

These comments present one interpretation of today's readings; others may be possible. Comments are best read with the readings.

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Sirach 27:4-7

NRSV

The author, Jesus ben Sira, makes a number of observations regarding dangers to integrity and friendship, in 26:19-27:21, probably based on his personal experience. Commercial activities can cause one to sin. A “stake” (27:2) is “driven firmly” to stabilize a structure.

A proper respect for God is required to avoid sin (27:3); to keep the business person honest. 27:4-8 tells us that what a person says can reveal his integrity (or lack of it). Sira gives three examples. After wheat has been cut down, it is shaken in a “sieve” (27:4). Shaking it leaves behind the chaff (“refuse”). In the same way “a person’s faults” are “revealed when he speaks”. So hear out a speaker to assess his degree of honesty (27:7).

Pursuing “justice” (27:8) will be rewarded. 27:9 is a variant of *birds of a feather flock together*. Those who are honest will associate with others who are, and those who are dishonest with those who are not (27:10). The “godly” (27:11) are consistent, while a “fool” is inconsistent. Don’t waste your time with “stupid people” (27:12). 27:16-21 advise that revealing something told you in confidence has repercussions: friendships will cease, and cannot be restored.

Psalms 92:1-4, 11-14

NRSV

This is a psalm of thanksgiving in which an individual contrasts the fate of those who trust in God with those who do not. He begins by rejoicing in morning and evening worship which is accompanied by musical instruments.

In vv. 5-11 he contrasts his experience with the fate of those who shun God’s ways: they are dull-witted and “stupid” (v. 6), but he is perceptive; they “sprout like grass” (v. 7), but “are doomed”, i.e. have no access to God; God has made him strong and powerful (“my horn”, v. 10, a symbol of strength and power); he has seen “the downfall” (v. 11) of his enemies.

The “righteous” are rewarded: they are prosperous (“flourish”, v. 12) and are still in good health “in old age” (v. 14). This shows that God is just and dependable (“my rock”, v. 15).

1 Corinthians 15:51-58

NRSV

Paul has written that neither the living nor those who have died can take part in the kingdom of God as they are. “We will not all die” but “we all will be changed”, we will all have new spiritual bodies.

The “mystery” (v. 51) is a secret truth, (revealed to and through Paul), about what will happen at the End, at the “trumpet” call expected to accompany it. Those who

had died had perishable (decaying) bodies. Becoming immortal, they will no longer be subject to the power of death. (Some translations have *corruptible* for “perishable” (vv. 50-54) and *incorruptible* for “imperishable”. While alive, we do tend to sin, so we are corruptible.)

Being then immortal, the prophecy that “‘Death has been swallowed up in victory’” (v. 54, perhaps Paul’s rendering of Isaiah 25:8) will be fulfilled. Note “we” in v. 52: Paul expects to still be alive when the End comes. The “sting” (v. 55) is that of the serpent. Sin has been overcome by Christ’s death on the Cross, so can no longer harm Christians. God gives us the “victory” (v. 57) over sin, and hereafter over death.

Paul ends by encouraging his “beloved” (v. 58) to be “steadfast”, not being shaken by false teaching (“immovable”), doing their very best in spreading the good news, because Christ has already won “the victory” (v. 57) for us. So being Christians (“in the Lord”, v. 58) they know that their “labour is not in vain”.

Luke 6:39-49

NRSV

This reading is like the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew, but with a different audience, and different intent. Jesus is speaking to a “great crowd” of his followers and a “multitude” of people some of whom have travelled far to hear him. They include both Jews and Gentiles.

Jesus’ preaching has a distinctly Christian flavour, for example “love your enemies ...” in v. 35. In v. 39 “a blind person” is one whose eyes are yet to be opened by Jesus’ teaching. In v. 40, “disciple” means *learner*, about the faith.

Vv. 41-42 indulge in hyperbole: focus on your major failures (“log”) rather than quibbling about minor failures (“speck”) in others. The Greek word translated as “hypocrite” (v. 42) originally meant *actor*; here it may mean one who is pitifully deceived about his own condition.

In vv. 43-45 Jesus says that the surest way of knowing the inner condition of a person is their outward manner of life, what they say, but just calling Jesus Lord is insufficient: obey his instructions; build your lives on effective implementation of his teachings. Act on them! (v. 47)

Vv. 48-49 are also in Matthew 7:24-27, part of the Sermon on the Mount. There the hearers are Palestinian, so this parable would make sense: the bedrock is close to the surface in Palestine so building a solid foundation was possible, and sensible, so the Spring and Autumn rains would not carry away the house. But here in Luke, many hearers were from elsewhere, places where the overburden too thick too dig through and/or rain is a rarity.