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Introduction



The image of a small portion of Michelangelo's fresco, "Creation," found above serves as metaphor for this page's means and ends.

- ? How would you characterize God's arm in the fresco?
- ? How would you characterize Adam's arm?
- ? What is the message in Adam's limp wrist? In the fact that his arm rests on his knee?
- ? How does Adam, as painted in Michelangelo's fresco, represent all of us as we engage in scripture study and seek to understand scripture, scripture's divine author and our relationship to Him?
- ? How does Adam, as painted in Michelangelo's fresco, represent all of us as we seek God's enlivening, strengthening, and saving influence and presence in our daily lives?

Michelangelo reminds us of our desperate need for God's presence in our lives if we are to follow Him and be all that He hopes us to be. In relation to this page and its purposes, we are in need of God's help as we seek to understand and apply scripture.

The questions we posed and our brief commentary concerning the fresco represent an example of our approach to each scripture reading.

Scripture readings are accompanied by general and passage-specific questions to ponder along with brief comments. In addition to the passage-specific questions associated with each reading, the reader can apply the following **general questions** to most readings. These questions come from the purposes of scripture as identified in the introduction to our site, ponderthescriptures.com, found on the site's home page

- What does this reading reveal about the character of God?
- How and what does this reading testify of Christ?
- What wisdom and knowledge does this reading provide?
- How does this reading direct the way you think and act?
- Of what dangers does this reading warn? How does it help you avoid these dangers?
- How does this reading gladden your heart, encourage you, and give you hope?
- How does this reading expand your vision and increase your expectations of the possible?
- What does this reading discern or "read" about you?
- How will you apply this reading to your life, to how you relate with others, and to how you relate to Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?

It is not intended that the reader ponder every question. We introduce numerous and varied questions in hopes that readers will find a question or two that catches their imagination and interest, seems pertinent to their lives, and provides an opportunity for meaningful pondering and further spiritual insight. In addition, if the reader wishes, the many and varied ponder questions allow the reader to spend additional time to consider passages from various perspectives.

Finally, we suggest that during and after your reading and pondering experience you consider how you can incorporate your thoughts and feelings from the scripture reading into your personal prayer life. As

you pray, share with Heavenly Father what you thought and felt as you studied and pondered. In your prayer, seek further insight from a God who is anxious to reveal himself, his will, and his interest in our lives. Incorporating your reading and pondering into your prayers can, we think, enliven a prayer life that can all too easily become mundane, mechanical, and rote.

Matthew 6.²⁴— just scripture

No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.

Questionary

- ? What does it mean to “serve” God? What does it mean to “serve” money?
- ? Why can the two not be “served” at the same time?

Matthew 6.³¹⁻³³— just scripture

Therefore take no thought, saying, “What shall we eat?” or, “What shall we drink?” or, “Wherewithal shall we be clothed?” (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.

Questionary

1. Jesus admonishes his disciples to “take no thought” concerning the most necessary temporal needs.
 - ? To your mind, what does it mean to “take no thought”?
 - ? How true are you to this admonition?
 - ? If another followed you about day after day for, say, a year, of what would they see you “taking thought” most often and seriously?

2. In regard to the most fundamental temporal needs, Jesus observes that “after all these things do the Gentiles seek.”
 - ? What is the importance and implication of this observation?
 - ? What do you think and feel at the thought that Jesus does not expect his disciples to be like or to be driven by the same priorities as everyone else?
 - ? How does Jesus’ admonition that we seek “first the kingdom of God” magnify this expectation?

Matthew 13.²²— just scripture

He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful.

Questionary

- ? How does the inappropriate “care of this world” manifest itself in an individual’s life?
- ? In a society’s habits and culture?
- ? What are the evidences that riches have deceived an individual? A Society?

Matthew 25.³⁴⁻³⁶— just scripture

Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, ‘Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me.

Questionary

- ? How do you feel about the “requirements” for inheriting “the kingdom” that Jesus outlines in today’s reading?
- ? How closely does our nation, with its policies, procedures, and laws, resemble a kingdom that could be said to have God as its exemplar and/or rulers?

Mark 10.²³⁻²⁷— just scripture

²³And Jesus looked round about, and saith unto his disciples, “How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!”

²⁴And the disciples were astonished at his words. But Jesus answereth again, and saith unto them, “Children, how hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God! ²⁵It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.”

²⁶And they were astonished out of measure, saying among themselves, “Who then can be saved?”

²⁷And Jesus looking upon them saith, “With men it is impossible, but not with God: for with God all things are possible.”

Questionary

1. Jesus warns, “How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!” When the disciples express their astonishment, Jesus responded with, “How hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God!”
? What is the difference between the two statements?

We might explain the difference in different ways.

- We might read the second statement as a clarification or even modification to the first as if Jesus is suggesting that, actually, what he meant to say and what he means is that one can “have” riches and enter into the kingdom as long as they do not “trust in” riches.
 - On the other hand, the second statement might be expanding on the first, indicating that “having” riches is pretty much the same thing as “trusting in” riches because the former is impossible without the second creeping in.
- ? Which of these two explanations for the difference in the two statements seems most likely to you? Why do you answer as you do?
 - ? How likely and common is it for those who “have” riches to not come to “trust in” their riches?
 - ? What does it mean to “trust in” riches, anyway?
2. After his second statement, Jesus goes on to say, “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.” There is no evidence that the small, security conscious “eye gate” was in existence at the time of Jesus. If it existed at all, it was of later invention. Therefore, many have considered the translation, “camel,” to be faulty. The Hebrew and Aramaic root, *gml*, can mean either “camel” or “rope,” depending on the vocalization of the root.
? How do you feel about Jesus’ statement that it is easier to thread a needle with a rope “than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God”?
 - ? How do you feel about the observation that this statement seems to include both those who “have” wealthy and those who “trust in” wealth?
 - ? Even if one accepts the traditional reading with the imagery of unloading the camel to enter the city, how many wealthy people shed, not bits and pieces of it, but all their wealth?
3. Twice we are told that the disciples were astonished by Jesus’ assertions concerning those with wealthy. The second time, they were “astonished out of measure” and asked, “Who then can be saved?” as if they felt that if the wealthy couldn’t enter the kingdom, no one could
? Why, do you think, were the disciples so astonished at Jesus’ assertions?
 - ? What does their astonishment tell you about the disciples’ feelings about wealth, the wealthy, and about the “spirituality” or “righteousness” of the wealthy?
 - ? How do you feel about the disciples’ apparent assumption that wealthy people were in shoe in to enter the kingdom of God?
 - ? To what degree do you find Jesus’ assertions surprising, and find yourself sharing the disciples’ positive attitude toward wealth, the wealthy, and spirituality/ righteousness?

4. The disciples seem to have concluded that if the wealthy could enter the kingdom, no one could. Jesus' reply was, "With men it is impossible, but not with God: for with God all things are possible."

? What does this suggest to you?

Some read it as if it said, "It is impossible for wealthy men to enter the kingdom without God's help, but with his help it is possible." Others have read it as Jesus' agreement with the disciples that no one was getting into the kingdom on their own. All needed God's superhuman assistance.

? How do you read it? Why?

Luke 1.⁴⁶⁻⁵⁶— just scripture

⁴⁶And Mary said,

“My soul doth magnify the Lord,

⁴⁷And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.

⁴⁸For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden:

for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.

⁴⁹For he that is mighty hath done to me great things;

and holy is his name.

⁵⁰And his mercy is on them that fear him

from generation to generation.

⁵¹He hath shewed strength with his arm;

he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.

⁵²He hath put down the mighty from their seats,

and exalted them of low degree.

⁵³He hath filled the hungry with good things;

and the rich he hath sent empty away.

⁵⁴He hath holpen his servant Israel,

in remembrance of his mercy;

⁵⁵As he spake to our fathers,

to Abraham, and to his seed for ever.”

⁵⁶And Mary abode with her about three months, and returned to her own house.

Questionary

Today’s reading represents the seventh of sixteen related to Luke’s introduction. After a four-verse preface to his work, Luke launched into the story he has to tell. Luke 1.⁵-2.⁵² can be read as a sort of introduction to his work. Luke does what most authors do in an introduction. He summarizes his work, his message, and what he hopes the reader will learn.

Luke’s introduction comes in the form of eight narratives, each accompanied by an “oracle.” By oracle, I mean “a divine announcement.” The first seven oracles come from the mouth of angels, men, and women—all inspired by the Holy Spirit of God. The eighth and final oracle comes from the very mouth of God Himself. Today’s reading contains the fourth oracle.

Today’s reading is called “Mary’s Magnificat.” In addition to being a passage we classify as a *Just Scripture*, it is also part of the traditional Christmas story that we retell year after year.

1. “Magnificat” means ‘to magnify’ or ‘exalt.’
 - ? What role does “magnification” play in Mary’s poem?
 - ? How does Mary “magnify” the Lord?
 - ? How does the Lord “magnify” Mary?
 - ? Who else is “magnified” in the poem?
 - ? How does the Lord “magnify” “them of low degree” and the “hungry”?
 - ? What impact does the Lord’s magnification of the low and hungry have on “the mighty” who govern and “the rich” who have everything a body could want?
2. In verses 50-54, Mary summarizes the work in which her son will engage during his ministry.
 - ? How would you summarize Mary’s insight into her son’s ministry and the results for which he will work?
 - ? How do you feel and what do you think when you contemplate that one of Jesus’ principle efforts will be to “remove the powerful from their thrones” and “remove all that the rich have”?
 - ? How does Jesus’ intentions toward the powerful and the rich relate to his intention to “scatter the proud in the imagination of their hearts”?

- ? What, do you think, do the hearts of the proud “imagine”?
- ? If we are to follow his example, minister as he ministers, and work for what he works, what would Mary’s Magnificat have you do?
- ? What will you do to be true to Jesus’ ministry and trying to accomplish his will?
- ? How is American Christianity doing as ministering as Jesus ministers?
- ? If it needs change or improvement, what can you do and say to work toward that change and improvement?

- ? How do you feel about the role reversals that Mary, mother of Jesus, describes in this passage?
- ? What did Jesus do during his earthly ministry to fulfil this aspect of his ministry?
- ? How does he continue to fulfil this aspect of his ministry from heaven?
- ? What do you think and feel about God when you consider the following superlative language: “Magnify the Lord,” “he that is *mighty*,” “done to me *great things*,” “he hath shewed *strength*,” “he hath...*exalted*,” “he hath *filled*”?
- ? What do you think and feel when you consider that this superlative language is aimed at a woman of “low estate,” “them of low degree,” and “the hungry,” i.e., vulnerable individuals and populations?
- ? What can you do to assist the Lord in the reversals his ministry intends and be true to this spirit of aid and comfort to the vulnerable?

Luke 3:7-14— just scripture

⁷Then said he to the multitude that came forth to be baptized of him,

“O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? ⁸Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance, and begin not to say within yourselves, ‘We have Abraham to our father:’ for I say unto you, That God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.

⁹And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: every tree therefore which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.”

¹⁰And the people asked him, saying, “What shall we do then?”

¹¹He answereth and saith unto them, “He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise.”

¹²Then came also publicans to be baptized, and said unto him, “Master, what shall we do?”

¹³And he said unto them, “Exact no more than that which is appointed you.”

¹⁴And the soldiers likewise demanded of him, saying, “And what shall we do?”

And he said unto them, “Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your wages.”

Questionary

1. Today’s reading is taken from Luke’s account of John the Baptist’s ministry and the message of his ministry. I have placed this read, ponder, pray exercise under the category of “Just Scripture”— scriptures that focus on the attributes of just and unjust individuals and societies.
 - ? After reading and pondering today’s reading, how and why is it appropriate to the “Just Scripture” category?
 - ? What is the common element in John’s counsel to common people, tax collectors (read: government employees), and soldiers, or military personnel?
2. John’s counsel to military personnel is “Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your wages.”
 - ? What is the relationship between doing violence and being discontent with wages and serving as a false witness?
Soldiers involved in armed conflict often resort to violence against non-combatants by stealing and plundering in order to enhance their material wealth. Though they were in no way involved or familiar with court cases, Roman soldiers were often hired to provide perjured testimony for one party or the other—the defense or the plaintiff. We have seen both of these criminal behaviors in modern warfare.
 - ? How would being content with one’s wages serve to diminish unjust behaviors of the sort John discusses?
 - ? What was the tax collector’s objective in “exacting more than that which was appointed”?
3. Calling them “vipers,” John warns his audiences to “flee from the wrath to come”?
 - ? What role do economic injustices play in bringing about “the wrath to come”?
4. Calling them “vipers,” John encourages his audiences to “bring forth fruits worthy of repentance”?
 - ? How does economic injustice and inequality impact one’s ability to repent and be forgiven?
 - ? How do the following passages relate to and support John’s main focus?

“And now, for the sake of these things which I have spoken unto you—that is, for the sake of retaining a remission of your sins from day to day, that ye may walk guiltless before God—I would that ye should impart of your substance to the poor, every man according to that which he hath, such as feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and administering to their relief, both spiritually and temporally, according to their wants” (Mosiah 4:26).

“And now behold, my beloved brethren, I say unto you, do not suppose that this is all; for after ye have done all these things, if ye turn away the needy, and the naked, and visit not the sick and afflicted, and impart of your substance, if ye have, to those who stand in need—I say unto you, if ye do not any of these things, behold, your prayer is vain, and availeth you nothing, and ye are as hypocrites who do deny the faith. Therefore, if ye do not remember to be charitable, ye are as dross, which the refiners do cast out, (it being of no worth) and is trodden under foot of men” (Alma 34.²⁸⁻²⁹).

- ? How do you feel and what do you think when you consider John’s focus on economic justice when asked about avoiding “wrath to come” and “bringing forth fruits worthy of repentance”?
- ? How repentant is an individual who engages in economic injustice him or herself and countenances economic injustice by the surrounding society and government?
- ? What can you do from an economic perspective to avoid “the wrath to come” and “bringing forth fruits commensurate with repentance”?
- ? After John encourages people to avoid being “hewn down, and cast into the fire” by “bringing forth good fruit,” the people ask what they are to do to fulfill his encouragement. Three groups, three answers. What is his answer to each group?
- ? What is the significance that in every case, his answer is economic?
- ? What does this suggest about the centrality of economics and materialism in our spiritual lives?

Luke 6.²⁰⁻²⁶ — just scripture

²⁰Blessed be ye poor: for yours is the kingdom of God.

²¹Blessed are ye that hunger now: for ye shall be filled.

Blessed are ye that weep now: for ye shall laugh.

²²Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man's sake.

²³Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy: for, behold, your reward is great in heaven: for in the like manner did their fathers unto the prophets.

²⁴But woe unto you that are rich! for ye have received your consolation.

²⁵Woe unto you that are full! for ye shall hunger.”

Woe unto you that laugh now! for ye shall mourn and weep.

²⁶Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you!

For so did their fathers to the false prophets.

Questionary

1. We are familiar with Matthew's version,

“Blessed are the poor in spirit....”

? How do you feel about Luke's more temporal imagining of Jesus' statement compared to Matthew's more seeming “spiritual” imagining?

? With which do you relate Most? Why?

? How does Luke's contrast add weight to Luke's temporal imagining?

Blessed be ye poor: for yours is the kingdom of God.

Vs.

But woe unto you that are rich!

? How do the other contrasts lend weight to the temporal imagining?

Blessed are ye that hunger now...

Vs.

Woe unto you that are full!

Blessed are ye that weep now...

Vs.

Woe unto you that laugh now!

2. In Luke's imagining of Jesus' statement the poor are “consoled” (see verse 24's contrast) by inheriting “the kingdom of God.”

? What is meant by “the kingdom of God” and how is it a consolation to the poor?

Certainly we can think of “the kingdom of God” in terms of glory and everlasting life. However...

? Can we also think of “the kingdom of God” has something inherited in mortality as well?

? How would you feel about imagining “the kingdom of God” as that state in which God honors, values, and enfranchises the poor, as opposed to the kingdoms of this world that dishonor, devalue, and disenfranchise the poor.

3. Consider Luke's portrait of the poor as hungry and inclined to sorrow, and the portrait of the rich as full and happy.

? How do you feel about these portraits?

4. Mary had this insight into the nature and purpose of her son's, Jesus, ministry.

“He hath put down the mighty from their seats,
and exalted them of a low degree.

He hath filled the hungry with good things;
and the rich he hath sent empty away” (Luke 1.⁵²⁻⁵³).

- ? How does this confirm and enhance Luke’s imagining of Jesus’ statements found in today’s reading?
- ? Which word would most accurately describe your feelings about the promise of consolation made to the poor?

Pleased
Happy
Confused
Skeptical
Resistant

- ? Why do you answer as you do?
- ? What feelings do you have when you consider God’s intent to recompense the poor/hungry for their earthly sufferings?
- ? What part do/can you play in this work of God?
- ? How do the more advantaged “separate [the poor] from their company,” and “reproach” them?
- ? What are your impressions when you compare and contrast Luke’s version of the Beatitudes with Matthew’s better-known version?
- ? How do the parallel woes, absent in Matthew, alter or enhance your understanding of these Beatitudes?
- ? Some chaff at Luke’s much more “physical” and “temporal” thoughts about real challenges faced in this life as opposed to the more “spiritual” approach Matthew took?
- ? How about you?

Luke 18.²²⁻²⁷— just scripture

Now when Jesus heard these things, he said unto him, “Yet lackest thou one thing: sell all that thou hast, and distribute unto the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow me.’

And when he heard this, he was very sorrowful: for he was very rich.

And when Jesus saw that he was very sorrowful, he said, “How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God! For it is easier for a camel to go through a needle’s eye, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.”

And they that heard it said, “Who then can be saved?”

And he said, “The things which are impossible with men are possible with God.”

Questionary

Today’s reading represents the Savior’s response to the nobleman who wished to know what he needed to do to enter heaven as well as the Savior’s reaction to the man’s failure to comply with the requirements.

- ? How hard is it to thread a needle with a rope (this imagery seems more likely than the camel and the eye)?
- ? Camel or rope, both are impossible. How do you feel about the Savior’s assertion?
- ? Like the disciples, you may be somewhat surprised, even disturbed by Jesus’s assertion. Why be surprised to learn that riches change one’s behavior, inhibit one’s willingness and ability to follow God’s values, and make it unlikely that one will enter the kingdom of heaven?
- ? What false doctrines will conflict and oppose Jesus’ assertion?
- ? Why are such conflicting doctrines so attractive and so damning?

Acts 2.⁴⁴⁻⁴⁵— just scripture

And all that believed were together, and had all things common; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need.

Questionary

- ? Today, I would suggest that the reader spend a little time examining the Law of Consecration as it is heavily discussed in the Doctrine and Covenants.

Acts 17.²⁴⁻²⁹— just scripture

²⁴God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; ²⁵neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; ²⁶and hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; ²⁷that they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us: ²⁸for in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, 'For we are also his offspring.' ²⁹Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device.

Questionary

1. Today's reading is a portion of a longer discourse that Paul delivered on Athens, Greece's "Mars Hill." There is much that could be mined from this discourse, but, today, we want to focus on three phrases found in it.
 - "He [God] is Lord of heaven and earth"
 - God "hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth."
 - "We are the offspring of God"
 - ? How does Paul's view of the world compare to yours?
 - ? Can you—and if you can, how can you—square these three truths spoken by the apostle Paul with the current "Put America First" doctrine?
 - ? How, do you suppose, God, Father of all mankind, feels about this "America First" doctrine?
 - ? What is suggested by, and how do you feel about my suggesting that this economic and military ideology of "America First" is a "doctrine"?
 - ? If you cannot square this modern doctrine with those taught by Paul, what is your responsibility to teach and live Paul's doctrine and resist the modern doctrine?
 - ? What will you do?
-
- ? As you contemplate the brotherhood of all mankind, be they of whatever nationality or race, what do you suppose God's feelings are toward nationalism, especially when nationalism has always been a source of distrust and hatred, violence, war, and death?

1corinthians 12.²⁶— just scripture

And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it.

Questionary

1. In today's passage, Paul speaks of the interconnectedness or intersectionality of church members.
 - ? How do you feel about being connected so intimately to others, both the "weak" and the "strong"?
 - ? How would you feel if we suggested that this interconnectedness is not limited to members of the Church but to every citizen of your nation and even every inhabitant of the planet?
 - ? How is this principle applied to society at large?
 - ? Is society any more healthy than its most vulnerable members?
 - ? How are you impacted by the successes of others?
 - ? Does their success diminish you in any way?
 - ? Can you rejoice in the advancement of others?

Philippians 2.⁴— just scripture

Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.

Questionary

- ? What do you do to be true to this Pauline admonition?
- ? What does our society do to encourage this type of thinking and behavior?
- ? What are the consequences of not giving heed to this counsel?

2thessalonians 2.³⁻⁴— just scripture

Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God.

Questionary

- ? Just one simple question... “How is the current American Emperor, Caligula as I call him, not the latest manifestation of Christian apostasy as its American adherents give him entrance to and allegiance of their heart?

1timothy 6.⁵⁻⁸— just scripture

⁵Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself. ⁶But godliness with contentment is great gain. ⁷For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. ⁸And having food and raiment let us be therewith content.

Questionary

1. Any number of evils might be imagined when considering “men of corrupt minds” and men “destitute of the truth. However, Paul has one evil and one untruth in particular in mind.
 - ? What is that untruth?
 - ? What is the problem in supposing that “godliness” is a means to financial success?
 - ? How does religion and the broader society teach the untruth that one’s relationship to God is evidenced by one’s economic status?
 - ? How would one “withdraw” themselves from those who teach, by word or action, that “gain is godliness”?

2. In verse six, Paul comes back to the idea of “gain.”
 - ? What is the nature of that gain?
 - ? what does it mean to be content?
 - ? What is the relationship between “godliness” and “contentment,” especially as that contentment relates to economic circumstances?
 - ? What does economic “discontentment” look like?
 - ? How “content” are you?
 - ? How “content” is our society? Is “contentment” in economic circumstances encouraged?
 - ? What does Paul’s warning here suggest about the relationship between discontent and one’s relationship with God?

- ? How realistic do you find Paul to be in his admonition that we be content with “food and raiment”?
- ? What do “food and raiment” represent in today’s life?
- ? How consistent with this admonition are you?

1 Timothy 6.⁹⁻¹¹— just scripture

⁹But they that will be rich fall into temptation and snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. ¹⁰For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. ¹¹But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness.

Questionary

1. In verses 5-8, Paul encourages the saints to be content in their economic lives if they can do no more than provide themselves with the most basic of life's necessities. In today's reading, Paul explores the evils that enter one's life when they discontent with life's necessities and seek to be "rich."
 - ? What are those evils?
 - ? What, do you think, is the nature of the "temptations and snares" that riches bring?
 - ? What "foolish and hurtful lusts" inflict the wealthy?
 - ? When you think of "destruction and perdition" what comes to your mind?
 - ? How does material wealth "pierce [the rich] with many sorrows?"
 - ? How and why do the "un-wealthy avoid these evils?"
 - ? To what degree have you fallen prey to such evils? Consider, for example, "foolish and hurtful lusts"?
2. Paul says that "the love of money is the root of all evil."
 - ? What is the difference between saying that "the love of money is the root of all evil" or "money is the root of all evil?"
 - ? Who doesn't love money?
 - ? In light of everything that has proceeded in 5-9, how would you feel about understanding "the love of money" as the desire for wealth above that needed for the necessities of life?
 - ? Think about the metaphor of a tree's root system. A root system passes all water and nutrients to the trunk, branches, leaves, and fruit of the tree. Take a few minutes to consider how the "love of money" feeds every other evil?
 - ? What societal evils get their strength from rampant materialism?
3. Paul encourages the saints to pursue "righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness" with the same energy and enthusiasm as the world pursues money.
 - ? When you consider the time, energy, and zealotry you spend in the pursuit of "righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness" how does it compare to the time, energy, and zealotry you spend seeking "money"?
 - ? How about society? To what degree does it seek "righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness"? To what degree money?
 - ? What evidence do you see in your society that confirms the prophetic warning that the wealth brings temptations, and acts as a snare?
 - ? According to today's reading, what is the "man [or woman] of God to "flee"?"
 - ? What are examples of "foolish and hurtful lusts"?

1timothy 6.¹⁷⁻¹⁹— just scripture

Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate; laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.

Questionary

- ? What does a “readiness to distribute” one’s economic benefits to others look like?
- ? We may ask this question of the private individual, but we can also ask it of public citizen. How “readily” do you as a citizen seek public policy that distributes assistance to the less advantaged?
- ? How “readily” does American culture and legislative priorities distribute to the less advantaged?

Hebrews 13.¹⁻²— just scripture

Let brotherly love continue. Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.

Questionary

1. The author of Hebrews admonishes, “Be not forgetful to entertain strangers.”
? What is meant by strangers?
2. The reference to entertaining angels unawares almost certainly refers to Abraham’s entertaining of the “three men” who visited him to inform him that Sarah would bear a child. However, “strangers” in the scripture often means immigrants, migrants, refugees, etc.
? How do we “entertain” immigrants, migrants, refugees, etc.?
? How do immigrants, migrants, refugees, etc., serve as “angels” who might bring a message of or from God?
? How does the way we “entertain” or not entertain “strangers” serve to as revelation concerning our individual and societal character?
? What does our willingness to accept or our insistence on denying “strangers” reveal about us individually and societally?
3. Before his admonition about “strangers,” Hebrew’s author admonishes, “Let brotherly love continue.”
? How does this relate to the immigrant, migrant, or refugee?

In lamenting the wickedness of those who lived at the time of the flood, God said, “And unto thy brethren have I said, and also given commandment, that they should love one another, and that they should choose me, their Father; *but behold, they are without affection, and they hate their own blood...*” (Moses 7.³³).

- ? Are immigrants, migrants, and refugees our “own blood”? Why do you answer as you do?
- ? What does the following passage contribute to our understanding of the “stranger” as our “own blood.”
“[God] hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth” (Acts 17.²⁶).
- ? Why is it so common throughout history and today for individuals to be suspicious of, fear, and poorly treat foreigners? What is it about the foreigner and/or the resident that creates this sort of fearful and spiteful environment?
- ? How is God likely to feel about the sort of nationalism in which individuals and societies show partiality for those of their own nation or society over those of others? Why do you answer as you do?

James 1.²⁷— just scripture

Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and [thus] to keep himself unspotted from the world.

Questionary

1. James speaks of religion that is “pure” and “undefiled” “*before* God and the Father.”
? What is the significance of the “before God”?
2. James mentions “fatherless and widows” as vulnerable populations that “pure” and “undefiled” religion serves.
? What other vulnerable populations might he have mentioned?
3. James speaks of being “unspotted from the world”?
? How does taking care of vulnerable people keep one “unspotted from the world”?
? How is the opposite true: that the world is “spotted” because it does not care for the vulnerable?
? What can and do you do to care for the vulnerable around you?
? What can and do you do to see that your society is true to James’ definition of “pure” and “undefiled” religion?
? How do you feel about and what we to make of individuals who personally try to engage in “pure” and “undefiled” religion, but then do not support society doing so through legislation and government action—local, state, and federal?

james 2.¹⁻⁵— just scripture

My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons. For if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment; and ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool: are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts? Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him?

Questionary

1. The type of “respect of persons” that is discussed in today’s reading is often based upon the false doctrines of the “prosperity gospel.”
 - ? What is the “prosperity gospel” and what is it about the doctrine that is so tempting?
 - ? How is the “respect of persons...” which not only includes showing more private and personal respect toward the “successful” than to the “unsuccessful,” but also supporting public policy that benefits the rich over the poor... how is this a denial of “faith of our Lord Jesus Christ”?

James 4.²— just scripture

Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not.....

Questionary

- ? In addition to teaching that “fighting and warring” never achieve their unrighteous material ends, what does this passage suggest about the true cause of “fighting and warring”?
- ? How do you feel and what do you learn when you see “lust” spoken of in the same breath as “killing,” “fighting,” and “warring”?

James 5.¹⁻⁶— just scripture

¹Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you. ²Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten. ³Your gold and silver is cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days.

⁴Behold, the hire of the labourers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth: and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of sabaoth.

⁵Ye have lived in pleasure on the earth, and been wanton; ye have nourished your hearts, as in a day of slaughter. ⁶Ye have condemned and killed the just; and he doth not [cannot] resist you.

Questionary

1. James speaks of employers who fraudulently refuse to respect the labor and pay the deserved wage of their employees.
 - ? How do you feel and what do you think when you contemplate that the wealthy became wealthy and “lived in pleasure on the earth” through wickedness not righteousness?
 - ? What role, do you suppose, did their refusal to pay laborers a “living wage” play in their becoming rich?
 - ? How applicable to today are James’ observation?
2. James characterizes the employers’ refusal to respect the labor and pay the deserved wage of their employees as “condemning and killing the just.”
 - ? How do you feel about this? Why is such language appropriate and far from being hyperbolic?
3. In his attempt to capture the extreme nature of the wealthy’s sins, James uses some very intense language.
 - ? What intense language do you find?
 - ? How do you feel about the following intense language?
 - The wealthy’s “riches are *corrupt*.”
 - The wealthy’s “garments are *moth-eaten*.”
 - The wealthy’s “gold and silver is *cankered*.”
 - The wealthy have “been *wanton*.”
 - The wealthy’s attitudes and actions are like “a *day of slaughter*.”
 - The wealthy’s ill-gotten gains “shall *eat your flesh as it were fire*.”
 - The wealthy will “*weep and howl*” for their “*miseries*.”
 - ? Do you feel that this intensity is appropriate to the sin?
4. James promises that the pain and insecurity that the poor experience at the hands of the wealthy enters “into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth.”
 - ? How do you feel about this? Does it bring you a sense of satisfaction or leave you confused and uncertain?
 - ? Why do you think and feel about the fact that James speaks of no “exceptions” and offers no “caveats” to his indictment of the rich?

1 John 2.¹⁵⁻¹⁷— just scripture

¹⁵Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. ¹⁶For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. ¹⁷And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.

Questionary

1. John admonishes the saints to “love not the world, neither the things that are in the world.”
 - ? What is meant by “the world”?
 - ? What type of things “in the world” are to be avoided?
2. In Greek, “lust” is an “uncontrolled,” not uncontrollable desire.
 - ? What uncontrolled desires does the “flesh” find offered in the surrounding world?
 - ? What uncontrolled desires do the “eyes” see in the surrounding world?
3. One of the things that is “of the world” and opposed to “the Father” is “the pride of life.”
 - ? What is “the pride of life”?

1 John 3.¹⁷— just scripture

But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?

Questionary

1. John speaks of those who “shutteth up his bowels of compassion.”
 - ? What does it mean to you to “shutteth up... bowels of compassion”?
 - ? How do your actions and your sentiments stack up against this apostolic assertion?
 - ? How can this apostolic assertion be applied to society at large and to how one nation treats another?
 - ? How does this apostolic assertion relate to popular notions of “My nation before other nations” as is found in an “America First” slogan?

Revelation 18.¹⁻³— just scripture

¹And after these things I saw another angel come down from heaven, having great power; and the earth was lightened with his glory. ²And he cried mightily with a strong voice, saying,

“Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen,
and is become the habitation of devils,
and the hold of every foul spirit,
and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird.

³For all nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication,
and the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her,
and the merchants of the earth are waxed rich through the abundance of her delicacies.”

Questionary

Today’s reading from the 18th chapter of Revelation is the first of five readings we will take from that chapter. Chapter 18 is a series, numbering seven, of what I call “laments” or “taunts” concerning the fall of Babylon—its cooperating individuals, institutions, and kingdoms of this world. Today’s reading from verses 1-3 would more accurately be thought of as a “taunt” than a “lament” as the angel who utters these words is surely not sorry to see the collapse of evil.

1. In the previous chapter, John sees a “great whore.” Her name is “Mystery, BABYLONG THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS, AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.” In today’s reading, the revelator speaks twice of “fornication.” It is used, of course, metaphorically of all sorts of perversion and unfaithfulness.
 - ? How do you feel about the revelator’s resort to such extreme and explicit language?
 - ? Do you find it a bit offensive?
 - ? How is it an appropriate metaphor of evil?
2. Consider each of the following phrases.
 - “Nations have drunk of the wine...”
 - “Kings... have committed fornication...”
 - “Merchants... are waxed rich through the abundance of her delicacies...”
 - ? How does each metaphorical phrase act as an interpretive key to the others?
 - ? How, for example, is the “fornication of kings,” related to the “merchants’ wealth,” and visa versa?
 - ? How, if at all, does today’s reading apply to modern populations, institutions, and nations?
 - ? How do you feel about the Revelator’s contention that the “merchants of the earth” find financial success through associations that are compared with whorish practices?
3. In the following readings from Revelation 18, note any repetition of individuals, classes, or institutions.

Revelation 18.⁴⁻⁸— just scripture

And I heard another voice from heaven, saying,
“Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins,
and that ye receive not of her plagues.
For her sins have reached unto heaven,
and God hath remembered her iniquities.
Reward her even as she rewarded you,
and double unto her double according to her works:
in the cup which she hath filled fill to her double.
How much she hath glorified herself, and lived deliciously,
so much torment and sorrow give her:
for she saith in her heart, ‘I sit a queen, and am no widow,
and shall see no sorrow.’
Therefore shall her plagues come in one day,
death, and mourning, and famine;
and she shall be utterly burned with fire:
for strong is the Lord God who judgeth her.”

Questionary

Today’s reading from Revelation 18 is our second in a series of five. It represents our second “taunt.”

1. I have often said that the Book of Revelation could not exist without the Old Testament. Old Testament language and imagery is everywhere, in nearly every single verse. Consider the following: the saints are warned to leave Babylon “that ye receive not of her plagues.”
 - ? When you read this, does an Old Testament narrative come easily to mind?
 - ? If Babylon is going to be struck by famines (the famines are mentioned earlier in the book and match very closely those inflicted upon Egypt) what is the Revelator telling you about the sins/crimes of Babylon—or latter-day societies?
 - ? What was ancient Egypt’s sin/crime?
 - ? How do modern day institutions and governments “enslave” populations for their own economic gain—which was, of course, what ancient Egypt was doing in enslaving the Israelites?
2. Babylon—modern-day populations, institutions, and governments—“glorified herself, and lived deliciously.”
 - ? How is this accomplished? How did ancient Egypt manage to “live deliciously”?
3. Babylon, like Egypt before her, boasts, “I sit a queen, and am no widow, and shall see no sorrow.”
 - ? Of what does Babylon boast here?
 - ? What grounds, do you suppose, does Babylon see for possessing such false security?
 - ? What propagandistic language among modern day populations, institutions, and governments are akin to this false Babylonian boast?

Revelation 18.^{9-17a}— just scripture

⁹And the kings of the earth, who have committed fornication and lived deliciously with her, shall bewail her, and lament for her, when they shall see the smoke of her burning, ¹⁰standing afar off for the fear of her torment, saying,

Alas, alas, that great city Babylon, that mighty city!
for in one hour is thy judgment come.”

¹¹And the merchants of the earth shall weep and mourn over her; for no man buyeth their merchandise any more: ¹²The merchandise of gold, and silver, and precious stones, and of pearls, and fine linen, and purple, and silk, and scarlet, and all thyine wood, and all manner vessels of ivory, and all manner vessels of most precious wood, and of brass, and iron, and marble, ¹³and cinnamon, and odours, and ointments, and frankincense, and wine, and oil, and fine flour, and wheat, and beasts, and sheep, and horses, and chariots, and slaves, and souls of men. ¹⁴And the fruits that thy soul lusted after are departed from thee, and all things which were dainty and goodly are departed from thee, and thou shalt find them no more at all. ¹⁵The merchants of these things, which were made rich by her, shall stand afar off for the fear of her torment, weeping and wailing, ¹⁶And saying,

“Alas, alas, that great city, that was clothed in fine linen, and purple, and scarlet,
and decked with gold, and precious stones, and pearls!
¹⁷For in one hour so great riches is come to nought.”

Questionary

Today’s reading is our third in a series of five readings from the eighteenth chapter of Revelations. It contains two laments.

1. In our first reading from Revelation 18 (verses 1-3), we suggested that you be on the look out for individuals, classes, or institutions that are repeated.
 - ? Do you find mention of any individuals, classes, or institutions in today’s reading that were mentioned previously in Revelation 18?
 - ? Why, do you think, they are “targeted” by the Revelator?
2. The Revelator might have simply said of the merchants: “no man buyeth their merchandise any more.” But he didn’t. He added a long list of twenty-eight items. Go back and reread the itemized list in verses 12-13.
 - ? Why do you think he “used ink” to itemize such a list?
 - ? What is the effect or impact of the list? What do you think and feel as you read it?
 - ? Of what would such an itemized and materialist list be constituted if the Revelator were writing today?
3. The merchants of Babylon were “made rich by her.” We have already seen that Babylon “prospered,” as Egypt had, through economic oppression of vulnerable people.
 - ? How does Babylon—modern day individuals, classes, institutions, and governments—utilize economic policies today that oppress the vulnerable and “enrich its merchants”?
 - ? What does the attire of Babylon—“fine linen, and purple, and scarlet... gold, and precious stones, and pearls” suggest about her priorities and values?
4. In today’s reading, individuals involved in a “global” economy lament its collapse.
 - ? What do you think when you hear them lament, “for in one hour so great riches is come to nought”?
 - ? What does it tell you about the actual value of temporal “riches”?
 - ? What are your thoughts and feelings as you read this, especially in light of the current economic situation?
 - ? How repentant do those who lament the collapse of their comfortable and profitable lifestyle sound to you? How about today?

- ? Sumaria. Assyria. Babylon. Egypt. Persia. Greece. Rome.... These all fell and disappeared for the world stage. Do you believe that modern national and global economies could collapse as did those listed? Why do you answer as you do?
- ? What role, if any, do you think “lust” for the material things of the world would play in any collapse?

Revelation 18.^{17b-20}— just scripture

^{17b}And every shipmaster, and all the company in ships, and sailors, and as many as trade by sea, stood afar off, ¹⁸and cried when they saw the smoke of her burning, saying,

“What city is like unto this great city!”

¹⁹And they cast dust on their heads, and cried, weeping and wailing, saying,

“Alas, alas, that great city, wherein were made rich
all that had ships in the sea by reason of her costliness!
For in one hour is she made desolate.

²⁰Rejoice over her, thou heaven,
and ye holy apostles and prophets;
for God hath avenged you on her.”

Questionary

Today’s reading is the fourth of five readings from Revelation 18. In it, we find our fifth and sixth laments of the chapter.

- ? What is the significance of “ships,” “shipmasters,” “ship companies,” “sailors” found in today’s reading?
- 1. Obviously, the “ships” etc., do not represent vessels, but financial/trading institutions.
 - ? Why, in addressing the fall of Babylon, is there such an emphasis on the economy of Babylon?
 - ? What does this suggest concerning latter-day financial institutions?
- 2. The Revelator observes “heaven,” “apostles,” and “prophets,” rejoicing over the demise of Babylon and its financial institutions.
 - ? Honestly, how will you feel about the collapse of Babylon’s financial institutions?
 - ? Will you be one who laments their collapse, or one who rejoices their demise with heaven, apostles, and prophets?

Revelation 18.²¹⁻²⁴— just scripture

²¹And a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone, and cast it into the sea, saying,

“Thus with violence shall that great city Babylon be thrown down,
and shall be found no more at all.

²²And the voice of harpers, and musicians, and of pipers, and trumpeters,
shall be heard no more at all in thee;
and no craftsman, of whatsoever craft he be,
shall be found any more in thee;
and the sound of a millstone
shall be heard no more at all in thee;

²³And the light of a candle
shall shine no more at all in thee;
and the voice of the bridegroom and of the bride
shall be heard no more at all in thee:
for thy merchants were the great men of the earth;
for by thy sorceries were all nations deceived.

²⁴And in her was found the blood of prophets, and of saints,
and of all that were slain upon the earth.”

Questionary

1. Today’s reading from Revelation 18 is the last of five readings. We have previously suggested that the reader look for a repetitious mention of a particular class.
 - ? Do you see such repetition?
 - ? What is the significance of the repetitious mention of “merchants”?
 - ? What role do they play in the establishment and maintenance of Babylon?
 - ? What is the relationship between the “merchants” and “sorceries”?
 - ? What is the significance of the silencing of “harpers,” “musicians,” “pipers,” and “trumpeters”?
 - ? What is the significance of the silencing of “millstone”?
 - ? What is the significance of blaming Babylon for all earthly violence?
- ? After completing the 18th chapter, what are your impressions?
- ? What principles have you learned from this chapter?