

records Jesus' life and ministry, his deeds and sayings. It also witnesses the faith and activity of the earliest Christians.

THE LIFE OF JESUS¹

1. The Annunciation

... The angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you. . . . Do not be afraid Mary for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High . . . and of his kingdom there will be no end."

... And Mary said,

My soul magnifies the Lord,
And my spirit rejoices in God my Savior. . . .

2. The Birth of Jesus

Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to

1. No attempt has been made here to reflect the scholarly debate about what parts of the Gospels reflect historical fact and what parts comprise symbolic discourse and mythic amplification.

take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." . . . When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus.

And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, for there was no room at the inn. In that region there were shepherds living the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord."

3. The Growing Boy in His Father's House

Now every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up as usual for the festival. When the festival was ended and they started to return, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it. . . . After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. When his parents saw him they were astonished; . . . He said to them, "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?"

4. Baptism and the Beginning of His Ministry

In those days John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea, proclaiming, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." . . . Then the people of Jerusalem and all Judea were going

out to him . . . and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. . . . And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased."

5. The Three Temptations

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. The tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." But he answered, "It is written,

'One does not live by bread alone,
But by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'

Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written,

'He will command his angels concerning you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'

Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

Again the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; and he said to him, "All these will I give you, if you will fall down and worship me." Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! for it is written,

'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'

6. Calling the First Disciples

As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fish for people."

7. Deeds of Power

A conduit for the power of the Spirit, Jesus healed many. In so doing he challenged traditional notions of ill people as unclean or outcast, and he signaled the depth of God's love. The Gospels abound in reports of miraculous healings; here are but a few.

a. Exorcism

He went down to Capernaum, a city in Galilee, and was teaching them on the sabbath. . . . In the synagogue there was a man who had the spirit of an unclean demon, and he cried out with a loud voice, "Let us alone! What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God." But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be silent, and come out of him!" When the demon had thrown him down before them, he came out of him without having done him any harm. They were all amazed and kept saying to one another, "What kind of utterance is this? For with authority and power he commands the unclean spirits, and out they come!" And a report about him began to reach every place in the region.

b. Healing a Paralyzed Man: "Stand Up and Walk"

One day, while he was teaching, Pharisees and teachers of the law were sitting near by. . . . Just then some men came, carrying a paralyzed man on a bed. They were trying to bring him in and lay him before Jesus; but finding no way to bring him in because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and let him down with his bed through the tiles into the middle of the crowd in front of Jesus. When he saw their faith, he said, "Friend, your sins are forgiven

you." Then the scribes and the Pharisees² began to question, "Who is this who is speaking blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?" When Jesus perceived their questionings, he answered them, "Why do you raise such questions in your hearts? Which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Stand up and walk'? But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"—he said to the one who was paralyzed—"I say to you, stand up and take your bed and go to your home." Immediately he stood up before them, took what he had been lying on, and went to his home, glorifying God.

c. Healing a Hemorrhaging Woman: "Your Faith Has Made You Well"

Then suddenly a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years came up behind him and touched the fringe of his cloak, for she said to herself, "If I only touch his cloak, I will be made well." Jesus turned, and seeing her he said, "Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well." And instantly, the woman was made well.

d. Giving Sight to a Blind Man: "Your Faith Has Saved You"

As he approached Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging. When he heard a crowd going by, he asked what was happening.

They told him, "Jesus of Nazareth is passing by." Then he shouted, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" Those who were in front sternly ordered him to be quiet; but he shouted even more loudly, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" Jesus stood still and ordered the man to be brought to him; and when he came near, he asked him, "What do you want me to do for you?" He said, "Lord, let me see again." Jesus said to him, "Receive your sight; your faith has saved you." Immediately he regained his sight and followed him, glorifying God; and all the people, when they saw it, praised God.

2. Jewish religious scholars and authorities.

8. Amid Growing Fame. . .

Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people. So his fame spread throughout all Syria. . . . And great crowds followed him from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and from beyond the Jordan.

9. . . . Rejection in Nazareth

He came to his hometown and began to teach the people in their synagogue, so that they were astounded and said, "Where did this man get this wisdom and these deeds of power? Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary? And are not his brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? And are not all his sisters with us?" And they took offense at him. But Jesus said to them, "Prophets are not without honor except in their own country and in their own house." And he did not do many deeds of power there, because of their unbelief.

10. An Ill Omen for Jesus: *The Death of the Baptist*

Herod was the Roman-appointed king of Judea, and part of his job was to prevent Jewish revolt against Roman rule. The Baptist had been drawing enthusiastic crowds, and Herod knew that the line between religious fervor and political agitation was thin. Herod's motive for executing John might, therefore, be only partly explained in the following selection. In any case, Jesus surely knew that many saw him as John's successor.

For Herod had arrested John . . . because John had been telling him, "It is not lawful for you to have [your sister-in-law]."

. . . The king . . . had John beheaded in the prison. . . .

. . . [Jesus'] disciples came and took the body and buried it; then they went and told Jesus.

Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place by himself.

11. The Beginning of the End

From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.

12. Jesus' Conspicuous Arrival in Jerusalem

a. The Triumphal Entry

And after throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road. As he was now approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen, saying,

"Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!
Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!"

b. Cleansing the Temple

Then he entered the temple and began to drive out those who were selling things there; and he said, "It is written,

'My house shall be a house of prayer';
but you have made it a den of robbers."

13. The Last Supper: *Jesus Celebrates Passover a Final Time*

a. Jesus Washes the Feet of His Disciples

Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. [And during supper he] got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. . . .

After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you."

b. "This Is My Body"

Then he took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." And he did the same with the cup after supper, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood."

14. "Not My Will, But Thine"

[On the Mount of Olives] he withdrew from them about a stone's throw, knelt down and prayed, "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done."

15. The Trial

Now Jesus stood before the governor; and the governor asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus said, "You say so." But when he was accused by the chief priests and elders, he did not answer. Then Pilate said to him, "Do you not hear how many accusations they make against you?" But he gave him no answer, not even to a single charge, so that the governor was greatly amazed.

Now at the festival the governor was accustomed to release a prisoner for the crowd, anyone whom they wanted. . . . The chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowds to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus killed. The governor again said to them, "Which of the two do you want me to release for you?" And they said, "Barabbas." Pilate said to them, "Then what should I do with Jesus who is called the Messiah?" All of them said, "Let him be crucified!" Then he asked, "Why, what evil has he done?" But they shouted all the more, "Let him be crucified!"

16. The Outrage

The soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the governor's headquarters, and they gathered the whole cohort around him. They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on his head. They put a reed in his right hand and knelt before him and mocked him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" They spat on him, and took the reed and struck him on the head. After mocking him, they stripped him of the robe and put his own clothes on him. They then led him away to crucify him.

17. The Crucifixion

a. Golgotha

So they took Jesus; and carrying the cross by himself, he went out to what is called The Place of the Skull, which in Hebrew is called Golgotha. There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, with Jesus between them. Pilate also had an inscription written and put on the cross. It read, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews."

b. "Forgive Them"

Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing."

c. "You Will Be with Me in Paradise"

One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, "Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!" But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong." Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." He replied, "Truly, I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

d. Mother and Son

Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary, . . . and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, "Woman, here is your son." Then he said to the disciple, "Here is your mother." And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.

e. "Why Have You Forsaken Me?"

From noon on, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. And about three o'clock Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" that is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" . . . Then Jesus cried again with a loud voice and breathed his last.

18. The Resurrection: *Two Accounts*

a. Mark

When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. . . . When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. But he said to them, "Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him just as he told you."

b. John

[Now] Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white,

sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him." When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?" Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him in Hebrew "Rabbouni!" (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, "Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord"; and she told them that he had said these things to her.

19. Postresurrection Appearances³

a. Luke

Now on that same day [as the resurrection] two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him.

... When he was at table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight.

... That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. They were saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!" They then told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

3. See also selection 32, below.

While they were talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost. He said to them, "Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? Look at my hands and my feet: see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. While in their joy they were disbelieving and still considering, he said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?" They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate it in their presence.

b. John

A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas [a disciple who doubted Jesus had risen] was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." Thomas answered him, "My Lord and My God!" Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

THE SAYINGS OF JESUS: "Never Has Anyone Spoken like This!"⁴

Scholars continue to debate which of Jesus' sayings may confidently be attributed to him and which were likely to have been placed in his mouth by his faith-inspired followers. No attempt has been made to reflect this complex and unresolved controversy. Instead, I have selected aspects of the Good News that have for nearly two thousand years resonated most deeply in the hearts of believers.

4. John 7:46.

20. On the Mystery of Himself

a. The Bread of Life

I am the bread of life. . . . Whoever eats of this bread will live forever.

b. The Light of the World

I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.

c. The Resurrection and the Life

I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die.

d. Come to Me, You Who Are Weary

Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

e. I Came to Save the Lost

For the Son of Man came to save the lost. What do you think? If a shepherd has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray? And if he finds it, truly I tell you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray.

f. I Am Among You

Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.

g. I Am the True Vine, Abide in Me

I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower. . . . Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches.

h. My Peace I Give You

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.

i. I Will Come Again

In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. . . . And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also.

j. The Way, the Truth, and the Life

I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

k. Who Do People Say That I Am?

Jesus . . . asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven."

21. Love and Its Expression in Forgiveness

It has been said that "everything that came from [Jesus'] lips . . . focus[ed] human awareness on the two most important facts about life: God's overwhelming love for humanity, and the need for people to

accept that love and let it flow through them to others.”⁵ The following utterances help us to understand the extraordinary fellowship of the early Christians.

a. Love One Another

I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.

b. Turn the Other Cheek

You have heard that it was said, “An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.” But I say to you . . . if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also; . . . and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile.

c. Love Your Enemies

You have heard that it was said, “You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.” But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous.

d. The Golden Rule

In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets.

e. I Was Hungry and You Gave Me Food

Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world, for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you

5. Huston Smith, *The World's Religions* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), 326–27.

gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me. . . . Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.

f. Before All Else, Be Reconciled

So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there at the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift.

g. Forgive Seventy-Seven Times

Then Peter came and said to him, “Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?” Jesus said to him, “Not seven times, but I tell you, seventy-seven times.”

h. Let the Sinless Cast the First Stone

. . . They said to him, “Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?” . . . Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, “Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.” . . . When they heard it, they went away. . . . Jesus . . . said to her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” She said, “No one, sir.” And Jesus said, “Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again.”

22. The Kingdom of God

Often upon Jesus' lips, the phrase “kingdom of God,” alternately rendered as “reign of God” or “kingdom of heaven,” was central to his teaching.

He sometimes spoke of it as a near-future apocalyptic event (see selections 26a and 26b, below), but he often implied that the kingdom was

here and now, dawning as a present fact (see 22j and 22k, below). As to what he meant by the kingdom of God, there is no better or more intriguing guide than the sayings and parables of the master.

a. The Beatitudes

When he saw the crowds he went up the hill. There he took his seat, and when his disciples had gathered round him he began to address them. And this is the teaching he gave:

How blest are these who know their need of God;
the kingdom of heaven is theirs.

How blest are the sorrowful;
they shall find consolation.

How blest are those of a gentle spirit;
they shall have the earth for their possession.

How blest are those who hunger and thirst to see right prevail;
they shall be satisfied.

How blest are those who show mercy;
mercy shall be shown to them.

How blest are those whose hearts are pure;
they shall see God.

How blest are the peacemakers;
God shall call them his sons.

How blest are those who have suffered persecution for the
cause of right;
the kingdom of heaven is theirs.

b. Become as Little Children

At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" He called a child, whom he put among them, and said, "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."

c. You Must Be Born Again

Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above. . . . The wind blows where it chooses, and

you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.

d. The Parable of the Mustard Seed

And this is another parable that he put before them: "The kingdom of Heaven is like a mustard-seed, which a man took and sowed in his field; As a seed, mustard is smaller than any other; but when it has grown it is bigger than any garden-plant; it becomes a tree, big enough for the birds to come and roost among its branches."

e. The Parable of the Treasure

The kingdom of Heaven is like treasure lying buried in a field. The man who found it, buried it again; and for sheer joy went and sold everything he had, and bought that field.

f. The Parable of the Vineyard Laborers

The kingdom of Heaven is like this. There was once a landowner who went out early one morning to hire labourers for his vineyard; and after agreeing to pay them the usual day's wage he sent them off to work. Going out three hours later he saw some more men standing idle in the market-place. "Go and join the others in the vineyard," he said, "and I will pay you a fair wage"; so off they went. At midday he went out again, and at three in the afternoon, and made the same arrangement as before. An hour before sunset he went out and found another group standing there; so he said to them, "Why are you standing about like this all day with nothing to do?" "Because no one has hired us," they replied; so he told them, "Go and join the others in the vineyard." When evening fell, the owner of the vineyard said to his steward, "Call the labourers and give them their pay, beginning with those who came last and ending with the first." Those who had started work an hour before sunset came forward, and were paid the full day's wage. When it was the turn of the men who had come first, they expected something extra, but were paid the same amount as the others. As they took it, they grumbled at their employer: "These late-comers have done only one hour's work, yet you have put them on a level with us, who have sweated the whole day long in the blazing sun!" The

owner turned to one of them and said, "My friend, I am not being unfair to you. You agreed on the usual wage for the day, did you not? Take your pay and go home. I choose to pay the last man the same as you. Surely I am free to do what I like with my own money. Why be jealous because I am kind?"

g. The Parable of the Wedding Feast

The kingdom of Heaven is like this. There was a king who prepared a feast for his son's wedding; but when he sent his servants to summon the guests he had invited, they would not come. He sent others again, telling them to say to the guests, "See now! I have prepared this feast for you. I have had my bullocks slaughtered; everything is ready; come to the wedding at once." But they took no notice; one went off to his farm, another to his business, and the others seized the servants, attacked them brutally, and killed them. The king was furious; he sent troops to kill those murderers and set their town on fire. Then he said to his servants, "The wedding feast is ready; but the guests I invited did not deserve the honour. Go out to the main thoroughfares, and invite everyone you can find to the wedding." The servants went out into the streets, and collected all they could find, good and bad alike. So the hall was packed with guests.

When the king came in to see the company at the table, he observed one man who was not dressed for a wedding. "My friend," said the king, "how do you come to be here without your wedding clothes?" He had nothing to say. The king then said to his attendants, "Bind him hand and foot; turn him out into the dark, the place of wailing and grinding of teeth." For though many are invited, few are chosen.

h. The Parable of the Prodigal Son

There was once a man who had two sons; and the younger said to his father, "Father, give me my share of the property." So he divided his estate between them. A few days later the younger son turned the whole of his share into cash and left home for a distant country, where he squandered it in reckless living. He had spent it

all, when a severe famine fell upon that country and he began to feel the pinch. So he went and attached himself to one of the local landowners, who sent him on to his farm to mind the pigs. He would have been glad to fill his belly with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. Then he came to his senses and said, "How many of my father's paid servants have more food than they can eat, and here am I, starving to death! I will set off and go to my father, and say to him, 'Father, I have sinned, against God and against you; I am no longer fit to be called your son; treat me as one of your paid servants.'" So he set out for his father's house. But while he was still a long way off his father saw him, and his heart went out to him. He ran to meet him, flung his arms round him, and kissed him. The son said, "Father, I have sinned, against God and against you; I am no longer fit to be called your son." But the father said to his servants, "Quick! fetch a robe, my best one, and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and shoes on his feet. Bring the fatted calf and kill it, and let us have a feast to celebrate the day. For this son of mine was dead and has come back to life; he was lost and is found." And the festivities began.

Now the elder son was out on the farm; and on his way back, as he approached the house, he heard music and dancing. He called one of the servants and asked what it meant. The servant told him, "Your brother has come home, and your father has killed the fatted calf because he has him back safe and sound." But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and pleaded with him; but he retorted, "You know how I have slaved for you all these years; I never once disobeyed your orders; and you never gave me so much as a kid, for a feast with my friends. But now that this son of yours turns up, after running through your money with his women, you kill the fatted calf for him." "My boy," said the father, "you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. How could we help celebrating this happy day? Your brother was dead and has come back to life, was lost and is found."

i. The Parable of the Good Samaritan

As non-Jews, Samaritans (persons from Samaria) would have been considered heathens by many in Jesus' audience. In casting a