

THE NEW TESTAMENT MADE HARDER

SCRIPTURE STUDY QUESTIONS

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Cover and book design: Jenny Webb

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The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of the American National Standard for Information Sciences—Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials. ANSI Z39.48-1984.

ISBN 978-0-8425-2871-9

Printed in the United States of America

maxwellinstitute.byu.edu

Wherever you look about you, in literature and life, you see the celebrated names and figures, the precious and much heralded men who are coming into prominence and are much talked about, the many benefactors of the age who know how to benefit mankind by making life easier and easier, some by railways, others by omnibuses and steamboats, others by the telegraph, others by easily apprehended compendiums and short recitals of everything worth knowing, and finally the true benefactors of the age who make spiritual existence in virtue of thought easier and easier. . . . You must do something, but inasmuch as with your limited capacities it will be impossible to make anything easier than it has become, you must, with the same humanitarian enthusiasm as the others, undertake to make something harder.

JOHANNES CLIMACUS
Concluding Unscientific Postscript

Lesson 17

Mark 10:17–30; 12:41–44;
and Luke 12:13–21; 14; 16

Given the quantity of material in these chapters, rather than try to cover everything, I will focus my questions on the verses from Mark and selections from the verses from Luke.

As you read this material, be sure to ask how it applies to us who live in the latter days. What do these verses teach us about taking up our cross? (Compare Jacob 1:8; 3 Nephi 12:30; Alma 39:9.)

What do they teach about riches (not what do we recall others saying that they teach, but what do they *really* teach)?

What does the parable and explanation in Luke 16:1–12 teach us about our relation to the world?

Mark 10

Verses 17–22: How is the story of verses 13–16 connected to the pericope in verses 17–30?

Why does the fact that the man is running suggest? Why does he kneel? That is an unusual thing to do before a teacher, which is a more accurate translation of the word that the King James Version translates *Master*.

Why do you think the man employs the unusual title “good teacher”? Why does Jesus reject being called “good” (verse 18)?

What does this person want? Compare this story to that in Matthew 12:28–34. How is the scribe in that story like the person in this one?

In verse 19 Jesus says that the man knows the commandments. What does that tell us about the person?

Why might Jesus have reworded the commandment “Do not covet” as “Defraud not”?

Which of the Ten Commandments does Jesus *not* mention in his initial response (verse 19)? Is that relevant?

Are the first four of the Ten Commandments implied in his second response (verse 21)? If so, how so?

What do we learn from the first part of verse 21, “then Jesus beholding him loved him”? What does it mean to say that Jesus beheld him? Clearly he was already looking at him. And what does it mean to say that Jesus loved him? Doesn’t Jesus love everyone?

In verse 21 Jesus tells the man that, in terms of observing the Torah, the Law, he lacks only one thing. What is that one thing?

Jesus commands the man to do three specific things: to go on his way, to sell everything he has and give it to the poor, and to then take up his cross and follow. Is any one of these more important to the other? Does one of them require that one do one of the others first?

What does “take up the cross” mean? Compare Matthew 16:24, Mark 8:34, and Luke 9:23.

How does this story compare to Matthew 8:18–22 (Luke 9:57–62)?

Jesus says little about property, but what he does say has a negative slant. Why? What does that mean for us? Might his teaching about property be a “hard saying” (John 6:60) for us? (The Greek word in John means “difficult to the point of being impossible.”)

The King James Version translates the first part of verse 22 merely as “and he was sad at that saying,” but a more literal and, I think, better translation is “but he, becoming gloomy at the word.” What makes this man gloomy? Why did the prospect of giving away his possessions grieve (literally “pain”) him?

When we read this story, we assume that the man is rich. Verse 22 gives us evidence for our assumption when it says “he had great possessions.” What does it mean to be rich? Is that an absolute description or a comparative one? If it is comparative, to whom ought we to compare ourselves in deciding whether we are rich?

Verses 23–27: When Jesus exclaims, “How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!” (verse 23), why are the disciples astonished (verse 24)? What does their astonishment show about their belief?

What do we really believe about riches and salvation? If we go behind what we say about riches, both publically and to ourselves, to our behaviors and attitudes, are we ever astonished that it is difficult for the rich to be saved? What might any such astonishment say?

How does this story relate to Jesus's admonition in Matthew 6:24 (Luke 16:13)?

Why does Jesus call the disciples children (verse 24)?

At verse 24 many New Testament manuscripts differ from the manuscripts used by the KJV. They omit "for them that trust in riches," so that instead the last part of the verse says merely, "How hard is it to enter into the kingdom of God!" What difference does that make to what Jesus is saying? Which version of the verse do you think is probably right? Why?

What is the point of verse 25?

Note this comment from a contemporary New Testament scholar about the eye of the needle:

Many stories have been told to indicate that the "eye of the needle" is a small postern gate that was opened at night when the city gate had been shut, and that a camel could get through it provided it had been fully unloaded. It is a nice story but not true in biblical terms. The eye of a needle refers to a surgeon's needle. In both Matthew 19 and Matthew 23, the point was that the camel was the largest animal with which people of the day were familiar. Jesus was using the term much as we would use the word *elephant* as the largest creature in our experience. Jesus may also have used the camel as an illustration because it was ritually unclean.¹

A century or two later in Judaism there was a similar rabbinic parable that spoke of an elephant rather than a camel.

In verse 26 the disciples are even more astonished, and they seem to ask, “If the rich can’t be saved, then who can?” If that isn’t what they are asking, what is it?

Is what Jesus teaches here related to his teaching about the narrow gate and how one enters that gate (Matthew 7:13–14; Luke 13:23–24)?

Verse 27 begins, “Jesus looking upon them saith . . .” Why is it important that he looked at his disciples? Is that parallel to him beholding the person in verse 21? What does Jesus see that caused him to say what he does in verse 27?

In verse 27 Jesus seems to be referring to Genesis 18:14. How might that reference be significant to what he teaches here?

Verses 28–30: Mark tells us that Peter began to say something (verse 28) and was interrupted by Jesus (verse 29). What was Peter trying to say? What does Jesus’s interruption show?

In verses 29–30, Jesus promises that those who deny themselves will receive a hundredfold “in this time.” What does that phrase mean? What does it mean to receive a hundredfold “with persecutions”?

Mark 12:41–44

Two mites were approximately one-hundredth of a day laborer’s wages,² no more than about three dollars, or even less, in today’s wages. How does this story contrast with the rest of chapter 12? How might it have given the disciples hope?

What do you make of the comparison between the *abundance* referred to in verse 44 (which could also be translated *excess*) of the wealthy and the *want* (or “lack”) of the widow?

Luke 12

Verses 13–15: In verse 13, what is the man asking Jesus to do? It seems that rabbis were often called to settle family disputes. Many recognized Jesus as a rabbi. Why, then, does he refuse to settle this (verse 14)? Isn't he the ultimate Judge? (Compare John 3:17–18, remembering that the word translated *condemn* could also be translated *judge*.)

Why does the man's demand cause Jesus to speak to his disciples about covetousness? What is covetousness? The Greek word translated *covetousness* means "wanting more." Does that tell us anything about what Jesus is criticizing?

What does it mean to say "a man's life consisteth not in the abundance [excess] of the things which he possesses" (verse 15)? Explain that claim as carefully and as true to the wording that Jesus uses as you can.

Does the story of the young man in Mark 10 offer an alternative for giving life meaning? What is it? (See also Luke 9:23–25.) Why is that the only thing that can truly give life meaning?

Verses 16–21: How is what the farmer does in Jesus's story in these verses different from what Joseph did in Egypt? Does this story teach that we ought not to retire or to prepare for retirement?

What does God's reproof in verse 20 mean? Can you put that in your own terms as it might apply to someone today?

What would it mean to be "rich toward God" (verse 21)? The Greek word translated *rich* means also "to have abun-

dance.” How do we have abundance *toward* God rather than from him?

Jesus gives a brief sermon explaining this parable in verses 22–40. Compare the two and ask yourself what this means for your own life.

It is taught that these verses were directed at those called to full-time service in the kingdom of God, people such as missionaries and apostles. Does that mean that they have no applicability to us? If they are relevant to the rest of us, how so?

Luke 14

Verse 15: What has brought on the exclamation of this verse?

Do you think that the speaker is thinking literally of eating in the kingdom of God, or is he thinking metaphorically? If the latter, what would it mean to eat in God’s kingdom?

Verses 16–24: How is this parable a response to the exclamation in verse 15? Can we infer anything about the man who spoke in that verse from this parable?

How are the excuses that the invitees offer like that of the young man in Mark 10:17–22?

Verses 25–27: How is the parable of verses 16–24 related to the teachings of verses 26–35?

The word *hate* in verse 26 is accurate, but it is probably hyperbolic. (Compare Proverbs 13:24 and 2 Samuel 19:6.) The Greek word can also be translated *disregard*. (Also see the JST.) How would those listening to Jesus probably have

responded to this? Is he intentionally alienating them? If so, why? If not, how so?

Read the JST for verse 27. Does it change the meaning of these verses, or does it augment that meaning?

Verses 28–32: The comparisons that Jesus makes in verses 28–32 are to people who carefully take into account what their actions will cost them before they proceed: a builder and a king going to war. Why does Jesus tell two parables that make the same point?

What do these parables tell us about forsaking all and following Christ? Verse 33 says that if we do not forsake all, we cannot be disciples of Christ, or, conversely, if we are his disciples, then we have forsaken all. In our context, what does it mean to forsake all? How do we do so—and have we done so?

Look at the verses inserted in the JST. (They are in the JST material in the back of your Bible.) What do they mean in the context of forsaking all and counting the cost of discipleship?

Luke 16:1–12

A steward was usually a slave entrusted with the management of a household. What that might mean would depend on the type and size of the household he was to manage. Some speculate that the master in question would have been one who did not reside at the household managed by the steward, an absentee landlord, as it were. That isn't necessarily the case. A steward entrusted with money was expected to make a profit for his master,

but stewards often also made money for themselves by manipulating the master's loans and by charging extra interest. Within limits, it seems that such practices were either tolerated or even expected. We might substitute the word *squandered* for *wasted* and understand the meaning more accurately.

The phrase "I am resolved" in verse 4 means "I've known all along."

What do we see the steward doing? In verse 8, why does his master commend the steward rather than condemn him?

In the same verse Jesus says "for the children of this world are in their generation [i.e., in their time] wiser than the children of light." What does that mean?

The word *mammon* (verse 9) seems to mean "that in which one trusts." What is Jesus recommending in verse 9? Is it related to any of the teachings of Ecclesiastes, for example, Ecclesiastes 2:24–26; 3:11–12?

How does verse 10 explain verse 9?

Are verses 11 and 12 parallel?

Can you see different ways of reading "if ye have not been faithful in that which is another man's, who shall give you that which is your own?" (verse 12).

Who might the "other man" be in this life? In the eternities?