest that 12:57 is more than an extension of the illustration about reading signs. It is also a strong warning to act accordingly. Once the crowds of hearers (in Jesus' day, Luke's, or the present) “read the time,” what is the “righteous” thing they need to discern and act upon? To judge what is righteous involves peace with God through the gift of righteousness in Jesus, *and* it entails making peace with one's adversary so one might not have to appear before the judge (12:58). If one does not make peace, then he will be judged and thrown into a prison out of which he will never gain release (12:59). (CC pp. 528-529)

on the way – ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ - This is placed in an emphatic position at the beginning of the sentence. It characterizes pilgrims on a journey, requiring instruction (catechesis) about “the way,” which can denote the Christian faith. (CC p. 526)

This interpretation suggests that this parable is about the content and results of Jesus' words and deeds, which are the signs that will be passed down to succeeding generations of Christians through preaching and catechesis. The later Christian hearer of the gospel might think of catechesis when Jesus tells his hearers to make an effort to settle with their adversary *on the way* (ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ; 12:58; see comments at 1:67–80). The current context is a journey to Jerusalem in which Jesus has been catechizing his disciples—with some words to the crowds—about his future and theirs. Jesus tells the crowds and the disciples that they will discern what is righteous through catechesis in the Christian faith. They will then be led to make peace with their adversary as they are on their way to God's final court. (CC p. 529)

to the judge – However, for those who reject the signs of Jesus' words and miracles—and for subsequent generations who reject them by rejecting the Gospel message—the parable may

have another application. In terms of the “division” (12:51–53) caused by Jesus, they are not on the side of Jesus but are among his opponents. Then not only is *God* the end-time judge, but also *Jesus* is the adversary who confronts them “on the way.” If they are not reconciled now (in this life) with their adversary—in this instance Jesus himself who calls them to repentance and faith—then it will be impossible for them to gain acquittal in the judgment to come. This interpretation would be particularly poignant if the situation described in the parable is that of a debtor (metaphorically, a sinner) being dragged off to the judge by his adversary so that the debtor might be thrown into debtor’s prison. This view of the parable is suggested by the last line, “I say to you, you will not come out from there until you have paid back even the last cent” (12:59). Without the intervention of Jesus into the lives of the disciples and the crowds, they are on their way to judgment and the eternal debtor’s prison. If they reject Jesus and his signs, they will never be able to get out because they will not be able to pay back their debt, even if it is as small as a lepton. To prevent being imprisoned, the disciples and the crowds need to be released from their debt by the one who comes proclaiming “to the captives release and to the blind recovery of sight, [who sends] the broken ones away in release” (4:18). Jesus told a story about this debt of sin and his cancellation of that debt in 7:40–43. Release comes through Jesus’ ministry of teaching and miracles that proclaim release. (E.g., Lk 5:20; 6:10; 7:22–23, 47–50) Through catechesis, while they are “on the way” with Jesus to Jerusalem (as the debtor was “on the way” with his adversary), they have the opportunity to read the signs of Jesus’ ministry to see that he proclaims forgiveness of all debts. (CC pp. 529-530)

magistrate. Lit, “ruler”; term could apply to many different kinds of civil authorities. *settle*. Come to agreement on the amount of debt owed and square it away. *judge*. Refers specifically to those who adjudicate cases in courts of law. *officer*. Here, a constable or bailiff in charge of a debtors’ prison. (TLSB)

12:59 *I tell you* – λέγω σοι—This phrase will tie this passage to the next one (cf. οὐχί, λέγω ὑμῖν at 13:3, 5), as well as to the preceding material (12:4, 8, 22, 27, 37, 44, 51). Use of the second person singular in 12:58–59 is perhaps due to the parable-like nature of the teaching illustration. (CC p. 527)

Warns of hell. Debtors’ prisons occasioned much suffering. Family and friends were expected to come up with the money needed to free the debtor, who was frequently tortured in order to motivate payment. We only escape hell through Jesus’ blood and merit. (TLSB)

last penny. Greek *lepton*. If a *kodrantes* is compared to a penny, this coin corresponds to half a penny. (CSB)

λεπτόν—The lepton is the smallest coin in Israel, implying that once one is in debtor’s prison, no matter how small the debt, it is impossible to get out. (CC p. 527)

This catechesis instructs the disciples and the crowds that God’s judgment is on Jesus, not on debtors reconciled to him and others, since the fire cast on the earth is cast on Jesus. He is an adversary to the debtor only if the debtor does *not* see him as the one who assumed the debts of all humanity, the one who gained forgiveness for all debts through his death, resurrection, and ascension. When the Gospel moves the hearer to faith and when he is baptized into Jesus’ death and resurrection, he is transported to the other side of the “division” (12:51–53) caused by Jesus; he is set on the side of Jesus and his relatives according to the new kinship (8:19–21). Christ is no longer his adversary but is now his advocate. (CC p. 530)

12:57–59 Jesus encourages His followers to repent and make peace quickly, lest a budding conflict escalate and spin out of control. His disciples are called not only to sacrifice possessions and relationships that hinder their way in the kingdom but also to avoid entangling disputes. Though hard feelings are often hard to let go, Jesus promises mercy and blessings for those who repent and receive His peace. • Lord, free me from any lingering resentment, ill will, or hatred toward another. Teach me to owe no one anything save the debt to love as You have loved us. Amen. (TLSB)