

# The Gospel of Matthew

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## The Gospel of Matthew

### Matthew 1:1-17

1 The record of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham: 2 Abraham was the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers. 3 Judah was the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, Perez was the father of Hezron, and Hezron the father of Ram. 4 Ram was the father of Amminadab, Amminadab the father of Nahshon, and Nahshon the father of Salmon. 5 Salmon was the father of Boaz by Rahab, Boaz was the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse. 6 Jesse was the father of David the king. David was the father of Solomon by Bathsheba who had been the wife of Uriah. 7 Solomon was the father of Rehoboam, Rehoboam the father of Abijah, and Abijah the father of Asa. 8 Asa was the father of Jehoshaphat, Jehoshaphat the father of Joram, and Joram the father of Uzziah. 9 Uzziah was the father of Jotham, Jotham the father of Ahaz, and Ahaz the father of Hezekiah. 10 Hezekiah was the father of Manasseh, Manasseh the father of Amon, and Amon the father of Josiah. 11 Josiah became the father of Jeconiah and his brothers, at the time of the deportation to Babylon. 12 After the deportation to Babylon: Jeconiah became the father of Shealtiel, and Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel. 13 Zerubbabel was the father of Abihud, Abihud the father of Eliakim, and Eliakim the father of Azor. 14 Azor was the father of Zadok, Zadok the father of Achim, and Achim the father of Eliud. 15 Eliud was the father of Eleazar, Eleazar the father of Matthan, and Matthan the father of Jacob. 16 Jacob was the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, by whom Jesus was born, who is called the Messiah. 17 So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations; from David to the deportation to Babylon, fourteen generations; and from the deportation to Babylon to the Messiah, fourteen generations.

When you read the gospel of Matthew it becomes evident that Matthew was writing for a Jewish audience. His emphasis on the fulfillment of prophetic scripture regarding the Messiah is a powerful testimony to the Jews regarding the credentials of Jesus Christ. Here at the beginning of the book we see his emphasis on the Jewish lineage of Jesus and the fulfillment of the promises of God in that lineage.

Matthew begins with “the record of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah”. The word translated “record” is *biblos* – a scroll or book, and “genealogy” is *genesis* – origin or birth. The King James translates it, “The book of the generation of Jesus Christ.” Matthew says he is giving us the record of the origin of the Messiah, Jesus. He traces out the line of Jesus from Abraham through David down to Jesus. He takes it for granted that Jesus is the Messiah, the Christ, the anointed One, the King, the son of David, the son of Abraham. You might say, “Well, that’s a matter of faith – that’s what Matthew believed”, and you would be right. The belief that Jesus is the promised Messiah is a matter of faith, and Matthew will go on throughout the book to present the evidence that supports the thesis that this is who Jesus is.

The whole of Christianity is built upon this issue of the uniqueness of Jesus. The thesis of the New Testament is just this – that Jesus is the Christ the Messiah, God incarnate. He was conceived of the Holy Spirit, lived a perfect life, performed miracles, wonders and signs, taught as no man has ever taught, died as a sacrifice on the cross for the sins of mankind, and rose bodily from the dead, having achieved victory over sin and death. It is all-important to understand just who Jesus really is. He indeed is the most important and unique man in all history.

I don't want to say too much about the genealogy in verses 2-16, as much has been written about it by others. There are a couple of difficulties with it we must acknowledge. The first and most obvious difficulty is that it diverges from the genealogy in Luke 3:23-38. The lists diverge from one another after David. Some have explained the differences between these two genealogies by saying that one is the line of Joseph and the other is the line of Mary. It is widely thought that the list in Matthew traces the line of Joseph while Luke traces the line of Mary, and that the "Eli" mentioned in Luke is the Father-In-Law of Joseph, as it was customary to list only men in the genealogies. Here's a perspective on the issue from the gotquestions.org website:

One explanation, held by the church historian Eusebius, is that Matthew is tracing the primary, or biological, lineage while Luke is taking into account an occurrence of "levirate marriage." If a man died without having any sons, it was tradition for the man's brother to marry the widow and have a son who would carry on the deceased man's name. According to Eusebius's theory, Melchi ([Luke 3:24](#)) and Matthan ([Matthew 1:15](#)) were married at different times to the same woman (tradition names her Estha). This would make Heli ([Luke 3:23](#)) and Jacob ([Matthew 1:15](#)) half-brothers. Heli then died without a son, and so his (half-)brother Jacob married Heli's widow, who gave birth to Joseph. This would make Joseph the "son of Heli" legally *and* the "son of Jacob" biologically. Thus, Matthew and Luke are both recording the same genealogy (Joseph's), but Luke follows the legal lineage while Matthew follows the biological.

Most conservative Bible scholars today take a different view, namely, that Luke is recording Mary's genealogy and Matthew is recording Joseph's. Matthew is following the line of Joseph (Jesus' legal father), through David's son Solomon, while Luke is following the line of Mary (Jesus' blood relative), through David's son Nathan. Since there was no Greek word for "son-in-law," Joseph was called the "son of Heli" by marriage to Mary, Heli's daughter. Through either Mary's or Joseph's line, Jesus is a descendant of David and therefore eligible to be the Messiah. Tracing a genealogy through the mother's side is unusual, but so was the virgin birth. Luke's explanation is that Jesus was the son of Joseph, "so it was thought" ([Luke 3:23](#)). (From <https://gotquestions.org/Jesus-genealogy.html>.)

Another issue here is that Matthew does not give us an exhaustive, complete list. There are people who are left out. This evidently was not unusual in Jewish genealogies. If we compare Ezra 7:1-5 with 1 Chronicles 6:3-15 we find six generations omitted from Ezra's list. When they said that someone was "the son of" someone else, they mean that he was descended from the individual, though he may have not been born to him directly. It is not Matthew's purpose to give us an exhaustive list, but rather to divide the descent into three neat fourteen generation segments, the first from Abraham to David, the second from David to the deportation to Babylon, and the third from the deportation to Babylon to the birth of Jesus. If you count the names in the third segment you find thirteen names, however, so perhaps someone was left out of that portion of the list.

Difficulties aside, Matthew's purpose is to show that Jesus is a descendant of Abraham and of David. He is from the tribe of Judah and from the house of David. In Galatians 3 Paul points out that the promise made to Abraham in Genesis 12 is fulfilled in Christ. In Genesis 49:10 Jacob says in his prophecy about Judah, "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, Nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, Until Shiloh comes, And to him shall be the obedience of the peoples." The Messiah, then, was to come through the tribe of Judah. In 2 Samuel 7

the Lord, speaking through Nathan the prophet, promised David that the Messiah would be one of his descendants and that His throne would be established forever. The Lord fulfilled these promises and did as He said he would do. He saw to it that Jesus came to this earth as planned and promised.

Matthew 1:18-25

Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: when His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit. 19 And Joseph her husband, being a righteous man and not wanting to disgrace her, planned to send her away secretly. 20 But when he had considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. 21 "She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins." 22 Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet: 23 "BEHOLD, THE VIRGIN SHALL BE WITH CHILD AND SHALL BEAR A SON, AND THEY SHALL CALL HIS NAME IMMANUEL," which translated means, "GOD WITH US." 24 And Joseph awoke from his sleep and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and took *Mary* as his wife, 25 but kept her a virgin until she gave birth to a Son; and he called His name Jesus.

Here is Matthew's rather brief description of the birth of Jesus Christ. The word "birth" in the Greek is literally *genesis*. He's talking about the origin, the source of Jesus Christ.

Mary and Joseph were engaged and it was "before they came together" that she was "found to be with child by the Holy Spirit." Mary was promised in marriage to Joseph, which at that time in that culture was a much more serious thing than engagement is in our culture. Note that Joseph is called "her husband" in verse 19, and the word translated "send her away" (*apoluo*) is the word for "divorce" elsewhere (Matthew 5:32, 19:3-9, Luke 16:18). To be betrothed was tantamount to being married, and it required a divorce to break it off. When it became obvious to Joseph that Mary was pregnant, he assumed what anyone would assume, that she had been unfaithful to him and had had a relationship with another man. We all know this is how women get pregnant. Evidently Mary had not told Joseph of the visitation from the angel Gabriel (Luke 1:26-38) who had told her the plan for the birth of Jesus. If she had told him, he apparently did not believe her. Even though it was obvious to Joseph that Mary had been fooling around, he did not want to disgrace her. The word translated "disgrace" means "to make an example of, to show as an example" ([Thayer's Greek Definitions](#)). He did not want to publicly expose her and subject her to ridicule and shame. He was a righteous man and not vindictive. He did not want to take revenge on her and humiliate her, and so planned to send her away privately. As much as he could he would keep things quiet and private. We need more people like Joseph.

As Joseph considered his plan about how to send Mary away secretly, the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and reassured him that the child had been conceived of the Holy Spirit. He did not need to be afraid of taking Mary as his wife. The Holy Spirit was responsible for her pregnancy and not some other man. The angel Gabriel had explained to Mary in Luke 1:35, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy Child shall be called the Son of God." There is no crude, blasphemous concept here that God somehow came down and had sexual relations with Mary. The Holy Spirit came upon her and caused her to conceive while she was still a virgin. This is why Jesus is holy and is called the Son of God.

Often in the Old Testament when someone is given their name at birth there is an explanation of why the name is given. For example, when the daughter of Pharaoh drew Moses out of the water and adopted him, she gave him the name Moses and explained, "Because I drew him out of the water" (Exodus 2:10). The name Moses means "to draw out". Jacob was Esau's twin and was holding onto Esau's heel as he was born and so was named "Jacob" which means "heel-catcher" (Genesis 25:26). Here in Matthew 1:21 the angel told Joseph the name he was to give to the son Mary would bear. He was to be called Jesus, and the explanation is, "for He will save His people from their sins." Jesus is the Greek form of the Hebrew name Joshua or Jeshua, which itself is a contraction from Jehoshua, which means "Jehovah our Salvation" (Vincent's Word Studies). In essence the angel is saying that this child is the Savior. He is the one who will truly save His people from their sins.

It is very significant that the angel says, "He will save His people from their sins." He does not say "He will save His people from their enemies," but "from their sins." In John's gospel he quotes John the Baptist pointing to Christ and saying, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29). His people need to be saved from their sins, and so He came as the sacrificial "Lamb of God" who gave Himself up to atone for their sins. Jesus said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin. The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son does remain forever. So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed" (John 8:34-36). Sin makes us slaves and prevents us from "remaining in the house forever," that is, sin excludes us from eternal life in the kingdom of God. Sin leads to death (Romans 6:23 and James 1:15). When Jesus saves us from sin and frees us, we are also saved from slavery to sin and are saved from death and the wrath of God. We are given the free gift of eternal life. So then Jesus is named Jesus because He is the one who saves from sin. His name tells us who He is and what He does.

Matthew says that this all took place to fulfill the prophecy in Isaiah 7:14, "Behold, the virgin shall be with child and shall bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel", which translated means, 'God with us'." These words were "spoken by the Lord through the prophet." This is how the word of the Lord comes to us. He speaks to a prophet and then the prophet speaks for the Lord to the people. Peter commented in 2 Peter 1:20-21, "But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God." Scripture is the word of God given through the words of men. The Bible is at once a divine and human book.

Isaiah said the virgin would get pregnant and bear a son. It has been argued that the word can mean "a maid" or "a girl" and does not necessarily mean she is a virgin, but when they talked about unmarried young ladies, I believe they assumed them to be virgins unless evidence to the contrary could be provided. We read this in Deuteronomy 22:13-21:

13 "If any man takes a wife and goes in to her and *then* turns against her, 14 and charges her with shameful deeds and publicly defames her, and says, 'I took this woman, *but* when I came near her, I did not find her a virgin,' 15 then the girl's father and her mother shall take and bring out the *evidence* of the girl's virginity to the elders of the city at the gate. 16 "The girl's father shall say to the elders, 'I gave my daughter to this man for a wife, but he turned against her; 17 and behold, he has charged her with shameful deeds, saying, "I did not find your daughter a virgin." But this is the evidence of my daughter's virginity.' And they shall spread the garment before the elders of the city. 18 "So the elders of that city shall take the man and chastise him, 19 and they shall fine him a hundred *shekels* of silver and give it to the girl's father, because he publicly defamed a virgin of Israel. And she shall remain his wife; he

cannot divorce her all his days. 20 "But if this charge is true, that the girl was not found a virgin, 21 then they shall bring out the girl to the doorway of her father's house, and the men of her city shall stone her to death because she has committed an act of folly in Israel by playing the harlot in her father's house; thus you shall purge the evil from among you.

This passage shows clearly that a man who took a young woman as his wife would expect her to be a virgin, and if it could be shown that she was not and had "played the harlot" before marriage, she was worthy of condemnation and stoning. To say that a young woman was unmarried was to say that she was a virgin.

The Son born to the virgin would be called "Immanuel". Jesus would be his proper name, but people would refer to Him as Immanuel - "God with us." Immanuel is a Hebrew word, and Matthew translates it for us. It would be said of Jesus that He is "God with us." In Jesus Christ humanity and divinity are united. He is fully God and fully man. Paul points this out in Philippians 2:6-8, "although He existed in the form of God, [He] did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, *and* being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross." Jesus is no ordinary man and had no ordinary birth. He is indeed the unique Son of God and there has never been nor will there ever be anyone like Him in all human history.

Joseph awoke from his dream and did as he was told. He was not skeptical of the message he received in the dream. It is rare, but sometimes God can and does communicate through dreams. We will see this again soon in Matthew. He took Mary as his wife and did not have sexual relations with her until after Jesus was born. Matthew's emphasis is on the fact that Mary was a virgin prior to the birth of Jesus. I believe the implication is that Joseph and Mary had normal marital relations after she had given birth. Joseph named Him Jesus as he was told. Joseph played his role and followed the Lord's commands.

#### Matthew 2:1-12

Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, 2 "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him." 3 When Herod the king heard *this*, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. 4 Gathering together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. 5 They said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for this is what has been written by the prophet: 6 'AND YOU, BETHLEHEM, LAND OF JUDAH, ARE BY NO MEANS LEAST AMONG THE LEADERS OF JUDAH; FOR OUT OF YOU SHALL COME FORTH A RULER WHO WILL SHEPHERD MY PEOPLE ISRAEL.'" 7 Then Herod secretly called the magi and determined from them the exact time the star appeared. 8 And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the Child; and when you have found *Him*, report to me, so that I too may come and worship Him." 9 After hearing the king, they went their way; and the star, which they had seen in the east, went on before them until it came and stood over *the place* where the Child was. 10 When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. 11 After coming into the house they saw the Child with Mary His mother; and they fell to the ground and worshiped Him. Then, opening their treasures, they presented to Him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. 12 And having been warned *by God* in a dream not to return to Herod, the magi left for their own country by another way.

If we will read this passage carefully we will notice that we may hold some false ideas about the visit of the Magi that come from Christmas songs, pageants and cards, but not from Scripture. The text does not specify how many of these Magi came. It was probably more than three. The number three was inferred from the mention of three gifts. They did not come when Jesus was a newborn and did not visit Him in the manger, but in a house (verse 11), and he was perhaps two years old (verse 16).

Jesus was born in Bethlehem “in the days of Herod the king.” This was Herod the Great, who lived from 73 to 4 BC. Since Herod died in 4 BC, we must assume Jesus was born before this, around 5 or 6 BC. Why wasn’t he born in the year 0 or 1, since “BC” supposedly means “Before Christ”? Well, there are a lot of complexities to it and the biblical writers are not so concerned with dates and exact chronology. Here’s what [shepherdproject.com](http://shepherdproject.com) says on the issue:

One would assume Jesus was born in 1 AD, but this is almost certainly inaccurate. Our present dating system was devised in 525 AD by a Christian monk named Dionysius Exiguus, but no satisfying explanation of his system has survived. All we know is that his new calendar was begun during “the consulship of Probus Junior” which he stated was 525 years “since the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ.” While various theories have been proposed as to his reasoning, all that is certain is that there were some inaccuracies in his calculations. Unfortunately, while his inaccuracies are well-known, calculating the accurate date for Jesus’ birth is not simply a matter of correcting Dionysius’ mistakes.

The word “Magi” is in the Greek text *magos*. [Thayer’s Greek Definitions](#) says of this word,

“1) a magus 1a) the name given by the Babylonians (Chaldeans), Medes, Persians, and others, to the wise men, teachers, priests, physicians, astrologers, seers, interpreters of dreams, augers, soothsayers, sorcerers etc. 1b) the oriental wise men (astrologers) who, having discovered by the rising of a remarkable star that the Messiah had just been born, came to Jerusalem to worship him.”

These men came from the east, having seen a star that indicated to them that the King of the Jews had been born. They may not have been kings themselves, but they may have been the envoys of a king from the east, perhaps from the area now known as Iraq. It probably took them many months to travel from their country to Jerusalem. When they arrived, they first went to Jerusalem, the Jewish capitol, thinking that surely the leaders there would know all about the one who had been born “King of the Jews.” They asked, “Where is He who has been born King of the Jews?” They assumed the Jews would know. These foreigners knew that He had been born, so surely the Jews should have known. It must have surprised the Magi that the Jews were unaware that He had been born. The Jews did know where He was to be born because of the prophecy from Micah 5:2, which they quote in verse 6. They should have also known when He was to be born because of Daniel’s “70 weeks” prophecy in Daniel 9:24-27. Had they been paying attention, the Jews should have been ready to welcome Jesus when He was born. There should have been a great celebration that the long-awaited Messiah had finally come!

The magi said that they were seeking one who had been born King of the Jews. Men are not usually born as kings, but if they are firstborn sons of kings they inherit the throne when their fathers die or when their fathers step down. Sometimes men are chosen or anointed as

kings by others who recognize that they are exceptional men. Jesus was one who was born as King of the Jews. He has been the King from all eternity and is now the King and will always be the King. It was Nathanael who recognized this about Jesus as soon as Jesus called him. He said, "Rabbi, You are the Son of God; You are the King of Israel" (John 1:49). Jesus is always the "King of kings and Lord of lords" (1 Timothy 6:15, Revelation 17:14 and 19:16).

When the Magi explained why they had come, they said, "For we saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him." This was their whole purpose in coming so far. The word translated "worship" is *proskuneō*, which literally means "to kiss towards one" ([Thayer's Greek Definitions](#)). It means to do homage to someone, to honor them. The word occurs 54 times in the New Testament and is usually translated "worship" or "worshiped," though sometimes it is translated "bowed down". Satan used this word when he tempted Jesus in the wilderness. He said, "All these things I will give You, if you fall down and worship me." Jesus quoted from Deuteronomy 6 in His reply, "Go, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only'" (Matthew 4:9-10). Jesus and the woman at the well discussed the proper place and practice of worship in John 4:20-24, using this same word. When Cornelius tried to worship Peter (Acts 10:25-26), Peter rejected this gesture and said, "Stand up; I too am just a man". The point is this worship is something reserved for deity. We are not to worship any thing or anyone other than the Lord God. The Magi came to recognize Jesus as not merely an earthly king, but as the incarnate deity He was. They had not come to honor Herod this way, but this kind of worship was reserved for the Son of God.

The news troubled Herod. He was the king of the Jews and was paranoid about rivals and threats to his position. When Herod was troubled, all Jerusalem was also troubled with him. A.T. Robertson writes in [Robertson's Word Pictures](#),

Those familiar with the story of Herod the Great in Josephus can well understand the meaning of these words. Herod in his rage over his family rivalries and jealousies put to death the two sons of Mariamne (Aristobulus and Alexander), Mariamne herself, and Antipater, another son and once his heir, besides the brother and mother of Mariamne (Aristobulus, Alexandra) and her grandfather John Hyrcanus. He had made will after will and was now in a fatal illness and fury over the question of the Magi. He showed his excitement and the whole city was upset because the people knew only too well what he could do when in a rage over the disturbance of his plans. "The foreigner and usurper feared a rival, and the tyrant feared the rival would be welcome" (Bruce). Herod was a hated Idumaeen.

Herod took steps to deal with this new threat to his reign. He first gathered all the chief priests and scribes and asked them where the Messiah was to be born. The grammar indicates he asked repeatedly – he kept asking one after another of these men about where the Messiah was to be born. It was urgent for him to find the boy. He realized that this was the fulfillment of the expectations of the Jews for the Messiah, the "anointed one", the Son of David who would reign on His throne forever. In his arrogance Herod thought he could destroy God's Messiah!

The chief priests and scribes knew that the Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem because of the prophecy in Micah 5:2, and so they quoted it to Herod. Micah lived about 700 years before Christ, yet tells us exactly where He was to be born. Though Bethlehem was a small and humble place, yet it was exalted among the places of Judah because from it would come the Messiah. Bethlehem is a tourist destination today because Jesus was born there.



The Messiah is described as “a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.” He is a ruler, a governor, a king, and yet He is not like Herod or Caesar. He is not a ruthless and capricious dictator. He will rule the nations “with a rod of iron” (Revelation 19:15), but for His people He is a Shepherd. Jesus called Himself “the good Shepherd” in John 10 and pointed out that the good Shepherd is the one who lays down His life for the sheep (John 10:11). He sacrifices Himself for His sheep. He will provide for His people, protect them, lead them and discipline them.

Herod not only wanted to know where the Messiah had been born, but he also wanted to know when He had been born. He called the magi secretly to himself, apart from the priests and scribes, and determined from them the exact time the star had appeared. The star had appeared when the “King of the Jews” had been born, and so would indicate to Herod how old the child would now be. Herod then sent the magi on to Bethlehem telling them to search for the child carefully and then return and report to him so that he might also go worship Him. He tried to use them as his unwitting agents to destroy the child. Why Herod did not gather his men and travel to Bethlehem himself with the magi at that point, I don’t fully understand. Possibly he understood and was sensitive to the fact that the Jews were expecting the Messiah, and that if he publicly went and killed the child while the magi were there as witnesses the outrage it would cause among the people would cost him his own life.

The magi listened to Herod and went out on their journey. They again saw the star which led them to the place where the child was. There seems to be an implication here that they had initially seen the star when they were in the east, but that it had disappeared from their view. After leaving Herod the star appeared again to them and led them to the exact spot where Jesus was. I’m certainly not knowledgeable enough to determine exactly what this star was, but there is a fascinating study at [bethlehemstar.com](http://bethlehemstar.com) that offers some plausible ideas regarding Jupiter and a conjunction with Regulus and Venus that happened about this time.

I think it’s important to note that the text does not say that the star led them to Bethlehem. I know that this is the common assumption about where the magi found Jesus, but there are a couple of things to point out about this. First, they could have easily found Bethlehem without the star and probably could have found Jesus there by asking around once they got there. Bethlehem was only about 6 miles south of Jerusalem. Second, Luke tells us that after Jesus was born and had been dedicated at the temple, the family returned to their home in Nazareth (Luke 2:39). I’m speculating here, but I think it’s possible that the star led the magi to Nazareth rather than Bethlehem. I know that’s Christmas heresy, but the text says the star led them “to the place where the child was” without specifying the place. There is a problem with this theory, though. Matthew 2:19-23 say that after Herod died Joseph was afraid to return to Judea (to Bethlehem) because Archelaus the son of Herod was king there and so he decided to go to the Galilee region and settled in Nazareth. This seems to imply that they had been living in Bethlehem prior to leaving for Egypt. It’s possible that the family, after returning to Nazareth shortly after Jesus was born as Luke describes, then returned at a later time to Bethlehem to settle there for a while, and it was indeed there that the magi found them. Wherever it was, the star showed the magi the way and they found the place where Jesus was.

The magi had come a long way because they believed the sign of the star that indicated that the King of the Jews had been born. They had been traveling for months to reach this place. They had been surprised to find that the leaders among the Jews had no idea the Messiah had been born. Perhaps they started doubting that they had interpreted things correctly. So Matthew tells us that when they again saw the star “they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy”. It was like God was telling them, “You’ve got it right! Here He is!” They whooped it up when they saw the star! It gave them mega joy! (The word for “great” here is

the Greek word *meGas*.) Finding Jesus and knowing that you've found the truth in Him is a source of overflowing joy. The greatest joy a human can experience is this joy of knowing the Lord and being known by the Lord.

The magi found the house, came in, saw Jesus and His mother Mary, fell to the ground and worshiped Him. They fulfilled their purpose in coming. They had come to honor Him and acknowledge Him as the King of the Jews, the Messiah, God incarnate. It's ironic that these men who came from far away knew He had come and knew who He was while those who should have known were clueless. We often find in the New Testament that Gentiles are more open to the message of Christ than are the Jews. Many of the common and simple Jews did believe in Jesus, but the elites who knew the scriptures best and should have easily recognized Him rejected Him, despised Him and were jealous of Him. Instead of bowing before Him and acknowledging Him as their King, they opposed Him and ultimately had Him put to death.

As part of their worship of Jesus, the magi opened their treasure boxes and presented Him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. Some see rich symbolism in these three gifts, the gold representing royalty, the frankincense as something offered along with sacrifices, and the myrrh foreshadowing His death (being a perfumed ointment used to anoint the dead). I think it's best not to speculate too much about possible symbolism here. I think they simply brought valuable offerings to Him to honor Him as the King. They were rich and costly gifts for this One who was unlike any other.

Herod had told the magi to come back and report to him after they had found the child so that he might also come worship Him. But in a dream the magi were warned not to return to Herod. The magi may have thought that Herod was sincere, but the Lord revealed the truth to them, and so they left to go back to their home country by another route. They did not return to Herod and they did not go back to Jerusalem.

The magi sought for Jesus because they were already believers and were already being led by the Lord. Faith was already operative in their lives before they left their home land. They saw a star that indicated He had been born. They already believed that He was the King of the Jews, the Messiah, and that He had been born as such. In faith they left their home land and came to Jerusalem to seek Him. Today we hear quite a bit about the church being open to "seekers" who are looking for the truth. If there are seekers, they are seeking because there is already at least a kernel of faith in their lives. They already believe there is truth to be found. They are probably already theists and want to find out about Him. The Lord has already been at work drawing them toward Christ.

#### Matthew 2:13-23

Now when they had gone, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Get up! Take the Child and His mother and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is going to search for the Child to destroy Him." 14 So Joseph got up and took the Child and His mother while it was still night, and left for Egypt. 15 He remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: "OUT OF EGYPT I CALLED MY SON."

16 Then when Herod saw that he had been tricked by the magi, he became very enraged, and sent and slew all the male children who were in Bethlehem and all its vicinity, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the magi. 17 Then what had been spoken through Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled: 18 "A VOICE WAS HEARD IN RAMAH, WEEPING AND GREAT MOURNING, RACHEL WEEPING FOR HER CHILDREN; AND SHE REFUSED TO BE COMFORTED, BECAUSE THEY WERE NO MORE." 19 But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to

Joseph in Egypt, and said, 20 "Get up, take the Child and His mother, and go into the land of Israel; for those who sought the Child's life are dead." 21 So Joseph got up, took the Child and His mother, and came into the land of Israel. 22 But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Then after being warned by God in a dream, he left for the regions of Galilee, 23 and came and lived in a city called Nazareth. This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophets: "He shall be called a Nazarene."

The magi departed for their home and again an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream as had happened previously (1:20) and said, "Get up, take the Child and His mother and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is going to search for the Child to destroy Him". The same language is used in verse 20 when this angel tells him to return to Israel. Joseph is given four commands – get up, take, flee and remain. First, he needs to wake up, to "get up". He needed to be awakened to the danger they were facing. He needed to be aroused and sobered to the responsibility on his shoulders for the protection of Jesus. It was time to get up and get going. Then he needed to take the Child and His mother. It is not "your Child", but "the Child and His mother." The Child was not Joseph's Child, but the Son of God, and Joseph was His custodian. Third, it was necessary to flee. Certainly the Father could have protected the Son through supernatural means, but He obviously chose not to do so aside from sending an angel to warn Joseph. He allowed His Son to be born into a world full of dangers and evils, where the enemy would try to destroy Him. The Son was allowed to be vulnerable to the malice of Herod. Fourth, Joseph was told to stay in Egypt until the angel told him to return.

Sometimes we are to resist evil (James 4:7, Hebrews 12:4) and sometimes we must flee (1 Corinthians 6:18). It is not always cowardly to flee. Sometimes running away to safety and hiding ourselves is the best and wisest thing to do when we are faced with temptation and evil. Standing your ground and trying to resist is not always the best solution.

The angel told Joseph the reason that they had to flee, "For Herod is going to search for the Child to destroy Him". Herod's intent was not to worship, but to destroy this "King of the Jews". His purpose in searching for Jesus was not constructive, but destructive. He was on a search and destroy mission. It was imperative for Joseph to act quickly because once Herod realized that the magi had not followed his directions it would not take long for Herod's soldiers to reach Bethlehem.

Joseph did act immediately, because it says he got up "while it was still night, and left for Egypt". He didn't wait until daylight or until after lunch. He woke up from his dream and immediately got going. They had to get up and pack quickly and depart. Often when the Lord gives us orders He means for us to carry them out right away without delay. I have a tendency to procrastinate and put off things, but sometimes the Lord means for us to do what He says when He says it. There was an urgency in the angel's commands and then an urgency in Joseph's obedience.

Joseph, Mary and Jesus stayed in Egypt until the death of Herod. Matthew tells us this was necessary to fulfill the prophecy from Hosea 11:1, "Out of Egypt I called My Son". The full text of Hosea 11:1 is, "When Israel was a youth I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son." Clearly the Lord was speaking there of the nation of Israel, but what we have is what's called a "dual-reference" prophecy. Yes, it applies first to the nation, but it also applies to the Messiah. As God had called Israel out of Egypt, so He also called His Son out of Egypt.

Herod waited, probably anxiously, for the magi to return and report to him, but it became evident to him after a while that they had tricked him and were not going to come back to him.

This made him very angry and he had all the male children up to two years old in Bethlehem and the surrounding area killed. He had learned from the magi that the child could be as old as two. Herod was one who tried to hide his malice toward Jesus and say the right things while all along planning to destroy Him. There are many people today who say nice things about how they respect Jesus and think He's a great moral teacher and so forth, but really they would sweep Him away if they could. They are like the people depicted in Jesus' parable in Luke 19 who said, "We do not want this man to reign over us".

Matthew comments that the killing of the little boys in Bethlehem fulfilled what had been spoken through Jeremiah the prophet in Jeremiah 31:15, "A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children; and she refused to be comforted, because they were no more". This is another example of a "dual reference" prophecy. In Jeremiah the passage is first a reference to the captivity in Babylon. Verses 16 and 17 in Jeremiah 31 say, "Thus says the LORD, 'Restrain your voice from weeping And your eyes from tears; For your work will be rewarded,' declares the LORD, 'And they will return from the land of the enemy. There is hope for your future,'" declares the LORD, 'And your children will return to their own territory.'" Here in Matthew it is applied to the grief that came about when the little boys were killed. Rachel, mentioned here, was buried in Bethlehem (Genesis 35:19) and her tomb is there to this day.

When Herod died, the angel again appeared in a dream to Joseph and again told him to get up and take the Child and His mother and return to Israel. Again there is an explanation, "those who sought the Child's life are dead". So again Joseph was obedient and followed the angel's instructions and came back to Israel. Instead of going back to Bethlehem, Joseph returned to Nazareth in the Galilee region. He had heard that Archelaus, son of Herod, was ruling over Judea, and he was also warned in a dream, presumably not to return to Bethlehem.

Matthew makes it sound as if this was the first time that Joseph, Mary and Jesus had been in Nazareth, but we know from Luke that this was their home town, and that they had only initially gone to Bethlehem because of the census ordered by Caesar Augustus (Luke 2:1-7).

So Joseph and the family returned to Nazareth and Matthew says, "This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophets: 'He shall be called a Nazarene'". The problem here is that there is no such quote anywhere in the Old Testament. One theory about this is that the word "Nazarene" is tied to the Hebrew word *nêțser*, which means "branch". The prophecy in Isaiah 11:1-2 calls the Messiah a "branch" from the root of Jesse, "Then a shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse, And a branch (*nêțser*) from his roots will bear fruit. The Spirit of the LORD will rest on Him, The spirit of wisdom and understanding, The spirit of counsel and strength, The spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD." Growing up in Nazareth gave Jesus the title "Nazarene" and fulfills the prophecy that He would be the "branch" of Jesse, who was the father of David.

Another interpretation of this quote is that Nazareth was a small, despised backwater town of Galilee, and that "Nazarene" was a term of derision and contempt. When Nathanael was told that Jesus was from Nazareth, he scoffed, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" (John 1:46). When Tertullus accused Paul before Felix he said, "For we have found this man a real pest and a fellow who stirs up dissension among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes" (Acts 24:5). One of the reasons or excuses the leading Jews had for rejecting Jesus as Messiah was that He was from Galilee. They were unaware, it seems, that He had been born in Bethlehem. John 7:40-43 says, "Some of the people therefore, when they heard these words, were saying, 'This

certainly is the Prophet.' Others were saying, 'This is the Christ.' Still others were saying, 'Surely the Christ is not going to come from Galilee, is He? Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes from the descendants of David, and from Bethlehem, the village where David was?' So a division occurred in the crowd because of Him." And in John 7:50-52 we read of Nicodemus speaking with the chief priests and Pharisees, "Nicodemus (he who came to Him before, being one of them) said to them, 'Our Law does not judge a man unless it first hears from him and knows what he is doing, does it?' They answered him, 'You are not also from Galilee, are you? Search, and see that no prophet arises out of Galilee.'" The idea is that the quote "He shall be called a Nazarene" is a reference to the prophecies that tell us that the Messiah would be despised and rejected (see Psalm 22:6, Psalm 69:11, Isaiah 53:2-4). In calling Jesus a "Nazarene" they were deriding Him as a pretender and imposter, thus fulfilling scripture.

While either of these theories is possible, I don't think we can know for sure to what Matthew is referring in this quote. I think we have to content ourselves with a bit of uncertainty when it comes to this quote.

#### Matthew 3:1-12

Now in those days John the Baptist \*came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying, 2 "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." 3 For this is the one referred to by Isaiah the prophet when he said, "THE VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS, 'MAKE READY THE WAY OF THE LORD, MAKE HIS PATHS STRAIGHT!'" 4 Now John himself had a garment of camel's hair and a leather belt around his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey. 5 Then Jerusalem was going out to him, and all Judea and all the district around the Jordan; 6 and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, as they confessed their sins.

7 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? 8 "Therefore bear fruit in keeping with repentance; 9 and do not suppose that you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham for our father'; for I say to you that from these stones God is able to raise up children to Abraham. 10 "The axe is already laid at the root of the trees; therefore every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 11 "As for me, I baptize you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not fit to remove His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. 12 "His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clear His threshing floor; and He will gather His wheat into the barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

According to Luke 1, John was born to Zacharias and Elizabeth in the hill country of Judah. Elizabeth was a relative of Mary. When the angel told Zacharias about John and about his mission, he said "You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth. For he will be great in the sight of the Lord; and he will drink no wine or liquor, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit while yet in his mother's womb. And he will turn many of the sons of Israel back to the Lord their God. It is he who will go *as a forerunner* before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, TO TURN THE HEARTS OF THE FATHERS BACK TO THE CHILDREN, and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous, so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord" (Luke 1:15-17). The Lord sent John to "turn many...back to the Lord their God," to go before the Lord in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn father's hearts back to their children, to turn the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous, and to prepare people for the coming of the Lord, the Messiah. This is John's job description. People needed to be turned. They had

turned away from the Lord and needed to be turned back. People had turned away from righteousness and had become disobedient, and needed to be turned back.

Matthew says that John came preaching in the wilderness and was saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” This was the summary of his message, and it is a message of turning, of changing one’s mind, of turning back to the Lord. The Greek term for “repent” is *metanoēō*, a compound of the preposition *meta*, “with”, and *noeō*, “to think.” So this word has to do with a re-thinking, a change of mind, a reconsideration of a previously held position, a re-evaluation of a course of life or action. Vincent’s Word Studies says this about the word:

A word compounded of the preposition *μετά*, *after*, *with*; and the verb *νοέω*, *to perceive*, and to *think*, as the result of perceiving or observing. In this compound the preposition combines the two meanings of *time* and *change*, which may be denoted by *after* and *different*; so that the whole compound means *to think differently after*. *Μετάνοια* (*repentance*) is therefore, primarily, an *after-thought*, *different* from the former thought; then, a *change of mind* which issues in *regret* and in *change of conduct*. These latter ideas, however, have been imported into the word by scriptural usage, and do not lie in it etymologically nor by primary usage. *Repentance*, then, has been rightly defined as “Such a virtuous alteration of the mind and purpose as begets a like virtuous change in the life and practice.” *Sorrow* is not, as is popularly conceived, the primary nor the prominent notion of the word. Paul distinguishes between *sorrow* (*λύπη*) and *repentance* (*μετάνοια*), and puts the one as the outcome of the other. “*Godly sorrow worketh repentance*” (2 Cor. 7:10).

This sort of repentance, then, is a re-thinking of one’s course that leads to a turn around and a heading back in the right direction. Jesus depicted this kind of repentance in the Parable of the Prodigal Son in Luke 15. The prodigal “came to his senses” and saw that he had gone the wrong direction in life and needed to return to his father instead of starving in the far country. He determined to humble himself and return to his father and ask to be made like a hired hand. This is what John was telling people they needed to do. They needed to change their minds and turn back to God and back to righteousness.

The reason John gave for this repentance was “for the kingdom of heaven is at hand”. The kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of God, was about to come upon men. It’s important to understand the meaning of “kingdom” as it is most often used in the New Testament. The word, *basileia*, means “kingship” or “royal power” (Thayer’s Greek Definitions) and not so much a place or a realm. It is “the right or authority to rule over a kingdom”. On some occasions it means the territory over which a king rules, but most often it means kingly power or authority. So when John says that the kingdom of heaven is at hand, he means that the rule of God is about to be realized. The King is about to come and rule. Daniel prophesied about this in Daniel 7:13-14, “I kept looking in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven one like a Son of Man was coming, And He came up to the Ancient of Days And was presented before Him. And to Him was given dominion, glory and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations and men of every language might serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which will not pass away; and His kingdom is one which will not be destroyed.” John was saying, “This is about to take place, so you need to repent!”

Matthew explains further in verse 3, “For this is the one referred to by Isaiah the prophet when he said, ‘The voice of one crying in the wilderness, “make ready the way of the Lord, make His paths straight!’”” This quote is from Isaiah 40:3, and is mentioned in all four of the gospels. Luke includes verses 4 and 5 from Isaiah 40, “every ravine will be filled, and every

mountain and hill will be brought low; the crooked will become straight, and the rough roads smooth; and all flesh will see the salvation of God.” John’s gospel has John the Baptist himself quoting Isaiah 40:3 when he was asked about who he was and what he had to say about himself (John 1:23). John was a voice crying in the wilderness. His purpose was to call upon people to prepare the way for the Lord. The way, the road, for the Lord was to be made ready, and the path for Him was to be made straight. Ravines needed to be filled and mountains needed to be brought down so that His path would be smooth and obstacles would be removed. When the President travels, there is an advance team that goes ahead of him to prepare the way for his arrival. They check to see that there is adequate security for the President and they meet with local officials to arrange things for him. This was the role of John the Baptist. He was the advance man for Jesus, exhorting people to prepare for the arrival of the King.

The appearance and diet of John are described in verse 4. He wore “a garment of camel’s hair and a leather belt around his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey.” No doubt this is meant to remind us of Elijah, who is described as “a hairy man with a leather girdle bound about his loins” (2 Kings 1:8). Though John denied that he was Elijah (John 1:21), we are told in Luke 1:17 that he came “in the spirit and power of Elijah”. Later in Matthew, Jesus talked about John and said that he was more than a prophet (Matthew 11:9) and went on to say, “And if you are willing to accept it, John himself is Elijah who was to come” (Matthew 11:14). In Matthew 17:10-13 after Peter, James and John had witnessed the transfiguration of Jesus and had seen Him talking with Moses and Elijah, they asked Him, “Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?” He replied; “Elijah is coming and will restore all things; but I say to you that Elijah already came, and they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they wished. So also the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands.” Verse 13 then says, “Then the disciples understood that He had spoken to them about John the Baptist.” Elijah had not died but had been taken up into heaven in a flaming chariot (2 Kings 2:11). His mantle and his “spirit” rested upon his successor Elisha (2 Kings 2:9-15). The Jews expected Elijah to return because of the prophecy in Malachi 4:5-6, “Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD. He will restore the hearts of the fathers to *their* children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, so that I will not come and smite the land with a curse.” As the spirit of Elijah rested on Elisha, so John the Baptist had the same spirit. John was not literally the same man as Elijah, but was a prophet of the same spirit with the same kind of mission. Jesus seems to tell us that Elijah still has a role in the future, that he will come and restore all things, but that in a sense he had already come in John the Baptist.

People were going out to John in the wilderness and were being baptized by him in the Jordan river as they confessed their sins (verses 5 and 6). They heard of John and went out to listen to him and then responded to his message. They listened to John, believed his message and repented. As they confessed their sins they were baptized. There is obviously a connection here between confession of sins and baptism.

Baptism is one of those things about which there is a lot of debate and confusion among different Christian groups. The English word comes directly from the Greek *baptizō*, which, according to Thayer’s Greek Definitions means “to dip repeatedly, to immerse, to submerge; to cleanse by dipping or submerging, to wash, to make clean with water, to wash oneself, bathe; to overwhelm.” One of the reasons Baptist denominations insist on baptism by immersion is simply because that is what the word means. It does not mean to sprinkle or spritz or squirt someone with water, but to immerse them in water. John was submerging people in the Jordan. I’m tempted here to go into a full study of baptism in the New

Testament, but I think I'll resist that and move on. John is going to mention another form of baptism in a few moments.

A contrast is introduced in verse 7 with the word "but." Many of the Pharisees and Sadducees came to John for baptism. The Pharisees and Sadducees were two rival parties within Judaism who were the leading parties among the Jews. The Pharisees were the more conservative theologically, having "seated themselves in the chair of Moses" (Matthew 23:2). Jesus told people to listen to their teaching but not to follow their example (Matthew 23:3-36) and warned against their many hypocrisies. The Pharisees and the scribes were the chief opponents of Jesus, taking issue with Him on many occasions about things such as observing the Sabbath, ceremonial washing, casting out demons and His authority for doing the things He was doing. They saw themselves as righteous and superior to others (Luke 18:9-14). Everything they did was done in order to be seen by others and admired (Matthew 6, Matthew 23:5).

The Sadducees were, we might say, more liberal theologically than the Pharisees. The New Testament tells us that they did not believe in the resurrection of the dead nor angels nor spirits (Matthew 22:33, Acts 23:8). Acts 5:17 makes it clear that they were associated with the high priest, "But the high priest rose up, along with all his associates (that is the sect of the Sadducees), and they were filled with jealousy." Paul took advantage of the fact that the Sanhedrin, the Jewish council, was composed of both Pharisees and Sadducees when he was standing trial before them in Acts 23. He identified with the Pharisees and said, "Brethren, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees; I am on trial for the hope and resurrection of the dead!" (Acts 23:6). At that point he caused a division among them and some of the scribes and Pharisees stood up to defend him. Hastings Dictionary of the Bible says this about the Sadducees:

Probably the name 'Sadducee' is derived from the name **Zadok**, a notable priest in the time of David and Solomon (2Sa\_8:17; 2Sa\_15:24, 1Ki\_1:34). His descendants long played the leading part among the priests, so that Ezekiel regarded them as the only legitimate priests (Eze\_40:46; Eze\_43:19; Eze\_44:15; Eze\_48:11). The name indicates the fact that is most decisive for the right understanding of the Sadducees. About the year 200 B.C., when party lines were beginning to be drawn, the name was chosen to point out the party of the priests. That is not saying that no priest could be a Pharisee or a Scribe. Neither is it saying that all the priests were Sadducees. In our Lord's time many of the poor priests were Pharisees. But the higher priestly families and the priests as a body were Sadducees. With them were joined the majority of the aristocratic lay families of Judæa and Jerusalem. This fact gives us the key to their career. It is wrapped up in the history of the high priesthood. For two centuries after the Exile the high priesthood earned the right to the leadership of the Jewish nation. But in our Lord's time its leadership lay far back in the past. Its moral greatness had been undermined on two sides. On one side it had lost touch with what was deepest in the being of the Jews. For the most part this was due to its aristocratic bias. The Levitical priesthood was a close corporation. No man not born a priest could become a priest. More and more, as the interests of the nation widened and deepened, the high priesthood failed to keep pace. Its alliance with the aristocratic families made things worse. The high priesthood and the people drifted apart. No great institution can do that and remain great.

So the Sadducees were part of the high priestly class, but the Pharisees were more like laymen and were more accessible to the common people.



John saw these men coming, and they were even coming for baptism. They came along with the crowds to be baptized. John was skeptical of their sincerity, however. When he saw them, he said, "You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" He calls them the "offspring of vipers" (World English Bible). Jesus also referred to them in the same way. In Matthew 12:34 He said, "You brood of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak good things?" Again, in Matthew 23:33 He says, "You serpents, you brood of vipers, how will you escape the sentence of hell?" Jesus and John both depict these men as dangerous, poisonous snakes. As such they are like the evil one who appeared to Adam and Eve as a serpent and deceived them. The implication may be that these men are deceivers like Satan.

John asked them, "Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" People were coming to John to repent and be baptized in order to avoid the wrath that is coming upon all sinners. John had been telling people to repent because the kingdom of heaven was at hand. One thing this means is that judgment is also at hand. When His kingdom comes His judgment and wrath come as well. John will go on here to develop the idea more in verses 10 through 12. The message about the kingdom of heaven coming is a message of warning. It's good news for those who listen and repent and believe, but it's ominous news for those who will not listen. The great day of separating the sheep from the goats that Jesus mentions in chapter 25 will come and His wrath will come upon the disobedient.

It seems today that we like to avoid this message. The message about judgment and wrath is not a popular message. The emphasis is on the love and grace of God and we hardly ever mention His just wrath. People in our culture seem to have rejected this idea that God will really one day pour out His wrath on those who do not believe. They see it as an idea that is unworthy of a loving God. Look at it this way, though. What if we were talking about a judge in a criminal court? The judge might be a very loving man toward everyone. He might be very tender-hearted and compassionate. But as a judge his job is to punish criminals. If a remorseless killer came before him and he was too loving and compassionate to sentence the man, but rather set him free, people would be outraged! We expect judges to punish the guilty. Why, then, do we think that God should be less just? Those who are guilty before Him will face His wrath, and He has said that we are all guilty (see Romans 3).

It is good thing and even loving to warn people of impending danger. Over on the coast of California you sometimes see blue signs that warn you about what to do in the event of a tsunami. Basically they say that you should run for higher ground. It is good to be warned about something and to be told what to do to avoid the danger. The wrath of God is a real danger, and God has provided a way to escape it through repentance and faith in Christ. It is not compassionate nor loving to omit this aspect of the biblical message.

In asking his question of these men, John was questioning their sincerity. Were they really there to escape the wrath of God and to prepare themselves for the coming Messiah, or was there another reason they had come? He said there was something that needed to happen that would prove their sincerity. He said, "Therefore bear fruit in keeping with repentance; and do not suppose that you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham for our father'; for I say to you that from these stones God is able to raise up children to Abraham" (verses 8-9). Real repentance produces good fruit. Real repentance, a real change of mind and of direction, a real turning back to God, produces real changes in thinking, attitude, values and behavior. People who claim to have repented who do not change their behavior and course of life have not really repented. In Luke we read that the people asked him for specifics about what this meant for them and what they should do:

10 And the crowds were questioning him, saying, "Then what shall we do?" 11 And he would answer and say to them, "The man who has two tunics is to share with him who

has none; and he who has food is to do likewise." 12 And *some* tax collectors also came to be baptized, and they said to him, "Teacher, what shall we do?" 13 And he said to them, "Collect no more than what you have been ordered to." 14 *Some* soldiers were questioning him, saying, "And *what about* us, what shall we do?" And he said to them, "Do not take money from anyone by force, or accuse *anyone* falsely, and be content with your wages." (Luke 3:10-14)

The fruit of repentance will mean different things for different people depending on what kinds of sins they have been involved in. He says in general that the fruit of repentance means caring for the needy and sharing one's resources with them instead of neglecting them. For tax collectors it means only collecting what they've been ordered to collect instead of abusing their position to enrich themselves. To the soldiers he said that they should not abuse their power, but that they should be content with their wages. It is interesting to note that John does not tell tax collectors to quit their jobs and find more honest work. He does not tell soldiers that they should resign from being soldiers. It is necessary that some people collect taxes and some people serve as soldiers. But repentance should bring about a change in the way they treat others in the performance of their jobs. Repentance leads to a change in the way we treat others. We begin to value them and serve them instead of abusing them for our own purpose.

In addition to bearing the fruit of repentance, John tells them to lay aside their false confidence in being children of Abraham. He says, "do not suppose that you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham for our father'". He is warning them not to continue to hold this point of view, "Don't keep on thinking this to yourself." John says that God has the ability to raise up children of Abraham from the stones near the Jordan. Being a physical descendant of Abraham was no basis for confidence that they would escape the wrath of God. They were not approved by God simply because Abraham was their father.

Jesus disputed with the Pharisees about their parentage in John 8 when He said to them, "You are from below, I am from above; you are of this world, and I am not of this world" (verse 23). Then in verses 31 through 47 we read this:

31 So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, "If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; 32 and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." 33 They answered Him, "We are Abraham's descendants and have never yet been enslaved to anyone; how is it that You say, 'You will become free'?" 34 Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin. 35 "The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son does remain forever. 36 "So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed. 37 "I know that you are Abraham's descendants; yet you seek to kill Me, because My word has no place in you. 38 "I speak the things which I have seen with My Father; therefore you also do the things which you heard from your father." 39 They answered and said to Him, "Abraham is our father." Jesus said to them, "If you are Abraham's children, do the deeds of Abraham. 40 "But as it is, you are seeking to kill Me, a man who has told you the truth, which I heard from God; this Abraham did not do. 41 "You are doing the deeds of your father." They said to Him, "We were not born of fornication; we have one Father: God." 42 Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and have come from God, for I have not even come on My own initiative, but He sent Me. 43 "Why do you not understand what I am saying? It is because you cannot hear My word. 44 "You are of your father the devil, and you want

to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies. 45 "But because I speak the truth, you do not believe Me. 46 "Which one of you convicts Me of sin? If I speak truth, why do you not believe Me? 47 "He who is of God hears the words of God; for this reason you do not hear them, because you are not of God."

Jesus acknowledged that they were descendants of Abraham, but pointed out that they were not doing as Abraham had done. Abraham had listened to the Lord, had believed the Lord, and had obeyed the Lord. These men were refusing to believe in the Lord and listen to his teaching. They were following the lead of their father, the devil. They were physical descendants of Abraham, but spiritually they were sons of the devil. Paul also picks up this theme in Romans 4 and Galatians 3 and says that it is those who are of faith who are children of Abraham, those who believe as he believed. He says that even Gentiles can become children of Abraham through faith and heirs of the promise God gave to Abraham (Galatians 3:6-14).

There are many who lack confidence in their salvation, but there are also many people who have a false confidence like the Pharisees and Sadducees. What we "say to ourselves" about our standing with God is all-important! We need to examine our internal dialogue and evaluate whether it is true. Too often we make assumptions that are not true. We reassure ourselves that we are alright on the basis of things that may be false. The Jews said to themselves, "We are OK because we are descendants of Abraham". We may convince ourselves that God approves of us because we go to church, or have been baptized, or come from a Christian family, or because we are good people and haven't done bad things. We may have even "gone forward" and responded to an "altar call" at a meeting and prayed a prayer to accept Christ at some point and think that because of the decision we made we have God's approval. But this confidence may be misplaced. If there is no "fruit in keeping with repentance" our faith may not be sincere.

In verses 10 through 12 John gets specific with his warning. What danger do these men, this "brood of vipers" face? There is an axe that is already laid at the root of the trees. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. There are no exceptions. Every fruitless tree is cut down and burned. Jesus uses this same metaphor in Matthew 7:17-19 and Matthew 12:33. In Luke 13:6-9 Jesus told the parable of the fruitless fig tree that was threatened with being cut down because it did not produce any fruit, illustrating the warning Jesus gave in Luke 13:5, "Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish".

Real repentance and real faith produces real good fruit in the lives of the redeemed. It is the real and sincere repentance that brings forth the fruit and not the other way around. We don't work and try really hard to be fruitful in order to repent. It's the turn around that yields good behavior, not the attempt at good behavior that produces the turn around. The nature of the tree determines the fruit it bears. A bad tree cannot produce good fruit, and a bad tree cannot become good apart from repentance. The real key for producing good fruit in our lives is abiding in Christ as He describes it in John 15:1-8.

1 "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. 2 "Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every *branch* that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit. 3 "You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. 4 "Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither *can* you unless you abide in Me. 5 "I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for

apart from Me you can do nothing. 6 "If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned. 7 "If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. 8 "My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples."

In verses 11 and 12 John points to the One who is coming after him and describes what He is going to do. John made it very clear that he was not the Messiah, but was the one who went before Him to prepare His way. He says here, "He is mightier than I, and I am not fit to remove His sandals." In John 1:27 he is quoted this way, "It is He who comes after me, the thong of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie." When Paul preached in Pisidian Antioch he said this about John, "And while John was completing his course, he kept saying, 'What do you suppose that I am? I am not He. But behold, one is coming after me the sandals of whose feet I am not worthy to untie'" (Acts 13:25). John denied that he was fit or competent or worthy to do the simplest act of service to the coming King. If they thought that John was a great prophet and a powerful man, they needed to see that he was insignificant compared to the mighty one who was coming.

It's interesting to read what Jesus said about John, because Jesus said that John was the greatest man in human history up to that point! Jesus said to the crowds, "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? But what did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Those who are splendidly clothed and live in luxury are found in royal palaces! But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and one who is more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written, 'BEHOLD, I SEND MY MESSENGER AHEAD OF YOU, WHO WILL PREPARE YOUR WAY BEFORE YOU.' I say to you, among those born of women there is no one greater than John; yet he who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he" (Luke 7:24-28). It's amazing to think that of all the great men mentioned in scripture, Noah, Abraham, Jacob, Moses, Samuel, David, Elijah and all the prophets, Jesus says that John is greater than all of them. He was greater because he was more than a prophet. He was the messenger of the Messiah. He was the envoy who prepared the way for Jesus. But even John was not worthy to untie the sandals of Jesus. And Jesus says that the least in the Kingdom of God is greater than John.

No one is really fit or worthy to serve or follow Jesus. Jesus stands in all human history as The Holy One, the Way, the Truth and the Life, the Bread of Life and the Water of Life, the unique Son of God. It is only by His grace that we are allowed to believe Him, to know Him and to follow Him. Whoever we are, we are far below Jesus, and we need to recognize how utterly unworthy of Him we are.

John said of himself in verse 11, "As for me, I baptize you with water for repentance". This is in contrast with what the One coming will do, "He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire". The Messiah has a different kind of baptism, and this is probably why the least in the kingdom is greater than John. To receive the baptism Jesus gives is far greater than to receive the baptism of John. Jesus is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit. The best John can do is to baptize with water, a symbolic washing that recognizes one's repentance. But the Messiah will truly baptize people with the Holy Spirit and fire. His baptism will make a real difference in their lives! His baptism will bring about a real purification and transformation! The Holy Spirit would be the "helper" sent to them to be with them forever, to teach them and remind them of what Jesus had said to them and to testify about Jesus (John 14:26 and 15:26). He is the "Spirit of truth" who will guide them into the truth (John 16:13-15). The Holy Spirit would give them the power to be the witnesses of Jesus (Acts 1:8).

John says that the Messiah would also baptize them with fire. He has just mentioned in verse 10 that unfruitful trees are cut down and thrown into the fire. In verse 12 he says that the chaff will be burned up with “unquenchable fire”. The context would seem to indicate that John means that the Messiah will baptize some with the Holy Spirit and others with the unquenchable fire of judgment and wrath. Those who repent and believe will be baptized with the Holy Spirit, those who do not believe and do not produce good fruit will be baptized with fire.

Some interpret this as metaphorical “fire” that is coupled with the Holy Spirit as a purifying element. When the day of Pentecost came after the ascension of Jesus this promise was fulfilled when the disciples were together in Jerusalem and they were baptized with the Holy Spirit. Acts 2:1-4 says, “When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues as of fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance”. When the Holy Spirit came upon them He came accompanied by “tongues as of fire” that were distributed and rested on them. Sometimes we use this same kind of picture when we talk about flames of fire “licking” at something that is burning. Flames do look like tongues. So the disciples were baptized with the Holy Spirit and with fire-like tongues at the same time. It seems to be tied in with the fact that they then immediately began to speak with other tongues (languages) as they were filled with the Holy Spirit.

Whichever interpretation is correct, the truth is that Jesus is the one who both baptizes with the Holy Spirit and brings fiery judgment upon those who reject Him. This is the clear warning from John.

John switches to another metaphor in verse 12, “His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clear His threshing floor; and He will gather His wheat into the barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire”. He just talked about fruitless trees that will be cut down and thrown into the fire, and now he talks about how the wheat will be separated from the chaff and the chaff will be burned. Notice how John uses the word “His” four times here, “His winnowing fork”, “His hand”, “His threshing floor” and “His wheat”. The thing that is not called “His” is the chaff. The chaff is not His and He is going to get rid of it. The world is the Lord’s and all that is in it. He has the right to do as He will with His world and those who are in it.

There were two steps to retrieving the grains of wheat from the wheat straw and husks, threshing and winnowing. Threshing loosened the grain from the husks and straw, and then winnowing separated the wheat kernels from the chaff. Winnowing simply involved tossing the stuff into the air with a winnowing fork or fan or shovel (some translations use this word). The heavier grain would fall down but the lighter chaff would be blown off by the wind. Once the grain had been separated and retrieved then the chaff could be swept up and burned. The Lord will do a thorough job of this. He will thoroughly clear or cleanse His threshing floor. Nothing will be overlooked. There will be no escape for the chaff; it will all be burned with unquenchable fire.

An “unquenchable” fire is a fire that can’t be extinguished. The Greek term translated “unquenchable” is *asbestos*, meaning not able to be extinguished. We use the word for a mineral that won’t burn, but the word means a fire that can’t be stopped.

Fruitless trees will be cut down and burned. The chaff will be separated from the wheat and burned with unquenchable fire. This is the warning of John to “flee from the wrath to come.” This is why the Pharisees and Sadducees needed to produce fruit in keeping with

repentance. This is why we also need to heed this warning. Jesus did not negate this teaching of John, but repeated it and made it more clear.

Matthew 3:13-17

Then Jesus \*arrived from Galilee at the Jordan coming to John, to be baptized by him. 14 But John tried to prevent Him, saying, "I have need to be baptized by You, and do You come to me?" 15 But Jesus answering said to him, "Permit it at this time; for in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he \*permitted Him. 16 After being baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove and lighting on Him, 17 and behold, a voice out of the heavens said, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased."

Jesus deliberately came from Galilee to the Jordan for the purpose of being baptized by John. This gave John the opportunity to testify to the fact that Jesus was the one he had been talking about. Here is the One who baptizes with the Holy Spirit and fire. Here is the One who will cut down the fruitless trees and separate the wheat from the chaff. Here is the One of whom he is not worthy. John was able to meet Him and say, "Here He is!"

The baptism of John was a baptism of repentance, but Jesus did not need to repent. He is the Son of God and does not sin. He is the holy and righteous One who always does what is pleasing to the Father. Why then does He seek to be baptized by John? For Jesus being baptized means something other than repentance. It is the beginning of His public ministry. It kicks off His ministry and serves as a testimony to who He is.

John tried to prevent Jesus from being baptized. The sense of the language is brought out in the World English Bible, "John would have hindered Him." To John this was completely inappropriate that he should baptize Jesus. He said, "I have need to be baptized by You, and do you come to me?" His intent was to prevent this from happening. What John says is true. He is unqualified to baptize Jesus and Jesus does not need to be baptized for repentance. If John is not worthy to untie His sandal, then surely he is not worthy to baptize Jesus. Jesus does not deny the truth of what John says here.

Jesus answered John by saying, "Permit it at this time; for in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness". He says that John should allow it. It is fitting or appropriate for them to do this in order to "fulfill all righteousness". This needed to be done in order to do things the right way. What does this mean? It calls for some reflection. In being baptized Jesus was doing what others were doing when they humbled themselves and confessed their sins and repented. Though He was not a sinner, but was the Savior, nonetheless He was identifying with sinners in baptism. He humbled Himself to be born as a human and He humbled Himself to be baptized as if He were a sinner. As Paul says, Jesus came "in the likeness of sinful flesh" (Romans 8:3).

For the people who came to be baptized by John, the act was a turning point in their lives. They were saying that they were turning from their sins and were turning back to the Lord to be obedient to Him. They were saying that they were going to walk in righteousness instead of continuing in unrighteousness. This is probably part of what Jesus is saying in His baptism. He is going to walk in righteousness. He is committed to fulfilling righteousness. In Matthew 5:17 He says, "Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill". Jesus is going to show us what it is to live a righteous life, a life that completely fulfills the Law and Prophets. His baptism was a statement that He was going to "fulfill righteousness".

At His baptism, as Jesus came up from the water, the heavens were opened and John saw the Spirit of God descend like a dove and light upon Jesus. Luke says that this happened while Jesus was praying and that the “Holy Spirit descended upon Him in bodily form like a dove” (Luke 3:21-22). John’s gospel expands the account:

29 The next day he saw Jesus coming to him and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! 30 This is He on behalf of whom I said, 'After me comes a Man who has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.' 31 I did not recognize Him, but so that He might be manifested to Israel, I came baptizing in water." 32 John testified saying, "I have seen the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven, and He remained upon Him. 33 I did not recognize Him, but He who sent me to baptize in water said to me, 'He upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him, this is the One who baptizes in the Holy Spirit.' 34 I myself have seen, and have testified that this is the Son of God” (John 1:29-34).

John makes it clear that he came baptizing in water so that Jesus might be manifested to Israel. The word for “manifested” means “made visible.” The whole purpose for what John was doing was to point to Jesus. John says the Lord had told him that the one on whom the Spirit descended and remained would be the one who baptizes in the Holy Spirit. This is what he saw when Jesus came and was baptized, and so he testified that Jesus is the Lamb of God and the Son of God.

This expression “the heavens were opened” seems interesting to me. Here are the four references to this that I have found in scripture:

- Ezekiel 1:1 - Now it came about in the thirtieth year, on the fifth day of the fourth month, while I was by the river Chebar among the exiles, the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God.
- John 1:51 - And He \*said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see the heavens opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."
- Acts 7:56 - and he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."
- Revelation 19:11 - And I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and He who sat on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and wages war.

It appears that the meaning is that “the heavens” are usually closed and we cannot see into them, but on rare occasions they are opened and people are allowed to see heavenly things they can’t ordinarily see. The “heavens” probably refers to the spiritual heavenly realm where angels and even demons live. Paul talks about the “heavenly places” in Ephesians. In 1:3 he mentions that God has blessed us “with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places”. In 1:20 he says Christ was seated at the Father’s “right hand in the heavenly places”. In 2:6 he says we are “seated...with Him in the heavenly places”. In 3:10 he says part of the purpose of his ministry was “that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places”. In 6:12 he says, “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places”. It seems clear that the “heavenly places” refers to the spiritual realm that transcends the physical and mortal realm. It is a realm that is usually invisible to us.

Not only did the heavens open and the Spirit descend on Jesus like a dove at His baptism, but the Father Himself also spoke and said, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased”. We see in this passage the Father, Son and Spirit mentioned together. The Father affirmed the identity of this One as His unique beloved Son. He said He is “well-

pleased” with Him. The Father repeated this on the Mount of Transfiguration when Peter James and John were there with Jesus along with Moses and Elijah. The voice out of a bright cloud said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him!” (Matthew 17:5). The testimony of the Father at His baptism was that Jesus is His Son and is the one who pleases Him. This passage echos Psalm 2:7 and Isaiah 42:1. Psalm 2:7 says, "I will surely tell of the decree of the LORD: He said to Me, 'You are My Son, Today I have begotten You'". Isaiah 42:1 says, “Behold, My Servant, whom I uphold; My chosen one in whom My soul delights. I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the nations.” The Son of God is declared by God to be such and is to be recognized as such by all people. He is the one who always does the will of the Father and always pleases Him.

The baptism of Jesus was a baptism of revelation and manifestation. At His baptism it was revealed that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God. This truth was manifested to John by the heavens being opened and the Spirit descending on Jesus, just as he had been told.

#### Matthew 4:1-11

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. 2 And after He had fasted forty days and forty nights, He then became hungry. 3 And the tempter came and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread." 4 But He answered and said, "It is written, 'MAN SHALL NOT LIVE ON BREAD ALONE, BUT ON EVERY WORD THAT PROCEEDS OUT OF THE MOUTH OF GOD.'" 5 Then the devil \*took Him into the holy city and had Him stand on the pinnacle of the temple, 6 and \*said 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 STRIKE YOUR FOOT AGAINST A STONE.'" 7 Jesus said to him, "On the other hand, it is written, 'YOU SHALL NOT PUT THE LORD YOUR GOD TO THE TEST.'" 8 Again, the devil \*took Him to a very high mountain and \*showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory; 9 and he said to Him, "All these things I will give You, if You fall down and worship me." 10 Then Jesus \*said to him, "Go, Satan! For it is written, 'YOU SHALL WORSHIP THE LORD YOUR GOD, AND SERVE HIM ONLY.'" 11 Then the devil \*left Him; and behold, angels came and *began* to minister to Him.

Having had the Spirit of God descend upon Him, the first thing the Spirit did was lead Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. Mark says that the Spirit “impelled” or “drove” Him into the wilderness (Mark 1:12). Jesus was to be tested before entering into His public ministry. The devil would try to trip Him up and get Him to sin. Evidently it was necessary at this point for Him to undergo this testing.

The Spirit led Him into the wilderness to be tempted, but it was the devil who did the tempting. James says clearly that God does not ever tempt anyone (James 1:13-17). He says we are tempted when we are “carried away and enticed” by our own lust. This is what the devil is going to try to do with Jesus; he is going to try to entice Him to fulfill His human desires in sinful ways.

The word for “devil”, *diabolos*, means a slanderer or accuser. When we find the word in the New Testament it is almost always a synonym for Satan, but in John 6:70 the word is applied to Judas, the betrayer of Jesus. In 1 Timothy 3:11, 2 Timothy 3:3 and Titus 2:3 the word is translated “malicious” (“malicious gossips”) in the New American Standard Bible. Tempting and accusing and enticing people into sin is Satan’s purpose, and he’s been very successful at it throughout human history.



Jesus fasted in the wilderness for forty days and nights, and then He became hungry. He was probably close to starving to death after having gone forty days without food, so He was indeed very hungry. When we are hungry we have a need, a lack and a desire. We need food, but we lack food, and so we have a strong desire for food. Jesus now feels this need and lack acutely, and naturally He wants something to eat. This provides the context for the first of Satan's temptations.

The tempter came and spoke to Jesus. He used words to tempt and to suggest a course of action. Satan tempts with words, with verbal commands, and it is never a good idea to listen to him and do what he suggests. Many people think that because a suggestion comes from a supernatural source, they must follow the suggestion. But if a suggestion or command is from a foreign voice in your head, it may well come from an evil entity who does not care about your well-being. Supernatural agents are not always good.

The tempter said to Jesus, "If you are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread". AT Robertson points out that this is a condition of the first class that assumes the condition to be true (Robertson's Word Pictures). The International Standard Version translates this, "Since you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become loaves of bread". At His baptism the Father declared that Jesus was His Son, and so the tempter picked up on this to challenge Jesus to use His power as the Son of God to change stones into bread to satisfy His hunger. He had the power to do this, to speak and to change the nature of the stones around Him, and it would be an easy way for Him to create the food He needed so urgently.

Jesus answered by quoting from Deuteronomy 8:3 and said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.'" I think the context of Deuteronomy 8:3 helps us understand the nature of the temptation that Jesus was facing at this point. In Deuteronomy 8 the Lord was explaining to the nation of Israel why He had allowed them to wander in the wilderness for forty years. He said it was, "that He might humble you, testing you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not" (Deuteronomy 8:2). Then He says in verse 3, "He humbled you and let you be hungry, and fed you with manna which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that He might make you understand that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord". Jesus was going through a similar experience in the wilderness. His trust in and obedience to the Father was being tested. Would He wait until the Father provided bread, or would He conjure some up on His own? Would He use His power to satisfy the longing of His flesh, or would He wait for the Father to provide for Him? I think this is the test He was facing.

In John 4, after Jesus had spoken to the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well, the disciples came to Him with food and were urging Him to eat, but He refused. He said to them, "I have food to eat that you do not know about". The disciples were puzzled, so He said, "My food is to do the will of Him who send me and accomplish His work" (John 4:31-34). There was a higher kind of "food" that nourished Jesus, the food of the will and commands of God. This was the food He had in the wilderness that sustained Him in His fast, the words which proceed from the mouth of God. In the wilderness Jesus learned by experience the meaning of Deuteronomy 8:3. He experienced living by the word of God rather than bread alone.

The second temptation takes place at the temple in Jerusalem. Satan took Jesus there and had Him stand on the "pinnacle of the temple". The word translated "pinnacle" is *pterugion*, which means "a wing" or "a little wing" (Thayer's Greek Definitions). Marvin Vincent, in His Word Studies, says this about the location of this "wing":

Herod's temple had two wings, the northern and southern, of which the southern was the higher and grander; that being the direction in which the chief enlargement of the temple area made by Herod was practicable. That enlargement, according to Josephus, was effected by building up walls of solid masonry from the valley below. At the extremity of the southern side of the area, was erected the "royal portico," a magnificent colonnade, consisting of a nave and two aisles, running across the entire space from the eastern to the western wall. Josephus further says, that "while the valley of itself was very deep, and its bottom could scarcely be seen when one looked down from above, the additional vastly high elevation of the portico was placed on that height, insomuch that, if any one looked down from the summit of the roof, combining the two altitudes in one stretch of vision, he would be giddy, while his sight could not reach to such an immense depth." This, in comparison with the northern wing, was so emphatically *the* wing of the temple as to explain the use of the article here, as a well-known locality. The scene of the temptation may have been (for the whole matter is mainly one of conjecture) the roof of this portico, at the southeastern angle, where it joined Solomon's Porch, and from which the view into the Kedron valley beneath was to the depth of four hundred and fifty feet.

As Jesus stood on this wing of the temple, the devil said, "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 strike Your foot against a stone.'" From such a height it would be certain death to jump off without a parachute. But Jesus was not a base jumper and had no parachute. The devil was inviting Jesus to prove He was the Son of God by doing this. Flying down from this wing of the temple without suffering any harm would be a miraculous demonstration of His uniqueness as the Son of God.

The devil explained by quoting scripture, from Psalm 91:10 and 11. The devil knows the Bible and is capable of using it. If we examine these two verses we discover that there is something the devil left out. The passage says, "For He will give His angels charge concerning you, to guard you in all your ways. They will bear you up in their hands, that you do not strike your foot against a stone". The phrase Satan left out was, "to guard you in all your ways". If we read all of Psalm 91 we discover that the Lord is promising guard the one who takes refuge in Him and trusts Him from the dangers that come his way in the course of life, from the "snare of the trapper and from the deadly pestilence" (verse 3), from the "terror by night" and the "arrow that flies by day" (verse 5), from the "pestilence that stalks in darkness, or the destruction that lays waste at noon" (verse 6). The one who trusts in the Lord may face all kinds of dangers, but the Lord will guard him and protect him in the midst of them. This passage does not, however, guarantee protection if a man deliberately does something reckless and foolish. In the normal course of a man's life he will not jump off the wing of the temple. This is not one of the "ways" of man who walks with the Lord and it is not an act of faith to do something like this.

Satan is good at misquoting, misinterpreting and misapplying the word of God. This is what he did at the beginning when he tempted Eve (Genesis 3:1). There are many who use the Bible, but misquote it, take it out of context and misapply it. This illustrates why it is so important to understand a quote in context. We must learn to draw from each text of scripture the intended meaning of the text and not our preferred or predetermined meaning. We must learn to detect distortions of the word of God.

Jesus answered the devil by quoting from Deuteronomy 6:16, and said, "On the other hand, it is written, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test'". There was a command that prohibited what the devil was telling Him to do. Yes, the passage from Psalm 91 promises

protection from danger for the man who trusts in and walks with the Lord faithfully, but if that man deliberately creates danger for himself as a test to see if the Lord really will protect him, then he is violating the command that one not put God to the test. To do such a thing is not faith, but presumption. This kind of test of the Lord is something that provokes Him.

Jesus shows us here why it is important to understand the full sweep of scripture rather than focusing on our favorite isolated verses. The assurances of Psalm 91 are marvelous, but must be balanced by the recognition that the passage does not give us a license to be reckless daredevils. One of the basic principles of the proper interpretation of scripture is that "scripture interprets scripture." That is, a passage of scripture must be understood in the context of other relevant passages that address the same theme or that address aspects or implications of a subject. The principle of God's protection of His people must be balanced by the command that they not test Him. There are many biblical subjects such as prayer, forgiveness, judgment and so on where we need to bring together many passages of scripture in order to have a clear, accurate and undistorted understanding of these things.

Next the devil took Jesus to the top of a very high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. Luke 4:5 says the devil showed him "all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time," which seems to imply that there was a supernatural aspect to this presentation. Jesus acknowledged that Satan was the "ruler of this world" in John 12:31, 14:30 and 16:11. 1 John 5:19 says "the whole world lies in the power of the evil one". Satan indeed does hold sway over the kingdoms of this world.

Satan said to Jesus, "All these things I will give to You, if You fall down and worship me." Luke gives us more detail about what Satan said, "I will give You all this domain and its glory; for it has been handed over to me, and I give it to whomever I wish" (Luke 4:6). We get a little insight here into how it is that Satan can make this offer. Authority over the kingdoms of mankind had been handed over to Satan. Jesus did not dispute this point with him. Who handed it over to him? Who abdicated as ruler over the earth and handed dominion over to Satan? I think the answer comes from Genesis and the fall of mankind. When God determined to create man, He said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth" (Genesis 1:26). After creating them, He said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth" (Genesis 1:28). God created the man and woman to rule over the earth. They were unique among all the creatures of the earth in that they were created in God's image and likeness. There is no created creature like man. This is why God gave humanity dominion over the earth and all of its creatures. In the fall (Genesis 3) Adam and Eve gave themselves over to the lies of Satan rather than the word of God and submitted themselves to him. They followed Satan's word rather than God's word and submitted to the false authority of Satan rather than the true authority of God. In doing so, they in effect made Satan their ruler. Humanity still rules over the earth and its creatures, but Satan rules over humanity.

We must hasten to say that the Lord was still in the middle of all of this. The fall of man did not take Him by surprise. Indeed, He had created the conditions through which this could take place. He created the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. He had commanded the man and woman not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. He had warned them of the consequences of disobedience. He had allowed Satan to have access to the man and woman. He made it possible for them to turn away from Him, and I don't think we can fully comprehend His reasons for doing things this way. Further, He knew that they would turn away. He knew that they would listen to Satan and submit to Him and all

along He had a plan for the redemption of mankind and for restoring the kingdom through His Son.

When Jesus talked about His impending death in John 12, He said, "Now judgment is upon this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out. And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself" (John 12:31-32). It was through His death that Jesus would "cast out" Satan, the ruler of this world, and would re-assert His dominion over all men. Hebrews 2:14-15 says, "Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives." Jesus deposed Satan, not by submitting to him and worshiping him, but through his atoning death on the cross that pays for the sins of mankind. When Satan offered to make Jesus the ruler over all the kingdoms of the earth if He would bow down and worship him, he was offering Jesus a shortcut to the eventual goal of ruling over mankind. Satan, of course, does not want to be "cast out" and "rendered powerless" but wants to maintain his position and power over humanity. He has desired all along to actually depose God Himself! But Christ has cast him out through His death and resurrection.

Jesus refused Satan's offer. He said, "Go, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only.'" The quote is from Deuteronomy 6:13, just three verses before the verse about not putting the Lord to the test. In the context Moses was exhorting Israel that they not forget the Lord and all He had done for them. He warned them not to follow the gods of the other peoples around them (Deuteronomy 6:14). He explained, "for the Lord your God in the midst of you is a jealous God; otherwise the anger of the Lord your God will be kindled against you, and He will wipe you off the face of the earth" (Deuteronomy 6:15). No other "god" or entity is to be worshiped except the Lord God Himself. This is the primary command of all commands, which Satan was asking Jesus to violate. This was the last straw for Jesus in this encounter, and He told Satan to leave. Jesus would never violate this fundamental and most important command.

We do not want to worship and serve the wrong thing. We do not want to submit ourselves to the devil and obey him. But when we turn away from the true God, we turn to other things to worship and serve them. Paul talks about this exchange in Romans 1:18-32. In Romans 1:25 he says, "For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen." To worship anyone and anything other than the Creator is to worship something He created that is unworthy of worship. The wrath of God will fall upon those who do this.

The devil departed and angels came to minister to Jesus. The evil spirit left as Jesus had commanded (the devil must submit to Jesus and not the other way around) and then good spirits came to help Him. Luke 4:13 says that the devil "left Him until an opportune time." The devil would be back to make more attempts to tempt Jesus.

Jesus models for us here an important strategy for facing temptation. We need to understand when we face temptation that Satan will question and contradict what God has said. We need to know the commands of God so that we can remind Satan and ourselves of what God has said and requires. We must be able to recognize it when a suggestion contradicts the word and will of God and quote the relevant scripture in order to fight the suggestion.

#### Matthew 4:12-17

Now when Jesus heard that John had been taken into custody, He withdrew into Galilee; 13 and leaving Nazareth, He came and settled in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali. 14 This was to fulfill what was spoken through Isaiah the

prophet: 15 "THE LAND OF ZEBULUN AND THE LAND OF NAPHTALI, BY THE WAY OF THE SEA, BEYOND THE JORDAN, GALILEE OF THE GENTILES—16 THE PEOPLE WHO WERE SITTING IN DARKNESS SAW A GREAT LIGHT, AND THOSE WHO WERE SITTING IN THE LAND AND SHADOW OF DEATH, UPON THEM A LIGHT DAWNED." 4:17 From that time Jesus began to preach and say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

Some time after Jesus had been tempted in the wilderness, He got word that John had been "taken into custody." The word means that he had been "handed over" into the custody of another. He had been arrested by Herod. The arrest and execution of John is recounted in Matthew 14:1-12. When He heard about John, Jesus withdrew into Galilee. This implies that Jesus had been in Jerusalem or Judea, and left for Galilee when He heard about John.

If we only had Matthew's gospel we would infer that this happened fairly soon after the temptation in the wilderness, but from John's gospel we learn that Jesus spent a fair amount of time in Jerusalem and Judea before He withdrew to Galilee. In fact He spent time going back and forth from Galilee to Judea (read John chapters 1 through 4). In John 2:1-12 Jesus is in Cana of Galilee, and then in 2:13 – 3:21 He is in Jerusalem for the Passover. In John 3:22-36 He is in Judea and John is still around as well. In chapter 4 He travels from Judea to Galilee by way of Samaria and has the encounter with the woman at the well. We find, then, that there is a gap of some months at least between Matthew 4:11 and Matthew 4:12.

Jesus went to His home town of Nazareth and then moved to Capernaum. Matthew tells us it is "by the sea, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali." Zebulun and Naphtali were tribes of Israel, Zebulun being one of the sons of Leah and Naphtali being the son of Bilhah, Rachel's maid. These two tribes bordered each other on the north and west shore of the Sea of Galilee.

In going to settle in Capernaum, Jesus fulfilled what was spoken through Isaiah in Isaiah 9:1-2. This message was delivered through Isaiah the prophet. The word of God was spoken through the prophet He had chosen. This is almost always His means for giving us His words and His revelation. He uses people as His spokesmen.

Isaiah 9 is the same chapter that contains the famous words, "For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; and the government will rest on His shoulders; and His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6). The coming of this one would be the fulfillment of the promise that the people walking in darkness would see a great light. The Messiah would come to this area where Jews and Gentiles mixed and would bring His light and life to them.

The condition of these people is described in the quote from Isaiah 9:2 in verse 16. They were "sitting in darkness" and "sitting in the land and shadow of death." The darkness in which they dwelt was the "shadow of death." Death casts a shadow over all mankind and the fear of death makes us slaves of Satan. Hebrews 2:14-15 says, "Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives." When we live in sin and death we are slaves of Satan. He holds over us the fear of death and makes us do his bidding. Jesus, through His death, rendered Satan powerless and freed us from the fear of death and from our slavery. Jesus told Paul that He had chosen and appointed him and sent him to the Gentiles in order "to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me" (Acts 26:18). We must understand that the world is in the darkness of sin and death and as representatives of Christ

we carry His light to this dark world. In Christ the light has been seen and the light has dawned. People need no longer dwell in darkness. The mission of the church has not changed. Our mission is one of opening eyes through the gospel message so that people can turn from the darkness to the light and put their faith in Christ and be forgiven and brought into His kingdom and family.

With John in custody, Jesus began to preach the same message, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Jesus also called upon people to change their minds and turn around because the rule of God was about to break in upon mankind.

Matthew 4:18-22

Now as Jesus was walking by the Sea of Galilee, He saw two brothers, Simon who was called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. 19 And He \*said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men." 20 Immediately they left their nets and followed Him. 21 Going on from there He saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and He called them. 22 Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed Him.

Matthew makes it sound as if Jesus simply called to these men and they immediately followed Him, but John again gives us more background to this account. Some of these men had been followers of John the Baptist, and John pointed them to Jesus.

35 Again the next day John was standing with two of his disciples, 36 and he looked at Jesus as He walked, and \*said, "Behold, the Lamb of God!" 37 The two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus. 38 And Jesus turned and saw them following, and \*said to them, "What do you seek?" They said to Him, "Rabbi (which translated means Teacher), where are You staying?" 39 He \*said to them, "Come, and you will see." So they came and saw where He was staying; and they stayed with Him that day, for it was about the tenth hour. 40 One of the two who heard John speak and followed Him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. 41 He \*found first his own brother Simon and \*said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which translated means Christ). 42 He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon the son of John; you shall be called Cephas" (which is translated Peter). (John 1:35-42)

Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two men who heard John the Baptist on that day, and he went and found Simon, who was called "Cephas" (Peter) by Jesus. John the apostle does not tell us who the other man was, but it is thought that John himself was the other man there who heard John the Baptist. Throughout the gospel of John the author never refers to himself by name. These two men, at least, had heard of Jesus directly from John the Baptist. Peter was the brother of Andrew, and James was the brother of John, and Luke 5:10 tells us that they were partners with each other in their fishing business. Having previously encountered Jesus and having been convinced that He was the Messiah, when He came to them and called them by the Sea of Galilee, they willingly left their nets to follow Him.

The command of Jesus to these men is "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men." The word "follow" translates two Greek words here, *duete*, a verb meaning "come!", and the adverb *opisō*, meaning "back, behind or after" (New American Standard Exhaustive Concordance). So Jesus was saying to them, "Come after Me!" It was a command and not simply a suggestion or option, He ordered them to come after Him. The call of Jesus to come

after Him is an order. It is not one good option among many, but is the only way that leads to life and meaning.

If these men will come after Jesus, He will do something for them. He will make them “fishers of men.” They will still be fishing and casting nets, but they will be fishing for men. It will be a different kind of fishing. Their purpose will change. Their aim in life would be re-focused. Instead of pulling fish out of the water they will be pulling people into relationship with Christ and into the kingdom of God. Jesus came to “seek and save the lost” (Luke 19:10) and His followers have the same purpose. Paul said, “I have become all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some” (1 Corinthians 9:22). When we respond to Jesus and follow Him the purpose and focus of our lives and work becomes re-centered on the message of Christ and the salvation of people.

It says of Simon and Andrew, “Immediately they left their nets and followed Him.” Of James and John it says, “Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed Him.” Their response was immediate. They did not hesitate or try to negotiate. They did not put Him off until another time. It was the Messiah who called them and it was a great privilege to be called by Him to follow Him.

What these men did immediately was to leave their nets, their boats and their family members in order to follow Jesus. They had to depart from fishing and the equipment and associations that accompanied it. There was a price to be paid in order to follow Jesus. They could not keep doing what they had been doing and follow Jesus. They could not take their boats and their nets with them. The old life had to be left behind and abandoned for the sake of following Jesus. This is not to say that there is anything wrong with being a fisherman or the profession of fishing; this was not an evil thing they were doing that had to be forsaken. But Jesus was calling them to a higher profession, and the lesser thing had to be left behind. He did not come to them to learn how to be a fisherman, but He came to them to call them to learn from Him how to be fishers of men. He would be the Teacher and they would be the students, and therefore it was necessary for them to depart from what they were doing in order to come learn from Him.

Following Jesus means leaving some things behind. The old life has to give way to the new life. Certainly evil patterns of thought and behavior and false beliefs must be turned away from and left behind. But also we will need to leave some other things behind that are not necessarily bad. We may have to change our profession. We may have to leave family and friends and partnerships. We may have to move to a different place. We will have to change our focus from concerns about survival and existence and comfort and profit to focus on trusting in the Lord and following His instructions. We will have to stop focusing on self and start focusing on the Lord and on service to others. Following Jesus will mean leaving many things behind and replacing those things with more worthy and virtuous things.

#### Matthew 4:23-25

Jesus was going throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness among the people. 24 The news about Him spread throughout all Syria; and they brought to Him all who were ill, those suffering with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, paralytics; and He healed them. 25 Large crowds followed Him from Galilee and the Decapolis and Jerusalem and Judea and from beyond the Jordan.

Here is a summary of the ministry of Jesus during His first tour of Galilee. He was traveling around the area visiting the synagogues, teaching and preaching the gospel of the

kingdom. It appears He had the same procedure that Paul later also followed of going to the synagogues and gathering with the Jews in order to preach there. Paul seems to have always gone first to the synagogues in the cities he visited in order to present the gospel message to the Jews first (see Acts 17:1-2).

The priority for Jesus was to teach and preach the gospel, the good news, of the kingdom. He came with an all-important message to present to everyone. Along with the message He also came to heal. It's interesting that the Greek word translated "healing" is *therapeuō*, which is related to *therapōn*, a servant or attendant. He was healing every kind of disease and sickness. There was no type or category of illness that Jesus could not heal. There was no illness that was too much for Him. He even raised people from the dead!

His healing ministry drew the crowds. If you have someone who can genuinely heal every kind of disease and sickness, word will get around and the sick and desperate will come to seek healing. This is what happened with Jesus. News of His miraculous healings spread quickly around the area. People brought all who were ill to Him to be healed.

The variety of illnesses is described in verse 24. There were those "who were ill." AT Robertson renders this "those who had it bad." The word for "suffering" means "held together with constraint, to compress" (Thayer's Greek Definitions). There were people who were experiencing the pressure of their illness. There was a variety of diseases and pains (torments) that people were experiencing. Then he gets more specific and mentions "demoniacs, epileptics, paralytics." The illnesses and afflictions were spiritual, mental and emotional as well as physical. Jesus healed them all. He could handle any sort of illness or disability.

People from all over heard about Jesus and came to follow Him. They were from Galilee, the Decapolis (ten cities), Jerusalem, Judea and from beyond the Jordan (east of the Jordan). He attracted large crowds due to His miraculous healings.

#### Matthew 5:1-12

1 When Jesus saw the crowds, He went up on the mountain; and after He sat down, His disciples came to Him. 2 He opened His mouth and began to teach them, saying,  
3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.  
4 "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.  
5 "Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth.  
6 "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.  
7 "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.  
8 "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.  
9 "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.  
10 "Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.  
11 "Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. 12 "Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

Jesus did not try to avoid the crowds. Attracting a crowd was a good thing and He did not run from them. In media the goal is to attract and hold an audience, and so it seems that Jesus was not averse to doing the same thing. His fame gave Him an opportunity to speak and to teach to a large number of people, and so here in chapters 5 through 7 we find the "Sermon on the Mount."



We have the first occurrence of the word “disciples” in Matthew here in verse 1. The word is *mathetes*, meaning a student, a pupil, a learner. Jesus had those following Him who were His pupils, His students, and their purpose was to learn from Him all that He had to teach them. They were those who were going to become “fishers of men.”

So Jesus “opened His mouth and began to teach them.” As rabbis usually did, Jesus sat down to teach, and He taught by speaking. This is a very obvious thing to point out, and maybe it’s unnecessary, but Jesus taught by speaking. I point this out because it seems that there are those today who think that teaching by means of the lecture or speech is ineffective. They want to use drama or song or film or dance in order to teach. Let me say that there is nothing wrong with these methods, but if we examine the teaching of Jesus we are examining what He said. Most of His teaching took the form of speech. Certainly He used story-telling as a method in His parables. He used object lessons (“I will make you fishers of men,” “I am the vine, you are the branches, and My Father is the vinedresser”). He taught by giving His students experiences as He healed the sick, cast out demons, raised the dead, stilled the storm and changed water into wine. But primarily His teaching was given in the form of speech.

What we call the “Sermon on the Mount” begins with the nine “beatitudes,” the “blessed are” statements. The word “blessed” is one of those words we use without often having a full understanding of what it means. The Greek word is *makarios*. Strong’s Greek Dictionary says the word means “fortunate, well off: - blessed, happy.” Thayer’s Greek Definitions simply says, “blessed, happy.” Marvin Vincent, in his Word Studies, has a lengthy treatment of this word, its background in classical Greek literature and its use in the Bible. Of its use in Greek literature he writes, “Its root is supposed to be a word meaning *great*, and its earlier meaning appears to be limited to *outward* prosperity; so that it is used at times as synonymous with rich.” In later use some moral elements came into the use of the word in the sense of “inward correctness as the essence of happiness.” Vincent says, “But in all of them, from Socrates onward, virtue depends primarily upon knowledge; so that to be happy is, first of all, to know. It is thus apparent that the Greek philosophy had no conception of *sin* in the Bible sense. As virtue depended on knowledge, sin was the outcome of ignorance, and virtue and its consequent happiness were therefore the prerogative of the few and the learned.” Regarding the use of the word in the Bible, Vincent says, “Happiness, or better, *blessedness*, was therefore represented both in the Old and in the New Testament by this word μακάριος. In the Old Testament the idea involves more of outward prosperity than in the New Testament, yet it almost universally occurs in connections which emphasize, as its principal element, a sense of God’s approval founded in righteousness which rests ultimately on love to God.” In the scriptures the word became “the express symbol of a happiness identified with pure character. Behind it lies the clear cognition of sin as the fountain-head of all misery, and of holiness as the final and effectual cure for every woe. For knowledge as the basis of virtue, and therefore of happiness, it substitutes faith and love.” The word, then, might be rendered “happy” or “fortunate” or even “approved by God”.

The first of the nine statements is, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” The word for “poor” here is a word that denotes someone who is utterly destitute. It is used of Lazarus in the story of Jesus about the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16:19-31. This is the level of poverty at which a person has no resources of their own and is reduced to begging for whatever others will give them. Jesus is not just speaking here of physical and economic poverty, but He says “poor in spirit.” The person who is spiritually poor is the one who has no spiritual resources of their own. They have no virtue, no righteousness of their own that they can rely upon, and they are aware of it. They are those who acknowledge their spiritual poverty, and it is a burden to their souls, as physical poverty is a burden. The reality

is that all of us are spiritually poor, but many of us do not recognize our poverty. We have a false confidence in our own virtue. We have been blinded to our poverty. This was the problem in the church in Laodicea. Jesus wrote to them in Revelation 3 and said:

15 'I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I wish that you were cold or hot. 16 'So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth. 17 'Because you say, "I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing," and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked, 18 I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire so that you may become rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself, and that the shame of your nakedness will not be revealed; and eye salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see. 19 'Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; therefore be zealous and repent.

The same word for “poor” is used here in Revelation 3:17. These people thought they were rich, but they were really poor, and needed to come to Jesus for the true spiritual wealth they needed. They did not know their true condition, and Jesus sought to open their eyes to their situation.

I think this is one of our greatest problems today, that people do not or will not recognize their spiritual poverty. They are blinded to their need for Christ and so do not come to Him. They think that they are good enough in and of themselves and that they are acceptable before God as they are. Part of the ministry of the church is to open the eyes of the unbelieving so that they can turn to the Lord. Jesus said this to Paul, “for this purpose I have appeared to you, to appoint you a minister and a witness not only to the things which you have seen, but also to the things in which I will appear to you; rescuing you from the Jewish people and from the Gentiles, to whom I am sending you, to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me” (Acts 26:16-18). Unless their eyes are opened by the gospel and the Spirit of God, people cannot turn from the darkness to the light and cannot put their faith in Christ.

The second beatitude is, “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.” We mourn when we experience loss. When someone close to us dies we mourn and grieve. We mourn when we cannot obtain what we need or attain what we are striving for. I think this beatitude may be tied to the first beatitude in terms of mourning over our spiritual poverty. Knowing that we fall far short of righteousness is a grief to us, or should be. Recognizing our spiritual poverty produces a mourning that causes us to cry out to God for the riches only He can supply.

The one who mourns will be comforted. No one wants to mourn. We would all like to avoid times of mourning in our lives, but when we mourn, especially when we mourn over our own sin, God provides comfort. Comfort will come to the grieving.

The third beatitude says, “Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth.” The King James Version uses the word “meek” and other versions use the word “humble”. The Greek word for “gentle,” *praus*, is used three other times in the New Testament, twice in reference to Jesus. In Matthew 11:29 Jesus says, “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.” Matthew 21:5 says, “Say to the daughter of Zion, ‘Behold your king is coming to you, gentle and mounted on a donkey, even on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.’” Jesus is the King who has come, yet He has not come with an army of angels to conquer, but comes as one who is humble and gentle, riding on the foal of a donkey. He has not swept in with an army on a war horse to conquer, but has come with gentleness.

I like what the Jamieson Fausset and Brown Commentary says about this word:

Towards men this disposition is the opposite of high-mindedness, and a quarrelsome and revengeful spirit; it “rather takes wrong, and suffers itself to be defrauded” (1Co\_6:7); it “avenges not itself, but rather gives place unto wrath” (Rom\_12:19); like the meek One, “when reviled, it reviles not again; when it suffers, it threatens not: but commits itself to Him that judgeth righteously” (1Pe\_2:19-22).

The gentle are blessed because they will inherit the earth. The word for “earth” can mean “land” or “ground” or “country.” One day the world will not be ruled by those who swagger in with power and force and authority, but who will inherit it because they have been gentle and humble and have submitted themselves to the King of kings and Lord of lords.

We come to the fourth beatitude in verse 6, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.” Hunger and thirst imply both a need and a lack. Hunger implies the need for food and a lack of food. Thirst implies a need for water and a lack of water. When we are hungry we begin to look for something to eat to satisfy our hunger and meet our need. When we are thirsty we look for something to drink. Hunger and thirst drive us to seek what we need. If we go long enough without food and water we will die. This is something we all know. Jesus says here that the blessed person is the one who feels acutely their need for righteousness. They crave righteousness. They understand that they need it and see that they lack it, and so they pursue it.

At this point we must ask, “What is righteousness?” What is it, why do we need it and how do we get it? If it is as essential as food and water, then we need to understand what it is and how to obtain it.

The word used for “righteousness” in Matthew 5:6 is *dikaionē*, which comes from *dikaios*, meaning “correct, righteous, by implication innocent” (New American Standard Exhaustive Concordance). I like what the Jamieson Fausset and Brown Commentary says, that righteousness denotes “that spiritual and entire conformity to the law of God, under the want of which the saints groan, and the possession of which constitutes the only true saintship. The Old Testament dwells much on this righteousness, as that which alone God regards with approbation (Psa\_11:7; Psa\_23:3; Psa\_106:3; Pro\_12:28; Pro\_16:31; Isa\_64:5, etc.)” The righteous person, then, is the one who is completely obedient to the law of God, who does all that God requires at all times. Jesus could say, “I always do the things that are pleasing to Him” (John 8:29). He said, “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work” (John 4:34). This is what the righteous person does, he always seeks to please the Lord in all he does and lives to do the will of God and accomplish His purpose. The righteous man does not live to please himself and indulge himself. Jesus said in John 7:18, “He who speaks from himself seeks his own glory; but He who is seeking the glory of the One who sent Him, He is true, and there is no unrighteousness in Him.” The righteous person does what Jesus did and seeks the glory of God rather than his own glory.

In addition, Hosea 14:9 says, “Whoever is wise, let him understand these things; Whoever is discerning, let him know them. For the ways of the LORD are right, And the righteous will walk in them, But transgressors will stumble in them.” The righteous are those who walk in the ways of the Lord, the ways that are right. Malachi 3:18 says, “So you will again distinguish between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve Him.” The righteous are those who serve the Lord, but the wicked do not serve Him.

Righteousness is what we need and what we lack. Scripture makes it clear that apart from Christ Himself there is no one who really is righteous. Paul strings together several quotes from the Psalms in Romans 3:10-18 and says,

“What then? Are we better than they? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin; 10 as it is written, ‘there is none righteous, not even one; 11 there is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God; 12 all have turned aside, together they have become useless; there is none who does good, there is not even one.’ 13 ‘their throat is an open grave, with their tongues they keep deceiving,’ ‘the poison of asps is under their lips’; 14 ‘whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness’; 15 ‘their feet are swift to shed blood, 16 destruction and misery are in their paths, 17 and the path of peace they have not known.’ 18 ‘there is no fear of God before their eyes.’”

If we are not righteous, then how do we obtain it? Where is it found? If we read further in Romans 3 we will discover the answer.

21 But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, 22 even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; 25 whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; 26 for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. 27 Where then is boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith. 28 For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law. 29 Or is God the God of Jews only? Is He not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, 30 since indeed God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith is one. 31 Do we then nullify the Law through faith? May it never be! On the contrary, we establish the Law (Romans 3:21-31).

Paul went on in Romans 4 to discuss further the righteousness that is credited to us by faith (see Romans 4:5 and 13). He is saying that though we cannot become righteous by our attempts to keep the Law, we can be “justified,” declared righteous, through faith in Jesus Christ. God is able to do this because of the “redemption which is in Christ Jesus.” It is because through His death Jesus paid the price for our sins and offenses God can then forgive those who believe in Him and can declare them righteous. He can credit to them the righteousness of Christ. A hunger and thirst for righteousness, then, is really a hunger and thirst for Christ Himself, because He is our righteousness. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 1:30-31, “But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, so that, just as it is written, ‘LET HIM WHO BOASTS, BOAST IN THE LORD.’”

To those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, the promise is that “they shall be satisfied.” Of the word here for “satisfied” Marvin Vincent in his Word Studies writes:

A very strong and graphic word, originally applied to the feeding and fattening of animals in a stall. In Rev 19:21, it is used of the filling of the birds with the flesh of God's enemies. Also of the multitudes fed with the loaves and fishes (Mat 14:20; Mar 8:8; Luk 9:17). It is manifestly appropriate here as expressing the *complete satisfaction* of spiritual hunger and thirst. Hence Wycliffe's rendering, *fulfilled*, is strictly true to the original.

Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness will not merely get a little taste or a crumb, but they will be filled to the full with it.

The fifth beatitude in verse 7 says, "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy." Probably the best way to understand mercy is to look at other places this word is used in the New Testament. Sometimes when people came to Jesus for healing they asked for mercy. Two blind men asked Him for mercy in Matthew 9:27 and another two in Matthew 20:30-31. A Canaanite woman came to Him and said, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is cruelly demon-possessed" (Matthew 15:22). These people recognized that they needed from the Lord, not justice or fairness or equality, but mercy. They saw that if He healed them it was an act of mercy and compassion.

In the parable of the unforgiving slave (Matthew 18:23-35) the king graciously forgave a slave who owed him millions and could not repay. The slave then went out and found a fellow slave who owed him 100 denarii and violently demanded that he pay his debt. The fellow slave asked for more time, but the first man was unwilling and had the man thrown into prison. When the king heard about it, he called the first slave to him and said, "You wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, in the same way that I had mercy on you?" And then it says, "And his lord, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him. My heavenly Father will also do the same to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart." When someone owes you money you have a right to collect that debt. There is no obligation to forgive the debt and let it go. You loaned them the money with the understanding that it would be repaid. Our natural inclination is to punish those who do not pay us what they owe. Our natural inclination is to get back at those who have hurt us. But mercy forgives. Mercy does not retaliate or try to punish those who have wronged us.

Paul told Timothy about the mercy he had received from the Lord in 1 Timothy 1:12-16:

12 I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because He considered me faithful, putting me into service, 13 even though I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor. Yet I was shown mercy because I acted ignorantly in unbelief; 14 and the grace of our Lord was more than abundant, with the faith and love which are found in Christ Jesus. 15 It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all. 16 Yet for this reason I found mercy, so that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life.

In Paul the Lord showed mercy to a man who was a blasphemer and persecutor and violent aggressor. If anyone did not deserve the mercy of the Lord it was Paul. In His mercy the Lord recognized that Paul "acted ignorantly in unbelief." Paul sincerely thought that he was serving the Lord by persecuting Christians (Acts 26:9-11). In His mercy the Lord turned Paul around and made him an advocate of Christ rather than an opponent. It will help us be merciful if we recognized the ignorance and unbelief of others. They may sincerely believe

that they are doing the right thing when they oppose us and injure us. We can be merciful to those who are hostile toward us if we remember that they have been deceived and are in darkness. Mercy is always given to the undeserving, to those who deserve wrath.

The merciful shall receive mercy. There is a reciprocal thing here. We can extend mercy to others because we have already received mercy from God. When we extend mercy we receive more mercy. God is merciful to the merciful.

One observation here that I think I need to underline, that I've touched on a bit already, is that our world needs to recognize its need for mercy. We hear a lot about social justice and fairness and equality, but there is little recognition of our great need for God's mercy and forgiveness. We are estranged from God and need to be reconciled to Him. We are sinners who must be forgiven or condemned. We are debtors who cannot possibly pay back our debt. God is merciful and wants to give us His mercy, but we don't see how badly we need it. We need to turn from thinking that God is being unfair and unjust and start crying out to Him for His mercy.

The sixth beatitude says, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." A pure thing is a thing that is clean, that has no contaminants in it. Pure water is just water and nothing else. Pure gold is only gold with no other elements mixed in with it. In this world these things require treatment to achieve this purity. We must purify water to remove impurities. We must refine gold in order to make it pure. The same is true of us, we must be purified. We don't start from a position of purity, but the Lord must make us pure. This purification is done for us through the blood of Jesus. John writes in 1 John 1:5-9:

5 This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all. 6 If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; 7 but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. 8 If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Our sin must be forgiven and our unrighteousness must be cleansed. This is only accomplished through the blood, the death, of Jesus Christ. The author of Hebrews says, "For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" (Hebrews 9:13-14). Through the death of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, God has provided for our purification. Our hearts are made pure as we turn to Christ and confess our sins and seek His forgiveness through His blood.

The pure in heart are blessed because they will see God. David says this in Psalm 24:3-5, "Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD? And who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, Who has not lifted up his soul to falsehood And has not sworn deceitfully. He shall receive a blessing from the LORD And righteousness from the God of his salvation." The one with clean hands and a pure heart, who is clean inside and out, will appear before God. He is the one who is free of the contamination of falsehood and deceit. Impure people are full of falsehood and deceit, but those cleansed through the blood of Christ are freed from these things.

Before moving on I think we must note that this purity Jesus is talking about is an inner purity, a purity of heart. He's not just talking about a change in behavior, but a change in heart on which right behavior depends. He emphasized this often. In Matthew 12:33-35 He says,

“Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for the tree is known by its fruit. You brood of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak what is good? For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart. The good man brings out of his good treasure what is good; and the evil man brings out of his evil treasure what is evil.” In Matthew 15:17-20 He says, “Do you not understand that everything that goes into the mouth passes into the stomach, and is eliminated? But the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders. These are the things which defile the man; but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile the man.” In Matthew 23:25-28 He blasted the scribes and Pharisees for being concerned about outer cleanliness while neglecting inner cleanliness:

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside they are full of robbery and self-indulgence. 26 "You blind Pharisee, first clean the inside of the cup and of the dish, so that the outside of it may become clean also. 27 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. 28 "So you, too, outwardly appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness."

Outward cleanliness depends on inward cleanliness. Good behavior comes from a good heart. If we neglect purity of heart we will never achieve pure behavior.

The seventh beatitude, in verse 9, is, “Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called sons of God.” The Greek term for “peacemakers” is *eirēnopoios*, and does indeed mean “peacemakers.” It does not describe someone who is merely peaceful or peaceable, but one who makes peace. A peacemaker is one who brings estranged parties together and enables them to be reconciled to each other.

Describing Jesus Christ in Colossians 1, Paul uses the verb form of the word, *eirēnopoieō*, and writes in verses 19 and 20, “For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven.” God's purpose in giving His Son as a sacrifice for our sins was to make peace with us and to reconcile everything to Himself. This is something that is pleasing to Him. God wants to be at peace with us and wants us to be reconciled to Him. He does not take pleasure in being at odds with us because of our wickedness. He has done what had to be done in order to make peace with us.

Having reconciled us to Himself through the blood of Christ, God gives to us, to His people, the ministry of reconciliation. Having made peace with us, God makes us peacemakers. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:18-21:

18 But all things are of God, who reconciled us to himself through Jesus Christ, and gave to us the ministry of reconciliation; 19 namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not reckoning to them their trespasses, and having committed to us the word of reconciliation. 20 We are therefore ambassadors on behalf of Christ, as though God were entreating by us: we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. 21 For him who knew no sin he made to be sin on our behalf; so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

The reconciled become ambassadors of Christ and agents of reconciliation. On behalf of Christ, we beg others to be reconciled to God. We are used of God to entreat others to be reconciled to Him. This is the message we urge upon others, the “word of reconciliation,” that they must be reconciled to God through the blood of Christ.

Peacemakers will be called sons of God. Because God is a peacemaker, those who take up this role are His offspring. They are doing what He does. We emulate God when we are peacemakers.

The eighth beatitude is in verse 10, “Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” The Greek word for “persecuted” is *diōkō*, meaning “to make to run or flee, put to flight, drive away” (Thayer’s Greek Definitions). I like the Contemporary English Version’s translation, “God blesses those people who are treated badly for doing right. They belong to the kingdom of heaven.” Often those who do what is right in God’s sight will be persecuted by the unrighteous. There are many reasons why people persecute others, and sometimes that persecution and opposition can be deserved. Those who victimize others deserve to be opposed and prosecuted. Peter discusses this in 1 Peter 2:19 and 20, “For this finds favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a person bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly. For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God.” If we sin and are treated harshly because of it, we gain no favor from God. But if we do what is right and suffer persecution as a result, we then do find favor with God.

The kingdom of God belongs to those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness. Those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness demonstrate that they love the Lord, are right with Him and are following after Him. As He was persecuted, so they are persecuted. They are subjects of His kingdom. The same thing is true of them that is true of those who are poor in spirit, the kingdom of heaven is theirs.

The ninth beatitude builds on the eighth, “Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you” (Matthew 5:11-12). Now Jesus switches from the generic to the specific. He says “Blessed are *you*.” He’s now speaking specifically of His disciples, of those who really follow Him. When (not if) they are abused verbally and physically because of Jesus they are blessed. Followers of Jesus can expect to be reproached, insulted, falsely accused and physically assaulted for His sake. Jesus told them that the world would hate them because of Him:

- Luke 21:16-17 "But you will be betrayed even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to death, and you will be hated by all because of My name."
- John 15:18-19 "If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you. "If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you."
- John 17:14 "I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world."

Why does the world hate Jesus so much? Jesus said that the world hates Him because, “I testify of it, that its deeds are evil” (John 7:7). He said to the world and the people in the world, “Your deeds are evil.” He called on people to repent or perish (Luke 13:1-5). Jesus did not affirm people in their sin and tell them that they are okay as they are. He said that He had



come to “call sinners to repentance” (Luke 5:32). No one likes to be told that they are wrong, that their beliefs are wrong and their behavior is wrong and that they need to repent. No one likes to hear that they are out of step with God and that they are subject to His wrath, but this is the objective truth. This is the “bad news,” but the good news is that through Jesus Christ God has made forgiveness available and we can be reconciled to Him through repentance and faith in Christ. The reality is that many will not tolerate this message that they are sinners in need of a Savior, and so will persecute His messengers.

For those who are persecuted for the sake of Christ it is a great blessing! Why is this? Not because being persecuted is enjoyable, but because of the reward that is set aside in heaven for those who suffer for His sake. There is much compensation in heaven for those who suffer for the sake of Christ. When Paul wrote of his sufferings in 2 Corinthians 4, he concluded by saying, “For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal” (2 Corinthians 4:17-18). In chapter 5 of 2 Corinthians he went on to talk about the eternal dwelling we receive from God when our “earthly tent” is torn down. There is unimaginable glory ahead for those who are faithful to Christ that far outweighs the suffering of this life. This is why Jesus tells us to rejoice and be glad in persecution.

Being glad and celebrating when we are persecuted seems like a strange way to react to it, but this is what Jesus says to do. Luke’s version of this saying by Jesus says, “Be glad in that day and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven. For in the same way their fathers used to treat the prophets.” This is what the apostles did when they suffered for the sake of Jesus. Acts 5:41 says, “So they went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name.” We are to react like we do when our team wins the World Series. Unfortunately today we don’t see much of this in the church in the West. Instead of rejoicing and gladness we seem to react with surprise and complaint when the world opposes us. It seems like we say, “Hey, you shouldn’t get upset with us, we are nice people trying to do good things!” It also seems like we are trying to present the good news of Christ in such a way as to avoid having the world get upset with us. This can do nothing but compromise the message. We must be ambassadors of Christ, urging the world to be reconciled to God through Him (see 2 Corinthians 5:11-21), and when we are abused and persecuted because of Christ, we must be glad and rejoice. We are privileged to suffer as He suffered and as the prophets suffered! Peter learned this lesson and wrote in 1 Peter 4:12-16:

12 Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; 13 but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation. 14 If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. 15 Make sure that none of you suffers as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler; 16 but if anyone suffers as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name.

Matthew 5:13-16

"You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men. 14 "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; 15 nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to

all who are in the house. 16 "Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven."

The disciples of Jesus are those whom He just described in the beatitudes. They are the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the gentle, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers and those who are persecuted for His sake. At least, this is what they should be as they follow Him. These are the attributes that they will develop as His students. These things will set them apart from the rest of the world. These things will make them the salt of the earth and the light of the world. The world is in desperate need of people like this.

So Jesus says to them, "You are the salt of the earth." There are a couple of inferences we might make from this picture. The first is that salt has a preservative character. Peter, Andrew, James and John were fishermen from the area of Galilee, and this sermon was given in that area. Everyone was familiar with the fish and the fishing industry of the area. Certainly the people of the area would have often enjoyed fresh fish, but much of it was salted and dried for preservation and shipped out to other places. The Hastings Dictionary of the Bible says:

In still later times, as is so abundantly testified by the Gospels and Josephus, the Sea of Galilee was the centre of a great fishing industry. In addition to the demand for fresh fish, a thriving trade was done in the salting and curing of fish for sale throughout the country. The fishes of our Lord's two miracles of feeding were almost certainly of this kind, fish cleaned, split open, salted, and finally dried in the sun, having been at all times a favourite form of provision for a journey.

A fish that is not preserved by salting and drying will soon rot and will have to be thrown out. A world without the "salt" of believers in Jesus is a world overtaken by the rot of sin and wickedness. The presence of followers of Christ in the world has a preservative effect. The wrath of God upon the world is restrained by the presence of the "sons of the kingdom" who exist among the "sons of the evil one" (see Matthew 13:29-30 and 13:37-42). We know that salt is an essential mineral that we must have in order to live, and the "salt of the earth" is an essential thing for the survival of humanity.

A second inference here is that perhaps Jesus is alluding to the command from Leviticus that says that grain offerings had to be offered with salt. Leviticus 2:13 says, "Every grain offering of yours, moreover, you shall season with salt, so that the salt of the covenant of your God shall not be lacking from your grain offering; with all your offerings you shall offer salt." The offering was unacceptable without salt. The world is unacceptable to God without the "salt" of those who follow Christ.

A third idea, of course, is that salt makes things taste better. Pasta without salt is very bland. Job said, "Can something tasteless be eaten without salt, or is there any taste in the white of an egg? My soul refuses to touch them; they are like loathsome food to me." The earth without the "salt" of believers is unpalatable to God.

Jesus asks, "if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty again?" The problem here is that we know that salt, sodium chloride, does not lose its flavor. It does not become non-salt. We are used to salt that is pure salt and only salt, and it does not "become tasteless." I don't think Jesus was ignorant of this fact about salt. So how can He talk about salt losing its flavor? Albert Barnes, in his Notes On the Bible, writes:

In eastern countries, however, the salt used was impure, or mingled with vegetable or earthy substances, so that it might lose the whole of its saltness, and a considerable quantity of earthy matter remain. This was good for nothing, except that it was used to place in paths, or walks, as we use gravel. This kind of salt is common still in that country. It is found in the earth in veins or layers, and when exposed to the sun and rain, loses its saltness entirely.

In other words, sometimes the stuff called “salt” in those days wasn’t entirely salt, but was mixed with other stuff that looked like salt, but wasn’t. This lines up with what Jesus will say later about false prophets who wear “sheep’s clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves.” I think Jesus here is talking about people who represent themselves as “salt,” as real believers in Christ, who are not really salty. They don’t really have the characteristics described in the beatitudes. They are fake salt with none of the flavor of true salt. They may look like Christians and talk like Christians but they do not have a Christian character. The fruit of the Spirit is not evident in their lives, and they essentially are no different from unbelievers.

When it comes to the rhetorical question, “how can it be made salty again?”, I think there are two possible meanings. The first is, “How can you restore the saltiness to salt that has lost its saltiness?” The implied answer seems to be, “you can’t!” That which isn’t really salt can’t be made into salt. The second possible meaning here is brought out in the World English Bible translation, “if the salt has lost its flavor, with what will it be salted?” In this case the “it” refers to the earth. With what will the earth be salted if the salt has lost its flavor? This is the idea. You have to have true salty salt, real sodium chloride, to salt the earth, and there is no alternative. There is no “plan B.” The earth must be “salted” with real Christians who truly manifest Christ in their character. There is no other group of people who can fulfill this function in the earth.

Salt that has lost its flavor is good for nothing. The only use for it is to throw it out and trample on it. The word has the idea of treating something with disdain or contempt. If you bought a box that said “salt” on it, opened it up to use it and found that it had no taste and evidently wasn’t real salt, you would be disgusted with it and with the store that sold it to you and the company that produced it. You would demand your money back. You would feel like you had been tricked and defrauded. This is what happens when we say that we are followers of Christ, but do not really manifest His character in the world. There must be a noticeable difference in our lives that is caused by the presence of His Spirit in us.

Jesus changes the metaphor to light in verses 14-16. He says “You are the light of the world” and exhorts them not to hide their light, but to let it shine. If we were to ask, “What gives light to the world?”, the natural answer would be “The sun.” The sun is the light of the world from a physical point of view. The light of the sun enables us to see. Our eyes would be useless without light. The metaphor of light is tied in with the necessity of sight. The purpose of the light is to enable sight.

It’s interesting to note at this point that John’s gospel makes it very clear that Jesus Himself is “the light of the world.” John 8:12 says, “Then Jesus again spoke to them, saying, ‘I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life.’” In John 9:5 He says, “While I am in the world, I am the Light of the world.” John 1:9 says that He is “the true Light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man.” How is it, then, that His disciples can be said to be the light of the world? Paul gives us the answer in Ephesians 5:6-10, “Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not be partakers with them; for you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light

(for the fruit of the Light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth), trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord.” In the Lord we become light as He is the Light. We are “children of Light”, born of the light and are no longer darkness. In Christ the nature of the believer is that of light and not darkness. John says in 1 John 1:7 that we are to “walk in the light as He Himself is in the Light.” Christ is the light in us. The goodness is His goodness. The righteousness is His righteousness. The truth is His truth. Christ lives in us and makes us the light of the world. He is the “en-lightener” who makes us light.

In the same way that a city built on a hill cannot be hidden, so the disciples of Jesus are not to hide their light. No one lights a lamp and then puts it under a basket to cover it up, but they put it on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. It would be absurd to light a lamp and then cover it up (I love the absurd humor of Jesus). This is the only purpose of a lamp – to give people light at night when they need it. The world is a dark place in dire need of the light of the life of Christ, and followers of Christ are here to give that light to the world. So Jesus exhorts them to “Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.” The light is there and must be allowed to shine. It is possible for us to inhibit the light, to hold it back, to cover it up; so Jesus tells us not to do so. It will shine out to others if we allow it.

There are two reasons that followers of Jesus must let their light shine before men. First, the light must shine so that people will see their good works. The light is seen in one’s good works. The Samaritan’s light was seen in how he helped the injured man by the road. The light of Jesus was seen in His healings, feeding the crowds, raising the dead, providing wine at a wedding and so on. The light is the supernatural presence and life of Christ in us, but it is made visible by what we do. Paul makes it clear in Ephesians 2:1-10 that we are not saved by good works, but for good works, “which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10). Salvation is not a result of our works, but good works result from our salvation. We don’t shine our light as a means of obtaining salvation, but because we have been saved.

Second, the light must shine so that people, seeing our good works, will glorify the Father who is in heaven. They will do what the crowd in Matthew 15:31 did when they saw people healed by Jesus, “So the crowd marveled as they saw the mute speaking, the crippled restored, and the lame walking, and the blind seeing; and they glorified the God of Israel.” They recognized that God was working in the things Jesus did. The good works we do are not done to glorify ourselves or attract attention to ourselves, but to glorify God and point people toward Him. It must be apparent to people around us that we did not generate these good works of ourselves. God must be honored for what we have done and not we ourselves. A lamp is there not so that people can see the lamp, but that they can see by the light of the lamp. Believers are here to enable people to see the truth and the glory of God. Paul said that Jesus gave him the task of opening the eyes of the Gentiles so that they could turn from darkness to light and receive forgiveness (Acts 26:18). Most people in the world do not realize that they are in darkness, and need the light of Christ and His people in order to see that they must turn to the light.

#### Matthew 5:17-20

"Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. 18 "For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished. 19 "Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called

great in the kingdom of heaven. 20 "For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven."

Jesus now moves into the subject of the Law and the righteousness of the Law. He starts with these foundational remarks and then develops the idea of surpassing righteousness in verses 21 through 48.

Jesus did not want them to have a false idea of His purpose. He did not want them to think that He had come to abolish the Law or the Prophets. The mission of the Messiah was not to set aside the Law, but to fulfill it. The word translated "abolish" is *kataluō*, literally "to loosen down." Jesus used this word in Matthew 24:2 when He said of the temple, "Truly I say to you, not one stone here will be left upon another which will not be *torn down*." Paul uses the word in 2 Corinthians 5:1, "For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is *torn down*, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." Jesus did not come to tear down or disassemble the law like a tent. The coming of Jesus does not mean that now the words of the Old Testament are no longer valid and can be ignored.

Instead of coming to abolish the Law and the Prophets, Jesus came to fulfill them. The word is *plēroō*, to make full, to fill up. A.T. Robertson says, "Fulfill is to fill full. This Jesus did to the ceremonial law which pointed to him and the moral law he kept. 'He came to fill the law, to reveal the full depth of meaning that it was intended to hold' (McNeile)." The Contemporary English Version picks up this idea and translates this, "I did not come to do away with them, but to give them their full meaning." Jesus will proceed to illustrate what He means in verses 21 to 48 as He talks about the laws regarding murder, adultery, divorce, vows, retaliation and loving one's neighbor. He will not set aside these laws, but rather to give them their full meaning. He also fulfilled in Himself and in His ministry the prophecies regarding the Messiah and the pictures and types given to us in the sacrifices and ceremonial Law. He is the true Lamb of God, the final and sufficient sacrifice for sins, the true Great High Priest, the great Son of David who would reign forever.

Jesus explains in verse 18, "For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished." Every word and letter of the Law is in force until the end of heaven and earth. Not the smallest letter (*iota* in the Greek text) or pen stroke of a letter would pass away from the Law. Some Hebrew letters can look very similar to one another, and care must be taken to distinguish them. Later, as Jesus was talking about the end of the age and His second coming, He said, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away" (Matthew 24:35). What God says endures beyond the existence of the heavens and the earth. There is nothing God has said, no command He has given, that He has or will retract. He has not said something and then said, "Oops! I shouldn't have said that!" Nor will God say, "You know, upon further reflection, I think I need to modify that requirement." Sometimes, as with the Sabbath law, God gave more explicit instructions as time passed and clarified things as questions arose, but He has not changed His mind and abolished certain laws.

The commandments of the Law are to be kept and taught and not annulled (verse 19). the Greek word for "annuls" here is *luō*, and the basic meaning is "to loosen." It's related to *kataluō* in verse 17 ("abolish"). The word is translated "abolishes" in the Lexham English Bible, "reject" in the Contemporary English Version, "relaxes" in the English Standard Version, "set aside" in the International Standard Version, and "break" in the King James Version. The commandments of God are not to be loosened, but, as we will see here, are actually tightened by Jesus. The bar is not to be lowered, but raised! God has given us commands

that we are unable to keep because of our sinful nature. The solution to this problem is not to do away with the commandments or modify them so that they are easier, but the solution is the atoning death of Christ who did keep and fulfill the Law. The solution is to give us a new nature through faith in Him and the new covenant in His blood.

Jesus gave an example of how the Pharisees and scribes set aside the commandment of God for the sake of their tradition in Matthew 15:1-9:

1 Then some Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus from Jerusalem and said, 2 "Why do Your disciples break the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread." 3 And He answered and said to them, "Why do you yourselves transgress the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition? 4 "For God said, 'HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER,' and, 'HE WHO SPEAKS EVIL OF FATHER OR MOTHER IS TO BE PUT TO DEATH.' 5 "But you say, 'Whoever says to his father or mother, "Whatever I have that would help you has been given to God," 6 he is not to honor his father or his mother.' And by this you invalidated the word of God for the sake of your tradition. 7 "You hypocrites, rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you: 8 'THIS PEOPLE HONORS ME WITH THEIR LIPS, BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR AWAY FROM ME. 9 'BUT IN VAIN DO THEY WORSHIP ME, TEACHING AS DOCTRINES THE PRECEPTS OF MEN.'"

In Mark's account of this Jesus adds, "...and you do many things such as that" (Mark 7:13). Jesus blasted them for transgressing the commandment of God in order to observe their tradition. He says that they invalidated the word of God. They actually taught that people could get out of their obligation to honor their parents by saying their money was given to God. We must be very careful that our traditions and fancy interpretations of scripture are not really intended to set aside the clear commands of God.

The one who annuls the least of the commandments will be called least in the kingdom. The one who keeps and teaches them shall be called great in the kingdom. There seems to be a suggestion here that some of the commandments of God might be called "least" in comparison to others, as if some commandments are more important or more significant than others. Some commandments deal with bigger issues than others. Indeed, Jesus said to the scribes and Pharisees, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others. You blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!" (Matthew 23:23-24). Laws regarding justice and mercy and faithfulness outweigh laws regarding giving tithes of the herbs they had grown. These men were meticulous about smaller things while neglecting the bigger things! The tithing of herbs is easy, matters of justice and mercy and faithfulness are not so easy, but are more important. Whether a commandment is easy or hard, big or small, heavy or lightweight, it is not to be nullified.

The one who keeps and teaches the commandments will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. To "keep" the commandments means to do them, to obey them, to put them into practice. The first priority when it comes to the commandments of God is that we do them. Commands are orders that are to be carried out. Military people understand this. Orders are not optional things, but imperative things. Soldiers are punished severely for disobeying orders. The problem with the scribes and Pharisees was that they preached and taught the Law, but they did not do it. Jesus says in Matthew 23:2-4, "The scribes and the Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses; 3 therefore all that they tell you, do and observe, but do not do according to their deeds; for they say things and do not do them. 4

"They tie up heavy burdens and lay them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are unwilling to move them with so much as a finger." Jesus expects His students who call Him "Lord" and "Rabbi" to obey the commandments. Proper teaching of the commandments of God requires proper observance of them. We need to be able to say that people can follow our example. You would not want to learn how to drive a car from someone who had never done it themselves. Such a person might know the theory of driving, but to properly teach driving you need to have experience actually doing it. People must be shown how to obey God's commands, not simply told to do so.

The statement in verse 20 further explains what Jesus is saying and sets up the examples in verses 21-48. He says, "For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven." One condition for entering the kingdom of heaven is the possession of righteousness that goes beyond that which the scribes and Pharisees had. He will tell us what He means in the verses that follow. The word for "surpasses" is *perisseuō*, and means "to be over and above, to abound" ([New American Standard Exhaustive Concordance](#)). If someone asks you to make twenty widgets and you make forty, you have surpassed what was requested, you have gone over and above what was asked. The kind of righteousness required of followers of Christ is a righteousness that goes over and above the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees. It is not minimum righteousness, but maximum. It is not the kind of righteousness that asks, "How far can I go without crossing the line?" It's not concerned with how close it can get to sin without sinning. It is righteousness that avoids all appearance of wanting to approach sin.

#### Matthew 5:21-26

"You have heard that the ancients were told, 'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER' and 'Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.' 22 "But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, 'You good-for-nothing,' shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, 'You fool,' shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell. 23 "Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, 24 leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering. 25 "Make friends quickly with your opponent at law while you are with him on the way, so that your opponent may not hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the officer, and you be thrown into prison. 26 "Truly I say to you, you will not come out of there until you have paid up the last cent.

The first example of surpassing righteousness Jesus gives us is the commandment about murder. "You shall not commit murder" is the sixth of the ten commandments and is found in Exodus 20:13 and Deuteronomy 5:17. Jesus begins each of these examples by pointing to the fact that they have heard that these things were said to people in the past. They were told not to commit murder and that whoever did commit murder would be "liable to the court." I think a more accurate translation of this is in the [Lexham English Bible](#), "subject to judgment." The WEB bible has "in danger of the judgment." It's not just that the one accused of murder will have to make a court appearance, but that the murderer will face judgment. Murderers will face judgment, if not in a human court, then in God's court, and there will be no escape. The murderer will be held liable.

Jesus contrasts what the ancients were told with what He has to say on the subject in verse 22. Jesus did not come to abolish the Law, but He does stand above it. He gave it and transcends it. He is the one who perfectly understands the Law, interprets the Law and knows

how to apply the Law. In what He says He is not nullifying or laying aside the commandment about murder, but He is expanding it to encompass anger and harsh words. It's not just those who actually commit real murder who are guilty, but also those who angry with their brothers and call them "good-for-nothing" and "you fool" who are also guilty.

All who are angry with their brother will be held guilty. Jesus uses the same word here that He used in verse 21 translated "liable," here translated "guilty." Anger is often the root of murder, so all who are angry with another will be held liable for their anger and what they do because of it. The harsh words Jesus cites next grow out of this anger. There is an escalation here from the emotion of anger to saying "You good-for-nothing" and then "You fool."

The word translated "good-for-nothing" here is *raka*, which is actually an Aramaic word transliterated into Greek, and means "empty." It was a word of contempt carrying the idea of "senseless" or "empty headed." We might say "airhead" or "dimwit." The one who says this to his brother shall be guilty before the supreme court. Jesus uses the word "*sunedrion*" or "sanhedrin," the top court or ruling counsel among the Jews.

Then He says the one who calls his brother a fool will be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell. The word for "hell" is *geenna* (gehenna) and has reference to the Valley of Hinnom south of Jerusalem. Of this word and this place Vincent writes:

The word Gehenna, rendered hell, occurs outside of the Gospels only at James 3:6. It is the Greek representative of the Hebrew Ge-Hinnom, or Valley of Hinnom, a deep, narrow glen to the south of Jerusalem, where, after the introduction of the worship of the fire-gods by Ahaz, the idolatrous Jews sacrificed their children to Molech. Josiah formally desecrated it, "that no man might make his son or his daughter pass through the fire to Molech" (2 Kings 23:10). After this it became the common refuse-place of the city, into which the bodies of criminals, carcasses of animals, and all sorts of filth were cast. From its depth and narrowness, and its fire and ascending smoke, it became the symbol of the place of the future punishment of the wicked. As fire was the characteristic of the place, it was called the Gehenna of fire. It should be carefully distinguished from Hades (ᾗδης), which is never used for the place of punishment, but for the place of departed spirits, without reference to their moral condition. (Vincent's Word Studies)

There are probably very few people who haven't at one time or another become angry with someone else and fired harsh words at them. Those harsh words are like bullets aimed at the heart of another that wound and kill. This is just one of many things that make us guilty before the court of God, guilty enough to be cast into the fiery hell.

So what are we to do if we have become angry and we have spoken harsh and hurtful words to someone? Jesus answers this question in verses 23 through 26. The Pharisees and scribes were very meticulous about observing the prescribed sacrifices and offerings and tithes. They were careful about the duties of outward worship. Jesus says, though, that if they were offering their gift at the altar at the temple and recalled that a brother had something against them, they should immediately leave their offering and go to be reconciled to their brother. They were not to think that their "murder" of their brother would be covered by their offering and that God would have no further requirement of them. The priority in this case is reconciliation to the brother rather than offering the sacrifice. The word for "reconciled" is *diallassō*, and means "to change," in this case, to change the mind of someone. The mind of the offended brother is to be changed from being wounded and holding something against the offender to being at peace again with them. This means that the offender must go and ask forgiveness of the one offended.



When a brother has been offended in this way he has become an “opponent” (verse 25). The word is *antidikos* and means an opponent or adversary. 1 Peter 5:8 uses this word to describe the devil, “Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.” The opponent wants to take the offender into court and have him thrown into prison. He wants to retaliate and obtain justice for his injury. Therefore Jesus says, “Make friends quickly with your opponent at law.” He says to do this before you get to court. Negotiate an “out of court settlement.” This is a very wise course of action. By settling out of court and making friends with the opponent, the offender avoids the judge, the officer and prison. Jesus indicates that it is inevitable that the offender will be found guilty by the judge, handed over to the officer (the International Standard Version has “guard”) and the officer will throw him into prison. Jesus says, “Truly I say to you, you will not come out of there until you have paid up the last cent.” There is a debt that must be paid by the offender, and he will remain in prison until the last bit of the debt is paid. There will be no early release, no forgiveness.

It seems these days in our culture that we have very little concern about this kind of anger and the hurtful words that come out of it. It is true that many people are too quick to take offense and to claim they’ve been victimized by the words of others. There is an over-sensitivity to things these days. But Jesus says that if we are angry with someone and say that they are worthless fools, we are guilty of murder! We are guilty enough to be condemned to the fiery hell! We owe a debt to the one we have hurt and we have an obligation to go to that person and seek forgiveness and reconciliation. This becomes the top priority in our lives if we are guilty of this.

Matthew 5:27-30

"You have heard that it was said, 'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY'; 28 but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. 29 "If your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. 30 "If your right hand makes you stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to go into hell."

The second example Jesus gives of righteousness that surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees is the commandment against adultery. The seventh commandment says, “You shall not commit adultery.” They had heard that this was what had been said. If we read Exodus 20 we find that God Himself spoke the ten commandments to the nation of Israel (Exodus 20:1), so this is among the things that He said to them.

Again Jesus contrasts what was said in the past with what He has to say on the subject, and again He does not eliminate the commandment, but amplifies it. Everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. He has done it in his heart before he does it with the rest of his body. The word translated “lust” is the Greek term *epithumeō*, which means a strong desire or longing. The word is translated elsewhere in the New Testament as “desired” (Matthew 13:17), “longing” (Luke 16:21), “coveted” (Acts 20:33), “covet” (as Paul quotes the tenth commandment in Romans 7:7) and “craved” (1 Corinthians 10:6). James tells us that “each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust” (*epithumia* – James 1:14). The man who looks on a woman in order to lust for her has already committed adultery in his heart and is already guilty.

What is to be done about lust? How can it be eliminated from our lives? Jesus recommends radical action! If your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out and throw it away. If your right hand makes you stumble, cut it off and throw it away. I think we need to recognize this as an example of Jesus' use of hyperbole and perhaps even a bit of humor. "Is the problem your eye? Tear it out! Is the problem your hand? Chop it off!" I'm not suggesting He's not serious, but I think the statements are hyperbolic.

The word for "stumble" in the Greek text is *skandalizō*, from which we get our words "scandal" and "scandalize". It means to put a snare or stumbling block in front of another. A.T. Robertson says, "The substantive (*skandalon*, from *skandalēthron*) means the stick in the trap that springs and closes the trap when the animal touches it. Pluck out the eye when it is a snare, cut off the hand, even the right hand. These vivid pictures are not to be taken literally, but powerfully plead for self-mastery" (Robertson's Word Pictures). To lust after someone else is to stumble and fall into sin, and the things that trip us up need to be eliminated from our lives. This is a simple principle.

In both examples Jesus explains the reason for this radical solution to the problem, "for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell." There is just one difference in verse 30 from verse 29. In verse 30 instead of saying "thrown into hell" He says "to go into hell." The word for "thrown" in verse 29 is the same word He used when He talked about throwing our eye or hand away. He also used the word in verse 25 when He talked about being "thrown into prison." There is a danger that one's entire body might be thrown into hell, and it is better to sacrifice one part of it than lose our entire body.

We should notice that the idea that guilty sinners will be cast into hell, into the eternal fire, is really part of the teaching of Jesus and it must not be ignored, dismissed or minimized. Yes, Jesus is loving and compassionate and did not come to judge the world, but to save the world (John 3:17), but He did teach clearly the reality of hell and of eternal judgment in the place of torment. It is not unworthy of Him to say these things because they are true. It is because of His love and compassion that He tells us these things. Love warns the beloved of dangers they face. Love tells the truth, and He has provided the way of escape through faith in Him. His atoning death covers our guilt and sin and makes it possible for us to be forgiven and saved out of death.

Causes of stumbling must be "cut out" of our lives. In reality it's not our eye or our hand that cause us to stumble. We stumble because of what goes on in our minds and in our hearts. Jesus explained that the evils we commit come out of the heart. In Matthew 15:17-20 He says, "Do you not understand that everything that goes into the mouth passes into the stomach, and is eliminated? But the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders. These are the things which defile the man; but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile the man." Evil thoughts, words and behavior come out of the heart, out of the mind.

There are some practical things we can do in order to apply what Jesus says here, though. Do we struggle with pornography? We must make sure that our internet connections are filtered and we need to have accountability to others. It is better to go without these things than to be snared by sin and face the possibility of being cast into hell. If we are single and struggle with lust and desire it is time to pursue marriage. Scripture exhorts us to channel our sexual desire toward our spouse (see 1 Corinthians 7:1-9 and Proverbs 5). Paul says in 1 Corinthians 6:18-20, "Flee immorality. Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a

temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.”

Matthew 5:31-32

"It was said, 'WHOEVER SENDS HIS WIFE AWAY, LET HIM GIVE HER A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE'; 32 but I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except for the reason of unchastity, makes her commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

Now we get to something that was “said” that is not one of the ten commandments, but was evidently an important command to the men of the time, and related to the command about adultery. The quote comes from Deuteronomy 24.

1 "When a man takes a wife and marries her, and it happens that she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out from his house, 2 and she leaves his house and goes and becomes another man's wife, 3 and if the latter husband turns against her and writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, or if the latter husband dies who took her to be his wife, 4 then her former husband who sent her away is not allowed to take her again to be his wife, since she has been defiled; for that is an abomination before the LORD, and you shall not bring sin on the land which the LORD your God gives you as an inheritance.”

There were two schools of thought among the Jews at the time about this “commandment” about divorce. One faction said that a man could divorce his wife for any reason, for anything he found objectionable. They found wide latitude in the words “some indecency” in Deuteronomy 24:1. Another faction said, no, this command allowed divorce only if the wife had been unfaithful. Jesus is going to have a discussion with the Pharisees about this later in chapter 19. Here He seems to come down on the side of those who said that divorce was only allowed if the wife had been unfaithful.

What was “said” was that when a man sent his wife away, he was required to give her a written certificate of divorce. This was for her protection, so that she could prove that she had been legally divorced by her husband and that he had released her. She could show that she had not left her husband against his will, but that he had sent her away and had repudiated her.

Jesus again has a higher standard. Everyone who divorces his wife makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery. The only exception is for the reason of “unchastity.” The Greek word translated “unchastity” is *porneia*, which Thayer's Greek Definitions defines as “illicit sexual intercourse.” If a woman had been sexually immoral, it was permissible, though not required, that her husband might divorce her. Since she was already committing adultery, he would not be causing her to commit adultery by sending her away. I think the idea here is that a man who divorces his wife makes her go out to find another husband, and the man intends to find another wife. The implication is that casual divorce and remarriage is actually adultery in God's eyes. People often divorce in order to pursue another partner. Divorce is the breaking of a covenant which a husband and a wife have taken upon themselves before God. In Malachi 2:13-16 God calls divorce “treachery” and says that He hates it. We will examine the issue more when we get to chapter 19.

Matthew 5:33-37

"Again, you have heard that the ancients were told, 'YOU SHALL NOT MAKE FALSE VOWS, BUT SHALL FULFILL YOUR VOWS TO THE LORD.' 34 "But I say to you, make no oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, 35 or by the earth, for it is the footstool of His feet, or by Jerusalem, for it is THE CITY OF THE GREAT KING. 36 "Nor shall you make an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. 37 "But let your statement be, 'Yes, yes' or 'No, no'; anything beyond these is of evil."

The third commandment says, "You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain" (Exodus 20:7). One of the ways the Lord's name was taken in vain was through false vows. Leviticus 19:12 says, "You shall not swear falsely by My name, so as to profane the name of your God; I am the Lord." Here is another thing that Jesus will talk about later, in chapter 23, as an example of the hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees. They taught that there were means of swearing oaths that were not binding, and means that were binding. For example, they said, "Whoever swears by the temple, that is nothing, but whoever swears by the gold of the temple is obligated" (Matthew 23:16). If you swore by the temple, you were not bound by your oath and you could be let off the hook, but if you swore by the gold of the temple, then you were under a solemn obligation to keep your oath. This is an example of how the swearing of "false vows" was common among the Jews of that day.

To swear on oath is to make a promise to be truthful. It is necessary because of the inherent falsehood of human nature. We are untrustworthy people who cannot be counted upon to tell the truth or keep our word. Therefore it is thought that oath-taking is necessary. If in court we swear to tell "the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth so help me God" and then proceed to lie, we can be found guilty of perjury and thrown into jail. It is a serious thing to take an oath. Solomon says this in Ecclesiastes 5:4-7:

4 When you make a vow to God, do not be late in paying it; for He takes no delight in fools. Pay what you vow! 5 It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay. 6 Do not let your speech cause you to sin and do not say in the presence of the messenger of God that it was a mistake. Why should God be angry on account of your voice and destroy the work of your hands? 7 For in many dreams and in many words there is emptiness. Rather, fear God.

Instead of making vows and taking oaths, Jesus says, "But I say to you, make no oath at all." Again, He is not nullifying the laws concerning oath-taking and swearing from the Old Testament, but is simply saying that it is better to be a person of integrity and not need to swear any oaths. He gives us four examples of things by which people swore oaths - by heaven, by the earth, by Jerusalem and by one's head. We should not swear by heaven because it is God's throne. He sits on His throne in heaven and rules there. We should not swear by the earth because it is His footstool. He rests His feet on the earth. We should not swear by Jerusalem because it is the city of the Great King. Jerusalem is the Lord's city, the city of David and of David's Son the Messiah. Psalm 48:1-2 says, "Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised, In the city of our God, His holy mountain. Beautiful in elevation, the joy of the whole earth, Is Mount Zion in the far north, The city of the great King." These things all belong to God and are associated with God, and to swear by them is ultimately to swear by God Himself. Therefore they are not trivial.

But what about making an oath by your head? What does that mean? Jesus explains, “for you cannot make one hair white or black.” Your hair is the color that it is, and you can’t change it at its root. Yes, you can color your hair, but under the coloring it’s still the same color. When you swear by your head you are swearing by something that is beyond your control. Barnes’ Notes on the Bible says:

To swear by the head was the same as to swear by the life; or to say, I will forfeit my life if what I say is not true. God is the Author of the life, and to swear by that, therefore, is the same as to swear by him.

Because thou canst not make one hair white or black - You have no control or right over your own life. You cannot even change one single hair. God has all that control; and it is therefore improper and profane to pledge what is God's gift and God's property; and it is the same as swearing by God himself.

The Pulpit Commentary says, “As each of the other objects included a reference to God, so does also thy head. For even that recalls to mind the power of God, since every hair of it bears the stamp of his handiwork.” Jesus is saying here that even if we “swear by our head” we do not avoid ultimately swearing by God Himself. We cannot avoid binding oaths by trying to find lesser things by which to swear. This is dishonest at its core. To try to find a way of taking an oath that provides you with a loophole so that you don’t have to keep your oath is corrupt and dishonest, and nullifies the whole reason behind oath-taking, which is to affirm the veracity of what you say.

Instead of swearing oaths, Jesus says, “But let your statement be, ‘Yes, yes’ or ‘No, no’; anything beyond these is of evil.” James alludes to this in James 5:12 and says, “But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath; but your yes is to be yes, and your no, no, so that you may not fall under judgment.” Jesus is saying that we must be people who mean what we say and don’t need to add oaths into the mix. When we say “yes,” our yes must really mean yes. When we say “no,” we must mean “no”. When Jesus says that anything beyond these “is of evil,” it could mean “is of the evil one.” The Contemporary English Version takes it that way and translates this, “Anything else comes from the devil.” I’m not sure that is how Jesus means this to be understood. It is true that the devil is a liar and is the “father of lies” (John 8:44), but dishonesty and deception also come from our own evil nature.

Matthew 5:38-42

"You have heard that it was said, 'AN EYE FOR AN EYE, AND A TOOTH FOR A TOOTH.' 39 "But I say to you, do not resist an evil person; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. 40 "If anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, let him have your coat also. 41 "Whoever forces you to go one mile, go with him two. 42 "Give to him who asks of you, and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you.

This law had to do with the penalty for someone who had intentionally and maliciously injured someone else. In context the passage in Exodus 21:22-25 says this:

22 "If men struggle with each other and strike a woman with child so that she gives birth prematurely, yet there is no injury, he shall surely be fined as the woman's husband may demand of him, and he shall pay as the judges decide. 23 "But if there is any further injury, then you shall appoint as a penalty life for life, 24 eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, 25 burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise.

Regarding false witnesses, Deuteronomy 19:21 says, “Thus you shall not show pity: life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.” The quote occurs again in Leviticus 24:19-

20, "If a man injures his neighbor, just as he has done, so it shall be done to him: 20 fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth; just as he has injured a man, so it shall be inflicted on him."

We should note first that this law was given to the nation as guide for dealing in court with penalties for violent crimes. Jesus deals with the issue on an individual interpersonal level. The sentences that must be handed down in a courtroom do not necessarily extend to how we treat one another in our individual relationships. Its tempting to think this law gives us permission to strike back when someone assaults us and hurts us, but it is meant to guide court decisions.

Though the legal standard was "eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth," Jesus gives us a different standard in our interpersonal one-to-one relationships. He says, "But I say to you, do not resist an evil person." The word for "resist," *anthistēmi* means to "stand against" or "oppose." (We get our word "antihistamine" from this word.) People are evil and are capable of monstrous evil against others. We see this in the news every day. Yet there are those who persist in thinking that human nature is basically good. But Jesus contradicts this idea. He said, "no one is good except God alone" (Mark 10:18). In Matthew 7:11 Jesus uses the same word as He does here and says, "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!" At the core of human nature is not goodness but evil. We are fallen rebels who have turned away from loyalty to God to other things. Paul explains this in Romans 7, and in verse 18 he says, "For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not." As we walk through this life we will encounter many evil people who will want to take advantage of us and do us harm for their own benefit, and we will want to strike back at them. When we strike back we act out of our evil nature and fuel a cycle of evil. Evil begets evil and violence begets violence. But Paul says in Romans 12, "Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, 'VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY,' says the Lord. 'BUT IF YOUR ENEMY IS HUNGRY, FEED HIM, AND IF HE IS THIRSTY, GIVE HIM A DRINK; FOR IN SO DOING YOU WILL HEAP BURNING COALS ON HIS HEAD.' Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." (Romans 12:17-21). Evil is to be overcome, not by meeting it with evil, but rather by meeting it with good.

Jesus gives four examples of non-resistance to evil. First, He says, "but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also." Of course this is where we get the saying "Turn the other cheek." It reminds me of what Sam Spade said to Joel Cairo in *The Maltese Falcon*, "When you're slapped, you'll take it and like it!" It's obvious that evil sometimes is manifested in violent assault. The response Jesus commands is not simply non-resistance, but it goes beyond that to actively offering to allow yourself to be hit a second time. Not only are we not to strike back, but we are to give our assailant another opportunity to hit us!

The second example has to do with a legal dispute, "If anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, let him have your coat also." In those days garments were very valuable. Recall that when Jesus was crucified, the Roman soldiers divided up His garments among them and cast lots for His tunic, because it was seamless and woven of one piece (John 19:23-24). People did not have closets full of clothing, but most had very few, and probably only one outer cloak. Marvin Vincent comments in his [Word Studies](#):

The former, the shirt-like under-garment or tunic; the latter, the mantle, or ampler over-garment, which served as a covering for the night, and therefore was forbidden by the Levitical law to be retained in pledge overnight (Exo\_22:26, Exo\_22:27). To yield up this without resistance therefore implies a higher degree of concession.

To voluntarily hand over your coat to someone who had sued you for your shirt was to say, "Here, take more than the Law allows!" It was to give more as a penalty than the Law prescribed.

The third example is in verse 41, "Whoever forces you to go one mile, go with him two." The word for "forces" here is *aggareuō*. Vincent's Word Studies says:

This word throws the whole injunction into a picture which is entirely lost to the English reader. A man is travelling, and about to pass a post-station, where horses and messengers are kept in order to forward royal missives as quickly as possible. An official rushes out, seizes him, and forces him to go back and carry a letter to the next station, perhaps to the great detriment of his business. The word is of Persian origin, and denotes the *impressment* into service, which officials were empowered to make of any available persons or beasts on the great lines of road where the royal mails were carried by relays of riders.

This word is used in reference to Simon of Cyrene who was "pressed into service" to carry the cross of Christ (Matthew 27:32 and Mark 15:21). Evidently this was something that Roman soldiers would do at times when they needed someone to do something, they would force them to carry out a task. Again, Jesus does not simply say, "If you are forced to go one mile, go the mile without complaining," but He says, "go with him two." We get our saying "Going the extra mile" from this passage. If you are forced against your will to go one mile on a thankless task, go another mile voluntarily. This is not what your oppressor will expect.

Last, Jesus says, "Give to him who asks of you, and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you." This does not sound like such an "evil" thing as the previous examples were. Luke's version of this in Luke 6:30 says, "Give to everyone who asks of you, and whoever takes away what is yours, do not demand it back." In Luke 6:35 Jesus explains further, "But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men." I think Jesus is talking about giving and lending to people who have no intention of making any effort to pay back what was given or loaned. "Ungrateful and evil" describes many people who make their living by asking others for money. We are to give and not turn away. Love sees needs and does what it can to meet those needs. John writes in 1 John 3:16-18, "We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. 17 But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? 18 Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth." Jesus pointed out in Matthew 25:31-46 that it is a characteristic of His sheep to give to meet the needs of others. This is a ministry we must not neglect, individually and corporately.

I'm not sure this principle of non-resistance applies in every circumstance. Jesus talked about how He was casting out demons by the Spirit of God and illustrated what He was doing by saying, "Or how can anyone enter the strong man's house and carry off his property, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house" (Matthew 12:29). There seems to be at least an implication that a man will resist those who try to break into his house in order to protect his family and property. It was expected that he would do so. A man has a responsibility to protect his family. I'm not sure that the Lord intends for us to observe a strict code of non-violence in all circumstances. There may be times when the lives of others are at stake and we must act to stop the aggressor.

Matthew 5:43-48

"You have heard that it was said, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR and hate your enemy.' 44 "But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45 so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the

good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. 46 "For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? 47 "If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? 48 "Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Here is the sixth and last "you have heard" example. They had heard it said, "You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy." The quote comes from Leviticus 19:18, and combined with verse 17 it says, "You shall not hate your fellow countryman in your heart; you may surely reprove your neighbor, but shall not incur sin because of him. 18 You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the LORD." We see immediately that it does not say "you shall hate your enemy." We see also that it seems to apply to "the sons of your people" and "your fellow countryman." The Jews evidently inferred from this that to love one's neighbor meant to love other Jews and then hate others who weren't Jews. Albert Barnes, in his Notes on the Bible, says:

The command to love our neighbor was a law of God, Lev. 19:18. That we must therefore hate our enemy was an inference drawn from it by the Jews. They supposed that if we loved the one, we must of course hate the other. They were total strangers to that great, special law of religion which requires us to love both. A neighbor is literally one that lives near to us; then, one who is near to us by acts of kindness and friendship. This is its meaning here.

When Jesus discussed the command to "love your neighbor as yourself" with a lawyer (Luke 10:25-37), the man asked, "And who is my neighbor?" Jesus replied with the "Parable of the Good Samaritan" to show that even those they hated might actually be "neighbors." This command to love one's neighbor extended beyond the Jewish brotherhood even to the hated Samaritans. We must not try to get around the command to love our neighbors by limiting the definition of "neighbor."

Jesus erases the "hate your enemy" part of this saying. Instead He says, "love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." Luke has an expanded version of this saying, "But I say to you who hear, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you" (Luke 6:27-28). This kind of love (*agape*) is a love of doing more than of feeling. It is a love that prays for the persecutors, that does good to those who hate, and blesses those who curse. Feelings can't be commanded, but actions can. Love is what we are to do to those who have made themselves our enemies and persecute us. We may not feel warm fuzzy affectionate feelings toward our enemies, but we can still pray for them, do good to them, and bless them.

When we love our enemies in this way we emulate our Father in heaven. We show ourselves to be His children, following His example. The sun is His, and He causes it to rise on the evil and the good. He sends rain in the righteous and the unrighteous. The sun rises because God causes it to do so. Rain falls because God sends it. What He causes He can prevent, and what He sends He can withhold. Yes, I know that the sun "rising" is a function of the rotation of the earth and it will happen in any case, but nonetheless it is something ultimately controlled by God. His general graces are given to all, whether or not they are His children.

Jesus recognizes that humanity is divided into two camps, the evil and the good, the righteous and the unrighteous. Today we hardly ever hear people speak in these terms, but this is consistent biblical teaching. We will hear Jesus speak of these two groups again.

Jesus further explains in verses 46 and 47 and asks some rhetorical questions. He asks, "For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?" There is no reward, no payoff, for loving those who love you. Even the worst kinds of people do this. Tax collectors exploited the authority they had from the Romans in order to enrich



themselves at the expense of others, and were hated and despised. The gospels often speak of “tax collectors and sinners” or “tax collectors and prostitutes” (Matthew 9:10-11, Matthew 11:19, Matthew 21:32). Loving those who love us is nothing extraordinary.

He makes the same point again in verse 47, “If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?” Even unbelieving foreigners greet their own brothers. Even gangsters love their own gang members. There is no special virtue in greeting only one’s brothers.

Jesus then summarizes in verse 48, “Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” The Greek word translated “perfect” is *teleios*, and means “brought to its end, finished, wanting nothing necessary to completeness, perfect” ([Thayer’s Greek Definitions](#)). The Father is and always has been perfect. There is nothing that needs to be changed about Him, nothing that needs to be added and nothing that needs to be subtracted. His character is complete and perfect and He always does what is right and good. He never makes a mistake or overlooks anything. He wants us to be like Him. He wants us to love the evil and the good as He does. In loving us He has showed us how to love those who hate us. All of us turned away from Him and rebelled against Him, yet He took the initiative to seek us and save us in Christ. He does not have a lower standard for us than He has for Himself, because He can’t. Only in Christ can we begin to approach His perfection.

#### Matthew 6:1-4

"Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven. 2 "So when you give to the poor, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be honored by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. 3 "But when you give to the poor, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, 4 so that your giving will be in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you."

Jesus gives a general principle in verse 1 and then illustrates it by talking about giving, prayer and fasting in verses 2 through 18. It is a caution against doing righteous deeds for the wrong reason. The word for “beware” is *prosecho*, “to turn the mind to, attend to, be attentive, to attend to one’s self” ([Thayer’s Greek Definitions](#)). I like the King James and Revised Version translation, “take heed.” He is saying that they should be mindful of their motives for doing their righteous deeds. We should deliberately pay attention to our reasons for doing things and evaluate them. The Lord cares not only about what we do, but also about why we do them. He wants us to pay attention to this.

The question that must be asked is, “Am I doing these things before men to be noticed by them?” In Matthew 23:5, speaking of the scribes and Pharisees, Jesus said, “But they do all their deeds to be noticed by men.” They gave in such a way that others would see them giving. They prayed in such a way that others would see them praying. They fasted in such a way that others would see them fasting. These things were done as a public show of piety in order to impress others. This is not the thing that should drive the behavior of a follower of Jesus.

When we do good and righteous things in order to be seen by others we have no reward from our Father in heaven. The Father does not reward righteous deeds done merely as a show for the sake of others. If we want the reward from the Father, we must have a different motive and a different procedure.

The first example of “practicing your righteousness” is giving to the poor. The Greek word for giving to the poor is *eleēmosunē*, and [Strong’s Dictionary](#) defines it as

“compassionateness, that is, (as exercised towards the poor) beneficence, or (concretely) a benefaction: - alms.” We might refer to it as “charitable giving.” Jesus assumes that His followers will do this – He says, “*when* you give to the poor,” not “if.” This is something we should do. Giving to the needy is not an optional thing, but is something we are expected to do.

When you give, Jesus says, there is a wrong way and a right way. The wrong way is to “sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be honored by men.” Commentators point out that there is no record to be found that the Jews actually did this in a literal sense. This does not mean that it couldn’t have happened, but that we have no recorded instance of it. It is possible that Jesus is being hyperbolic. Maybe He’s not saying they did this literally, but rather that they made such a public show of their giving that it was as if they were “sounding a trumpet” before them. Trumpets were used to get peoples’ attention, often used in war to call men to battle (Judges 3:27, 6:34, Nehemiah 4:20) or to recall men from pursuit (2 Samuel 2:28). The hypocrites called attention to their giving publicly so that they might be honored by men. They were giving and calling attention to their giving in order to receive esteem and honor from others. Our word “hypocrite” comes right from the Greek word here, and it indicates someone who is an actor or pretender. These men were playing the part of generous and compassionate people without really being motivated by generosity or compassion. They just wanted to appear that way to others. Jesus says, “they have their reward in full.” They received the honor they sought from other men.

In contrast, those who follow Jesus are to give in secret. Jesus says, “do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing.” His point is “so that your giving will be in secret.” Giving is to be done in a way that is hidden from the view of others and is concealed. We are even to strive to eliminate self-consciousness from the act. We should even try to avoid congratulating ourselves about our giving! Jesus promises that the Father who sees the things done in secret will reward us. Other people will not see what we do in secret, but our heavenly Father will. Whatever we do in secret, good or evil, is seen by the Father. He will reward the good things done in secret, things done to please Him and not for any other reason.

This command of Christ has been on my mind quite a bit over the years because I work for a donor-supported Christian radio station. In this context the difficulty of motivating people to give to support the ministry has been a constant challenge. The temptation is great to try to appeal to people to give for the wrong reasons. People are still motivated by this desire to be honored by others, to see their name in lights, to have the spotlight trained on them because of their generosity and virtue. Some Christian radio stations encourage large gifts by having what are called “day sponsors.” If someone gives a large gift that will pay for a full day of broadcasting on the station, they can select the day when they want to be honored. They might choose an anniversary or a birthday. On that day they will be mentioned often during the day and thanked for sponsoring that day. I can’t help but think this approach violates the principle Jesus gives us here. When we do this kind of thing we encourage people to make a show of their giving, to give in order to be noticed and congratulated by others. I think this is something that donor-supported Christian ministries need to beware of in their fundraising techniques. It may motivate some people, but I think it encourages people to give for the wrong reasons.

Something we should note here before moving on is that two different words are used throughout these three examples that are both translated “reward.” When He says, “they have their reward in full” the word is *misthos*, meaning wages paid for work, money that is earned through labor. When He says, “your father...will reward you” the word is *apodidōmi*, which

means to give up, to give back, to return or restore (New American Standard Exhaustive Concordance). When the hypocrites give and pray and fast in order to be seen and honored by men, they are paid for their efforts by the adulation they receive from others. They receive the wage for which they worked. When we do these things in secret in order to please the Father, he will give back to us. He will reimburse us. He will give us a reward and will recognize our efforts, not as something we've earned, not as a wage, but as a gracious gift.

Matthew 6:5-15

"When you pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. 6 "But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you. 7 "And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words. 8 "So do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.

9 "Pray, then, in this way: 'Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. 10 'Your kingdom come. Your will be done, On earth as it is in heaven. 11 'Give us this day our daily bread. 12 'And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. 13 'And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. [For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.]' 14 "For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15 "But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions."

Again as He talks about prayer, Jesus says there is a wrong way and there is a right way. In fact, there are two wrong ways when it comes to prayer. First, when you pray you are not to be like the hypocrites, the actors, who stand in the synagogues and on the street corners as they pray in order to be seen by men. They love to do this. Performers love to perform because of the recognition and adulation they receive from their audiences. These men loved to perform their eloquent prayers before others. Again Jesus says, "they have their reward (*misthos*) in full." They have received full payment for their performance.

By contrast, Jesus says, when you pray, you are to go into your inner room, close the door and pray to the Father in secret. The Father is there in secret. The word for "secret" is *kruptos*, and means hidden or concealed. The Contemporary English Version uses the word "private" and the International Standard Version renders it "hidden." The prayers of a follower of Jesus are to be offered in private, hidden away from the view of others. Prayer is to be a private time with the Father alone and not a public performance. There is a sense in which the Father is present in private in a way that He is not present in public. When we seek Him, we seek Him privately. Prayer is to be a private and individual thing. Yes, I know that we are to pray together when we gather as the church as well, but that is to be in addition to and not instead of our private prayers.

There is a reward from our Father for private prayer. He wants us to seek Him sincerely. He wants to spend time with us. When we pray with other people around there is the hindrance of being conscious of them and what they think of us. This is why we need to withdraw to a private and hidden place for prayer. That is the place of truth and sincerity.

There is a second error to be avoided when we pray. Jesus says, "And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard from their many words." "Meaningless repetition" translates the word *battalogeō*, meaning "to stammer, to repeat the same things over and over, to use many idle words"

(Thayer's Greek Definitions). I like how the Lexham English Bible translates this, "But when you pray, do not babble repetitiously like the pagans, for they think that because of their many words they will be heard." This is the way the Gentiles (the foreigners, the pagans) pray. Their practice of prayer is based on a faulty assumption that they will be heard for their "many words." We can see this in non-Christian prayer. In Islam prayer is to be carried out in a prescribed manner and the same words are to be repeated every time. In Hinduism prayer is embodied in the chanting of mantras and repetitive prayer is emphasized. But real prayer does not have to be repetitive nor lengthy. I think the key here is that our words in prayer are not to be meaningless, empty or vain. As long as what we are saying has real meaning and we are not just multiplying words because we think that more words means we have a better chance that God hears us, then we are really praying. If you were to talk to someone and they kept chanting the same words over and over as they spoke to you, you would think that they might be mentally or emotionally disturbed. Likewise, God does not want us to think that He needs or wants to hear us chant the same things again and again, or that it will do us any good to do so.

This does not mean, however, that we never repeat our requests to God. Jesus Himself, when He prayed in the garden of Gethsemane, made the same request three times (Matthew 26:36-44). Paul asked three times that his "thorn in the flesh" might be removed (2 Corinthians 12:8). In Luke 18:1-8 Jesus told a parable "to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart." The parable talks of a widow who kept coming to an uncaring judge asking for protection from her opponent. She came again and again saying, "Give me legal protection from my opponent," but the judge initially refused. The widow would not accept his refusal and kept coming back. She finally wore him down and he said, "Even though I do not fear God nor respect man, yet because this widow bothers me, I will give her legal protection, otherwise by continually coming she will wear me out." Jesus pointed out that the Father is not like the uncaring judge. He said, "Hear what the unrighteous judge said; now, will not God bring about justice for His elect who cry to Him day and night, and will He delay long over them? I tell you that He will bring about justice for them quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?" The elect of the Father cry out to Him day and night for justice, and He will answer their cry quickly. It is appropriate that they should keep crying out to Him for justice and not lose heart. These are examples of sincere, heartfelt requests and not of meaningless repetition.

Jesus continues, "So do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him." Do not think that the more wordy you are the more the Father will listen. Also do not think that God is unaware of your needs. You already have His attention. He already knows all about you and your situation.

There are a couple of obvious points here in verse 8 about prayer. First, prayer is asking. Yes, there are elements of adoration, confession and thanksgiving that should be integral to our prayers, but the bottom line of prayer is that it is mainly asking for things from the Father. If you examine the teaching of Jesus about prayer, you find this to be true. He tells us to ask. The example prayer He is about to give us here is full of requests. C.S. Lewis wrote an essay entitled "Work and Prayer" in which he challenged the idea that asking in prayer is a "lower" or unworthy form of prayer:

This is the case against prayer which has, in the last hundred years, intimidated thousands of people. The usual answer is that it applies only to the lowest sort of prayer, the sort that consists in asking for things to happen. The higher sort, we are told, offers no advice to God; it consists only of "communication"...with Him; and those

who take this line seem to suggest that the lower kind of prayer really is an absurdity and that only children and savages would use it.

I have never been satisfied with this view. The distinction between the two sorts of prayer is a sound one; and I think on the whole (I am not quite certain) that the sort which asks for nothing is the higher or more advanced. To be in the state in which you are so at one with the will of God that you wouldn't want to alter the course of events even if you could is certainly a very high or advanced condition.

But if one simply rules out the lower kind, two difficulties follow. In the first place, one has to say that the whole historical tradition of Christian prayer (including the Lord's Prayer itself) has been wrong; for it has always admitted prayers for our daily bread, for the recovery of the sick, for protection from enemies, for the conversion of the outside world, and the like. In the second place, though the other kind of prayer may be "higher" if you restrict yourself to it because you have got beyond the desire to use any other, there is nothing especially "high" or "spiritual" about abstaining from prayers that make requests simply because you think they're no good. It might be a pretty thing (but, again, I'm not absolutely certain) if a boy never asked for cake because he was so high-minded and spiritual that he didn't want any cake. But there's nothing especially pretty about a boy who doesn't ask because he has learned that it is no use asking. I think that the whole matter needs reconsideration.

(The entire essay is available here: <https://redeeminggod.com/work-and-prayer-by-c-s-lewis/>)

The second obvious point about prayer is that we should pray about what we need. The Father knows what we need before we ask. If we wonder what we should pray about, the answer is that we should pray about what we need. The Father is already aware of your needs, but go ahead and ask Him to meet those needs. There is an idea among many Christians that our prayers should be for others and for needs "out there" among the missionaries and pastors and others who are needy and suffering but we should not pray for ourselves. Selfless prayer may also be "high minded" and virtuous, but Jesus expects us to pray for what we need.

In verses 9-13 Jesus gives us what we call "the Lord's prayer." It would probably be better to call it "the Lord's model prayer" or "the disciple's prayer." It is an example prayer that gives His people an idea of how they should pray. John chapter 17 would probably be better described as "the Lord's prayer." I don't think Jesus means that we should recite this prayer and only say these things when we pray. Certainly as we read the New Testament we find many more examples of prayer that speak of many things besides what Jesus covers here. I think this model prayer is a broad guideline for the sorts of things we should pray about.

The prayer addresses "Our Father who is in heaven." Jesus refers to God as "your Father" or "your heavenly Father" and here as "our Father" 16 times in the Sermon on the Mount. It is clear that He wants those who follow Him to address God as their Father. Our relationship to God is not just that of slave to Master or subject to King or soldier to Commander, but child to Father! He has given us life and we belong to Him, to His family. He is our Father in heaven. He is in secret and sees what is done in secret, but ultimately He dwells in heaven, in that place that transcends the earth and the material universe. To recognize that He is in heaven is to recognize His transcendence, that He is above and beyond this earth and this life and over everything.

The first request in this prayer is “Hallowed be Your name.” It is a request and not a statement of fact. The World English Bible renders it, “may your name be kept holy.” The Lexham English Bible has, “may your name be treated as holy.” The Contemporary English Version says, “help us to honor your name.” Verses 9 and 10 are concerned with the things of God, “Your name,” “Your Kingdom” and “Your will.” Albert Barnes comments:

The word “hallowed” means to render or pronounce holy. God’s name is essentially holy; and the meaning of this petition is, “Let thy name be celebrated, venerated, and esteemed as holy everywhere, and receive from all people proper honor.” It is thus the expression of a wish or desire, on the part of the worshipper, that the name of God, or that God himself, should be held everywhere in proper veneration.

The essence of our duty to God and our worship of God is to honor Him properly as God. He has made His existence known to all people, but people have turned away from Him and worshiped and served lesser things instead. Romans 1:21 says, “For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened.” It is the duty of every person to recognize God and honor Him as God, to venerate Him properly for who He is. This first request in the prayer, then, is that all might recognize and believe in and honor the Father for who He is.

The next two requests, “Your kingdom come” and “Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” are at least closely related if not parallel ideas. We should recall that the word for “kingdom,” *basileia*, has to do with kingship, kingly authority. “Your kingdom come” is a request that the Father would establish His rule on the earth, that He will reign over us. Where He rules as King His will is done, His orders are followed, what He wants is what comes to pass. So we see that the coming of His reign goes hand-in-hand with His will being done. God reigns in Heaven and His will is done there, and those who follow Jesus want to see Him reign on earth and have will done here as well.

The implication of this verse is that the Father does not now reign on earth as He does in Heaven and that His will is not now done on earth as it is in heaven. We have seen as we examined Satan’s temptation of Jesus that Satan is now the ruler of mankind and of the earth, and he works at cross-purposes to the Father. Mankind, following Satan, is in rebellion against the Father and for the most part is not interested in submitting to His rule or doing His will. If we follow Christ we long to see this change. We long to see humanity, the earth and all creation again subject to the rule of the Father and obedient to His will. So we request that His reign might come in fullness and we ask that His will might be done completely by everyone. It starts with us and our families, that He might rule over us and that we might do His will, and then extends to others.

These first three requests show us what the priorities of a follower of Jesus should be. We seek as the highest priority the concerns of the Father. We ask that Father might be honored as God and that His kingdom might come in fullness and His will might be done on earth. In verse 33 Jesus says, “But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.” This pursuit of the Father, His honor, His rule and His will as the primary things puts everything else in our lives into their proper place. When we are more concerned about the lesser things of life we are out of step with our Father.

In verses 11 through 13 Jesus gets to requests regarding the “lesser things.” He shows that we are to ask for our daily bread, forgiveness of our debts and deliverance from evil. We should pray about our daily physical needs, we should say, “Give us this day our daily bread.” This recognizes that our bread comes from the Father and that we are dependent upon Him for it. Doubtless the word “bread” is meant to encompass more than just a loaf of bread or our

food for the day, but stands for all of our physical needs. It includes food, clothing, shelter, income, energy, transportation, etc. that is necessary for our daily lives. It is appropriate to ask each day for our daily needs. We should note that He does not say, "Give us this month our monthly bread." The Father's tendency is to give what we need when we need it. Most of us today live month-to-month rather than day-to-day, but when we ask, we ask for what we need today. If we have an abundance, we should be very grateful and look for ways to bless others.

In addition to asking for daily bread, we are to ask for forgiveness of our debts as we have forgiven our debtors (verse 12). The Greek terms here are indeed "debt," *opheilēma*, and "debtors," *opheiletēs*. When Jesus talks about forgiveness He often depicts it in terms of debt and forgiveness of debt (see Matthew 18:21-35 and Luke 7:36-50). The parallel passage in Luke 11:4 says, "And forgive us our sins (*hamartia*), for we ourselves also forgive everyone who is indebted (*opheilō*) to us." Sin makes us debtors. We owe a debt to God and to others that we can never repay because of our sin.

The word for "forgive" is *aphiēmi*, which means "to send away." The request is that the Father would send away or set aside our debts in the same way that we have sent away the debts others owe to us. Notice the past tense here. The idea is that we have already forgiven the debts of others, so we ask that in the same way the Father might forgive our debts. When we forgive, we are dismissing the penalty we feel we are owed because of the wrong someone else has done against us. We are letting go of the requirement that the one who wronged us must be punished. We must check ourselves at this point. Have we let go of the debt that others owe us, or are we still requiring repayment? We will run into this again when we get to the passage in Matthew 18.

Note also here that this is the only part of the prayer that Jesus comments on in verses 14 and 15. This part of the prayer called for a further explanation, "For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions." Another synonym for "debts" is brought in here, "transgressions." The Greek word is *paraptōma*, "a false step, a trespass" (New American Standard Exhaustive Concordance). Vincent's Word Studies says, "This word is derived from *παραπίπτω*, to *fall or throw one's self beside*. Thus it has a sense somewhat akin to *ἁμαρτία*, of *going beside a mark, missing*. In classical Greek the verb is often used of *intentional falling*, as of *throwing one's self upon* an enemy; and this is the prevailing sense in biblical Greek, indicating *reckless and wilful sin*." In Mark 11:25 Jesus uses this same word when He says, "Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father who is in heaven will also forgive you your transgressions." When we have something against someone else, Jesus requires that we forgive them. Even if they have willfully and intentionally harmed us we are to forgive. Even if we have an airtight case against them with lots of evidence and witnesses we are to forgive.

Jesus then gives us two "if – then" propositions. If you forgive others, your Father will forgive you. If you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive you. Receiving forgiveness from our Father depends upon our extending forgiveness to others. There is a sense in which the Father forgives us first and then expects us to do the same, as Jesus will illustrate in Matthew 18, but moving forward in our relationship with Him the Christian is to ask the Father to forgive him as he has forgiven others. Paul writes in Ephesians 4:32, "Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you."

The last request in this model prayer is in verse 13, "And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil." The word translated "temptation," *peirasmos*, does not exclusively mean a solicitation to do wrong. It is also used in the sense of an experiment, a trial or a test.

Peter uses the word in this sense in 1 Peter 4:12-13, "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; 13 but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation."

Persecution and suffering for the sake of Christ are trials, tests that come upon us that prove the genuineness of our faith. So it is possible here that this is a request to be spared from testing, from trials of this nature. Some commentators have adopted this interpretation in light of what James writes in James 1:13-17, "Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am being tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone. 14 But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. 15 Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death. 16 Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. 17 Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow." It seems very clear that temptation to sin does not come from God. He cannot be tempted nor does He tempt. We are tempted when we are "carried away and enticed by" our own lust, our own desire. So it could be that the request in Matthew 6:13 is a request that the Father not lead us into times of testing and trial. But we must note the context here. The second part of this request contrasts with the first part as He says, "but deliver us from evil." (Some versions translate this "the evil one.") He has just shown us that we must ask for forgiveness for the debt of our sin. It seems that He is encouraging us to ask for protection from future sin. It seems clear to me that Jesus is telling us to pray that we might avoid evil. He's saying "Instead of leading us into temptation, deliver us from evil." I don't believe that this contradicts the teaching of James. Jesus did not say "Do not tempt us," but "Do not lead us into temptation." It could be that He means for us to take this in both senses, that the Father will protect us from trials and from being victimized by evil, and that He will also protect us from being tempted to sin and from committing evil ourselves.

In what sense, then, might the Father "lead us into temptation"? We should recall Matthew 4:1 which says, "Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil." The Spirit did not tempt Jesus, but did lead Him to the place of temptation. The tempting was done by the devil. It is wise for us to ask the Father not to lead us to a place of temptation, so that we might avoid both the temptation and the sin that may result.

The doxology in the second half of of verse 13 is evidently not a part of the original prayer, nor of the original text of Matthew. A.T. Robertson says:

The Doxology is placed in the margin of the Revised Version. It is wanting in the oldest and best Greek manuscripts. The earliest forms vary very much, some shorter, some longer than the one in the Authorized Version. The use of a doxology arose when this prayer began to be used as a liturgy to be recited or to be chanted in public worship. It was not an original part of the Model Prayer as given by Jesus. ([Robertson's Word Pictures](#))

#### Matthew 6:16-18

"Whenever you fast, do not put on a gloomy face as the hypocrites do, for they neglect their appearance so that they will be noticed by men when they are fasting. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. 17 "But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face 18 so that your fasting will not be noticed by men, but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.



Fasting is something that followers of Jesus will do. It is part of practicing one's righteousness. Of all the spiritual disciplines it is one of the most neglected by most Christians. We understand giving and prayer, but fasting is not a big part of our culture or practice. As Jesus talks about fasting He again follows the same pattern as He has with giving and with prayer. Fasting is not to be a public show but a private matter between the believer and the Lord.

When fasting, the example of the hypocrites is not to be followed. They want everyone to see that they are fasting and so they "put on a gloomy face" and "neglect their appearance." The word for "gloomy face," *skuthrōpos*, occurs just here and in Luke 24:17 where it is translated "looking sad." It is a face that looks sullen or sad. The gloomy face is a put on, deliberately applied by the hypocrites. They don't have to look this way, but they choose to do so. They neglect their appearance. Instead of the usual care that one gives to one's appearance, they deliberately neglect their appearance, and perhaps even make themselves look worse so that people will see they are fasting. For these men their fasting is a pretense, an act put on in order to impress others with their piety. Again, Jesus says, "they have their reward (*misthos*) in full."

When we fast we are to take care of our appearance as we would usually do. There should be no change to our appearance when we fast. It should not be apparent to people around us that any unusual thing is happening in our lives. We are to conceal the fact that we are fasting from others. When we fast, we fast for the Father, as a means to seek Him and pursue His approval.

Matthew 6:19-21

"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. 20 "But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; 21 for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

I don't think Jesus is here changing the subject to talk about something else, but this is a continuation of the theme of seeking rewards from the Father. By giving and praying and fasting in secret, we are pursuing rewards from the Father and are storing up treasures in heaven. Jesus is giving us a further explanation of the rewards we have from the Father.

As He did in His examples about giving, praying and Fasting, Jesus again here says, "Do not" do things this way, "but" instead do things differently. Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven. The Greek text of verse 19 says this, "μη θησαυριζετε υμιν θησαυρους επι της γης." The verb θησαυριζετε (*thēsaurizō*) means to lay up or store up treasure. The noun θησαυρους (*thēsauros*) is the word for the treasure, the wealth or goods that are laid up or deposited into a treasury. So a literal translation of the Greek would be "do not treasure up for yourselves treasures upon the earth." Let's notice here that Jesus says treasures are to be stored up. Jesus did not say, "Do not store up for yourselves treasures." He said not to store them up on earth, but in heaven. Some say that we should do what we can to serve the Lord with no thought of any reward, with no thought of piling up "treasures" for ourselves. They think it impure or unworthy for a follower of Christ to be motivated by rewards and heavenly treasures. But Jesus does not say this. He wants us to seek rewards and treasures in the right way and in the right place and from the right source. He knows we are motivated by these things. There is a godly self-

interest that moves us to want to please the Father. He wants us to know there are rewards in store for those who pursue them from the Father.

So what is the problem with storing up treasures on earth? Jesus says, “moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal.” The word for rust, *brōsis*, means “That which eats; from the verb βιβρώσκω, *to eat*. Compare *corrode*, from the Latin *rodo*, *to gnaw*.” (Vincent’s Word Studies). The word for “destroy” is *aphanizō*, “to snatch out of sight, to put out of view, to make unseen, to cause to vanish away, to destroy, consume” (Thayer). Both moths and rust eat away at earthly treasures and cause them to vanish or to be thrown out and removed from view. I’ve had several nice sweaters and wool shirts ruined by moths over the years. When we were in Hawaii I observed a number of fairly late-model cars that were already beginning to rust from the salt air. Treasures on earth are subject to the law of entropy and will decay. We constantly have to maintain things to keep them going. The more earthly treasures you have, the more it will cost you in terms of work and money to maintain those things to try to keep them from decay. Jesus is saying earthly treasure is not permanent, but temporal. It will not last.

Not only do earthly treasures decay, but they can also be taken from us. Treasures on earth are also subject to theft. We have had three bicycles stolen out of our garage on a couple of occasions, and our old 1983 Toyota Camry was stolen and then recovered a month later. We know what it’s like to have our property invaded and our things taken. Not only do earthly treasures need to be maintained, but they also need to be guarded and protected. So the trouble with earthly treasures is that they temporary and insecure. If the things we value most highly and pursue as the top priority are earthly things, we will find ourselves anxious, fearful, insecure and busy trying to preserve and protect those things.

In verse 20 we find the contrast. Instead of treasuring up treasures on earth, Jesus tells us to treasure up treasures in heaven. Focus your energies and efforts on storing up wealth for yourself in heaven. Treasure in heaven is not destroyed by moths nor rust. In heaven there are no thieves who will break in and steal our treasure. Heavenly treasure is durable, it is eternal and not temporal. Heavenly treasure is secure, it can’t be stolen. There will be no need for locks on the doors of heaven. We won’t need security cameras, fences, guards, vaults or passwords in heaven. We won’t have to spend our time cleaning, polishing, mending, repairing or lubricating things in heaven. Our treasure will be secure and we will be secure.

Jesus explains, “For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” This explains the ultimate reason for laying up treasure in heaven instead of on earth. Your heart will be where your treasure is. The focus of your affections and your efforts will be upon the location of your treasures. This is a major problem for most of us. We are focused on this life and this world rather than on heaven. We are focused on earthly things rather than heavenly things. Our lives revolve around storing up treasures on earth and we barely think of treasures in heaven. Jesus told us that in order to follow Him we must deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Him, but the word tells us to indulge ourselves and follow our desires. The world tells us that we must be consumers, that we must acquire things for ourselves in order to have a happy and fulfilling life. Jesus warned against greed and said, “not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions” (Luke 12:15). If we follow Jesus He must become primary in our lives, and our focus must shift from earth to heaven, from the temporal to the eternal, from the seen to the unseen. If our hearts are fearful and insecure, it is because we lack a heavenly focus.

"The eye is the lamp of the body; so then if your eye is clear, your whole body will be full of light. 23 "But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light that is in you is darkness, how great is the darkness! 24 "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth."

It's difficult to see how this passage relates to what Jesus has just said about storing up treasures in heaven instead of on earth. Why now does He start talking about the eye and how it is the "lamp of the body"? What does He mean by this? What does He mean about our body being full of light or full of darkness?

First, let us observe that Jesus is continuing with contrasts between one thing and another. In verses 1 through 18 He was drawing a contrast between seeking rewards from others on earth with seeking rewards from the Father in heaven. In verses 19 through 21 He contrasts storing up treasures on earth with storing up treasures in heaven. Now here in verses 22 and 23 He contrasts a clear eye which brings light to the whole body with a bad eye which fills the body with darkness. Then in verse 24 He points out that no one can serve two masters. No one can go two ways at the same time. We cannot serve both God and wealth, but we have to come down on one side or the other. I think this business here about the eye relates to the subject of storing up treasures and the subject of worry and what we seek in verses 25 through 34. Everything in chapter 6 is related. Jesus is saying throughout the chapter that we have two ways we can go. We can seek to impress people or we can seek to impress the heavenly Father. We can store up treasure on earth or we can store up treasure in heaven. We can have a good eye and a body full of light or we can have a bad eye and a body full of darkness. We can serve God or we can serve wealth. He is urging us to take the right path rather than the wrong path.

So He says that the eye is "the lamp of the body" and the eye needs to be "clear" in order for our whole body to be "full of light." The Greek word translated "clear" is *haplous*, "simple, single, whole, good fulfilling its office, sound" (Thayer's Greek Definitions), used in the New Testament only here and in the parallel passage in Luke 11:34. The eye is the light-sensitive organ of the body. We do not perceive light and do not have vision apart from eyes that work properly. We need good, clear eyes in order for our bodies to properly perceive and use light. Blindness makes life very difficult indeed! The word *haplous* is contrasted with the word "bad," *ponēros*, in verse 23. The word *ponēros* is used often in the New Testament and is translated "evil," "bad," "worthless," "crimes" (Acts 25:18), "malignant" (Revelation 16:2) and "wicked" in the NASB, the most common translation being "evil." The NASB translates the word as "evil" elsewhere in the Sermon on the Mount (5:11, 37, 39, 45; 6:13; 7:11). A bad eye is an evil eye and leads to a body full of darkness. I think Jesus is talking about an evil eye that focuses on evil or looks at things from an evil, corrupted perspective.

Vision and light are used as metaphors for perception, knowledge, wisdom and understanding. The motto for the University of California is "Fiat Lux," "Let there be light" (which of course comes from Genesis 1:3). Light is a metaphor for education and knowledge. Those who have knowledge and understanding of things are said to be "enlightened." Jesus says "If then the light that is in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!" I think what He means is that if what you call "light" in your life, your perception, knowledge, understanding, wisdom, beliefs and world-view, is really darkness, then your darkness is great. If your knowledge is untrue and your wisdom is really foolishness, then your "light" isn't really light at all, but is darkness. If the way you see things is really evil and wicked, then you aren't really

“enlightened” at all, but the light in you is really pitch black darkness. Paul talks about this in Romans 1:18-25:

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, 19 because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. 20 For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. 21 For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. 22 Professing to be wise, they became fools, 23 and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures. 24 Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them. 25 For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

The bad eye is the eye that suppresses the truth in unrighteousness, that refuses to see the truth of God that is clearly visible in creation. The bad eye leads to futile speculations and foolish, darkened hearts. It is the eye that will not honor God as God or give thanks, and exchanges the truth of God for a lie. We see evidence of this all around us today in those who call evil good and good evil (Isaiah 5:20), in those who insist that others tolerate and embrace and affirm their views and values while they try to shut down the views and values of others. This blindness, this darkness, is why Jesus told Paul that He was sending him to the Gentiles, “to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me” (Acts 26:18). It is required that the blinded eyes of those who don’t believe in Christ be opened so that they can turn from their darkness and be enlightened by the truth.

In verse 24 Jesus points out that no one can serve two masters. One or the other will rise to the top and take precedence. If we try to serve two masters Jesus says we will either hate one and love the other or we will be devoted to one and despise the other. If two people try to rule us and issue us orders, we will invariably prefer one over the other. It may lead to confusion, conflict and maybe chaos. Jesus points to the two competing masters, “You cannot serve God and wealth.” The word for “wealth” is *mammōnas*, which means riches, wealth or treasure. Luke uses this word also as Jesus draws conclusions from His parable of the unrighteous steward in Luke 16:9-14:

9 "And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by means of the *wealth* of unrighteousness, so that when it fails, they will receive you into the eternal dwellings. 10 "He who is faithful in a very little thing is faithful also in much; and he who is unrighteous in a very little thing is unrighteous also in much. 11 "Therefore if you have not been faithful in the use of unrighteous *wealth*, who will entrust the true riches to you? 12 "And if you have not been faithful in the use of that which is another's, who will give you that which is your own? 13 "No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and *wealth*." 14 Now the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, were listening to all these things and were scoffing at Him.

Here Jesus refers to “unrighteous wealth” as contrasted with the “true riches.” This ties what He is saying here in with His exhortation about laying up treasures in heaven rather than on earth. He is saying to use earthly wealth faithfully to “make friends” and to lay up the “true riches,” treasures in heaven. Note that the Pharisees scoffed at Him because they were “lovers of money.” They were those who thought that they could serve both God and money, and probably thought that wealth was an indicator of the blessing and favor of God. But God warns us against being lovers of money. Jesus warned about “all forms of greed” that drives us to hoard wealth for ourselves in Luke 12:13-21. 1 Timothy 6:9-10 says, “But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. 10 For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.” In Hebrews 13:5 it says, “Make sure that your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, “I WILL NEVER DESERT YOU, NOR WILL I EVER FORSAKE YOU.”

Before moving on, let’s say something about this idea of being a “servant” to a “master.” These words are used often in the New Testament and the idea was well understood by the people to whom Jesus spoke. The terms have to do with servants, or slaves, and their masters. The word translated “masters” is *kurios*, which is most often translated “lord” in the New Testament. Jesus is saying, “No one can be a slave to two lords.” Slavery has existed throughout most of human history. Conquerors always thought it their right and privilege to enslave those they had conquered. Sometimes people were in such great debt or poor economic condition that they needed to sell themselves into slavery in order to survive. The poor have often been dependent on the rich and powerful for their survival. The notion of slavery may be repugnant to us, but it was something that was commonplace at that time and taken for granted. This is not to say that God ordains slavery or approves of it, but in a fallen and sinful world it became a reality.

There is a sense in which everyone is a slave. Jesus said, “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin. The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son does remain forever. So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed” (John 8:34-36). Since everyone commits sin, everyone is a slave of sin and must be set free by the Son. This is what Jesus came to do. In Luke 4:18 He quoted Isaiah 61:1, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed.” He then said, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” Jesus is the one who releases the captives, who sets us free from our slavery to sin. If we are not slaves of God we will be slaves of sin and of ruler of this world. For more on this subject read Romans chapter 6.

#### Matthew 6:25-34

25 "For this reason I say to you, do not be worried about your life, as to what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? 26 "Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they? 27 "And who of you by being worried can add a single hour to his life? 28 "And why are you worried about clothing? Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin, 29 yet I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these. 30 "But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will He not much more clothe you? You of little faith!

31 "Do not worry then, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear for clothing?' 32 "For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. 33 "But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. 34 "So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Because we cannot serve God and money, and because we should be laying up treasures in heaven rather than earth, Jesus tells us now that we must stop worrying about our lives. The reason behind not being worried is the fact that it betrays an earthly focus (a "bad eye") rather than a heavenly focus.

The basic command is "do not be worried." Jesus uses the word "worried" five times in this passage. The word (*merimnaō*) is translated "anxious" in the older version of the NAS, as well as in other translations. The King James has "take no thought for your life," which in 1611 carried the same idea that we would call worry or anxiety. But Jesus is not saying that we should not think about these things, but that we should not be anxious and worried about them. Worry is something that doesn't just plan for future needs, but frets and obsesses about future needs.

Jesus mentions two categories of things not to worry about, your life and your body. Regarding your life, what you will eat and what you will drink. Regarding your body, what you will put on, that is, what you will wear. These are the bare necessities. We might add many other things to His list that we have a tendency to worry about. It's interesting that Jesus says nothing about shelter, work, income, property, relationships, health or any of the myriad other things that we might worry about. I don't think He's saying it's OK to worry about other things as long as we're not worried about food, drink and clothing. I think He's saying that we are not to worry about the essential needs of life, whatever those needs might be.

In the first of His rhetorical questions in this passage at the end of verse 25, Jesus asks, "Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?" The implied answer is "Yes, of course life is more than food and the body is more than clothing!" The word for "life" here is *psuchē*, which is elsewhere translated "soul" (e.g. Matthew 11:29 and Matthew 16:26). The word essentially means "breath" and came to denote the spirit or the soul. One of the notes in Thayer's Greek Definitions says, "the vital force which animates the body and shows itself in breathing." So Jesus here is speaking of the soul and the body, the physical and the spiritual. Food keeps us alive and clothing protects the body. Describing the creation of the first man in Genesis 2:7, it says "Then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being." God created Adam's body and then breathed into it the breath which is life, and Adam came alive. God did not feed the body food, but breathed into it and made it alive. The life is more than food because food is merely the thing that sustains the life in the body. The life is the important thing, the food is just the fuel.

Jesus gives us two illustrations, one that addresses worry about food and another that addresses worry about clothing. The first is about the birds of the air in verses 26 and 27. The birds of the air do not do the things that we do. They do not sow, nor reap, nor gather their crops into barns, yet the Father feeds them. Why do the birds not do these things? Well, it's because they are incapable of doing them. They have neither the intelligence nor the physical ability to sow, reap and gather. Man is the only creature capable of doing these things, and yet the other creatures do not starve. They are provided with food by the Father. Now, I don't think that Jesus is saying here that we should stop sowing, reaping and gathering. I don't think that is His point. Of course we should keep planting and harvesting our crops. He is not

saying that we should just sit around doing nothing and the Father will feed us. He's saying that as we do these things we need not do them with worry and anxiety. As we do what we can do we trust the Father to provide instead of fretting. Jesus asks, "Are you not worth much more than they?" The implied answer is, "Yes, we are worth more than birds." A human is worth much more than a bird or many birds. Jesus crossed the sea of Galilee and allowed many pigs to be destroyed for the sake of healing one man (Mark 5:1-20). There is no creature on earth more valuable or important to God than a human. We are created in God's image and so have inestimable value to Him. It is not "speciesist" to say that we are more valuable than the other creatures of the earth. The other creatures of earth are not equal to man and do not have the same standing or rights that man has.

The next rhetorical question Jesus has is, "And who of you by being worried can add a single hour to his life?" If we look at the various translations of this verse we will likely get confused about what Jesus is saying. The King James Version says, "Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?" The Revised Version says, "And which of you by being anxious can add one cubit unto his stature?" The World English Bible says, "Which of you, by being anxious, can add one moment to his lifespan?" So are we talking about adding a cubit to our height or adding time to our lifespan? The Greek word translated "hour" is *pēchus*, which means the forearm as a length of measure, that is, a cubit. Thayer's Greek Definitions says, "a measure of length equal to distance from the joint of the elbow to the tip of the middle finger (i.e. about 18 inches, (.5 m) but its precise length varied and is disputed)." The word for "life" is *hēlikia*, meaning age, time of life, maturity. It can mean stature in terms of height, so it could be translated as the KJV has it. But it's hard to conceive of anyone thinking that if they worry about things it will make them taller, so the likely meaning is that worry will not add any length of time to the span of our lives. The message is that worry adds nothing to our lives. It will not make us taller. It will not make us live longer. If anything, worry will shorten our lives. There is no advantage to be gained or benefit from worry.

The second illustration is that of lilies of the field and the grass of the field in verses 28-30. Jesus asks, "Why are you worried about clothing?" He urges us to observe the lilies of the field, to examine them and learn from them. Again He says we should notice what they do not do. They do not toil nor do they spin. They do not work hard to clothe themselves. Again, I don't think that Jesus is telling us to stop working and spinning thread and making clothing. He's telling us to stop worrying as we do these things. Though the lilies do not work hard to clothe themselves, they are clothed more gloriously than Solomon! In our front yard we have some flowers called ixias that bloom in the spring. Over the years they have spread from a small patch in front of our window to a larger portion of the front yard, and there are a great variety of colors and combinations of colors when they are in bloom. It's always a great treat when they are in full bloom, and people stop to take pictures of our yard. This is what I think of when I read these words from Jesus. Jesus says that God is the one who clothes the lilies and the grass of the field, and if He does this for flowers and grass, won't He much more do so for us? The lilies and grass are short-term things that flourish only for a moment, and then are cut down and thrown into the fire. Our ixias only bloom for a few days, then the flowers wither and before long we mow them down and toss them into our green recycling bin.

I think Jesus gets to the crux of our problem with worry in verse 30 when He asks, "Will He not much more clothe you? You of little faith!" Worry is a symptom of little faith. Worry is a crisis of belief. It is a failure to believe that God will give us the food, drink and clothing that we need. It is a lack of confidence in the Lord and His care for us, and a belief that we must meet these needs exclusively by our own efforts. We will hear Jesus use this word *oligopistos*, "little faith" three more times in Matthew. If we find ourselves worrying a lot about these kinds of things, food, drink, income, clothing and the other necessities of life, we must

examine our faith. We must ask ourselves if we are really putting our confidence and trust in our heavenly Father, if we are really believing that He does indeed care for us and will meet our needs.

In verse 31 Jesus again says, “Do not worry” and reveals what worry says, “What will we eat?” “What will we drink?” “What will we wear for clothing?” Worry looks to the future and fretfully asks these questions. When we have stopped worrying we stop asking questions like this. These are questions that the Gentiles ask. Jesus explains that it is a characteristic of the Gentiles, those who do not know God, to “eagerly seek all these things.” To worry and to eagerly pursue these things that we all need is to behave like unbelievers. We must have these things but God does not intend that they should be the primary things that dominate our thoughts and efforts. Jesus assures us, “Your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.” Providing His children with their food, drink and clothing is His concern. Our Father is not unaware of our physical needs. He is not exclusively concerned with spiritual and religious things.

Jesus gives us an alternative and solution to worry in verse 33, “But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.” The unbelievers eagerly seek first their food, drink and clothing, but believers in Christ are to focus on and pursue other things. When He says “seek first” He means that these things are to be the foremost or chief pursuit for us. The first priority and concern for a follower of Jesus is to be the kingdom and righteousness of the Father. Believers are to concern themselves with the rule of God, His kingship on earth. We saw this in His model prayer in verse 10, “Your kingdom come.” We want to be subject to His rule, and see the earth and all mankind subject to the rule of God. Believers are also to concern themselves with the righteousness of God, that we and others might believe and behave rightly and do God’s will, and be rightly related to Him. I like what the Jamieson Faucett and Brown Commentary says at this point:

But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you — This is the great summing up. Strictly speaking, it has to do only with the subject of the present section - the right state of the heart with reference to heavenly and earthly things; but being couched in the form of a brief general directory, it is so comprehensive in its grasp as to embrace the whole subject of this discourse. And, as if to make this the more evident, the two keynotes of this great sermon seem purposely struck in it - “the KINGDOM” and “the RIGHTEOUSNESS” of the kingdom - as the grand objects, in the supreme pursuit of which all things needful for the present life will be added to us. The precise sense of every word in this golden verse should be carefully weighed. “The kingdom of God” is the primary subject of the Sermon on the Mount - that kingdom which the God of heaven is erecting in this fallen world, within which are all the spiritually recovered and inwardly subject portion of the family of Adam, under Messiah as its Divine Head and King. “The righteousness thereof” is the character of all such, so amply described and variously illustrated in the foregoing portions of this discourse. The “seeking” of these is the making them the object of supreme choice and pursuit; and the seeking of them “first” is the seeking of them before and above all else. The “all these things” which shall in that case be added to us are just the “all these things” which the last words of Mat\_6:32 assured us “our heavenly Father knoweth that we have need of”; that is, all we require for the present life. And when our Lord says they shall be “added,” it is implied, as a matter of course, that the seekers of the kingdom and its righteousness shall have these as their proper and primary portion: the rest being their gracious reward for not seeking them. (See an



illustration of the principle of this in 2Ch\_1:11, 2Ch\_1:12). What follows is but a reduction of this great general direction into a practical and ready form for daily use.

So verse 33 is a great key to the entire Sermon on the Mount, and not just to this passage about worry. Especially this is a key to chapter 6, as Jesus has told us to pursue rewards from the Father rather than men and to lay up treasures in heaven rather than on earth and to have a good eye rather than a bad eye, and to serve God rather than wealth. Following these commands requires that we put God's rule and righteousness before all else. We are told the same thing in different terms elsewhere. We are told to focus on the unseen things that are eternal rather than the visible things that are temporal in 2 Corinthians 4:16-18. We are told to walk by the Spirit and not by the flesh in Romans 8 and Galatians 5. Colossians 3 tells us to keep seeking the things above, where Christ is and to set our minds on the things above and not on the things that are on earth.

When we seek first God's kingdom and righteousness, Jesus promises, "all these things will be added to you." Food, drink, clothing and all the other necessities of physical life will be given to us by the Father if we are seeking as our first priority His kingdom and righteousness. There is no need to worry about these things.

Finally, Jesus says, "So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own." The same word for "worry" is translated "care" in this verse in the NASB, so the more accurate rendering is in the World English Bible, "Therefore don't be anxious for tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself." Worry is that which looks ahead to the future and frets about tomorrow. But really, tomorrow never comes. We always live today. We can only live one day at a time. We have this tendency, though, to want that feeling of security that comes from knowing that we have enough money and resources to meet our needs for months or years to come. The trouble is that we never seem to have enough stored up. If we have enough for six months, we fret about the following six months. If we have enough for ten years, we worry about what happens after that. But really we only have today and are not guaranteed tomorrow. Each day is a day that "has enough trouble." The word for "trouble" is *kakia*, wickedness, evil, malice. In Ephesians 5:15-16 Paul writes, "Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil." The days in which we live in a fallen world are evil and troublesome days. We can count on each day being difficult to varying degrees, and it does no good to worry about what evil will arise tomorrow. When God's kingdom comes in fullness and righteousness is restored among men, then the days will be good.

Reflecting on chapter 6, the question that comes to my mind is "How do we do these things? What are some practical steps we should take to obey these commands?" First, we are to commit ourselves to private piety that is sincere and genuine rather than a pretense. God is looking for people who will seek Him sincerely rather than putting on a performance for the approval of others. This requires that we decide that our giving, our prayers, our fasting and our other spiritual practices will be done for His pleasure and for the reward that comes from Him. We must decide that the primary relationship in our lives will be with the Lord.

Second, we must address our attitude toward and use of money and wealth. We must cultivate a heavenly focus rather than earthly. Pursuing rewards from the Father is part of this. We lay up treasures in heaven as we seek to please Him in what we do. We also lay up treasures in heaven as we give. We must learn to use our resources to bless others and thus lay up treasures in heaven. To the man who came to Jesus and asked Him how he might obtain eternal life, Jesus said, "If you wish to be complete, go and sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me" (Matthew 19:21).

The man was wealthy and had treasure on earth, and he could have had treasure in heaven if his heart hadn't been focused on his earthly treasure.

Third, we must learn to have a good focus, a focus on serving God rather than wealth. Our eyes must be turned from this world and the things and values of this world to focus on God and the things of His kingdom.

Fourth, we must learn to live life day-to-day by faith, trusting our heavenly Father for our needs as we seek first His kingdom and righteousness.

Matthew 7:1-6

1 "Do not judge so that you will not be judged. 2 "For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you. 3 "Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? 4 "Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' and behold, the log is in your own eye? 5 "You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye. 6 "Do not give what is holy to dogs, and do not throw your pearls before swine, or they will trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces.

Jesus has told those who follow Him that their righteousness must surpass that of the scribes and Pharisees in Matthew 5:20. The scribes and Pharisees were those who saw themselves as righteous and did not hesitate to judge others. In their eyes they were righteous and others were sinners, they were just and others were condemned. Those who follow Christ must have a different attitude.

To understand this passage we must first understand what it means to "judge" someone else. The word translated "judge" is *krinō*. Strong's dictionary says it means "to distinguish, that is, decide (mentally or judicially); by implication to try, condemn, punish: - avenge, conclude, condemn, damn, decree, determine, esteem, judge, go to (sue at the) law, ordain, call in question, sentence to, think." The job of a judge in a court of law is to determine guilt or innocence, condemn the guilty and acquit the innocent, and impose a sentence on the guilty. Jesus is saying that we are not to try, convict and condemn one another. We are not to go around as those who are in a position to determine the relative degrees of guilt or innocence of others. In a criminal case in a court of law what must be determined is whether the accused is guilty or innocent of committing a crime. It is a fairly straightforward thing. There is a law against theft. A person has been arrested for the crime of stealing. The court must attempt to determine if there is enough evidence to prove that the accused is guilty. There is an objective standard of behavior, and judging is the act of deciding if someone has violated that standard.

Jesus says we should not judge in order to avoid being judged ourselves. He explains in verses 2 through 5. He says first, "For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure it will be measured to you." We will be judged in the same way we judge others. We will be held to the same standards. The Greek text is more accurately translated by the World English Bible, "and with whatever measure you measure, it will be measured to you." The Greek uses the noun *metrō*, "measure" and then the present active verb form *metreō*, to measure, and then the future passive indicative form of the verb, "it will be measured." The measurement standard you use to measure out to others will be the standard by which you will be measured in the future. If you use an unfair, inaccurate or overly harsh standard to measure others, then the same standard will be applied to you. If you expect others to measure up to a certain standard, then you must hold yourself to the same standard.

I love the absurd humor of Jesus in verses 3 through 5. It's a mistake to think that Jesus is always grave and humorless. He will use humor to make His point and seems to especially love this kind of absurd contrast, especially when speaking of the foibles of the hypocrites. He asks two questions. First, "Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye?" Second, "Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' and behold, the log is in your own eye?" Why do you do this, and how can you say this, in view of your condition? Here is a case where indeed a brother has a speck in his eye. It is a small splinter of something and it is an irritant. We all know what it feels like to have something in our eye. On some occasions we might need some help to get it out. Then there is another guy who has a "log" in his eye. The Greek word is *dokos* and means a beam or a rafter. Robertson's Word Pictures says it is "a log on which the planks in the house rest, joist, rafter, plank, pole sticking out grotesquely." This guy comes along, somehow is able to see that his brother has a little speck in his eye, and offers to take the speck out, while overlooking the beam that is in his own eye! Jesus asks, "Why do you do this?" Why do you see and inspect the speck in your brother's eye while not noticing or perceiving the beam that is in your own eye? Your brother has a small problem, but you have a much bigger problem of the same kind. Your brother may need some help with his speck, but as long as you have the log in your eye, you are not qualified to help him. Why do you focus on your brother's problem and ignore the bigger problem in your own life? We all have a tendency to do this, to justify ourselves and condemn others, to maximize their sins and ignore our own. If somehow you are successful in helping your brother get rid of his "speck," he will then no doubt be able to see that you have a log in your eye. Your hypocrisy will be obvious.

Jesus then tells us what to do. "You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye." You must first deal with your own logs before you concern yourself with the specks of others. You cannot see clearly as long as you ignore the log in your eye. We are in no position to judge the sins and flaws of others so long as we ignore our own. This is the kind of judging that Jesus is prohibiting here, hypocritical judging.

So, why do we fail to notice the logs in our eyes? Why do we refuse to see them and deal with them? What are some of the reasons for this? One reason, I think, is that we want to feel superior. We want to feel that we are in fact better than other people, and that we are in a position to pass judgment on others. Another reason is that we are ashamed of that "big sin" in our lives and we do not want to face it. We want to hide it. We want to pretend it's not there. We are pretenders and hypocrites who divert attention from ourselves by pointing at others. Another reason is that if we are aware of the issue, we will excuse it or diminish it as an issue. We will say, "Oh, it's not really a big deal." Like the smoker or drinker who says, "I can quit any time!" We deceive ourselves into thinking that the big deal is not really a big deal. Jesus is telling us to face up to the sins and weaknesses in our lives and deal with them before we try to "help" anyone else with their sins.

Paul also warns against this kind of hypocritical judging in Romans 2. In verses 1 through 8 he writes:

Therefore you have no excuse, everyone of you who passes judgment, for in that which you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. 2 And we know that the judgment of God rightly falls upon those who practice such things. 3 But do you suppose this, O man, when you pass judgment on those who practice such things and do the same yourself, that you will escape the judgment of God? 4 Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience,

not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance? 5 But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, 6 who WILL RENDER TO EACH PERSON ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS: 7 to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life; 8 but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation.

He goes on in the rest of the chapter to discuss this problem further. He says to the Jews in verses 17 through 24:

17 But if you bear the name "Jew" and rely upon the Law and boast in God, 18 and know His will and approve the things that are essential, being instructed out of the Law, 19 and are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, 20 a corrector of the foolish, a teacher of the immature, having in the Law the embodiment of knowledge and of the truth, 21 you, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that one shall not steal, do you steal? 22 You who say that one should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? 23 You who boast in the Law, through your breaking the Law, do you dishonor God? 24 For "THE NAME OF GOD IS BLASPHEMED AMONG THE GENTILES BECAUSE OF YOU," just as it is written.

I think we see an example of this kind of behavior in John 8, in the account of the woman caught in the act of adultery. The scribes and Pharisees brought a woman to Jesus whom they said had been caught committing adultery. They tried to use her to put Jesus into a difficult spot. They said, "Now in the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women; what then do You say?" Jesus at first did not respond, but stooped down and wrote on the ground with His finger. As they kept at Him, He finally said, "He who is without sin among you, let him be the first to throw a stone at her." One by one the men all left. I'm speculating, but I think that each one of these men who accused this woman were probably also adulterers. In fact, I think it likely that they set this woman up, that one of them had lured her into this tryst in order to have someone to accuse before Jesus. I think they were as guilty as she was, and perhaps more so. Adulterers have no business throwing stones at other adulterers.

Now we get to verse 6, which seems to be out of place here. How does this saying relate to anything else in the context? Jesus says, "Do not give what is holy to dogs, and do not throw your pearls before swine, or they will trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces." Holy things are not to be given to dogs. Dogs care nothing for holiness. They might appreciate having a nice piece of meat from a sacrificial offering, but giving it to them would profane the offering. The offering is for the Lord and for those offering it, for their sanctification, and not for dogs. It is an abuse of the holy to give it to dogs. It is an outright waste to toss pearls to swine. They will think you are giving them food, and when they find you have deceived them, they will trample down the pearls and attack you. The swine do not care about pearls. We may value pearls, but swine do not. To them pearls are useless.

It seems clear that Jesus is talking about giving holy things and good things of value to people who have no concern for such things. The Jews referred to Gentiles as "dogs" (Matthew 15:26) and thought them unworthy of the blessings of God. So having just told us not to judge is Jesus now telling us that we should judge that some people are "dogs" and "swine"? Well, yes, He is saying that we need to have enough discernment to see when it would be useless to try to give holy and valuable things to people who have no interest in

them. The book of Proverbs is full of references to people who are “fools” and “scoffers” and “sluggards” and so on, and how useless it is to try to correct them or teach them. Proverbs 9:7-9 says, “He who corrects a scoffer gets dishonor for himself, And he who reproves a wicked man gets insults for himself. Do not reprove a scoffer, or he will hate you, Reprove a wise man and he will love you. 9 Give instruction to a wise man and he will be still wiser, Teach a righteous man and he will increase his learning.” We have to be able to tell the difference between a wise man and a scoffer, and not waste our time trying to correct or teach a scoffer.

Matthew 7:7-11

"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. 8 "For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. 9 "Or what man is there among you who, when his son asks for a loaf, will give him a stone? 10 "Or if he asks for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he? 11 "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!

Jesus gives us three modes or means of pursuing what we need from the Father. He says, “ask, seek and knock.” Each of these three verbs is present tense and active, and could be translated “keep asking and it will be given to you; keep seeking and you will find; keep knocking and the door will be opened to you.” The word “ask” is used in each of these five verses. Jesus is urging us to ask and to pursue what we need and want from the Father, and to do it with persistence. Jesus has already said, “Your Father knows what you need before you ask Him” in Matthew 6:8, but this does not mean that we do not need to ask. James says, “You do not have because you do not ask” in James 4:2b.

These verbs, ask, seek and knock, are imperative verbs, that is, they are commands. Jesus is ordering us to keep on asking, seeking and knocking. This is what He wants us to do. The Father wants to give to us, allow us to find what we’re looking for, and to open doors for us, but evidently this depends on our asking, seeking and knocking. It appears that there are things that God will not do unless we ask Him to do them. We can actually, by asking, prompt God to do something He would not have done had we not asked! He gives us the ability, by asking in faith, to move Him to action!

Now, it must be said at this point that according to scripture and experience we will not see every request granted by the Father. It would be too dangerous if God gave us everything we asked with no exceptions. We might ask God to strike down the aggressive driver on the freeway. God has the option of saying “No.” Scripture tells us we must ask in faith without doubting (James 1:5-8). We must ask in accordance with God’s will (1 John 5:14-15). We must ask with right motives (James 4:3). We must not get the idea from Matthew 7 or elsewhere that God offers us an unrestricted promise to grant every request regardless of what it is.

Jesus again illustrates with rhetorical questions, “Or what man is there among you who, when his son asks for a loaf, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he?” The expected answer to this is, “No man is going to treat his son this way!” When your son is hungry and asks for food, you are not going to give him something deceptive or dangerous instead. You are not going to trick him or treat him cruelly. You will give him what he needs when he asks.

Jesus concludes, “If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!”

For the seventh time in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus uses the term “evil” (*ponēros*). He has said that we are blessed when people speak evil against us because of Him (5:11). He has said that if we say anything beyond “yes” or “no” it is of evil (5:37). He told us not to resist an evil person (5:39). He said that the Father causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good (5:45). He taught us to pray that the Father deliver us from evil (6:13). He warned us against an eye that is bad or evil (6:23). Now He uses the word to describe His listeners. He says “you are evil.” It appears that Jesus did not hold the view that humans are basically and intrinsically good and virtuous. Instead His judgment is that we are evil. We do not begin from a position of goodness and then somewhere along the line become bad; we are evil from the get-go. We don’t start out on the right path and then at some point take a wrong turn; we start on the wrong path. In our day this is a bitter pill to swallow. We do not like to think of ourselves as “evil.” We may think of some individuals like Adolf Hitler or Charles Manson as evil, and we may acknowledge that certain ideologies and behaviors are evil, but we are very reluctant to apply this word to ourselves. We prefer to think that we are “good” people, who occasionally may slip up in minor ways. This is, perhaps, the greatest satanic deception of our day. We desperately need an awakening to this truth today. We need our eyes opened to God’s holiness and our sinfulness and our need for forgiveness and reconciliation to Him.

Though we are evil, we know how to give good gifts to our children. We will give them a loaf and not a stone. We will give them a fish and not a snake. We care about the well-being of our children. How much more does the good heavenly Father give what is good to those who ask. Jesus said in Luke 18:19, “No one is good except God alone.” John writes, “This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5). The only one who is truly good, comprehensively good, only good, is God Himself. There is no evil in Him at all. There is no darkness in Him at all. Since He is good He only gives what is good. James 1:17 says, “Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow.” This is why our requests are sometimes denied, because we cannot see that what we are asking is not good for us. Sometimes we ask for things that we think would be good, but that God knows would not be good for us. Recently I heard a prayer request from a woman who was struggling financially. She asked for prayer that God would make her rich so that she would no longer have to worry about money. I don’t know for sure, but I suspect that God may not grant that request. I suspect that the Lord would rather teach her to trust Him for her day-to-day needs rather than make her rich so that she wouldn’t need to trust Him.

Luke’s version of this saying, in Luke 11:13, has Jesus saying, “If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?” The highest good that the Father can give us is His Holy Spirit, who is His very presence in us. Jesus called Him, “the Spirit of truth” and said, “whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you.”

#### Matthew 7:12

"In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is the Law and the Prophets."

How do we summarize “the Law and the Prophets”? How do we simplify the requirements of God’s Law and the scriptures and boil it all down to the basics? Here’s the answer from Jesus. In everything treat people the same way you want them to treat you. The

word “treat” translates the Greek *poieō*, to make or to do. I like the International Standard Version translation, “Therefore, whatever you want people to do for you, do the same for them, because this summarizes the Law and the Prophets.” The main command when it comes to our relationships with others is “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Jesus said that this was the second most important commandment, right after “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind” (Matthew 22:37-40). He said, “On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.” To treat others the way we want to be treated is to love our neighbor as ourselves. In every human encounter we should ask, “How would I want to be treated in this situation?” We should use this criterion to determine how we will behave toward others. Do we want to be respected? We should be respectful. Do we want others to listen to us? We should listen to them. Do we want to be treated kindly? We should be kind. Do we want to be criticized, chewed out and abused? Probably not, so we should avoid treating others this way. This is a simple, but all-important command from our Lord.

Matthew 7:13-14

"Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. 14 "For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it."

Jesus tells us to opt for “the narrow gate” instead of the wide gate. The Greek term *stenos* is translated “narrow” in verse 13 and “small” in verse 14. The reason that Jesus gives for choosing the narrow gate is that the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction. The broad gate opens on a wide and well-traveled road, but the destination is destruction. Paul uses the same word in Philippians 3:18-19, “For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction, whose god is their appetite, and whose glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things.” Peter says, “But by His word the present heavens and earth are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men” (2 Peter 3:7). The Bible does indeed teach that there will be a day of judgment and that the ungodly will face destruction. If we are faithful to the word of God we cannot set this truth aside.

If the wide road ends in destruction, why do most people take this road? Why do so many refuse to consider that there might be another option? Let’s consider some reasons that people stay on the road that leads to destruction.

First, the wide road is an easy road to take. It is the default road. If you do not take the narrow road, you are on the wide road. It is a multi-lane freeway, and most people are on this road. It moves along more smoothly than a narrow road. It is the path of least resistance. It takes less effort than the narrow road. You don’t really have to do anything in order to be on this road and stay on this road. Since most everyone is going this way, it is easy and is sometimes even fun.

Second, it is the popular road. It’s not a lonely road nor an unknown road. Because most people take this road it may appear to be the right road because it is the most popular. Familial and social pressure keeps many on this road. The majority seem to think it is the right way. Many people think this way today. If the majority thinks that something is true, then it must be true. If a poll shows that over 50 percent of people think that humans evolved from chimps, then that must be true. This is dangerous to our souls. The wide road is the “politically correct” road. There is the threat of being a social outcast if we don’t take this road. Those on

the wide road want to think that they are correct. They try to justify their beliefs, values and behavior and represent them as acceptable and good. They then tend to resent those who take the narrow road, and pressure others into staying on the wide road. Many will stay on the wide road because they have many loved ones on the same road, and they feel like if they opt for the narrow road they will be abandoning their loved ones.

Third, many are on the wide road to destruction because they are ignorant of the destination. They don't know that it leads to death. Perhaps they've been deceived into thinking that it is the road that leads to life. Jesus is about to warn us in the next paragraph about false prophets who want to lead people astray and keep them on the wide road to destruction. If they became aware of the destination they might seek to find the narrow road to life.

Fourth, some take it because it is wide and not narrow. It is wide and broad because there are fewer limits and restrictions. It is the road that allows for more latitude in beliefs and behavior. It is appealing because it is broad and "inclusive" rather than "exclusive." It is the road that allows people to live and behave in any way they wish and to choose any philosophy or world view that suits them. It is the road of those who are "broad minded" and not "narrow minded." It is the road of those who believe that all beliefs are equally valid and all paths lead to truth and to God.

A fifth reason that some take the wide road is that they do not feel worthy to take the narrow road. This again is a deception. They feel like they have to achieve some level of goodness or be in a certain upper class in order to take the narrow road. They have been led to believe that the narrow road is only for certain especially "holy" people, for priests and nuns and pastors and so on, but they don't qualify for it. The truth is that no one attains to life by their own behavior or the quality of their character. God makes it very clear that eternal life is a free gift He gives and it does not depend on our good deeds (see Ephesians 2:8-9 and Romans 3:23-24).

Sixth, some are on this wide road and know that it ends in destruction, but are ignorant of any other road. They do not know of the road that leads to life. These are those who need to be told of the narrow road, that there is another path available that leads to life.

Jesus further explains that the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it. In contrast to the wide gate and broad way that leads to destruction that is traveled by many, the narrow road to life is found by few. Since it is a small gate it is easy to miss. It must be sought. There is a degree of deliberate effort that must be made to enter by the narrow gate. One needs to recognize that the wide road is the road to destruction and have a desire to find the narrow road to life. The tragic thing is that the majority of people will not even seek this road. Even if they have heard of it and know it is available, they will pass it by. Because of its narrowness it is a harder road, an unpopular road, a lightly-traveled road and even thought to be a foolish route to take.

So Jesus tells us to take the narrow gate and the narrow path that leads to life, but what is this path? How do we find it? Jesus later says that He Himself is the "gate" and the "path." In John 10:7-10 it says, "So Jesus said to them again, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.'" He is the door, or the gate, the point of entry into the kingdom of God. In John 14:6 He says, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me." In the original Greek text the term used for "way" here is the same term used for "way" in Matthew 7:13 & 14. If you have heard about Jesus you have heard about the narrow gate and the narrow way. To believe in Him is to take the small gate and



narrow way. Jesus made it clear that if we want eternal life we must come to Him. In John 5:39-40 He says "You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me; and you are unwilling to come to Me so that you may have life." Taking the narrow gate and the narrow way means to believe in and follow Jesus Christ. He Himself is eternal life.

Matthew 7:15-20

"Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. 16 "You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles, are they? 17 "So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. 18 "A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. 19 "Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20 "So then, you will know them by their fruits."

Jesus wants His people to know that false prophets will come to them. Paul warned the Ephesian elders about this as well in Acts 20:28-31, "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. 29 "I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; 30 and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. 31 "Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears." This is a danger to which church leaders in particular need to give attention. When Paul said, "Be on guard" he used the same word for "beware" in Matthew 7:15, *prosechō*, which we encountered also in Matthew 6:1. Jesus wants them to be aware of and on guard against false prophets (*pseudoprophētēs* in the Greek). Among believers in Christ there must be a consciousness that these false prophets exist and their purpose is to "draw away the disciples after them."

A prophet is one who speaks for God, one who says, "Thus says the Lord." This phrase occurs 417 times in the New American Standard Bible. We must not think that prophets always give predictions about the future. Mostly, they pass on to their listeners what they heard from the Lord, usually a word about turning back to Him, trusting in Him and being obedient to Him. A false prophet pretends to speak for the Lord, but is actually a deceiver. A false prophet will say, "Thus says the Lord" and then proceed with distortions and lies. Not everyone who claims to speak for God really does speak for God.

The false prophets come in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. They wear the clothing of sheep, and so appear to be sheep, but they are wearing a disguise. Paul describes them in a similar way in 2 Corinthians 11:13-15, "For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. 14 No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. 15 Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end will be according to their deeds." Even Satan himself dresses up like an angel of light. If we were to see Satan, he would probably appear to us as a glorious angel of God. Satan does not appear as something hideous, ugly and repulsive, but as something beautiful and glorious. The things he says will sound good to our ears. A false prophet will probably look good and sound good. He will say things we like to hear. It may be difficult to discern a false prophet from a true prophet, because he will look like one of the flock. This is why we must stay alert.

The inward character of the false prophet is that of a ravenous wolf. A wolf does not come among the sheep for the benefit and welfare of the sheep. The wolf comes to destroy

the sheep, to drag them off and eat them. Paul says they are savage and do not spare the flock. False prophets and teachers in the church are not motivated by the desire to be of benefit to others, but by a desire to serve themselves and their own appetites.

How do we discern a false prophet? Jesus says, "You will know them by their fruits." You will know them by what comes out of their lives. Thorn bushes do not produce grapes. Good trees do not produce bad fruit, and bad trees do not produce good fruit. The fruit that comes from a tree is determined by the character of the tree. The fruit that comes out of our lives is determined by our inward character. The fruit of a ravenous wolf is death, destruction and chaos in the flock. The tree that does not produce good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Jesus made this same point in the parable of the fruitless fig tree in Luke 13:6-9 and in His discussion about the branches that do not abide in Him in John 15:1-8. Those who do not bear good fruit will be cast out and burned, and there are no exceptions. It is good fruit that God is looking for in our lives.

Matthew 7:21-23

"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. 22 "Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' 23 "And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.'

What is the "good fruit" that the Lord wants to see? It is doing the will of the Father who is in heaven. Jesus here contrasts those who say with those who do. Many give lip service to Jesus and call Him "Lord," but do not do the will of the Father. It is easier to say than to do, to profess than to perform. It is not true that everyone who calls Jesus "Lord" is saved and is a subject of the kingdom. There are many false believers and cults who call Jesus "Lord." The false prophets may call Jesus "Lord," but they do not do His will nor are they known by Him.

The participles here, "says to Me," and "does the will" are present active. The International Standard Bible picks up the tense and translates, "Not everyone who keeps saying to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will get into the kingdom from heaven, but only the person who keeps doing the will of my Father in heaven." What's needed is not only continually recognizing Jesus as Lord, but also continually doing as He says. In Luke 6:46 we hear Jesus ask, "Why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?" If Jesus really is our Lord, then He is the one who commands us and we are to submit to Him and carry out His orders. Of course, Jesus is going to finish up here in Matthew 7 with an emphasis on this in the verses that follow.

On the day of judgment, the day when we "enter the kingdom of heaven," many will point to the great things they did in the name of Jesus. They will say, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?" The question implies a positive answer, "Yes, you did these things in My name." Jesus does not deny that they did things in His name. They will point to their works done in the name of Jesus as the basis for being admitted into His kingdom. They will put their confidence in these things they have done.

These people claim some powerful and miraculous things. How can these things be done without the power and authority of Christ behind them? How can these things be done falsely in the name of Christ? Evidently charlatans and pretenders can still do amazing things. Jesus warns in Matthew 24:23-24, "Then if anyone says to you, 'Behold, here is the Christ,' or 'There He is,' do not believe him. 24 "For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show

great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect.” The wizards and magicians of Pharaoh were able to duplicate some of the signs of Moses (Exodus 7 and 8). This is a caution to us about putting our faith in someone because they work a miracle, sign or wonder, or have what sounds like a great prophetic word from the Lord. Their words and works are intended to mislead people and draw them away from the Lord rather than drawing them toward Him.

On that day Jesus will declare to them, “I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.” Even though they called Him “Lord,” there was no time when He ever knew them. He will disavow ever having any acquaintance with them. He won’t say that He knew them at one point and then they fell away. He won’t say that some of their deeds were really done by His power and others were not. He won’t say that He knew them a little bit, but not thoroughly. He will say, “I never knew you.” The Lord either knows us or doesn’t know us, there is no half-way with Him. We either really belong to Him or we do not. We are either genuine sheep of His flock or we are impostors or outsiders.

Jesus will order them to depart from Him because they are those who “practice lawlessness.” They may have used His name to do some spectacular things, but they are those who practice lawlessness and do not do the will of the Father in heaven. “Lawlessness” is *anomia*, to be without law. These people behave with no regard to the Law of God. They set aside the Law and follow their own rules. Jesus gave us an example of this in Matthew 15 when the Pharisees and scribes confronted Him for allowing His disciples to eat without having observed the tradition of washing their hands before eating. Jesus blasted them for setting aside the commandment of God in order to observe their tradition when it came to the commandment to “honor your father and mother” (see Matthew 15:1-9). In Matthew 23:23-24 He says, “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others. 24 “You blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!” These men who were supposedly righteous and all about the Law actually in practice did not hesitate to set aside parts of the Law that were inconvenient or costly.

John tells us that “sin is lawlessness” in 1 John 3:4. Beware of teachers who tell you the Law is irrelevant to your life. Beware of those who teach that grace means that there is no requirement to observe God’s Law. Yes, grace is that which saves us from our inability to obey the Law and from our lawlessness, but grace does not give us the license to live lawless lives. Paul tackles this issue in Romans 6 through 8 and says, “For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin the flesh, so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit” (Romans 8:3-4). What the Law requires can be fulfilled in us as we walk according to the Spirit. Followers of Jesus are not to be those who practice lawlessness. If someone professes to be a follower of Christ and calls Him “Lord” but has no interest in following His commands, we can be sure that they are not genuine disciples of His. True disciples concern themselves with observing His commands (Matthew 28:20).

#### Matthew 7:24-27

"Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock. 25 "And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock. 26 "Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. 27 "The rain fell, and the

floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell—and great was its fall."

Now Jesus shifts from talking about saying and doing to hearing and doing. Everyone who hears His words and does them is wise. Everyone who hears and does not do them is foolish. Hearing is important, but it must lead to doing. Hearing leads to faith and faith leads to obedience. Paul says that faith comes from hearing in 1 Corinthians 10:17. Faith then leads to the good works that God has prepared for us to do (Ephesians 2:10).

The wise man is the man who hears the words of Jesus and acts on them. He is the man who builds his house on the rock. Notice that the wise man's house is not exempt from the storms. The rain fell, the floods came, the winds blew and the storm beat on the house. The one who hears and obeys the teaching of Jesus will still be subject to the inevitable storms of life. Difficulties, trials, tribulations and sufferings will still come to the wise man, but his "house" will not be destroyed, because it is built on the rock of obedience to Christ. Obedience to the word of Christ gives us the foundation that makes us durable. It enables us to stand and endure through the trials of life.

Everyone who hears but does not obey is like a foolish man who builds on the sand. He has no foundation. Mere hearing is not enough. It is not enough to listen, to memorize and meditate on what Jesus says. We must move forward to obedience. When the storms come upon the foolish man's house, it collapses spectacularly.

James also warns us of the danger of hearing without doing in James 1:22-25:

22 But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves. 23 For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; 24 for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. 25 But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does.

Those who hear without doing deceive themselves. They think that mere hearing is enough. James says one who hears without doing is like a man who looks at himself in a mirror, then goes away and does nothing about his appearance. He has seen what needs to be fixed, but has done nothing to fix it. The word of God is like a mirror that reveals us as we are and lets us see what needs to be adjusted and fixed. As we look intently at God's law and do what it shows us needs to be done, we will be blessed and become effective. As Jesus said in John 13:17, "If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them." Blessing is not in the hearing or in the knowing, but in the doing.

#### Matthew 7:28-29

When Jesus had finished these words, the crowds were amazed at His teaching; 29 for He was teaching them as one having authority, and not as their scribes.

The teaching of Jesus had a unique impact on the crowds who heard Him. The crowds were "amazed" at His teaching. The Greek word *ekplēssō* means "to strike out" ([New American Standard Exhaustive Concordance](#)). They were astonished, they were, we might say, "gobsmacked." His teaching was striking to them because He taught "as one having authority." The reason He taught with authority is because He had authority. He is the Son of God. He is the King of the kingdom. He is the Messiah, the Christ. He knows what He is

talking about and He is right. Therefore He speaks with truth and confidence. He does not have to qualify what He says with words like “perhaps” or “possibly” or “maybe.” He says, “This is the way it is” and “Do it this way” and we don’t have to wonder if His teaching is accurate.

If we teach the teachings of Jesus we can be equally authoritative. We can speak with confidence and authority if we say the same things He did. Jesus in fact told us to do this. He said, “Teach them to observe all that I commanded you” (Matthew 28:20).

#### Matthew 8:1-4

When Jesus came down from the mountain, large crowds followed Him. 2 And a leper came to Him and bowed down before Him, and said, "Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean." 3 Jesus stretched out His hand and touched him, saying, "I am willing; be cleansed." And immediately his leprosy was cleansed. 4 And Jesus \*said to him, "See that you tell no one; but go, show yourself to the priest and present the offering that Moses commanded, as a testimony to them."

Matthew often mentions the “crowds” that followed and surrounded Jesus. The Greek term *ochlos* is used 47 times in Matthew. It was the presence of the “large crowds” that prompted Jesus to sit down on the mountain and deliver the “Sermon on the Mount” (Matthew 4:25 and 5:1). We just read in 7:28 that “the crowds were amazed at His teaching.” Now in chapter 8 the large crowds continue to follow Him.

In chapters 8 and 9 we find that Matthew records a string of miracles. He moves from the teaching of Jesus to the powerful works of Jesus. Matthew has mentioned previously that Jesus had been traveling in Galilee teaching and healing (4:23-24), so He was already known for miraculous healing, and it was a primary reason that the large crowds gathered and followed Him. Now Matthew will give us some specific examples.

I love how the leper expressed his request to be made clean. He bowed down before Jesus and said, “Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean.” He did not ask, “Lord, can you make me clean?” He did not ask, “Lord, is there anything you’re able to do for me?” For him there was no question of the ability or power of Jesus. He knew Jesus had the power and authority to make him clean. The thing he did not know was if Jesus was willing to do it. Did Jesus want to make him clean? That was the question. When we ask Jesus to do something for us, we should come with this same kind of faith. We should know that He is able to do what we ask, but we may not be sure that it is in accord with His will. We should come to Him with the understanding that He may have other plans or a higher purpose than we can comprehend.

Lepers were outcasts. They were required to separate themselves from others and warn others that they were “unclean.” Leviticus 13:45-46 says, "As for the leper who has the infection, his clothes shall be torn, and the hair of his head shall be uncovered, and he shall cover his mustache and cry, 'Unclean! Unclean!' 46 "He shall remain unclean all the days during which he has the infection; he is unclean. He shall live alone; his dwelling shall be outside the camp." The danger of infecting others was too great, and so lepers had to live apart from others. Lepers were to be avoided.

Jesus did not hesitate to touch this man. He said, “I am willing; be cleansed.” Immediately the man was cleansed of his leprosy. The healing was instantaneous. This was always the case with the healings of Jesus, they were always immediate. He speaks the word and issues the order and the healing is accomplished. We see this over and over in the gospels. Jesus speaks and what He says is done.

Jesus told the man to keep it a secret and to go show himself to the priest and present the offering that Moses commanded. This would be a testimony to the priests. The procedure for recognizing the cleanness of someone who had been a leper is described in Leviticus 14. Going through this procedure with the offerings and the priests would say to the priests that this man had been healed and could be accepted into society, and that there was One among them who had the power to cleanse lepers. Mark tells us that the man “went out and began to proclaim it freely and to spread the news around, to such an extent that Jesus could no longer publicly enter a city, but stayed out in unpopulated areas; and they were coming to Him from everywhere.” Crowds had already been following Jesus, and when this man started telling his story even larger crowds came to Jesus. Our testimony about what Christ has done for us is a powerful thing.

#### Matthew 8:5-13

And when Jesus entered Capernaum, a centurion came to Him, imploring Him, 6 and saying, "Lord, my servant is lying paralyzed at home, fearfully tormented." 7 Jesus \*said to him, "I will come and heal him." 8 But the centurion said, "Lord, I am not worthy for You to come under my roof, but just say the word, and my servant will be healed. 9 "For I also am a man under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to this one, 'Go!' and he goes, and to another, 'Come!' and he comes, and to my slave, 'Do this!' and he does it." 10 Now when Jesus heard this, He marveled and said to those who were following, "Truly I say to you, I have not found such great faith with anyone in Israel. 11 "I say to you that many will come from east and west, and recline at the table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven; 12 but the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." 13 And Jesus said to the centurion, "Go; it shall be done for you as you have believed." And the servant was healed that very moment.

A centurion was the commander of a “century,” or about 100 or so Roman soldiers. The centurions were kind of the backbone of the Roman army, and very important men. In his account, Luke gives us more details and clarifies that the centurion did not personally come to Jesus, but sent a delegation of Jewish elders. Here’s Luke’s version in Luke 7:1-10:

1 When He had completed all His discourse in the hearing of the people, He went to Capernaum. 2 And a centurion's slave, who was highly regarded by him, was sick and about to die. 3 When he heard about Jesus, he sent some Jewish elders asking Him to come and save the life of his slave. 4 When they came to Jesus, they earnestly implored Him, saying, "He is worthy for You to grant this to him; 5 for he loves our nation and it was he who built us our synagogue." 6 Now Jesus started on His way with them; and when He was not far from the house, the centurion sent friends, saying to Him, "Lord, do not trouble Yourself further, for I am not worthy for You to come under my roof; 7 for this reason I did not even consider myself worthy to come to You, but just say the word, and my servant will be healed. 8 "For I also am a man placed under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to this one, 'Go!' and he goes, and to another, 'Come!' and he comes, and to my slave, 'Do this!' and he does it." 9 Now when Jesus heard this, He marveled at him, and turned and said to the crowd that was following Him, "I say to you, not even in Israel have I found such great faith." 10 When those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the slave in good health. (Luke 7:1-10)

It was because this centurion did not feel himself worthy to come to Jesus that he sent the elders to make the request for him. He knew well the attitude of Jews toward Gentiles in general and Roman centurions in particular. No doubt he had to work hard to gain the trust of these people. The elders, however, said to Jesus, "He is worthy for You to grant this to him; for he loves our nation and it was he who built us our synagogue." He had proven that he was a God-fearing Gentile and friend of the Jewish nation by building their synagogue for them. He had gained their respect and appreciation even though he was a Roman centurion. The assumption of the elders was that Jesus would not be willing to do anything for a Roman centurion. When they came they had to make the case for him and his worthiness.

When the centurion said, "I am not worthy" he used the same word that John the baptist used in Matthew 3:11 when he said, "I am not fit to remove His sandals." Again, there is not one person on this earth who is really fit or worthy to serve Jesus or to ask anything from Him or to expect anything from Him. Anything we are allowed to do for Him or receive from Him is a gift of His grace.

The centurion's servant was bedridden, paralyzed, and "fearfully tormented." The word Matthew uses for "servant" is *pais*, meaning "boy" or "child." This was probably a young man. Luke refers to him as a "*doulos*," a slave, and says he was "highly regarded by him." Luke tells us that he was sick and about to die. He was on the verge of death.

Jesus said, "I will come and heal him," and began to follow the elders to the home of the centurion. As Jesus neared the house the centurion sent friends to say that he was not worthy. He was not worthy to have Jesus come into his home and he did not consider himself worthy to come to him in person. It could be that the centurion, being familiar with the attitude of the Jews toward Gentiles, did not want to damage the reputation of Jesus among the Jews by having Him visit his home. When Peter went to visit Cornelius the centurion in Caesarea and shared the gospel with him and his household, the Jews took issue with him when he got back to Jerusalem. They said, "You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them" (Acts 11:3). He explained to them the vision he had had and how he had gone and shared the gospel of Christ with them and how the Holy Spirit had fallen on them. In Acts 11:17 Peter says, "Therefore if God gave to them the same gift as He gave to us also after believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way?" Verse 18 says, "When they heard this, they quieted down and glorified God, saying, 'Well then, God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life.'" By His willingness to go to the home of the centurion, Jesus demonstrated the truth of what these men finally realized.

Because of his military training and experience the centurion understood what it meant to be under authority and to have authority. The word for "authority" is *exousia*, which Thayer's Greek Definitions defines as "power of choice, liberty of doing as one pleases; physical and mental power; the power of authority (influence) and of right (privilege)." This is the same word used for "authority" in Matthew 28:18, "all authority has been given Me in heaven and on earth." The centurion was under authority and had to carry out the orders he was given, and he also had authority over the soldiers and slaves under his command. In practical terms this meant that he could say to one soldier "Go!" and he would go, and to another "Come!" and he would come, and to his slave, "Do this!" and he would do it. As a man with authority he did not make requests and say "pretty please," but he issued orders that were carried out with unquestioning obedience. The centurion realized that Jesus had this kind of authority on a much greater scale. He realized that Jesus was the Messiah, the King, and had the authority to command that his servant be healed, and it would be done. So he says, "But just say the word, and my servant will be healed." He believed that it was not necessary for Jesus to come to his house, to see or touch the servant, or to do any kind of ceremony. He saw that Jesus could simply order that the healing be done and it would be done.

When Jesus heard these words from the centurion, He marveled. The Lexham English Bible says “he was astonished.” This word is most often used in the gospels to describe the reaction of people to the things Jesus did or said. They were often amazed or astonished or wondered at the things He did. Besides this incident, there was one other time this word was applied to Jesus. It is Mark 6:6 in His hometown of Nazareth where people were familiar with Him and His family and refused to believe in Him. Mark 6:6 says, “He wondered at their unbelief.” What amazed Jesus about the centurion was his great faith. What amazed Jesus about the people of Nazareth was their lack of faith. The man who should have been clueless about Jesus had the greatest faith in Him while the people who should have been quick to believe rejected Him.

Jesus said, “Truly I say to you, I have not found such great faith with anyone in Israel.” The word for “great” is *tosoutos*, and has to do with quantity. It could be translated “so much” or “so vast.” So Jesus is saying that He has not found so much faith in anyone in Israel. This Gentile centurion had more faith than anyone in Israel! Faith is what Jesus is looking for. Jesus asked in Luke 18:8, “When the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?” When He returns He wants to find people who believe in Him, trust in Him, put their confidence in Him and walk with Him. He looked for it among those in His hometown of Nazareth but did not find it, and so was not able to do much among them. Several times Jesus got after the disciples for their lack of faith (Luke 12:28, Matthew 6:30, Matthew 8:26, Matthew 14:31, Matthew 17:20, Mark 4:40-41). There were even many who saw His miracles and signs and still did not believe in Him. John comments in John 12:37-43:

37 But though He had performed so many signs before them, yet they were not believing in Him. 38 This was to fulfill the word of Isaiah the prophet which he spoke: "LORD, WHO HAS BELIEVED OUR REPORT? AND TO WHOM HAS THE ARM OF THE LORD BEEN REVEALED?" 39 For this reason they could not believe, for Isaiah said again, 40 "HE HAS BLINDED THEIR EYES AND HE HARDENED THEIR HEART, SO THAT THEY WOULD NOT SEE WITH THEIR EYES AND PERCEIVE WITH THEIR HEART, AND BE CONVERTED AND I HEAL THEM." 41 These things Isaiah said because he saw His glory, and he spoke of Him. 42 Nevertheless many even of the rulers believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they were not confessing Him, for fear that they would be put out of the synagogue; 43 for they loved the approval of men rather than the approval of God.

Blinded eyes and hardened hearts will not believe in Jesus. Those who love the approval of people more than the approval of God will not believe. As long as the approval of others is more important to us than the approval of God, we will not have great faith in Christ. The centurion believed in Jesus even though it probably made him an oddball among his peers in the Roman army. Because of his faith he identified with and helped the people of God, recognized his own unworthiness and believed in and called upon the Messiah.

The centurion was just one representative of the many who are going to come from east and west to recline at the heavenly banquet with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (verses 11 and 12). The Jews had the attitude that the blessings of Yahweh were for them alone, and that the Gentiles, the other nations, were excluded from them. But this was never the case. In His covenant with Abraham, God had said, “Go forth from your country, And from your relatives And from your father's house, To the land which I will show you; And I will make you a great nation, And I will bless you, And make your name great; And so you shall be a blessing; And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed” (Genesis 12:1-3). It has always been God’s purpose to



bless all the peoples and nations of the earth through the descendants of Abraham, and primarily through Christ who came through the line of Abraham.

This is not the only place where Jesus makes this point. In Luke 13:28 He says, "In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but yourselves being thrown out. 29 "And they will come from east and west and from north and south, and will recline at the table in the kingdom of God." After telling the parable of the tenant vine-growers who abused the owner's servants and killed his son, Jesus said, "Did you never read in the Scriptures, 'THE STONE WHICH THE BUILDERS REJECTED, THIS BECAME THE CHIEF CORNER stone; THIS CAME ABOUT FROM THE LORD, AND IT IS MARVELOUS IN OUR EYES'? Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people, producing the fruit of it. And he who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; but on whomever it falls, it will scatter him like dust" (Matthew 21:42-44). In Luke 14 Jesus tells a parable about a man who had a big party and invited many people. When the time came for his party, he sent messengers to tell those who were invited to come to the party, but they all made weak excuses for why they could not come. In verses 23 and 24 He says, "And the master said to the slave, 'Go out into the highways and along the hedges, and compel them to come in, so that my house may be filled. For I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste of my dinner.'" In John 10:16 He says, "I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will hear My voice; and they will become one flock with one shepherd." So Jesus made it very clear that people from other nations would be welcomed into the kingdom of heaven. The uninvited will be invited and the excluded will be included.

One of the things we may not understand as we read this is this saying that the many from east and west "will recline at the table" with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Contrary to DaVinci's Last Supper painting, at that time they did not pull chairs up to tables in order to dine. Instead, they reclined on cushions beside a low table, leaning on one arm while they ate with the other. So Jesus is saying that many from among the Gentiles, the other nations, will come and will eat and will enjoy fellowship with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom.

By tragic contrast, the "sons of the kingdom will be cast out into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." Those who had confidence that they were acceptable to God because they were children of Abraham (Matthew 3:9) and therefore "sons of the kingdom" were in for a rude awakening. Gentiles will be welcomed into the kingdom while the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into the outer darkness. This is the first of three times in Matthew where Jesus talks about people being cast into "the outer darkness" where there will be "weeping and gnashing of teeth" (see also Matthew 22:13 and 25:30). This place Jesus also called "the furnace of fire" in Matthew 13:42 and 50, and the place for the hypocrites in Matthew 24:51. Outside the kingdom of heaven it is dark. There is no light there. If you've ever experienced total darkness you know that it's a very uncomfortable feeling. I experienced it often when I was a teenager and we had a darkroom my Dad had built in a corner of the garage. I was often in there to develop black and white film and to make prints. When handling film it was necessary to make sure that it was absolutely dark or else the image on the film would be ruined. Without light I had to learn to do things by touch and feel rather than by sight. It was always a relief when I got the film safely into the light-tight developing tank and could turn the lights back on. John tells us in 1 John 1:5 that "God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all." The "outer darkness," then, is not just the absence of light, but is also the absence of God. There is no perception or experience of the presence of God in this place. In this place people are cut off from the light and life and goodness and love of God. It is not a fun place, not a place where we really want to be.

Jesus ordered the centurion to “Go,” promising him, “it shall be done for you as you have believed.” At that instant the servant was healed. The centurion believed Jesus had the authority to issue the order and it would be done, and so it was. Here and in other places Jesus seems to say that there is a connection between what people believe and what He does for them. He could do no great works among the people of Nazareth because of their unbelief. But for those who came to Him in faith, believing He is the Messiah and that He can meet their need, He responded and granted their requests. There were times when He healed and did miracles without being asked, as when He fed the 5,000, when he stilled the storm (and asked the disciples where their faith was), when He raised the widow’s son from the dead in Luke 7:11-16. These and other incidents demonstrate that it was not always necessary that someone ask Jesus in faith to do something. He is the Lord and He can do whatever He wishes. He is not restrained by our unbelief or our limited belief. At the same time it appears there are times when we may not receive what He wants to give because we do not ask or even think to ask. We need to learn to think big like the centurion did. We need to expand our understanding of the Lord and His capabilities.

There are two primary things about the faith of the centurion that I want to emphasize before moving on. The first is that his faith recognized who Jesus was. He believed Jesus was the Lord, the Messiah, the Son of God, God incarnate. He recognized the authority and power of Jesus, that Jesus was able to issue orders and they would be carried out in the natural and supernatural realms. He saw that Jesus was in command of a heavenly force that would carry out anything He ordered. He also saw that Jesus was compassionate, that He cared for suffering people and wanted to heal them. His faith is a challenge to us to recognize the position, authority and power of Jesus.

The second thing about his faith was that he recognized and admitted his unworthiness. This is an important aspect of Christian faith that we have overlooked. The centurion did not personally come to Jesus because he recognized he was not worthy to do so. He confessed that he was not worthy to have Jesus come under his roof. It’s interesting that Jesus did not contradict him. Jesus did not say, “Yes, you are worthy! Don’t have such a low view of yourself!” In saying he was unworthy, the centurion was stating a fact. He was in fact unworthy. As John the baptist was unworthy, and the centurion was unworthy, so we are unworthy. We need to throw out the idea that we are worthy and deserving, that we are entitled to receive anything from the Lord. The only thing we deserve from the Lord is death (Romans 6:23). We may not demand anything from the Lord as if He owes us anything. We may only appeal to His love and grace as those who are undeserving. The basis of our asking is not our worthiness but His grace.

#### Matthew 8:14-17

When Jesus came into Peter's home, He saw his mother-in-law lying sick in bed with a fever. 15 He touched her hand, and the fever left her; and she got up and waited on Him. 16 When evening came, they brought to Him many who were demon-possessed; and He cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were ill. 17 This was to fulfill what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet: "HE HIMSELF TOOK OUR INFIRMITIES AND CARRIED AWAY OUR DISEASES."

In Mark’s version of the healing of Peter’s Mother-In-Law, we are told that Jesus was told about her illness as soon as He arrived (Mark 1:30). It may be that this is the first that Peter had heard of it himself. Jesus had not come there for the purpose of healing the woman, but found the need when He arrived. He touched her hand, the fever immediately left her, and

she got up and waited on Him. The word translated “waited on” is *diakoneō*, which just means to serve or to minister to someone. A “deacon” is a servant.

When evening came, people came to Him bringing those who were demon possessed and ill. Why did they wait until evening? It may have been a Sabbath day, and they were prohibited from traveling far on the Sabbath, but in the evening the Sabbath was over and they were free to come to Him. He cast out or expelled the evil spirits with a word. His means of casting out demons was to speak and order them to leave. We see Jesus doing this often in the gospels. He speaks and the demons obey. There was no ceremony, no incense or candles, chants or mumbo-jumbo. He just ordered them out of their victims, and they had no option but to obey. He also healed all those who were ill. Everyone who came for deliverance or healing was healed.

Matthew explains that He did these things to “fulfill what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet, “He Himself took our infirmities and carried away our diseases.” This quote is from Isaiah 53:4, which the NASB translates, “Surely our griefs He Himself bore, and our sorrows He carried.” Isaiah 53 is all about the suffering of Christ for our sins, and how He was “pierced for our transgressions” and “crushed for our iniquities” (verse 5), how God “caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him” (verse 6) and how He was “cut off out of the land of the living for the transgression of my people” (verse 8). Matthew says that this verse is fulfilled in the healing ministry of Jesus. This is why many say that there is “healing in the atonement.” Indeed, Isaiah 35:5b says, “And by His scourging we are healed.” Some carry this to the point of saying that not only may Jesus heal us physically if He pleases to do so, but that He must do so because it is built in to the atonement, and that we may “claim” healing from Him by faith. The caveat they put forth that allows them to explain why some don’t receive their healing is that in order to be healed our faith must be strong enough. Our healing depends on an unwavering faith in the healing power of Christ. When people try to claim their healing but do not receive it, they are blamed for having inadequate faith. This is a very cruel doctrine. In the example of Paul’s “thorn in the flesh” (2 Corinthians 12:1-10) we see that sometimes God says “no” when we ask for healing, because He has another purpose in allowing our affliction. I think that there is ultimate healing, physical and spiritual, in the work of Christ for us, but the complete healing does not always take place in this life, but in the next. In the fullness of the kingdom of heaven there will be complete healing.

#### Matthew 8:18-22

Now when Jesus saw a crowd around Him, He gave orders to depart to the other side of the sea. 19 Then a scribe came and said to Him, "Teacher, I will follow You wherever You go." 20 Jesus \*said to him, "The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head." 21 Another of the disciples said to Him, "Lord, permit me first to go and bury my father." 22 But Jesus \*said to him, "Follow Me, and allow the dead to bury their own dead."

There seems to be a connection between Jesus seeing the crowd and ordering that they should leave for the other side of the sea. It was time for Him to leave this crowd and go elsewhere. Luke gives us more information in Luke 4:42-44, “When day came, Jesus left and went to a secluded place; and the crowds were searching for Him, and came to Him and tried to keep Him from going away from them. 43 But He said to them, ‘I must preach the kingdom of God to the other cities also, for I was sent for this purpose.’ 44 So He kept on preaching in the synagogues of Judea.”

When He announced that He was leaving, a scribe came forward and said, "Teacher, I will follow You wherever You go." The scribes, along with the Pharisees, were a class of men who were specialists in the Old Testament law and all the traditions that were built around it over the years. They came into conflict often with Jesus and He aimed His harshest criticism at them. The scribes and Pharisees, according to what Jesus said about them, sought self-advancement and self-exaltation above everything else. We will see this very clearly when we get to chapter 23. They were hypocrites who looked good on the outside but were rotten on the inside. They focused on minutia and ignored the bigger and more important issues. They used their tradition to get around some of the clear commands of the Law. So this man from this group comes to Jesus and claims that he will follow Jesus wherever He goes. This sounds like a full and unqualified commitment to Jesus, the kind of commitment a teacher looks for in students. But does he understand what this really means?

Jesus replied, "The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head." The designation "Son of Man" is Jesus's favorite name for Himself. It occurs in 80 verses in the gospels, mostly from the lips of Jesus as He refers to Himself. I think that Jesus uses this name for Himself because of the way it is used to designate the coming Messiah in Daniel 7:13 and 14, "I kept looking in the night visions, And behold, with the clouds of heaven One like a Son of Man was coming, And He came up to the Ancient of Days And was presented before Him. 14 And to Him was given dominion, Glory and a kingdom, That all the peoples, nations and men of every language Might serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion Which will not pass away; And His kingdom is one Which will not be destroyed." Jesus quoted from this passage as He answered the high priest in Mark 14:60-62, "The high priest stood up and came forward and questioned Jesus, saying, 'Do You not answer? What is it that these men are testifying against You?' 61 But He kept silent and did not answer. Again the high priest was questioning Him, and saying to Him, 'Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?' 62 And Jesus said, 'I am; and you shall see THE SON OF MAN SITTING AT THE RIGHT HAND OF POWER, and COMING WITH THE CLOUDS OF HEAVEN.'" When Jesus referred to Himself as "the Son of Man," the Jews would have naturally thought of this passage from Daniel 7 and realized that He was claiming to be this figure. He is the Messiah, the coming King.

We can only speculate as to why Jesus answered the scribe with this saying about having nowhere to lay His head. The foxes and birds have their dwellings, but the Son of Man does not have a place of His own. I think that perhaps this scribe had visions of greatness and exaltation for himself if he attached himself to Jesus. He may have thought that he could achieve an important place in the administration of the King if he made this commitment. But Jesus wanted him to understand that following Him around meant having no settled place to live, no comfortable bed, no palace or even a humble home. Following Jesus meant enduring hardships that he had not imagined.

We need to understand that there will be difficulties and even deprivations if we want to follow Christ. He said that the first thing we must do if we want to follow Him is deny ourselves (Matthew 16:24). If we say, "I will follow You" to the Lord, we must understand that it may mean that we will have to say "no" to many things we like and say "yes" to unpleasant things that will be uncomfortable.

A second man, a disciple, came to Jesus and said, "Lord permit me first to go and bury my father." This seems like a reasonable request. If the man's father had just died, it was necessary for him to be buried right away. He is asking for leave in following Jesus to attend to his father's funeral. But commentators point out that it is probable that his father was not yet actually dead. It was the custom among the Jews to bury the dead on the same day they had died. If the man's father had just died, he would not have been there with Jesus in the

first place. What he means is “Let me wait until my father dies, and then I can follow You.” The CEV translation brings this out, “Lord, let me wait till I bury my father.” No doubt this man was facing family pressure, especially from his father, to turn away from following Jesus. He faced a dilemma. Should he turn from his father to follow Jesus or turn from Jesus to please his father? He wanted to follow Jesus, but he also wanted to please his father.

We often run into these kinds of scenarios when faced with deciding to follow Christ. It's unfortunate that many choose not to follow Jesus because of family disapproval. It's very hard, for example, for someone to follow Christ out of a strong Muslim family. It can be a life-threatening thing to do so. Even in our own culture there are many who disapprove of Christianity because it is narrow and exclusive and claims Jesus is the only way to salvation. It teaches unpleasant truths like sin and judgment and submission to God and His will. So if pleasing our disapproving family members or our disapproving society is more important than following Christ, we will not be able to follow Him. In Luke 12:51-53 Jesus says, “Do you suppose that I came to grant peace on earth? I tell you, no, but rather division; 52 for from now on five members in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three. 53 "They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law." Then in Luke 14:26 He says, “If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple.” Jesus will always claim first place in our lives above father, mother, wife, children, brothers, sisters and even our own lives! If family approval is more important than Jesus we cannot be His students.

Jesus answered, “Follow Me, and allow the dead to bury their own dead.” The word for “follow” both here and in verse 19 is *akoloutheō*, “to be in the same way with, that is, to accompany” (Strong's). Here it is a present active imperative, a command that the man is to continually and deliberately follow Him. The man is to allow, or leave, the dead to bury their own dead. Obviously those who are literally physically dead cannot bury others who are physically dead, so Jesus must have another sense in mind for those who are “dead” burying the dead. The truth is that apart from Christ we are spiritually dead. Ephesians 2:1 says, “And you were dead in your trespasses and sins.” Jesus explained in John 5:24-27:

24 "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.

25 "Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. 26 "For just as the Father has life in Himself, even so He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself; 27 and He gave Him authority to execute judgment, because He is the Son of Man.

Hearing the word of Christ and believing causes us to pass “out of death into life.” Hearing the voice of the Son of God makes us come alive from the dead. Jesus was telling this man to allow those who are spiritually “dead” to see to their own affairs while he follows Christ. His is not to allow his unbelieving father to hold him back.

#### Matthew 8:23-27

When He got into the boat, His disciples followed Him. 24 And behold, there arose a great storm on the sea, so that the boat was being covered with the waves; but Jesus Himself was asleep. 25 And they came to Him and woke Him, saying, "Save us, Lord; we are perishing!" 26 He \*said to them, "Why are you afraid, you men of little faith?" Then He got up

and rebuked the winds and the sea, and it became perfectly calm. 27 The men were amazed, and said, "What kind of a man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?"

Jesus had "given orders to depart to the other side of the sea" in verse 18, so He and the disciples got into a boat and set out. Mark tells us that other boats were with Him as well (Mark 4:36). As they were crossing a "great storm" arose on the sea. The Greek is *meegas seismos* – a great shaking, commotion or tempest. The word *seismos* is translated "earthquake" elsewhere in the New Testament, and of course provides us with our word "seismic." Due to the fact that the sea of Galilee is 680 feet below sea level and surrounded by mountains, it is subject to these sudden violent storms. In fact, there are a number of YouTube videos that can give you an idea of what these storms are like even today.

The storm was so great that the boat was "being covered with the waves." Luke says "they began to be swamped and to be in danger," and Mark says, "the waves were breaking over the boat so much that the boat was already filling up." In the midst of this perilous storm Jesus was asleep. Mark says He was asleep on the cushion in the stern of the boat (Mark 4:38). For anyone to sleep in the midst of such chaos must indicate extreme exhaustion. It indicates also peace and confidence in the midst of a storm. He could sleep knowing the Father was watching over Him.

The disciples came to Him, woke Him up and said, "Save us, Lord; we are perishing!" In Luke they say, "Master, Master, we are perishing!" and in Mark, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" In Matthew's account they are asking Him to save them, but in Luke they are informing Him and in Mark they are questioning why He is unconcerned about the danger they were in. Probably all of these elements were present. There was at least a thought that maybe Jesus could do something about the situation. At least He should be alerted before they all drown. Maybe He could help bail out the boat. Maybe He could send for angels who could help them. In all three gospels the message is, "we are perishing." The word for "perishing" is *apollumi*, which means "to destroy" or to "destroy utterly" (New American Standard Exhaustive Concordance). It is a present tense indicative verb. They were saying that they were in the process of perishing at that moment. They were not saying that they were concerned that things were getting worse and they might perish in the near future. They were saying that at that point they were perishing. The water was rising in the boat and they were about to go down.

Being awakened, Jesus asked a very odd question, "Why are you afraid, you men of little faith?" It's odd because the reason they were afraid was self-evident. Surely He could see the storm and the danger for Himself! Here's this horrendous storm going on and the boat is sinking and He asks, "Why are you afraid?!" The implication is that they should not be afraid, that there was no reason for fear in the situation. Obviously He sees the situation from a very different perspective than that of the disciples. Where they see mortal danger He sees nothing to fear.

The phrase "men of little faith" translates one word, *oligopistos*, here a plural adjective, which indeed means little or puny faith. In their fear they were demonstrating that their faith was too small, too inadequate to meet the test before them. Where these men saw a problem with the weather Jesus saw a problem with their faith. Their faith was not big enough to encompass this storm. If the centurion had been with them at this time they may have not needed to awaken Jesus. He had big faith that understood the power and authority of Jesus, but these men had not yet fully perceived who He is. Jesus is greater than any mere storm. He transcends all the storms and difficulties of life. The disciples thought that they all, including Jesus, were subject to the storm. They had no idea that the storm might be subject

to Jesus or to the authority of Jesus exercised through their faith. They thought that all they could do was bail the water and try to stay afloat. As we grow in faith we learn to look to the One who is bigger and more powerful than the storm.

Jesus got up and “rebuked the winds and the sea, and it became perfectly calm.” The winds and sea were not behaving as they should have, so He rebuked them. Mark tells us He said, “Hush, be still” (Mark 4:39). The wind and waves obeyed Him and it became “perfectly calm.” It was not just plain old calm, but it was a *megas*, a great calm. At the rebuke of Jesus it went from a *megas seismos*, a great storm, to a *megas galeñē*, a great calm.

Those with Jesus in the boat were amazed. The same word, *thaumazō*, is used here for “amazed” that is translated “marveled” in describing the reaction of Jesus to the faith of the centurion in verse 10. They saw something they had not expected to see. He did something they had not imagined He could do. The idea that He might be able to actually order the storm to stop had not occurred to them. So they asked, “What kind of a man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?” Everyone knows that it is outside the ability of man to control the winds and waves. As we say, “Everybody complains about the weather, but nobody does anything about it!” Storms come and we can only take refuge somewhere and wait them out. They will do what damage they will do, and if we survive we clean up and move on. We know that we can’t just issue orders to the weather and have it bend to our will. The word for “obey” is *hupakouō*, meaning to listen, to harken, to attend to someone. The wind and the waves listened to Jesus and did as He said. Anyone seeing this happen would be amazed and ask this question, “What kind of man is this?”

This is just one of many incidents during the ministry of Jesus that reveal His power and authority. He has demonstrated His power over illness and over evil spirits, and now He demonstrates His power over nature and over the weather. The forces of nature even obey Him. But I have a feeling that there is more going on here than an ordinary natural storm. I’m speculating at this point, but I think there may be something supernatural going on here as well. In Ephesians 6:12 Paul says, “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.” If we look at the context and notice what’s coming up next in Matthew 8, we see that Satan had some important assets on the other side of the sea. No doubt he did not want Jesus to come there and meddle in his territory. It’s possible that Satan may have been behind this storm. There is precedent for it in the book of Job when God allowed Satan to afflict Job to test him. One of the disasters that came upon him, killing his children, was a great wind. We read in Job 1:18-19, “While he was still speaking, another also came and said, ‘Your sons and your daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother’s house, 19 and behold, a great wind came from across the wilderness and struck the four corners of the house, and it fell on the young people and they died, and I alone have escaped to tell you.’” Now this does not mean that every destructive storm that comes along is caused by Satan, but it does illustrate that if God allows it, Satan can operate at times using these means. It may be that this storm was allowed in God’s providence as a test for the disciples. In fact it could be that Jesus deliberately went to sleep as part of this test of their faith, so that they would have to face the crisis themselves without His conscious presence.

The Lord is going to send these tests into our lives that will reveal our faith or lack of it. Will we see that if Jesus is with us there is no reason for fear? Will we see that Jesus is bigger than the storm? Will we exercise our faith to rebuke the winds and the waves that try to hinder us from the purpose the Lord has for us? Jesus was going to cross the sea and no storm could stop Him. Drowning in the middle of Galilee was not the plan. We need to ask the

Lord to give us eyes of faith that see beyond the storms and see the power and presence of Jesus in them.

Matthew 8:28-34

When He came to the other side into the country of the Gadarenes, two men who were demon-possessed met Him as they were coming out of the tombs. They were so extremely violent that no one could pass by that way. 29 And they cried out, saying, "What business do we have with each other, Son of God? Have You come here to torment us before the time?" 30 Now there was a herd of many swine feeding at a distance from them. 31 The demons began to entreat Him, saying, "If You are going to cast us out, send us into the herd of swine." 32 And He said to them, "Go!" And they came out and went into the swine, and the whole herd rushed down the steep bank into the sea and perished in the waters. 33 The herdsmen ran away, and went to the city and reported everything, including what had happened to the demoniacs. 34 And behold, the whole city came out to meet Jesus; and when they saw Him, they implored Him to leave their region.

Having stilled the storm, Jesus and those following Him came to the other side, the East side, of the Sea of Galilee to the "country of the Gadarenes." Luke and Mark call it "the country of the Gerasenes." Regarding the question of where this event took place and the two different place names, Caleb Colley at [apologetics.org](http://apologetics.org) says:

Matthew, Mark, and Luke were writing of the same general area. The Roman city Gerasa was a famous city that would have been familiar to a Gentile audience, but Gadara, as the capital city of the Roman province of Perea, was the chief of the ten cities in Decapolis (Lenski, 1946, p. 205; Coffman, 1975, p. 85; Youngblood, 1995, p. 468), so even those who lived in Gerasa could have been called Gadarenes. The stamp of a ship on Gadarene coins suggests that the region called Gadara probably extended to Galilee (McGarvey, n.d., p. 344; McClintock and Strong, 1969, 3: 706). The New Testament writers chose to refer to the area in different ways.

Probably the gospel writers are not trying to pinpoint a particular spot, but are referring to the same general area. He came into their "country," their region.

There is another difficulty here we must mention. Matthew's account tells of two demon-possessed men, but Luke and Mark only mention one man. The solution that many have proposed to this problem is that there were two men as Matthew mentions, but that Luke and Mark chose to focus only on the one man who was the leader among the two. Albert Barnes writes:

This difference of statement has given rise to considerable difficulty. It is to be observed, however, that neither Mark nor Luke say that there was no more than one. For particular reasons, they might have been led to fix their attention on the one that was more notorious, and furious, and difficult to be managed. Had they denied plainly that there was more than one, and had Matthew affirmed that there were two, there would have been an irreconcilable contradiction.

This is an argument from silence. Since Mark and Luke do not explicitly state that there was not another, we may infer that there may have been a second man they chose to ignore. I have never found this solution to be very convincing. I can't think of another way to reconcile



these accounts, however, aside from saying that either Matthew got it wrong or Mark and Luke got it wrong.

The two men who met Jesus are described in verse 28. They were “demon-possessed.” The word is *daimonizomai*; we might say “demonized.” Demons lived within them and drove them to behave as they did. They came out of the tombs where they lived. They were “extremely violent.” Other translations use the word “fierce.” No one could pass by that way because of them. Mark and Luke tell us that people had tried to restrain them, but they were so strong they would break their chains and escape. They were continually crying out and gashing themselves with stones (Mark 5:5). It is true that demons will give a person true supernatural power, but it is a malevolent power. The demonized person will not experience peace and joy and blessing, but misery, anger, violence and mental illness. Some people seek out involvement with evil spirits because they think the spirits will give them what they want and they will attain power over others. They instead will find misery, ruin and alienation from others.

The demons in the men cried out, “What business do we have with each other, Son of God? Have you come here to torment us before the time?” A more literal translation of the first question would be “What between You and us, Son of God?” The older version of the New American Standard translated this, “What do we have to do with You, Son of God?” They could see plainly that He had come to deal with them, and they were not pleased. Mark and Luke tell us that Jesus was commanding the demons to come out of the men. Before Jesus they were deathly afraid. They recognized who He was and knew His authority and power over them. They called Him “Son of God.” Jesus was not someone they could deceive or trifle with.

Their second question is interesting, “Have you come here to torment us before the time?” They want to know why He has come, what is His purpose in reference to them. Had He come there to torment them? The word is *basanizō*, [Thayer's Greek Definitions](#) says it means “to question by applying torture” or “to vex with grievous pains (of body or mind), to torment.” They knew that He had the power to torment them or torture them. Luke 8:31 adds, “They were imploring Him not to command them to go away into the abyss.” The “abyss” is mentioned several times in the book of Revelation. In Revelation 20:1-3 it says, “Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand. 2 And he laid hold of the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; 3 and he threw him into the abyss, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he would not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were completed; after these things he must be released for a short time.” These demons feared that Jesus had come to throw them into this abyss, this bottomless pit. They knew that this would be their eventual fate, but did not think it was the time for it yet. They thought it was “before the time” that they should be tormented. It's ironic that these demons who had tormented these men for so long should plead with Jesus not to do the same to them! It appears that demons know that their time is limited, and that one day they will be cast out and locked up for good. In the meantime they want to cause as much damage as they can to humanity.

Jesus had been ordering the demons to come out of the men, and the demons pleaded with Him to allow them to go into the herd of swine. It's evident that demons, once they inhabit someone's body, do not want to be cast out. In Matthew 12:44 Jesus indicates that demons consider people to be houses they inhabit, and they find some sort of rest there. Dwelling inside a human for some reason is more comfortable for them than being disembodied. So these demons do not want to be evicted. They even requested to be cast out into the swine rather than be without a physical body to inhabit. It is appropriate unclean spirits should be

cast into unclean animals. Leviticus 11:7 and Deuteronomy 14:8 make it clear that pigs were unclean for the Israelites because they did not chew the cud. Pigs were and still are despised among the Jews and Muslims.

The demons could not go out into the swine unless Jesus allowed them to do so. Jesus simply said, "Go!" and they came out of the man. They entered the swine and then destroyed the whole herd by making them rush down into the sea. Mark 5:13 says that there were about 2,000 pigs in this herd, so it was no small number of them that were destroyed. I don't know why Jesus allowed them to do this. Obviously there were people who were making their living in this place by raising pigs, and this would be a great loss to them. Perhaps these people should not have been trading in unclean animals in the first place. Whatever the reason, we see here that these two men were more important to Jesus than 2,000 pigs. He would allow their destruction in order to free these men.

The herdsmen ran away to the city and reported what had happened. Matthew makes a point of specifying that they reported about what had happened to the demonized men. These men whom no one could contain or subdue had been subdued by a word from Jesus. Maybe "subdued" is not the right word. They had been set free by Jesus. Their oppressors had been driven out. The madness that had tormented these men had been transferred to 2,000 pigs. So the whole city came to meet Jesus and implored Him to leave their region. He had sent the demons away and now the people of the place wanted to send Him away. Luke tells us why they asked Him to leave, "The people went out to see what had happened; and they came to Jesus, and found the man from whom the demons had gone out, sitting down at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind; and they became frightened. Those who had seen it reported to them how the man who was demon-possessed had been made well. And all the people of the country of the Gerasenes and the surrounding district asked Him to leave them, for they were gripped with great fear; and He got into a boat and returned" (Luke 8:35-37). The people had been terrified by these men and the demons in them, and now here was a man who was more powerful than he. Here was a man who had the power to simply order the demons to leave and they had to do so.

It might seem strange that these people pleaded with Jesus to leave them rather than welcoming Him. Luke says that they asked Him to leave because of their "great fear." It reminds me of what Peter said after Jesus had given them the miraculous catch of fish in Luke 5:4-10:

4 When He had finished speaking, He said to Simon, "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch." 5 Simon answered and said, "Master, we worked hard all night and caught nothing, but I will do as You say and let down the nets." 6 When they had done this, they enclosed a great quantity of fish, and their nets began to break; 7 so they signaled to their partners in the other boat for them to come and help them. And they came and filled both of the boats, so that they began to sink. 8 But when Simon Peter saw that, he fell down at Jesus' feet, saying, "Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man!" 9 For amazement had seized him and all his companions because of the catch of fish which they had taken; 10 and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, "Do not fear, from now on you will be catching men."

I think Peter already at this point believed that Jesus was the Messiah, but this incident was an eye-opener for him as a fisherman and it dawned on him that this was no ordinary man. Peter was a career fisherman, but had never seen anything like this. He fell before Jesus and asked him to go away from him because he was a sinful man. Peter suddenly felt

himself in the presence of a powerful holiness, and felt exposed as a sinner. He feared the presence of Jesus because of his sinfulness. I think this is what was going on with the people of Gadara as well. The presence of this powerful holiness was too scary for them. Jesus respected their request and left, but left the men behind as a witness to them (Mark 5:20). I don't know what kind of sinful practices these people were involved in, but the presence of Jesus exposed their guilt and they became fearful. When we want to cling to our sin we will not want to welcome Jesus, but we will want to send Him away. Those who love the darkness will not come to the light (John 3:20). If we want to be saved from our sin we will come to Him and welcome Him, but if we want to continue in our sin we will turn Him away. This is the fundamental truth behind unbelief.

Jesus has power over all the evil spirits in all creation and not just the occasional demon here and there. They all must do as He says and submit to Him. He can deal with them collectively as well as individually. He outranks and overpowers all of them. When faced with the massed forces of spiritual darkness we must remember that the One in us is far greater than the one who is in the world (1 John 4:4).

#### Matthew 9:1-8

Getting into a boat, Jesus crossed over the sea and came to His own city. 2 And they brought to Him a paralytic lying on a bed. Seeing their faith, Jesus said to the paralytic, "Take courage, son; your sins are forgiven." 3 And some of the scribes said to themselves, "This fellow blasphemes." 4 And Jesus knowing their thoughts said, "Why are you thinking evil in your hearts? 5 "Which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up, and walk'? 6 "But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"—then He \*said to the paralytic, "Get up, pick up your bed and go home." 7 And he got up and went home. 8 But when the crowds saw this, they were awestruck, and glorified God, who had given such authority to men.

Leaving the Gadarenes behind, Jesus and the disciples again crossed the sea and came to "His own city." Mark tells us this was Capernaum (Mark 2:1). Having just crossed the sea and stilled the storm, now they get into the boat again to return to the other side. Sometimes following Jesus is like this. You go far out of your way to minister to two people, then you go back. Sometimes we may wonder if the results are worth the effort. Two men were delivered and transformed, which was more than worth the effort.

When Jesus got back the large crowd gathered around Him again. They heard that "He was at home" (Mark 2:1-2). The men who came bringing the paralytic were four men who carried the paralyzed man (Mark 2:3). The word "paralytic" is a transliteration of the Greek word *paralutikos*. Mark and Luke tell us that these men could not get to Jesus with their friend because of the crowd, so they went up on the roof of the house where Jesus was, removed the roof tiles, and lowered him down to Jesus through the opening (Mark 2:4 and Luke 5:19). I don't think the roofs of these houses were very high, so it probably wasn't too dangerous to do this.

Matthew, Mark and Luke all tell us that Jesus saw the faith of these men. He could clearly see what they believed through what they did. They believed that if they could get this man to Jesus, Jesus could heal him. Their deeds revealed their faith. James tells us this explicitly. James 2:14-26 says:

14 What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him? 15 If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food,

16 and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled," and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that? 17 Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself. 18 But someone may well say, "You have faith and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works." 19 You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder. 20 But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless? 21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar? 22 You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected; 23 and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "AND ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS," and he was called the friend of God. 24 You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone. 25 In the same way, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? 26 For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.

Genuine faith, real belief, produces deeds that flow from and reveal that faith. Real faith makes itself seen in what we do because of it. Intellectual assent to propositions like "God is one" is important, but does nothing for us if it does not produce any change in our behavior. We may thoroughly understand and believe in the principles of aerodynamics and understand how airplanes can fly, but if we never get on an airplane to take to the skies our "faith" is never really demonstrated or realized. We may have intellectual understanding that a chair can hold us up and keep us from falling on the ground, but if we never entrust ourselves to the chair to sit on it, then our "faith" does nothing for us. Real faith is faith that gets on the plane and sits in the chair. Real faith in Christ is faith that comes to Him and puts confidence in Him to do what is needful. These men had real faith that if they brought their friend to Jesus, He would heal him.

Seeing their faith, Jesus said something unusual. He said, "Take courage, son; your sins are forgiven." The Jews connected suffering and illness with sin. When the disciples saw the man who had been blind from birth they asked, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he would be born blind?" (John 9:2). The people there with Jesus would probably have assumed the same thing about this paralyzed man, that he was paralyzed because of his sin. Indeed, it is possible that some illnesses and injuries are a result of sinful behavior. I've heard of people being injured in the commission of a crime, for example. It's hard to feel sympathy for the thief who was paralyzed because he fell through the skylight of a building he was trying to burglarize. This man may have been such a case, so Jesus first addresses his sinfulness and assures him that his sins have been forgiven. There was a bigger problem in his life than his paralysis. The issue of sin had to be addressed. We often treat all kinds of symptoms without getting at the root cause of those symptoms, which is our sin and rebellion against God. Without question this man had come to Jesus for healing, but more than that He needed forgiveness. It does little good to treat the symptoms of cancer without getting rid of the cancer. Jesus came to get rid of the cancer of sin and to take away our guilt.

The scribes who were there had an issue with this statement of Jesus. They said to themselves, "This fellow blasphemes." This word comes directly from the Greek *blasphēmeō*, "to slander, hence to speak lightly or profanely of sacred things" (New American Standard Exhaustive Concordance). Mark and Luke add that these scribes were also saying, "Who can forgive sins but God alone?" This becomes the issue in this passage. How can this traveling rabbi claim to have the authority to forgive sins, which only God can do? How can He grant forgiveness to this man? In their minds this was blasphemy for a mere man to forgive

someone's sins. Jesus was claiming the authority of God for Himself. These men did not believe that Jesus was the Son of God, God incarnate, and so they viewed this statement as an outrageous overreach.

Jesus knew what these men were thinking, and so asked them two questions, "Why are you thinking evil in your hearts?" and, "Which is easier? To say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk'?" The first question challenged the nature of their thinking. Their thinking regarding His ability to forgive sins was evil. To think that the Son of God could or would blaspheme was evil. It was an error to think that He did not have the authority to forgive sins. The problem here was not that Jesus was saying He could forgive sins, but that these men were not recognizing who He really was and what He could do as Lord and Messiah. The real problem here was that they were refusing to recognize Him and His authority. The problem was not with Him but with them and how they were thinking. This is always the case. There is never a problem with Jesus, but if there is a problem it is with us and with our thinking. Faulty thinking about Jesus needs to be corrected. The erroneous thinking of these men did not stop Him from exercising His authority and doing what He was sent to do. Faulty thinking about Jesus will not stop Him and should not stop us either.

The second question offers two alternatives. In this case, facing a paralyzed man, is it easier to say "Your sins are forgiven," or to say, "Get up and walk"? It seems obvious that it's easier to say "Your sins are forgiven" because forgiveness of sins can't be proven. We can't see the forgiveness of sins, there is no visible evidence for it. A person may exhibit peace and joy after having been forgiven, but that is subjective. It is harder to say to this man "Get up and walk" because if he did not get up and walk everyone could see that the command was powerless and useless. It is always easier to say something than to do something.

Jesus wants these scribes to know that He has the authority to forgive sins, and so He says the harder thing, "Get up, pick up your bed and go home." The healing of this man was a demonstration of the authority of Jesus. When He speaks and issues an order, it is done. The Roman centurion understood this clearly. If Jesus says the man's sins are forgiven, then they are forgiven. If Jesus says this man is healed of his paralysis, then he is healed. Jesus is authorized on earth to forgive sins and to heal and to do whatever else He wants to do. Jesus removed the sin and the consequences of the sin.

The crowds were "awestruck." The word is *phobeō*, fearful, afraid. They saw His authority and it filled them with fear, a fear that brought glory to God. They saw that the authority of Jesus was a God-given authority and not man-made. We need this kind of fear. Job 28:28 says, "And to man He said, 'Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; And to depart from evil is understanding.'" Proverbs 8:13 says, "The fear of the LORD is to hate evil; Pride and arrogance and the evil way And the perverted mouth, I hate." A proper fear of the Lord will turn us away from evil. As people saw Jesus exercise His authority over all things, they came to have a proper respect and reverence for Him.

#### Matthew 9:9-13

As Jesus went on from there, He saw a man called Matthew, sitting in the tax collector's booth; and He \*said to him, "Follow Me!" And he got up and followed Him. 10 Then it happened that as Jesus was reclining at the table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and were dining with Jesus and His disciples. 11 When the Pharisees saw this, they said to His disciples, "Why is your Teacher eating with the tax collectors and sinners?" 12 But when Jesus heard this, He said, "It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick. 13 "But go and learn what this means: 'I DESIRE COMPASSION, AND NOT SACRIFICE,' for I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

As we might expect, Matthew includes the account of how Jesus called him in his gospel. Jesus saw Matthew sitting in the tax collector's booth. Vincent's Word Studies says this was "the elevated platform or bench which was the principal feature of the toll-office, as in modern custom-bazaars, being put for the whole establishment. This customs-office was at Capernaum, the land-rag-place for the many ships which traversed the lake or coasted from town to town; and this not only for those who had business in Capernaum, but for those who would there strike the great road of eastern commerce from Damascus to the harbors of the West." So Matthew was a tax-collector, and this becomes part of his identity as he refers to himself in Matthew 10:3 as "Matthew the tax collector."

Tax collectors were pretty much universally hated and reviled because they used their office and authority to enrich themselves at the expense of others. Jesus has already alluded to this in Matthew 5:46, "For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?" They were in the same class as prostitutes (Matthew 21:31-32). Even so Jesus came along and ordered this despised tax-collector to follow Him, which was a scandalous thing for a rabbi to do.

As He had called the fishermen and they left their nets, so He called Matthew (Levi) and he left his tax office. No doubt he was already familiar with Jesus. He had at least heard of Jesus and what He was doing. He probably thought there was no way that Jesus would select him to be a follower of His, but Jesus did. The tax-collectors and sinners, despised as they were by those who considered themselves righteous, more readily saw their need for mercy and forgiveness (see Luke 18:9-14 and Luke 19:1-10). It appears that Matthew jumped at the chance to follow Jesus. It was a surprising privilege for him to be called by Jesus.

Mark and Luke tell us that the house where Jesus reclined with the tax collectors and sinners was Matthew's (Mark 2:15 and Luke 5:29). Luke describes the gathering as a "big reception" and says there was a "great crowd of tax-gatherers and others who were reclining at the table with them." Matthew had the resources to put on a large feast in honor of Jesus, and his friends who were tax collectors and sinners were welcomed. No one told them that they weren't qualified to come, nor did Jesus and the disciples withdraw from the gathering. The Pharisees held themselves aloof, and would not associate with such sinners. They took note of the fact that Jesus and His disciples were eating with the tax collectors and sinners. They were quick to jump on any perceived violation of their rules by Jesus. They asked the disciples, "Why is your Teacher eating with the tax collectors and sinners?" To them, Jesus was "your Teacher," not "the Teacher." They did not recognize Him as their Teacher nor claim to be His students. The question was accusatory, "Why is He doing this? Justify His actions!" The implication is that He would not be eating with these people if He were really the Messiah or even a good rabbi.

Some people look for reasons to be offended, for reasons to reject Christ. The Pharisees watched Jesus closely in order to catch Him (Luke 11:54 and 20:20). Later they set up questions and scenarios designed to trap Jesus into making an unpopular statement or a wrong choice. People reject Christ in order to remain in the comfortable darkness to which they are accustomed (John 3:19-21), and the reasons they give for doing so are mostly invalid excuses. We must realize that there is no pleasing some people. They will be critical of us no matter what we do or how pleasant we are. They will sift through our words and behavior to find anything that offends them and make an issue of it. We must beware of being so sensitive to the criticisms of opponents that we compromise our message in some way.

Jesus heard that the Pharisees were asking about why He was eating with tax collectors and sinners, and so He answered the question. In Matthew the first part of His reply is very brief, "It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick." In saying

this Jesus acknowledged that there were problems with the people with whom He was sharing a meal. They were sick. They were not well. They needed a physician, and He is the Great Physician. They were spiritually ill and needed healing. Jesus did not deny that these people were sinners. He, as a physician, had come for these kinds of people and it was not His purpose to avoid them, but to seek them out and to call them to repentance. A doctor who avoids sick people because he finds them disgusting is worthless as a doctor. Luke adds in the factor of the need for repentance in his version of this, "It is not those who are well who need a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance" (Luke 5:31-32). He did not come to affirm sinners in their sin, but to call them to repentance. He came to heal the sick, not to tell them that they weren't really sick or that it was all "in their heads" or that sickness is normal and should be embraced. He wants to heal the sick and that requires repentance.

Jesus continued, "But go and learn what this means: 'I desire compassion, and not sacrifice,' for I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners." Jesus quoted Hosea 6:6 and implied that these Pharisees did not know what it means. In Hosea the NASB translates it, "For I delight in loyalty rather than sacrifice." The Hebrew word for "loyalty" is *chesed*, often translated "lovingkindness" in relation to God. I like the Good News Bible's rendering, "I want your constant love, not your animal sacrifices." When Jesus quotes this verse the text uses the Greek word *eleos*, meaning mercy, pity or compassion. Jesus will quote this verse again in Matthew 12:7. Jesus is explaining that the reason that He came to call sinners and not the righteous is because He desires compassion and not sacrifice. He is speaking in terms of what He wants to impart rather than what He wants to receive. He came to impart mercy rather than the requirement of the religious ritual of sacrifice. These sinners need mercy, not justice, grace and not judgment. The Pharisees offered judgment, Jesus offered mercy.

The Pharisees were those who would not acknowledge themselves as sinners. They viewed themselves as righteous and viewed others with contempt (Luke 18:9). Yet they needed Jesus as much as anyone else. Romans 3:23 tells us that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God," and Romans 3:10 quotes Psalm 14 and 53 and says, "There is none righteous, not even one." If we know and understand and acknowledge that we are sinners, we are wise, because Jesus came to call sinners to repentance. He came to treat our greatest problem and to heal us and to set us free. If we will not admit our sin and our need, we will not come to Jesus, and if we don't come to Jesus there is no way we will be made well.

#### Matthew 9:14-17

Then the disciples of John \*came to Him, asking, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast?" 15 And Jesus said to them, "The attendants of the bridegroom cannot mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them, can they? But the days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast. 16 "But no one puts a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; for the patch pulls away from the garment, and a worse tear results. 17 "Nor do people put new wine into old wineskins; otherwise the wineskins burst, and the wine pours out and the wineskins are ruined; but they put new wine into fresh wineskins, and both are preserved."

Another question came from another source, this time from the disciples of John the Baptist. Again, it is a "why" question. They want to know the reason that He and His disciples are doing something differently. Why do the followers of John and the Pharisees fast, but the disciples of Jesus do not fast? I doubt this is a hostile question like the one the Pharisees

asked, but I think it is sincere. They noticed that Jesus and His disciples did not practice the asceticism that they practiced. Jesus had come “eating and drinking” (Matthew 11:18) and it appears John’s disciples thought this was inappropriate or unexpected for the Messiah. Jesus was definitely doing things differently, and was not behaving as many of the Jews expected the Messiah to behave.

In His answer, Jesus says that His disciples are the “attendants of the bridegroom” and it is not appropriate for them to mourn while the bridegroom is with them. The word “attendants” translates the Greek word *huios*, which means “sons.” The word for “bridegroom” is *numphōn*, meaning “the bridal chamber” ([Thayer](#)). The Revised Version has a more literal translation, “Can the sons of the bride-chamber mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them? but the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then will they fast.” A.T. Robertson says this is “is a late Hebrew idiom for the wedding guests, ‘the friends of the bridegroom and all the sons of the bride-chamber’ (Tos. Berak. ii. 10)” ([Robertson’s Word Pictures](#)). A wedding is a joyful event and a time of celebration and not mourning. It is a time for feasting and fun. You can’t mourn at a wedding as you would at a funeral. Fasting has to do with mourning and it would not be fitting for the disciples of Jesus to fast as long as He is with them. A time was coming when the bridegroom would be taken away from them, and then they would fast.

Walking with Jesus should be a joyful thing. Yes, there is sadness and suffering and mourning along the way at times, but it is a joyful privilege to know Jesus and to have fellowship with Him. Jesus said, “These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full” (John 15:11). He wants His joy to be in us (John 17:3) and this is why He has said the things He has said. The church is His bride and He is the bridegroom. That He would commit Himself to us is a cause of great joy and celebration.

In verses 16 and 17 Jesus illustrates what He’s saying by pointing to two things that people do not do, both having to do with bringing old things and new things together. First, no one patches an old garment with a new, unshrunk piece of cloth. They know that when the garment is washed, the patch will shrink and will tear the garment. The new tear will be worse than the one that had been patched. Luke’s version of this says, “No one tears a piece of cloth from a new garment and puts it on an old garment; otherwise he will both tear the new, and the piece from the new will not match the old” (Luke 5:36). In Luke the unshrunk piece of cloth comes from a new garment. The person trying to patch the old garment this way would end up ruining two garments, the one from which the piece of cloth was torn, and the old one he was trying to patch. Sometimes the new is simply incompatible with the old and they cannot be combined.

Second, Jesus says no one puts new wine into old wineskins. This idea is foreign to us because we put our wine into glass bottles and not skins. Regarding these wineskins the [International Standard Bible Encyclopedia](#) says this:

The Israelite, like the modern Arabic and Syrian, used mainly the skin of the goat and the sheep, but the skins of the ox and the camel have also been put to this purpose. The skin is removed from the animal by drawing it over the body from the neck downward, half the skin on each of the limbs being also retained. It is then tanned, the hair cut close, turned inside out, and has all the openings save one closed with cords, when it is ready for use. The reference to “a wineskin in the smoke” in [Psa 119:83](#) is generally explained on the supposition of its being hung there for mellowing purposes, but this can scarcely be accepted, for wine is never left for any length of time in the skin on account of its imparting a disagreeable flavor to the contents. The explanation of the New Testament passages is that the new wine, still liable to continue fermenting to a



small extent at least, was put into new, still expansible skins, a condition that had ceased in the older ones.

An old wineskin would have lost its elasticity, and so if new wine were put into it which was still fermenting, the expanding gases would burst the old wineskin. Putting new wine into old wineskins would cause you to lose both the wine and the wineskin. Only an ignorant person would make this mistake, and he would likely only make it once. Wine was a valuable thing that took a lot of work to produce and you would do what you could to preserve it.

So what is the point that Jesus is making with this parable of old things and new things? When Jesus came He inaugurated a new thing on this earth. He brought in the kingdom, the reign, of God on the earth. He brought in a new covenant in His blood (Luke 22:20). He brought in the covenant referred to in Jeremiah 31:31-34:

"Behold, days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, 32 not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them," declares the LORD. 33 "But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days," declares the LORD, "I will put My law within them, and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. 34 "And they shall not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them," declares the LORD, "for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more."

The author of Hebrews quotes this passage from Jeremiah and points out that Jesus is the mediator of a better covenant than the Mosaic covenant, enacted on better promises (Hebrews 8:6-12). In Hebrews 8:13 he says, "When He said, 'A new covenant,' He has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear." The old covenant was inadequate because it was a covenant the people could not keep. They broke the old covenant. They could not live by the laws of the old covenant. It did not impart to them eternal life, but rather it imparted condemnation. Paul puts it this way in Romans 7:4-6, "Therefore, my brethren, you also were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ, that you might be joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, that we might bear fruit for God. 5 For while we were in the flesh, the sinful passions, which were aroused by the Law, were at work in the members of our body to bear fruit for death. 6 But now we have been released from the Law, having died to that by which we were bound, so that we serve in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter." The old covenant of the Law actually served to arouse the "sinful passions" of our flesh and added fuel to the fire of our sinful flesh. The Law does nothing to release us from sin, but rather points out and defines our sin and even has the effect of increasing our sin! What we needed was a new covenant that truly releases us from our sin and provides forgiveness. This is exactly what we have in the new covenant in Christ. Through Christ's sacrifice we are made to die to the Law and we are joined to Him. We may now serve God truly in the "newness of the Spirit and not the oldness of the letter." Under the new covenant the Spirit of God actually comes and dwells in us to enable us to bear the fruit that God is looking for.

The new covenant in Christ is not an attempt to "patch" the old covenant with something new. The new covenant fulfills the old and replaces it. The old covenant pointed to the problem, the new covenant solves the problem. The old covenant was a shadow, the new

covenant is the substance (Hebrews 10:1). When we try to cling to a legalistic system, we will find that we cannot integrate the forgiveness and freedom that Christ brings into it. When the Judaizers came along after Paul and told Gentile believers in Christ that they had to be circumcised and obey the Law in order to be saved, he opposed them vigorously (see Acts 15). Paul tackles this problem in his letter to the Galatians. He points to the incompatibility of Christ and the attempt to be justified through the Law in Galatians 5:1-6,

It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery. 2 Behold I, Paul, say to you that if you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no benefit to you. 3 And I testify again to every man who receives circumcision, that he is under obligation to keep the whole Law. 4 You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace. 5 For we through the Spirit, by faith, are waiting for the hope of righteousness. 6 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love.

When we add law-keeping to the message of the gospel we ruin the gospel. If salvation and eternal life requires that we keep the Law, then we are still lost, because we cannot keep the Law. The good news is no longer the good news if it requires us to keep the Law.

The Pharisees and scribes did not want the new covenant that Jesus brought because they were invested with the old. They were comfortable with their laws and traditions and religious rituals. They not only sought to obey the Law, but also had developed traditions in addition to the Law. In some cases their traditions were actually an attempt to nullify the Law, as Jesus illustrated regarding the commandment to honor Father and Mother in Mark 7:6-13. Their role was to teach others how to behave and to enforce that proper behavior, and so they found power in the old covenant that would be nullified under the new. They were convinced that the new was not needed because the "old is good."

People who preach a "gospel" that says that Law keeping is required in addition to faith in Christ are trying to patch the old with the new. They are trying to put the new wine into old wineskins. It is a message of slavery and not of freedom. It is a message of condemnation and not of forgiveness. We will never be justified by our attempts to keep the Law. We are only justified through faith in the finished work of Christ on the cross. This is the new thing that must be embraced, and the old must be left behind.

#### Matthew 9:18-26

While He was saying these things to them, a synagogue official came and bowed down before Him, and said, "My daughter has just died; but come and lay Your hand on her, and she will live." 19 Jesus got up and began to follow him, and so did His disciples. 20 And a woman who had been suffering from a hemorrhage for twelve years, came up behind Him and touched the fringe of His cloak; 21 for she was saying to herself, "If I only touch His garment, I will get well." 22 But Jesus turning and seeing her said, "Daughter, take courage; your faith has made you well." At once the woman was made well. 23 When Jesus came into the official's house, and saw the flute-players and the crowd in noisy disorder, 24 He said, "Leave; for the girl has not died, but is asleep." And they began laughing at Him. 25 But when the crowd had been sent out, He entered and took her by the hand, and the girl got up. 26 This news spread throughout all that land.

There is much more detail to this story in Mark and Luke than is provided by Matthew

(see Luke 8:40-56 and Mark 5:21-43). From Mark and Luke we learn that the name of the synagogue official was Jairus and that he said that his daughter was “at the point of death” (Mark 5:23). Luke says the girl was his only daughter, was “about 12 years old and she was dying” (Luke 8:42). With his daughter on the verge of death this man evidently felt that he had to go get Jesus. Normally with a loved one at the point of death we will not leave their side, but when Jesus is around things are different. He can heal the sick and raise the dead. There is still hope when Jesus is nearby.

Jairus laid out his request to Jesus, “My daughter has just died; but come and lay Your hand on her, and she will live.” This is the procedure he believed was necessary. He believed Jesus had to come to his home, lay His hand on his daughter, and then she would be healed. He did not have the faith of the centurion, but Jesus did not correct him. Jesus followed the man’s procedure, even though it was not necessary. Jesus did not say, “I don’t need to come to your house. I will speak the word and your daughter will be healed.” In His grace Jesus will adapt Himself to our level of faith. According to Luke and Mark, it was reported to Jairus as they were on their way that his daughter had just died. They said, “Your daughter has died; do not trouble the Teacher anymore.” They thought there was no longer any hope that she could be healed. But Jesus encouraged his faith and said, “Do not be afraid any longer; only believe, and she will be made well” (Luke 8:50). It was not too late and Jairus did not need to be afraid, but needed to replace fear with faith.

On the way another desperate person, a woman who had been suffering from a hemorrhage for 12 years, secretly approached Jesus to touch His garment. She was able to approach secretly because, as Mark and Luke point out, there was a great crowd of people following Jesus and pressing around Him. She had said to herself, “If I only touch His garment, I will get well.” Probably the “fringe of His cloak” is a reference to the tassels that God had commanded the Israelites to put on the corners of their garments. This is mentioned in Numbers 15:38-40:

38 "Speak to the sons of Israel, and tell them that they shall make for themselves tassels on the corners of their garments throughout their generations, and that they shall put on the tassel of each corner a cord of blue. 39 "It shall be a tassel for you to look at and remember all the commandments of the LORD, so as to do them and not follow after your own heart and your own eyes, after which you played the harlot, 40 so that you may remember to do all My commandments and be holy to your God."

These tassels served to remind them of the Lord’s commandments. There was no power in them, but they were simple visual reminders that they belonged to the Lord and were supposed to follow Him.

When the woman touched His garment, she was healed. Luke and Mark tell us that Jesus was aware that power had gone out from Him and turned to ask who had touched Him. The woman fearfully admitted what she had done. But Jesus was not angry, but rather wanted to reassure this woman. He wanted to correct any misapprehension she may have had about how and why she had been healed. She had not been healed because she touched His garment, but because of her faith. He said, “Your faith has made you well.” He did not want her to believe that His garment had any mystical power. He also wanted to affirm before everyone that this woman had been healed. When she was bleeding she was “unclean” and was cut off from others because of it (Leviticus 15:25-28). Now the woman could be considered “clean” again and accepted into the society of others. Jesus wanted everyone around to know that she had been healed.

When they got to the home of Jairus it was a scene of mourning. The NASB describes it

as “noisy disorder,” while other translations call it a “commotion.” A. T. Robertson says, “Besides the several flute-players (voluntary or hired) there were probably ‘some hired mourning women (Jer. 9:17) *praeficae*, whose duty it was to sing *naenia* in praise of the dead’ (Bruce).” Jesus told the mourners to leave because their services were not needed. He said, “Leave; for the girl has not died, but is asleep.” Immediately the mourners switched from mourning to laughing at Jesus. The word for “laughing” indicates a derisive, scornful type of laughing. It wasn’t just that they found His words funny, but that they found them nonsensical and absurd. They all knew she had died and for Jesus to say she was only asleep was ridiculous.

Jesus took Peter, James, John and the girl’s parents into the house and excluded everyone else (Luke 8:51). He took the girl’s hand and according to Mark 5:41 said “Talitha kum,” which Mark tells us means “Little girl, I say to you, get up!” The words “talitha kum” are Aramaic, the language of the area around Galilee. There are a few instances of transliterated Aramaic sayings of Jesus in the gospels. In Mark 7:34 Jesus healed a deaf man by saying “ephphatha!” which means “Be opened!” Another example is in Matthew 27:46 and Mark 15:34 where Jesus said while He was on the cross, “Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?” which means “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?” I think these Aramaic sayings are important because they demonstrate clearly that the gospels were early documents, written by men who spoke and understood the language of the area around Galilee. In these words we have the very words of Jesus as spoken by Him. The Aramaic transliterations demonstrate that the gospels could not have been written by some impostor in the third or fourth centuries. These men had actually heard Jesus say these things.

The girl obeyed the command of Jesus and got up. Mark and Luke both say that she got up immediately. Even the dead must obey Jesus Christ. Luke tells us her spirit returned and that Jesus ordered that she be given something to eat. Her life and health had been restored, but it was still necessary to sustain it with food.

The news of what He had done “spread throughout all that land.” This astounding miracle could not be kept quiet. A man who can raise the dead will not be able to avoid notoriety.

#### Matthew 9:27-31

As Jesus went on from there, two blind men followed Him, crying out, "Have mercy on us, Son of David!" 28 When He entered the house, the blind men came up to Him, and Jesus \*said to them, "Do you believe that I am able to do this?" They \*said to Him, "Yes, Lord." 29 Then He touched their eyes, saying, "It shall be done to you according to your faith." 30 And their eyes were opened. And Jesus sternly warned them: "See that no one knows about this!" 31 But they went out and spread the news about Him throughout all that land.

As Jesus went from the place where He had raised the girl to some other place, two blind men followed Him and kept crying out to Him, “Have mercy on us, Son of David!” The word for “crying out” is a present active participle. They were persistent and kept on crying out, asking for mercy. They did not have our modern idea that life had been unfair to them and that they deserved fairness. They did not ask for social justice. They did not say, “Why has God made us blind? Why is He so unjust?” They did not question the goodness or justice of God, but they recognized their need for mercy. They did not demand healing, but cried out for it from a Messiah they saw as a merciful man. They knew that Jesus was the “Son of David,” the Messiah, and that He had the ability to heal them, and so they cried out to Him for mercy. This is something that we seem to have lost - the recognition that we need the mercy of God and the determination to pursue it.

Jesus waited until he got to the place where He was staying and entered the house before He dealt with these men. Why He did not stop along the way and minister to them, I don't know. The men persisted and followed Him into the house and came up to Him. They did not give up when He went into the house. It seems they would not take "no" for an answer.

Jesus asked them an odd question, "Do you believe that I am able to do this?" These men had been following Him along, crying out to Him for mercy. If they had not believed He could heal them, they would not have done it. Still, Jesus asked the question. The word translated "able," *dunamai*, is found often in the New Testament and means power or ability. Our word "dynamite" comes from this word. Jesus wanted to know if these men sincerely thought that He had the power to heal them of their blindness. They had already demonstrated their faith by following Him and crying out, but now He wants to hear them verbally affirm their faith, which they quickly did, saying, "Yes, Lord." Faith needs to be seen in our deeds and heard in our words. What we believe must impact both our deeds and our speech. Our faith needs to be verbalized. We need to say what we believe. He wanted these men to say, "Yes, Lord, you are able to heal our blindness."

Jesus touched their eyes and said, "It shall be done to you according to your faith." As they had believed, so it was done. They believed Jesus could heal them, and He did heal them. Genuine faith produces results. James tells us that when we ask for wisdom we must ask in faith without any doubting. He says the one who doubts "ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways" (see James 1:5-8). There is little chance that a person who hesitates between belief and unbelief will receive anything from the Lord. We must decide to believe based on what we have heard about the Lord, as these blind men had.

Once their request had been granted and their eyes opened, Jesus "sternly warned them: 'See that no one knows about this!'" The Greek word translated "sternly warned" is *emprimaomai*. A.T. Robertson says of this word, "A difficult word, compound of *en* and *brimaomai* (to be moved with anger). It is used of horses snorting (Aeschylus, Theb. 461), of men fretting or being angry (Dan\_11:30)." Thayer's Greek Definitions says it means "to charge with earnest admonition, sternly to charge, threatened to enjoin." Jesus was serious about this; He did not want these men to make it known that they had been healed. Why would He do this? Why would Jesus want to keep this a secret? There is a similar account using the same language in Mark 1:43-45 after He had healed a leper, "And He sternly warned him and immediately sent him away, 44 and He said to him, 'See that you say nothing to anyone; but go, show yourself to the priest and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, as a testimony to them.' 45 But he went out and began to proclaim it freely and to spread the news around, to such an extent that Jesus could no longer publicly enter a city, but stayed out in unpopulated areas; and they were coming to Him from everywhere." I think Mark here gives us a clue as to why Jesus would say this to people He healed. The crush of people who came to Him from all over limited His movements. He could not go into a city because of the crowds of people. It's probable that Jesus told these men to keep it quiet so that this would not happen. Jesus did not want all of His time taken up with those who came for healing or those who came wanting to see Him perform miracles. Jesus had not come to be a showman or a performer.

Despite being warned, the men went out and spread the news about Him. I suppose a certain amount of this was unavoidable. Family and friends would see that they had been healed of their blindness and ask what had happened. They could not avoid having to tell some people. But they went beyond this, they deliberately spread the news all over the area about their healing.

Matthew 9:32-34

As they were going out, a mute, demon-possessed man was brought to Him. 33 After the demon was cast out, the mute man spoke; and the crowds were amazed, and were saying, "Nothing like this has ever been seen in Israel." 34 But the Pharisees were saying, "He casts out the demons by the ruler of the demons."

While the men who had been blind were leaving, another man was brought to Jesus who was mute and demonized. Evidently the mute condition was caused by the demon. He couldn't talk because the demon controlled him. There is no record here in this incident that Jesus asked anything about faith. He may have, but it is not recorded for us. We also don't know if this man would have come to Jesus if left to himself. Someone brought him to Jesus. People with heavy spiritual problems are blessed if they have someone who brings them to Jesus. There are many around us who need to be taken by the hand and brought to Jesus.

Once the demon was cast out, the man spoke. The demon was taken away and the inability to speak was removed. I wish I knew what the man said! The amazed crowds said, "Nothing like this has ever been seen in Israel." What they had witnessed was unprecedented. The authority and power of Jesus was an amazing thing.

The Pharisees felt they had to explain what was going on without attributing it to divine power, so they said, "He casts out the demons by the ruler of the demons." Their solution was to attribute the power of Jesus to the devil himself! Jesus will address this blasphemy in chapter 12. The Pharisees did not want to believe that Jesus is the Messiah because it would mean that they would then have to submit to His authority themselves and become obedient to Him. They could not acknowledge that He was exercising the power of God and continue to reject His words and works. At the same time they could see and could not deny what He was doing. Their solution was to say that His authority came from Satan. People are still doing this today. Those who do not want to acknowledge Jesus as Lord come up with all sorts of excuses for their unbelief. Rather than acknowledge the miracles of Jesus and of the Bible, they cast about for all sorts of alternative explanations or dismiss them altogether as myths and legends. But those who witnessed these things and recorded them for us are faithful. The eyes of faith see through the shaky excuses of those who reject Christ.

Matthew 9:35-38

Jesus was going through all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness. 36 Seeing the people, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and dispirited like sheep without a shepherd. 37 Then He \*said to His disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. 38 "Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest."

Verse 35 gives us a summary of this tour of ministry in the Galilee area. Note the verbs in this verse. Jesus was "going through all the cities and villages," He was teaching, proclaiming and healing. As He traveled he went from city to city and village to village, and in each place He went to the synagogue. He went to the place where the Jews gathered each Sabbath in each town. The words for "teaching," "proclaiming" and "healing" are present tense active participles, that is, these things were His ongoing practice. Jesus was methodical and not haphazard. He followed a procedure. He followed the same procedure in each place.

The teaching and proclaiming was the first priority. Delivering the message, the "gospel of the kingdom," was the priority. In Luke 4:16-30 we see the example of what happened

when He came to His hometown of Nazareth. When he came into the synagogue he was given the Isaiah scroll and he read the passage that says, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed, to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord" (Luke 4:18-19). Jesus was anointed by the Spirit of the Father to do these things, to preach the gospel, to proclaim freedom to the captives and sight to the blind, to free the oppressed and to proclaim God's favor. I'm not saying that the healing ministry of Jesus was unimportant. The healings were demonstrations of His power and authority and validated His claim to be the Messiah. But if we think about it, the earthly healing was a temporary thing. The girl He had raised from the dead would later die again. Those He healed would eventually succumb to something else. But the preaching and teaching of Jesus would have eternal impact. We must not stop with merely meeting the physical needs of people. They must also hear the gospel and come to know Christ.

Jesus was healing "every kind of disease and every kind of sickness." There was no malady that was beyond His ability to heal. His power was absolute over every illness that we might mention.

Jesus felt compassion for the people, for the crowds that followed Him and came to Him. The word for "felt compassion" is *splagchnizomai*. Thayer's Greek Definitions says the word means "to be moved as to one's bowels, hence to be moved with compassion, have compassion (for the bowels were thought to be the seat of love and pity)." He felt compassion for them because "they were distressed and dispirited like sheep without a shepherd." "Distressed" is *skullō*, meaning "to skin, flay; to rend, mangle" (Thayer) or figuratively "to harass" (Strong's). "Dispirited" is *rhiptō*, which means "to throw" or "to cast down." They were victims of Satan and the meanness of others, like the man who had been beaten and robbed in the Parable of the Good Samaritan. They were like domestic sheep that have no shepherd. They had no leadership they could trust and no protection from predators. The scribes and Pharisees were not true shepherds for the people. They had laid heavy burdens upon them that they themselves were unwilling to touch (Matthew 23:4). They had also shut off the kingdom of heaven from people and would not allow people to go in (Matthew 23:13). Instead of making their followers sons of heaven, they made them sons of hell (Matthew 23:15). They led people astray and taught them that there were loopholes that would allow them to get around the commands of God. The spiritual leaders of these people led them to destruction rather than life.

Most people around us today are just like this. They are shepherdless sheep. They follow leaders who are leading them to destruction, blind guides who will cause them to fall into a pit (Matthew 15:14). We should feel compassion for them as Jesus does. We must point them to the Good Shepherd who gives life to His sheep (see John 10).

Seeing these crowds all around Him and feeling compassion for them, Jesus said to His disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest." Regarding the harvest, He says three things. First, it is a plentiful harvest, a big harvest. It is a very large crop that needs to be harvested. Farmers are always happy to have a big yield on their crops because it represents wealth for them. Second, God is the Lord of the harvest. He is over the harvest and in charge of it. Third, it is His harvest. The crop is His crop, it belongs to Him and He must reap it. There was no problem with the crop itself, it is what you always want to see if you're a farmer. The problem was that there were few workers to harvest the crop. There was a lack of workers willing to go out into the fields and bring in the harvest. Harvesting crops is hard work, the pay isn't great, and is short-term. Once the crop is in a worker's services are no longer needed. Jesus exhorted the disciples to "beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His

harvest.” It is to be a matter of urgent prayer for them. It is something about which they are to be concerned. They are to entreat the Lord to thrust out workers into the harvest. The word for “send out” is *ekballō*, meaning to expel, to drive out or cast out. The word is often used of “casting out” demons (e.g. Matthew 7:22). The Lord of the harvest must be urged to compel workers to go out and harvest the crop. It is something that must be done, and unwilling workers must be forced out to do the job.

It seems obvious that the “harvest” the Lord is talking about is the harvest of the souls of people, these people who were like sheep without a shepherd. Many of them were ready to believe and follow Jesus, but there weren’t enough workers to preach to them and teach them. We need to urge the Lord to raise up those who will go out to declare the gospel and lead people into the kingdom, and if we pray for this, we must be willing to do so ourselves.

#### Matthew 10:1-4

Jesus summoned His twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every kind of disease and every kind of sickness. 2 Now the names of the twelve apostles are these: The first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; and James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother; 3 Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; 4 Simon the Zealot, and Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed Him.

Having told them to pray that the Lord of the harvest would send out workers into the harvest, Jesus then did this very thing with His men. Luke tells us that prior to this time, Jesus had spent all night in prayer and then came the next day and called all the disciples together and chose twelve of them and named them “apostles.” The Greek word *apostolos* means a messenger or delegate, one sent to represent another. Hastings Dictionary of the Bible says,

Apostle, ‘one commissioned,’ represents a Heb. word which signified not merely a messenger but a delegate, bearing a commission, and, so far as his commission extended, wielding his commissioner’s authority. ‘The Apostle of any one,’ says the Talmud, ‘is even as the man himself by whom he is deputed.’ The term was applied by Jesus to the twelve disciples whom He attached to Himself to aid Him in His ministry and to be trained by the discipline of His example and precept for carrying it on after His departure (Luk\_6:13, Mat\_10:2). Cf. Joh\_17:18 ‘Even as thou didst commission me unto the world, I also commissioned them unto the world’ (where ‘commission’ is the verb cognate to ‘Apostle’).

So prior to our text here in Matthew 10 Jesus had selected these twelve men to be His representatives. Mark says, “And He went up on the mountain and summoned those whom He Himself wanted, and they came to Him. And He appointed twelve, so that they would be with Him and that He could send them out to preach, and to have authority to cast out the demons” (Mark 3:13-15). The first concern of an apostle was to be “with Him,” to accompany Him and learn from Him, and then the second concern was to be sent out by Him to preach and heal.

Jesus called the twelve apostles to Himself and gave them authority over unclean spirits and authority to heal every disease and every sickness. They were authorized in His name to act on His behalf to cast out unclean spirits and to heal all sicknesses. We were just told in 9:35 that Jesus was doing this same thing, healing all kinds of diseases and sickness. Jesus gave these twelve the authority to do the same things He was doing. We must not think that



preaching was left out, because in verse 7 He tells them to preach. I don't believe that this authority has been revoked from the church. If we follow Jesus we have this same authority to act in His name to accomplish His purposes and advance His kingdom, His rule, on the earth.

The twelve apostles are named in verses 2 through 4, Simon Peter, his brother Andrew, James and John the sons of Zebedee, Philip, Bartholomew, Thomas, Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot. There may be a pairing of these men, that is, Simon with Andrew, James with John, Philip and Bartholomew, and so on. Mark 6:7 and Luke 10:1 say that Jesus sent them out in pairs, and here we probably see how these men were paired up.

It was Jesus who gave Simon the name "Peter" according to Mark 3:16 and John 1:42. In fact, in John 1:42 Jesus says, "You are Simon the son of John; you shall be called Cephas" and John tells us that "Cephas" is translated "Peter." Cephas is the Aramaic and Peter is the Greek, and both mean "rock." He also gave a nickname to James and John, calling them "Boanerges, which means, 'Sons of Thunder'" (Mark 3:17). Matthew of course says that he is the tax collector. The other Simon is called "Simon the Zealot." The word translated "zealot" here is *Kananitēs*, a word of Aramaic origin which means "zealot." Hastings Dictionary of the Bible says this about the zealots:

CANANÆAN or CANAANITE occurs in Mat\_10:4 and Mar\_3:18 as a designation of Simon, one of the disciples of Jesus. The first is the correct reading, the Gr. Kananaios being the transliteration of kan'ânayyâ (a late Heb. derivative from kannâ' = 'jealous'). It is rendered in Luk\_6:15 and Act\_1:13 by Ζηλωτής (zealot). The Cananæans or Zealots were a sect founded by Judas of Gamala, who headed the opposition to the census of Quirinius (A.D. 6 or 7). They bitterly resented the domination of Rome, and would fain have hastened by the sword the fulfilment of the Messianic hope. During the great rebellion and the siege of Jerusalem, which ended in its destruction (A.D. 70), their fanaticism made them terrible opponents, not only to the Romans, but to other factions amongst their own countrymen.

Evidently Simon was a member of this group prior to meeting Christ.

The last man mentioned is Judas Iscariot, "the one who betrayed Him." The word "Iscariot" means he was from the town of Kerioth in the south of Judea. Judas was the one who betrayed Jesus. The word means to "give into the hands of another" (Thayer). Forever Judas bears the shame of being the one who handed Jesus over to His enemies.

#### Matthew 10:5-42

These twelve Jesus sent out after instructing them: "Do not go in the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter any city of the Samaritans; 6 but rather go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. 7 "And as you go, preach, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.' 8 "Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. Freely you received, freely give. 9 "Do not acquire gold, or silver, or copper for your money belts, 10 or a bag for your journey, or even two coats, or sandals, or a staff; for the worker is worthy of his support. 11 "And whatever city or village you enter, inquire who is worthy in it, and stay at his house until you leave that city. 12 "As you enter the house, give it your greeting. 13 "If the house is worthy, give it your blessing of peace. But if it is not worthy, take back your blessing of peace. 14 "Whoever does not receive you, nor heed your words, as you go out of that house or that city, shake the dust off your feet. 15 "Truly I say to you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city.

16 "Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; so be shrewd as serpents and innocent as doves. 17 "But beware of men, for they will hand you over to the courts and scourge you in their synagogues; 18 and you will even be brought before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles. 19 "But when they hand you over, do not worry about how or what you are to say; for it will be given you in that hour what you are to say. 20 "For it is not you who speak, but it is the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you. 21 "Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death. 22 "You will be hated by all because of My name, but it is the one who has endured to the end who will be saved. 23 "But whenever they persecute you in one city, flee to the next; for truly I say to you, you will not finish going through the cities of Israel until the Son of Man comes.

24 "A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a slave above his master. 25 "It is enough for the disciple that he become like his teacher, and the slave like his master. If they have called the head of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign the members of his household! 26 "Therefore do not fear them, for there is nothing concealed that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. 27 "What I tell you in the darkness, speak in the light; and what you hear whispered in your ear, proclaim upon the housetops. 28 "Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. 29 "Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? And yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. 30 "But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. 31 "So do not fear; you are more valuable than many sparrows. 32 "Therefore everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. 33 "But whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven.

34 "Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. 35 "For I came to SET A MAN AGAINST HIS FATHER, AND A DAUGHTER AGAINST HER MOTHER, AND A DAUGHTER-IN-LAW AGAINST HER MOTHER-IN-LAW; 36 and A MAN'S ENEMIES WILL BE THE MEMBERS OF HIS HOUSEHOLD. 37 "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. 38 "And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. 39 "He who has found his life will lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake will find it.

40 "He who receives you receives Me, and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me. 41 "He who receives a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward; and he who receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward. 42 "And whoever in the name of a disciple gives to one of these little ones even a cup of cold water to drink, truly I say to you, he shall not lose his reward."

Here are the instructions that Jesus gave to the twelve apostles before He sent them out ("sent out" is the Greek word *apostellō*). The first part, from verses 5 through 15, deals with the specific instructions for the short-term mission immediately ahead of them. Jesus gave them specific directions and procedures.

First, Jesus told them where to go and to whom to go. He said, "Do not go in the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter any city of the Samaritans; but rather go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." For this trip they were not to go to the Gentiles or Samaritans. Jesus will later tell them to go to these people (Matthew 28:19 and Acts 1:8). The gospel is meant for all peoples, but for this short-term mission they were only supposed to go the "lost sheep of the house of Israel." We just learned in chapter 9 that Jesus felt compassion for these people who

were like sheep without a shepherd, and so He is going to send these men out as workers into the harvest of souls among these lost sheep. These lost sheep needed to be led back to their Shepherd, and these men were His delegates, sent out to gather these sheep to Him.

Again in verse 7 we see the priority of the message. It is the same message proclaimed by John the Baptist (Matthew 3:2) and Jesus (Matthew 4:17), "The kingdom of heaven is at hand." As they went along, they were to proclaim or announce this, that the rule of heaven was close at hand. (See the comments earlier on Matthew 3:2). The word for "preach" here is *kērussō*, to proclaim or announce. When we think of preaching we think of more lengthy messages than this. This is not what we would call a "sermon," but an announcement. The Contemporary English Version translates it, "As you go, announce that the kingdom of heaven will soon be here." The English Standard Version says, "And proclaim as you go, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.'" No doubt as these men went out making this announcement it would lead to questions and longer discussions, as it had with both John and Jesus. This is not the only thing they would say. As they talked with people they would no doubt explain that Jesus was the Messiah, the King who was to come, and that people needed to believe in Him.

It's interesting that the element of repentance is missing from this proclamation. Both John and Jesus said, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand," but here He tells them to simply say, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand." I don't think this is a significant thing. The fact that the reign of God is about to break in on us carries with it the implied message that we need to prepare by repenting. The Jews would have understood this. They had at least heard of the message of John and of Jesus, and now here were His men who were saying the same thing. They were getting a consistent message that the Lord was coming to rule, and people needed to get ready.

In addition to proclaiming the kingdom, Jesus told them to "Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons." They had seen Him do all of these things, and He gave them authority to do them as well. These things were evidences of the truth of their proclamation. These miraculous works demonstrated that the rule of God was breaking in upon a world dominated by Satan. They showed that the King had delegated His authority to these men and they spoke and acted on His behalf, exercising His power over the spiritual rulers of this world. As they did these things it would be difficult for their opponents to dispute the veracity of their proclamation.

As they did these things, they were to "give freely" because they had "freely received." Jesus means that they are not to do these things as a money making venture. They were passing along His message and His healing, and they were to do this without expecting any compensation. They could have taken advantage of desperate people by asking for money in exchange for healing, but Jesus prohibits this. This says something about the many so-called "faith healers" we have today who mostly are charlatans who are using ministry in order to enrich themselves. What comes from Jesus is to be given away freely and graciously. Beware of those who claim to minister in the name of Jesus who require payment for their services.

In verses 9 and 10 Jesus tells them what not to take with them. They are to travel light and not take gold, silver or copper in their money belts, or a bag, or two coats or extra sandals, or a staff. They were not to throw a bunch of extra things into a bag and carry them along with them. They were to go out as they were without extra provisions and clothing. The explanation is in verse 10, "for the worker is worthy of his support." The word translated "support" is *trophē*, meaning food or nourishment. Luke has the same saying in Luke 10:7, "for the laborer is worthy of his wages." Luke uses the word *misthos*, wages, instead of *trophē*. Paul quotes this saying in 1 Timothy 5:17-18, "The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and

teaching. For the Scripture says, 'YOU SHALL NOT MUZZLE THE OX WHILE HE IS THRESHING,' and 'The laborer is worthy of his wages.'" Though the workers are not to charge for their services, they should be supported by those who receive their services and who benefit from their ministry. The workers are not to be motivated by making a profit and must give freely, but those who receive from them have a responsibility to help support them and should feed them, shelter them, clothe them and help them on their way. In 1 Corinthians 9 Paul discusses this issue at length and points out that those who preach the gospel have both a duty to do so without charge and a right to receive support from those to whom they minister. He writes in verses 11 and 12, "If we sowed spiritual things in you, is it too much if we reap material things from you? If others share the right over you, do we not more? Nevertheless, we did not use this right, but we endure all things so that we will cause no hindrance to the gospel of Christ." He did not want to hinder the gospel with any appearance of a profit motive.

Jesus addresses the subject of lodging in verses 11-13. Where were they supposed to stay? When they went to a city, they were to ask about who was "worthy" in the city, and stay with that man in his house until they left. They were to give the house their blessing of peace as they entered, and if it turned out not to be worthy, they were to take back their blessing. We see right away that this word "worthy" is an important term here. We saw it in verse 10 where He said, "the worker is worthy of his support," and the same word is used here in verses 11 and 13. The Greek term is *axios*, meaning "of weight, of worth." He told them to inquire about who in the city was "of weight," was deserving, of having them stay with him. We see this in the ministry of Jesus as He traveled around, people invited Him to come and stay with them. They did not consider it a burden and inconvenience, but a privilege. This was the custom and expectation of that culture. To have shown hospitality to Jesus would probably have been seen as a great honor for many in that day. To refuse hospitality to travelers was a shameful thing.

There are several examples of people showing this kind of hospitality to Jesus and His disciples. In Jericho the tax collector Zaccheus opened his home to Jesus as recorded in Luke 19:1-10. Zaccheus, because he was short, had climbed into a sycamore tree in hope of seeing Jesus. Jesus came up to the tree and said, "Zaccheus, hurry and come down, for today I must stay at your house." Zaccheus hurried down and "received Him gladly." He was happy to receive Jesus and to have Him come to his home. He probably thought that he was not worthy, but Jesus explained that He had come to "seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). In our culture we would think it rude to invite ourselves to stay at someone's home. We would think of it as an intrusion or imposition, but they did not have that attitude.

Martha, Mary and Lazarus entertained Jesus on more than one occasion in their home in Bethany near Jerusalem (Luke 10:38-42, John 12:2). The day Jesus rose from the dead a couple of His followers were traveling from Jerusalem to Emmaus, and Jesus appeared to them as a traveler, but they did not recognize Him. He asked about what they were talking about and they told Him about the events of the last few days, about Jesus and how they had hoped that He was the one who would redeem Israel, but He had been crucified. They told Him about how some of the women went to the tomb that morning and found it empty and had seen a vision of angels who told them He was alive, and about how some of the men also went and found the empty tomb, but didn't see Jesus. Jesus rebuked them for being slow to believe and then explained from the Scriptures all the things that spoke of Him and the truth of these events. Since it was late in the afternoon, they invited Him to stay with them (Luke 24:13-35). As he reclined at the table with them and broke and blessed the bread, their eyes were opened and they recognized Him.

Jesus gave them a procedure to follow as they entered the house where they would stay.

First, they were to give the house their greeting. By “house” He probably does not mean the building, but the household, the people living in the house. We greet people and not buildings. If the household proved to be worthy, if the people were welcoming and hospitable, they then were to give them their blessing of peace. In Luke’s version of these instructions it says, “Whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace be to this house.’ If a man of peace is there, your peace will rest on him; but if not, it will return to you” (Luke 10:5-6). The greeting or blessing of peace has long been a tradition among the Jews. The word in the Greek text here is *eirēnē*, meaning “peace” or “welfare.” No doubt the Hebrew word they would have used was “*shalom*.” According to [myjewishlearning.com](http://myjewishlearning.com), shalom has a broader meaning than simply a lack of strife or conflict,

The Hebrew word for peace, shalom, is derived from a root denoting wholeness or completeness, and its frame of reference throughout Jewish literature is bound up with the notion of shelemut, perfection. Its significance is thus not limited to the political domain — to the absence of war and enmity — or to the social — to the absence of quarrel and strife. It ranges over several spheres and can refer in different contexts to bounteous physical conditions, to a moral value, and, ultimately, to a cosmic principle and divine attribute.

In the Bible, the word *shalom* is most commonly used to refer to a *state of affairs*, one of well - being, tranquility, prosperity, and security, circumstances unblemished by any sort of defect. *Shalom* is a blessing, a manifestation of divine grace.  
(<https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/shalom/>)

To bless a household with “shalom,” then, was to express a hope for holistic well-being upon it. Isaiah 32:17 says, “And the work of righteousness will be peace, and the service of righteousness, quietness and confidence forever.” Peace is a result of righteousness. Peace cannot exist if unrighteousness prevails. So a wish for peace is a wish for righteousness and right behavior and belief. This is what we should pursue for ourselves and wish for others.

The house may or may not be worthy of their blessing of peace. If the people in the household welcomed them and were enthusiastic about opening their home, then they were to bless them with the wish for peace. If the people would not welcome them then their peace was to return to them. The verb translated “take back” is *epistrephō*, and it is in the passive voice. It means to turn, to turn back or to return. Since it is passive, “take back” is probably not the best translation. It’s not that you gave something to someone and then found they weren’t worthy, so you snatched it back. The World English Bible is probably more accurate, “If the household is worthy, let your peace come upon it, but if it isn’t worthy let your peace return to you.” Your peace is seen as something that you can bestow that you can give to the worthy, but that returns to you on its own if the object is unworthy. Your blessing of peace sort of bounces off of them and returns to you. It doesn’t stick because those you tried to give it to would not be people of peace.

I think the key to understanding who the “unworthy” are is in verse 14. They are those who will not receive them nor listen to them. There would be those who rejected them and their message about the King and the kingdom, and to reject those sent by the King was to reject the King Himself (see verse 40). People who are hostile to the representatives of Christ are hostile to Christ Himself. When Jesus confronted Saul on the road to Damascus He asked, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” (Acts 22:7). Jesus takes it personally when His people are persecuted. He tells us explicitly in Matthew 25 that the way we treat the least

of His people is the way we treat Christ Himself (Matthew 25:31-46). These thoughts should give us pause before we treat one another with disdain or neglect.

Jesus told them to shake the dust off their feet as they departed from the house or the city that would not receive them. Mark adds that this would be “a testimony against them” (Mark 6:11). It was a physical statement that they had been rejected and so they in turn rejected the very dust of the place and would not allow it to cling to them. Paul did this when he was in Corinth. He went to the synagogue there every Sabbath reasoning with the Jews and Greeks there trying to show them that Jesus was the Messiah, but they would not listen and resisted him. Acts 18:6 says, “But when they resisted and blasphemed, he shook out his garments and said to them, ‘Your blood be on your own heads! I am clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.’” Paul had fulfilled his responsibility and delivered the message, but they had rejected it, and so he was absolved of any guilt related to their unwillingness to believe. He would turn to the Gentiles in Corinth and no longer waste his time trying to convince the Jews. Their guilt would be upon their own heads. Indeed, Jesus says, “It will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city.” Jesus will mention these two cities again in chapter 11, where we will take a closer look at this saying. The cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed by fire and brimstone because of their great wickedness. The fertile plain where they used to exist is now the Dead Sea. But in the day of judgment the Lord will go easier on them than He will on those who reject His people and His message.

Part of the ministry of followers of Christ is a ministry of warning. Those who reject the King and His rule over them will be judged severely. The act of shaking their dust off of the disciples’ feet was a warning. They were saying what Paul said, “Your blood be upon your own heads!” You find this ministry of warning throughout the ministry of Jesus Himself, especially as He confronted His opponents. This sort of warning seems to be lacking in a lot of our churches and ministries these days. It seems we rarely mention the consequences of rejecting Christ.

Jesus was sending these guys out to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, but they would be like sheep in the midst of wolves (verse 16). This seems like a very risky and even foolish thing for a shepherd to do, to send His sheep out among a pack of wolves. They will be prey in the midst of predators. He wants the disciples to be very aware that this will be their situation, and so He goes into a lengthy discussion of the dangers and perils they will face. He tells them to “be shrewd as serpents and innocent as doves.” The Greek word translated “shrewd” is *phronimos* and comes from *phroneō*, “to have understanding, to think” (New American Standard Exhaustive Concordance). It deals with the mind and how we think. Of this word the NASEC says, “practically wise, sensible.” Vincent’s Word Studies suggests that it denotes “prudence with regard to their own safety, wary.” As they went out to preach and to minister, they needed to be mindful of the fact that they were like sheep among wolves and be alert and wary of the opposition they would face.

The word for “innocent” is *akeraios*, composed of the negative particle *a*, without, and *kerāō*, to mix. So it means something that is not mixed with anything else, something that is unadulterated or without impurity. Pure water is just water and nothing else. Pure gold is just gold and nothing else. Thus the NASB translates it “innocent,” not mixed with guilt or guile or falsehood. The disciples are to go out as men with integrity and honesty without any hidden agenda.

So in this one verse we have reference to four creatures, sheep, wolves, serpents and doves. The disciples are to have aspects of the character of sheep, serpents and doves, and are to recognize that their opponents are like wolves who want to devour them. As we are sent out by Jesus we must have our eyes wide open and be conscious of these things that

Jesus tells us about in this context. We must not be naive about ourselves nor about our world and the opposition we will face.

Since they are sheep surrounded by wolves, Jesus tells them to “beware of men.” He tells them, “for they will hand you over to the courts and scourge you in their synagogues.” He says again in verse 19, “when they hand you over.” The same word, *paradidōmi*, is used here that was used of Judas in verse 4, translated “betrayed.” It is also used in verse 21, “Brother will betray brother to death.” The reason the disciples must be wary of men is that they will hand them over or deliver them up to prosecution and persecution. He does not simply say that this might be a possibility, but that it will happen, it is a certainty that men will do this to them and they will experience these things. They will even be brought before governors and kings because of their ministry for the sake of Christ. They must be conscious that these things will happen for the sake of Christ, on His account. They will not be arrested and prosecuted because they are evildoers or law breakers, but because they represent Jesus Christ. They should remember that Jesus had said, “Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you” (Matthew 5:11-12). We see this clearly fulfilled in the book of Acts, especially in the ministry of the apostle Paul.

This persecution would not be senseless and purposeless. It would provide them with an opportunity for a testimony to people of influence. In a court of law one is required to testify, to give evidence to the truth of the case. When believers are delivered up to the courts and rulers, it provides an opportunity for them to give testimony about Jesus Christ and the gospel, to talk about what they are doing and why they are doing it in His name. This testimony would be offered not just to Jews, but also to the Gentiles. Peter writes in 1 Peter 3:14-16, “But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. **AND DO NOT FEAR THEIR INTIMIDATION, AND DO NOT BE TROUBLED,** 15 but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence; 16 and keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ will be put to shame.” When this kind of persecution happens to us, we must learn to see it as a great opportunity for the defense of the gospel and a great chance to share our testimony with those who would not otherwise hear what we have to say. We will be asked to account for our hope, and we must always be ready give a gentle and reverential defense.

Giving testimony requires that we say something. Being hauled into court and accused is a scary and intimidating thing. Jesus says when this happens, “do not worry about how or what you are to say; for it will be given to you in that hour what you are to say. For it is not you who speak, but it is the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you.” In this situation they do not need to have prepared and rehearsed statements. They need not be anxious about how or what to say. Sometimes it’s not just knowing what to say, but also how to say it, how we will come across, that troubles us. We may fear that we will be too nervous, or stammer or stutter and not be able to deliver our words well. But Jesus assures us that in that hour when we must speak to judges and great men the words will be given to us. What we must say will be given when we need it. He explains it further in verse 20, “For it is not you who speak, but it is the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you.” This is amazing if you think about it. In this kind of situation those sent by Jesus who represent Him will actually be the mouthpieces for God the Father! His Spirit in them will speak through them, with their voices.

We see an example of this in Stephen’s words before the High Priest and the Sanhedrin in Acts 7. Stephen recounted the history of Israel, emphasizing the stubbornness of their

fathers in refusing to believe in and follow Moses, and then said, "You men who are stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears are always resisting the Holy Spirit; you are doing just as your fathers did. Which one of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? They killed those who had previously announced the coming of the Righteous One, whose betrayers and murderers you have now become; you who received the law as ordained by angels, and yet did not keep it" (Acts 7:51-53). We are told in Acts 7:55 that Stephen was "full of the Holy Spirit." Speaking the words he was given to speak in that hour led to his listeners being "cut to the quick" and they rushed upon him, took him out of the city and stoned him to death, fulfilling his words by their behavior. When the Father speaks through us at these times, He may say some harsh things to our listeners. He may say things they cannot deny but that still will provoke them to rage. This happened to Jesus in His home town when He pointed out that Elijah was sent to a Gentile widow in Sidon and not to any of the widows of Israel, and that Elisha healed Naaman the Syrian of his leprosy and not any of the lepers of Israel (Luke 4:23-27). The people in the synagogue rose up and tried to kill Him, but He passed through them and went on His way. This is not to say that when this happens to us our words must always be confrontational. In Acts 26 as Paul spoke to king Agrippa he simply told his story about how Christ appeared to him and turned him from being an opponent to a proponent. The response from Agrippa was very positive. Agrippa said, "In a short time you will persuade me to become a Christian" (verse 28). Agrippa said to Festus the governor, "This man might have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar" (verse 32). So the outcome of these situations will vary and our lives will not always be in danger, but whatever words are given in that hour we must speak.

Who are these opponents who will hand them over to the courts and scourge them in the synagogues? He says, "Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death." The word translated "betray" is *paradidōmi*, the same word translated "hand you over" in verses 17 and 19. The wolves who will hand them over will be their own relatives, their brothers and their fathers and their children. They will not just hand them over to be punished, but will hand them over to death! They will pursue the death penalty for them. We not only need to beware of those "out there" in the world who will oppose us, but we must beware also of the people who are closest to us in our families! Some Muslims believe that in order to preserve their family's "honor" they are duty-bound to kill family members who depart from Islam. It is a costly thing in some parts of the world to believe in Jesus! Jesus will comment on this more in verse 34-39.

Not only will family members oppose them, but also Jesus says, "You will be hated by all because of My name, but it is the one who has endured to the end who will be saved." It would be a big mistake for them to think that everyone would love them and welcome them with open arms. On the contrary, they will be hated by all! They will be hated because of their association and identification with Jesus, because of His name. They will hate them because they hate Jesus. There are few who find the narrow road to life, and the many who remain on the wide road to destruction hate them. This is why it is an error for us to try to make ourselves lovable and acceptable to the world. Jesus said that the world only loves its own. In John 15:18-19 He says, "If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you." The only way to be loved by the world is to be of the world. When believers try to win the love of the world they end up being out of step with the Lord and His word. The goal of those who represent Jesus is not winning the love of the world, but calling the world to repentance and faith in Christ, challenging people to depart from the wide road to destruction in order to take the narrow



road to life. Jesus said that He would send them the Holy Spirit and that He would “convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment” (John 16:8). The Holy Spirit is concerned with the themes of sin, righteousness and judgment, but if we are trying to please the world, we may be tempted to avoid these themes. People don’t like to be called “sinners,” they don’t want to be called to righteousness, and they don’t want to think about the judgment of God. We must deliver the message the Lord has given us realizing that many in the world will reject it and will oppose us.

The disciples must endure the hatred to the end. They must not allow the hatred and opposition of the world to turn them from Christ. The doctrine of the perseverance of the saints in reformed theology is an important doctrine. Once the Lord gets hold of us, He does not let us go. We will endure, we will persevere. We will not shrink back and abandon our faith. The author of Hebrews addresses this in Hebrews 10:32-39:

32 But remember the former days, when, after being enlightened, you endured a great conflict of sufferings, 33 partly by being made a public spectacle through reproaches and tribulations, and partly by becoming sharers with those who were so treated. 34 For you showed sympathy to the prisoners and accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting one. 35 Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. 36 For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised. 37 FOR YET IN A VERY LITTLE WHILE, HE WHO IS COMING WILL COME, AND WILL NOT DELAY. 38 BUT MY RIGHTEOUS ONE SHALL LIVE BY FAITH; AND IF HE SHRINKS BACK, MY SOUL HAS NO PLEASURE IN HIM. 39 But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul.

Some do “shrink back to destruction,” but it is those who endure to the end who are really saved. Those who have faith preserve their souls. Jesus said, “All that the Father gives Me will come to me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out” (John 6:37), and “of all that He has given me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day” (John 6:39-40). Those truly given by the Father to the Son will come to Him, will truly believe, will not be cast out or lost, and will be raised up on the last day. They will endure to the end and will truly be saved. The endurance of true believers is certain, not because of their will or performance, but because of the work of God in them.

Sometimes the disciples will need to flee persecution (verse 23). This is something that will happen to them, Jesus says, “Whenever they persecute you,” and not “if they persecute you.” They will be persecuted. The word for “persecute” is *diōkō* and means to chase or to put to flight, to pursue. They will be treated in such a way that they will need to flee in order to preserve their lives. They will be driven out of some cities, so Jesus tells them to simply move on to the next city. We see this often in Paul’s ministry in the book of Acts. He followed this procedure.

Then we have this difficult saying in verse 23b, “for truly I say to you, you will not finish going through the cities of Israel until the Son of Man comes.” He seems to be saying that He will come again before they finish going through all the cities of Israel. If this is a reference to His second coming it would contradict what He said later as He discussed His coming and the end of the age, “This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come” (Matthew 24:14). It seems clear that He must not be referring to His second coming. There are a number of theories among

commentators, but I think the best solution is proposed by Albert Barnes and others, that Jesus is talking about the destruction of Jerusalem which took place in 70 AD. Albert Barnes writes,

Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel ... - That is, in fleeing from persecutors from one city to another, you shall not have gone to every city in Judea until the end of the Jewish economy shall occur. See the notes at Matthew 24:28-30. By "the coming of the Son of Man," that is, of "Christ," is probably meant the destruction of Jerusalem, which happened about thirty years after this was spoken. The words are often used in this sense. See Matthew 24:30; Mark 13:26; Luke 21:27, Luke 21:32. (Albert Barnes's Notes on the Bible)

An excellent treatment of this subject is found here:

<https://www.christiancourier.com/articles/668-what-is-the-meaning-of-matthew-10-23>.

In verses 24 and 25 Jesus gives them three illustrations of relationships to make the point that if He is hated and rejected, they will be as well. He is the Teacher, the Master and the Head of the household, His followers are the disciples (students), the slaves and the family members. The student is not greater than or above the teacher. The slave is not greater than the master, and the family members are not greater than the head of the family. This is not the only place where we hear Jesus say this. In Luke 6:40 He says, "A pupil is not above his teacher; but everyone, after he has been fully trained, will be like his teacher." In John 13:16 He says, "Truly, truly, I say to you, a slave is not greater than his master, nor is one who is sent greater than the one who sent him." And in John 15:20, "Remember the word that I said to you, 'A slave is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also." The student can expect to be treated like his teacher is treated. If the teacher is despised, the students will be as well. We should not expect that the world will hate Jesus but will love us. If we follow Jesus we are His students, His slaves, His family members and we will be treated as He is treated. We will be maligned as He is maligned.

The goal of a disciple is to "become like his teacher," and the slave wants to become "like his master." The job of a teacher is to impart their knowledge and/or skill to their students, and the purpose of the student is to learn that knowledge and skill. When you take piano lessons, you want to learn to play the piano like your teacher, and it takes time and practice. As we follow Jesus our desire is to become like Him. We want to learn to speak as He speaks, to act as He acts, to think as He thinks. If this is not our desire, then we probably are not really His students.

Then Jesus says, "If they have called the head of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign the members of his household!" The name "Beelzebul" is a transliteration of the Greek word in the text here. Robertson's Word Pictures says of this word,

Beelzebub (beezeboul according to B, beelzeboul by most Greek MSS., beelzeboub by many non-Greek MSS.). The etymology of the word is also unknown, whether "lord of a dwelling" with a pun on "the master of the house" (*oikodespotēn*) or "lord of flies" or "lord of dung" or "lord of idolatrous sacrifices." It is evidently a term of reproach. "An opprobrious epithet; exact form of the word and meaning of the name have given more trouble to commentators than it is all worth" (Bruce).

From the encounter with the Pharisees in Matthew 12:24-32 we learn that the Pharisees used the name "Beelzebul" to designate "the ruler of the demons" (12:24). In His reply, Jesus

says, "If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself; how then will his kingdom stand? If I by Beelzebul cast out demons, by whom do your sons cast them out? For this reason they will be your judges" (12:26-27). The name "Beelzebul," then, was a designation for Satan. To say that Jesus was the embodiment of Satan was the ultimate blasphemy. If the opponents say such things about Him, they will say even worse things about those who follow Him!

The message of verses 26 through 31 is "do not fear" (verses 26, 28 and 31). First He says, "Therefore do not fear them, for there is nothing concealed that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. What I tell you in the darkness, speak in the light; and what you hear whispered in your ear, proclaim upon the housetops." When Jesus says, "there is nothing concealed that will not be revealed," the Greek word for "concealed" is *kaluptō*, and the word for "revealed" is *apokaluptō*. The word *kaluptō* means "to cover," and *apokaluptō* means "to uncover." There is nothing that has been covered up or hidden that will not be uncovered and revealed. (By the way, the word "apocalypse" comes from *apokaluptō*.) Similarly, there is nothing "hidden" or secret that will not become known. Everything that has been covered up will be uncovered, and everything that has been secret will become known. I think verse 27 builds on verse 26. It is the things that have been "concealed" and "hidden" that He will tell them about. The disciples are to speak and to proclaim what He tells them. They will uncover the covered and make known the secret things.

The big question here I think is, what are the concealed and hidden things that will be revealed? Is Jesus talking about the secret things of God that are revealed in the gospel and the message of Christ, or is He talking about the secrets of men and their depravity that they have concealed from others? Paul wrote about how his ministry involved revealing the truth of God that had been hidden in the past. In Ephesians 3:8-10 he says, "To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ, and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things; so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places." In Colossians 1:25-27 he says, "Of this church I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit, so that I might fully carry out the preaching of the word of God, that is, the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints, to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory." In the preaching of the gospel of Christ the "manifold wisdom of God" has been made known, and the mystery of "Christ in you, the hope of glory" has been manifested. In what He says to His servants, Jesus discloses to the world the things that were hidden in the past.

On the other hand, Paul says in Romans 2:16 that there will be a day when, in accordance with the gospel, "God will judge the secrets of men through Jesus Christ." The secrets of men will be revealed in the day of judgment. But before that, there can be times when the secrets of individual unbelievers might be revealed to the servants of Christ. Paul writes about the experience of an unbeliever amidst believers in 1 Corinthians 14:24-25, "But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an ungifted man enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all; the secrets of his heart are disclosed; and so he will fall on his face and worship God, declaring that God is certainly among you." The prophetic gift in the church can involve the disclosure of the secrets of people's hearts. I think this is most likely the thing that Jesus is talking about here, given the context. He had just told them not to be worried about what to say when they were brought before courts and rulers, but to say what the Spirit gave them to say. We saw the example of Stephen who uncovered the secrets of the hearts of the men in the Sanhedrin. Peter knew the secrets of Ananias and Sapphira who tried to lie

about how much they had been paid for their property (Acts 5:1-11). Peter also knew the heart of Simon the magician in Acts 8:9-24, who offered money to the apostles to try to obtain the power to bestow the Holy Spirit on others. Peter said to him, "May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! You have no part or portion in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. Therefore repent of this wickedness of yours, and pray the Lord that, if possible, the intention of your heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bondage of iniquity" (Acts 8:20-23). The Lord knows the hearts of all people, and there are times He may disclose to His servants the things that individuals or groups of people have covered up and hidden about themselves so they might be turned around and brought to faith.

How does this relate to being unafraid? Why is the uncovering of hidden things a reason for setting aside fear? I think it's because the shameful, sinful things that people cover up in their lives are the things that cause them to oppose Jesus and His followers. John 3:19-21 explains this, "This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But he who practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God." People hate Jesus, who is the Light, because their deeds are evil. They will not come to Him because they are afraid their evil deeds will be exposed. And now Jesus says to His men that this is part of their ministry, exposing the hidden, evil deeds of people who hate them. If we show people that the real reason they hate Jesus and avoid Him is because of their own evil, perhaps their eyes will be opened to this truth and they will acknowledge it and repent. There is a chance that revealing their secrets will prompt them to turn and to believe. This is why we are to say these things without fear. The Lord wants to use us to open people's eyes!

So then, the responsibility of the disciples is to listen to what Jesus says to them and then speak it and proclaim it. They must not be afraid to do this, even if what He gives them to say is provocative and harsh. What He gives us to say may anger people who are not willing to hear it. We must recognize the truth of John 3:19-21, that it is a given that people have committed evil deeds that they want to conceal, and that is why they won't come to Christ. These are the things that followers of Jesus must confront. We should recognize it is a blessing to be confronted with and turned from our sins. Peter said to the Jews, "For you first, God raised up His Servant and sent Him to bless you by turning every one of you from your wicked ways" (Acts 3:26). This is our ministry as well.

For a second time Jesus tells the disciples not to fear in verse 28, "Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." Their opponents have the ability to kill the body, but not the soul. Their power, ability and authority is limited to the physical. The one they should fear is God, who has the ability to destroy both soul and body. He contrasts here man's ability to kill with God's ability to destroy. The Greek word translated "destroy" is *apollumi*, "to destroy, destroy utterly" (New American Standard Exhaustive Concordance). Based on other passages on this subject, I don't believe that Jesus is talking here about annihilation, that people cease to exist when God casts them into hell, but about eternal punishment in the place of "outer darkness" where there is "weeping and gnashing of teeth" (see Matthew 8:12, 13:42, 13:50, 22:13, 24:51 and 25:30). God has power over both soul and body. He is not limited as we are.

The fear of the Lord is crucial. Job said, "And to man He said, 'Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding'" (Job 28:28). Proverbs 8:13 says, "The fear of the LORD is to hate evil; Pride and arrogance and the evil way And the perverted mouth, I hate." If we do not fear the Lord we are not wise, and the fear of the Lord

will turn us from evil. So Jesus urges upon us the fear of the Lord, a proper respect for His power, authority and judgment. If we fall into the hands of men they may kill us, but if we fall into God's hands, which no one can avoid, we may be destroyed eternally in hell!

The third time Jesus tells them not to fear in verse 31 revolves around the value of sparrows. He talks about sparrows to show that though they are almost worthless to men, the heavenly Father cares about them. At that time they could get two sparrows for a cent. The word for "cent" in the Greek is *assarion*, a coin worth one tenth of a drachma. The Father is mindful of even the smallest birds, and they do not fall apart from Him. A single sparrow will not fall to the ground without the Father's awareness and consent. If this is true, how much more is it true that we will not face any difficulty or misfortune apart from the Father! Jesus says, "But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. God counts and is aware of every individual hair on our heads. We lose them and think nothing of it, but God tracks them and is aware of them. Paul reassured those with him on the ship facing the storm in the Mediterranean sea, "Not a hair from the head of any of you will perish" (Acts 27:34). We don't care much about our individual hairs, as we don't care much about sparrows, but the Father cares even about these little things. And so Jesus says, "So do not fear; you are more valuable than many sparrows." Jesus is still talking about the fear of men and what they might do to us. The Father doesn't let a hair of our head fall apart from His will and knowledge. The knowledge that God values us and watches over us is a key to dealing with the fear of men.

Jesus says in verses 32-33, "Therefore everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven." There are two options when it comes to Christ, to confess Him or to deny Him. The Greek phrase in verse 32 says literally, "confess in Me." Vincent's Word Studies says:

A peculiar but very significant expression. Lit., "Confess in me." The idea is that of confessing Christ out of a state of oneness with him. "Abide in me, and being in me, confess me." It implies identification of the confessor with the confessed, and thus takes confession out of the category of mere formal or verbal acknowledgment. "Not every one that saith unto me, ' Lord! Lord!' shall enter into the kingdom of heaven." The true confessor of Christ is one whose faith rests in him. Observe that this gives great force to the corresponding clause, in which Christ places himself in a similar relation with those whom he confesses. "I will confess in him." It shall be as if I spoke abiding in him. "I in them and thou in me, that they may be perfected into one, and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them as thou hast loved me" (John 17:23).

To confess Christ before men, then, is not just to affirm Him as the Son of God and the Messiah, but to say that we belong to Him, to say that He is our Lord and we are His servants, that we own Him as Lord and He owns us. It is to say that we abide in Him and He in us. We trust in Him and know Him and therefore confess Him, or we do not trust in Him, do not know Him and therefore deny Him.

The one who "confesses in Him" will also be confessed by Him before the Father in heaven. The one who says before men, "Yes, Jesus Christ is My Lord" will hear Jesus say to the Father, "Yes, this is one of mine."

When I think of people denying Christ before men I think of Peter. We will get to the story in chapter 26. Jesus warned Peter that he would deny Him three times before a rooster would crow. Peter vehemently insisted that he would not deny Jesus, but that he would even die with Him. Nevertheless Peter did deny Jesus, even with an oath (Matthew 26:69-75). When

the rooster crowed Peter remembered what Jesus had said and he went out and wept bitterly. But this was not the end of the story for Peter. Jesus did not disown him and kick him out. Peter was not required to quit as an apostle of Christ. His faith did not fail and he turned around and once again confessed Christ. His failure was not permanent. Jesus did confess Peter before the Father. Peter denied Jesus in this instance because he was fearful of others. He was not as prepared as he thought he was to confess Christ and defend his faith. He was caught off guard and his fear prompted him to deny Jesus. An instance of denying Jesus out of fear will not cause us to be cast out of the kingdom, but if we turn back and renew our faith we will find courage to speak up for Him as Peter did.

The Jews thought, and still do think, that the mission of the Messiah is to establish peace on earth. Indeed, scripture does indicate that this is something He is to do. Isaiah 9:6-7, that famous passage that we hear at Christmas, says, "For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, On the throne of David and over his kingdom, To establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness From then on and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this." The Jews expected that the Messiah would come, would defeat their enemies, establish His kingdom, and bring about peace on earth. Since Jesus did not do these things, Jews in general do not believe that He is the Messiah. Even after the resurrection of Christ, the disciples were still anticipating this. In Acts 1:6 they asked, "Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?" When Jesus proclaimed that the kingdom was near, He was saying that the time for the rule of the Messiah was at hand. When He said this, the Jews naturally thought He meant that He intended to take over as king and defeat their enemies. But now Jesus says to the disciples, "Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword" (verse 34). These guys needed a shift in their thinking, and this statement was probably a shock to them. They needed to understand this, that Jesus did not come to end conflict between people, but to bring a sword. He had already told them about the hatred and persecution they would face because of His name in verses 21-25, even from family members. Now He explains more about this.

In verses 35 and 36 He says, "For I came to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man's enemies will be the members of his household." The Greek word translated "set against" is *dichazō*, "to cause a separation, to separate" (New American Standard Exhaustive Concordance) and "to cut into two parts, cleave asunder, sever" (Thayer's Greek Definitions). Because of their commitment to Christ, the relationships between the disciples and their closest family members will be severed. A man's family members will become his enemies, his foes. Jesus here is quoting from Micah 7:6. Starting at Micah 7:5 the passage says, "Do not trust in a neighbor; Do not have confidence in a friend. From her who lies in your bosom Guard your lips. For son treats father contemptuously, Daughter rises up against her mother, Daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; A man's enemies are the men of his own household." Those who follow Jesus should not expect that family members will also follow Him. We must be ready to face opposition even from parents and siblings and in laws. Often family members will not applaud our commitment to Christ, but will oppose it. Even the members of Jesus' family said of Him at one point, "He has lost His senses" (Mark 3:21).

Then He says, "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who has found his life will lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake will find it" (verses 37-39). Here again we see Jesus use this

word “worthy” (*axios*) three times. We’ve already seen it in verses 10, 11 and 13. The word translated “more than” is the Greek word *huper* (our word “hyper”) and means over, beyond or above. If we love father or mother above Jesus we are not worthy of Him. If we love son or daughter above Jesus we are not worthy of Him. He’s not saying that we don’t love our family members, but that if we exalt them above Jesus we are not worthy of Him. He is always to take first place above everyone else. This is not a new idea. The first commandment is “You shall have no other gods before Me” (Exodus 20:3). The Hebrew word for “before” also means “above” or “over.” Yahweh kicked off the ten commandments with this same requirement, that He must come first above everyone else in our lives. Jesus is making a claim to this same place in our lives if we want to follow Him. If we put others in this place we are not worthy of Him. If pleasing family members is more important to us than pleasing Jesus, we are not worthy of Him. If the will of father, mother, sister, brother, son or daughter is of a higher priority than the will of Jesus, then we are not worthy of Him and will not really be able to follow Him. There will be times when saying “yes” to Jesus will mean saying “no” to others we love.

Not only is one not worthy of Jesus if he loves family members more than the Lord, but he is also unworthy if he doesn’t take up his cross and follow after Him. We must remember that at this point Jesus had not yet literally taken up His own cross. He had not yet been betrayed and arrested. He had not yet been required to carry His cross to the place He would be crucified. I think the disciples knew what He meant by this. They knew how the Romans executed the worst of criminals. They knew the condemned men were required to carry their own crosses to the place of execution. Jesus knew that He would carry His cross. He knew that He would be executed like a common criminal. He knew that He was going to the cross, that this was His path, so He told His men that they must do the same. They must also take up their own crosses and follow Him. He elaborated on what this means in verse 39. It means they must lose their lives for His sake. Jesus repeated this in Matthew 16:24-26, “Then Jesus said to His disciples, ‘If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?’” Being worthy of Jesus and following Him means not only saying “no” to close family members, but even saying “no” to self as well. If we try to protect and preserve our own lives as our most precious possession, we will end up losing our lives. But if we say no to self and give up our lives for the sake of serving Jesus, we will find true life in Him.

There is a common interpretation about this idea of taking up one’s cross that we must dismiss as an error, and that is the idea that the “cross” we bear is some difficulty or hard situation we have to cope with in life. Some say that an illness or disability is a “cross” they’ve been given to bear. It might be a bad marriage or a troublesome relative. These are not the sorts of things Jesus is talking about. He is talking about willingly going to our own death for the sake of following Him. He is talking about laying down our lives so that we might live in Him. This is what He requires if we want to follow Him.

Jesus finished up His instructions by saying, “He who receives you receives Me, and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me. He who receives a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet’s reward; and he who receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man’s reward. And whoever in the name of a disciple gives to one of these little ones even a cup of cold water to drink, truly I say to you, he shall not lose his reward” (verses 40-42). We touched on this passage already a bit when we looked at verse 14 where Jesus used this same word translated “receives.” In verse 14 He mentioned those who would not receive them nor listen to them, and now He talks about

those who do receive them. The Greek word for “receives” is *dechomai*, to receive, accept, welcome, “to take with the hand” ([Thayer](#)). In verse 40 the present tense participle “receiving” is followed by the present tense active verb “receives.” We might translate it, “He who is receiving you receives Me, and he who is receiving Me receives Him who sent Me.” As the disciples go out representing Christ, they will be welcomed or opposed as Christ Himself. Those who welcome them welcome Jesus, and those who welcome Jesus welcome the Father as well.

There are rewards for those who will receive them. There is another word for “receives” in verse 41. When He says, “He who receives a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet’s reward,” the first word for “receives” is *dechomai*, and the second word translated “receive” is *lambanō*, to take or lay hold of something. The one who welcomes a prophet in the name of a prophet will in the future take hold of the reward of a prophet. He will receive the pay of a prophet. The one who receives a prophet will be compensated as if he is also a prophet. When we welcome those who work and speak for the Lord, we will be paid as if we worked alongside them. The same is true for welcoming “the righteous man.”

What does it mean to “receive a prophet in the name of a prophet,” or “a righteous man in the name of a righteous man”? I think the English Standard Version gives the sense of it, “The one who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet’s reward, and the one who receives a righteous person because he is a righteous person will receive a righteous person’s reward.” The one who receives the prophet recognizes that the person is a prophet and in that name welcomes him as such. He is happy and considers it a privilege to host a prophet! When we welcome the prophet and the righteous man because of their status as prophets or righteous men we become partners with them and help enable their ministry. We will be rewarded as one of them! There is a reward for helping support those who minister in the name of the Lord. One may not be a prophet, but if we help a prophet we may receive a prophet’s reward.

Whoever even gives a cold drink to a little one in the name of a disciple will not lose his reward (verse 42). Mark 9:41 has a similar saying, “For whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because of your name as followers of Christ, truly I say to you, he will not lose his reward.” The Greek word for “little ones” is *mikros*, meaning small, little, insignificant. Our word “micro” comes from this word. Jesus uses the word to refer to children who believe in Him in Matthew 18:6. The [Jamieson Fausset Brown](#) commentary makes a great observation about this passage, “There is here a descending climax - ‘a prophet,’ ‘a righteous man,’ ‘a little one’; signifying that however low we come down in our services to those that are Christ’s, all that is done for His sake, and that bears the stamp of love to His blessed name, shall be divinely appreciated and owned and rewarded.” When we give even the simplest help to the servants of Christ because they are servants of Christ, we will not lose our reward. This is true not just for the well known and more famous disciples, but also for the lowest and least. We tend to pay more attention to those we think are more significant people, but the Lord is mindful when we minister to the smallest among us.

#### Matthew 11:1-6

When Jesus had finished giving instructions to His twelve disciples, He departed from there to teach and preach in their cities.

2 Now when John, while imprisoned, heard of the works of Christ, he sent word by his disciples 3 and said to Him, "Are You the Expected One, or shall we look for someone else?"  
4 Jesus answered and said to them, "Go and report to John what you hear and see: 5 the BLIND RECEIVE SIGHT and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, the



dead are raised up, and the POOR HAVE THE GOSPEL PREACHED TO THEM. 6 "And blessed is he who does not take offense at Me."

I'm not sure why someone decided that verse one should begin a new chapter, since it obviously should be the last verse of chapter 10, but here it is. We should remember that things like chapter breaks are not necessarily inspired by God. Jesus completed giving the disciples their instructions, He left to preach and teach in their cities. I presume that he means the cities of Galilee. It's interesting that healing is not mentioned here. His primary work was preaching and teaching.

Matthew does not tell us that Jesus sent out the twelve on their own mission of preaching and teaching, but Luke does in Luke 9:1-6. Luke's version of the instructions is much more abbreviated than Matthew's. Luke 9:2 says, "And He sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to perform healing." Verses 3 through 5 contain the instructions, and then Luke 9:6 says, "Departing, they began going throughout the villages, preaching the gospel and healing everywhere." Apparently as the disciples went out, Jesus also went out to preach and teach in a number of cities on His own.

While in prison John the baptist heard about "the works of Christ." Luke 7:18 tells us that John's disciples told him about what Jesus was doing. Matthew emphasizes that he heard about the works being done by Christ, by the Messiah. Jesus is the Messiah, but for some reason John was having doubts. He sent his disciples to Jesus and asked, "Are You the Expected One, or shall we look for someone else?" The word translated "Expected One" is *erchomai*, meaning "to come." Here it is a present active participle, *erchomenos*, "the coming one." The International Standard Version is probably more accurate, "Are you the Coming One, or should we wait for someone else?" The Jews were all waiting with great anticipation for the coming of the promised Messiah, the prophet who would be like Moses (Deut. 18:15-19), the son of David (2 Samuel 7:12-16; Isaiah 9:7), the One who would be the Son of God (Psalm 2), the one prophesied by Daniel (Daniel 9:25-27).

John had pointed to Jesus as the Messiah. He had said, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! This is He on behalf of whom I said, 'After me comes a Man who has a higher rank than I for He existed before me.' I did not recognize Him, but so that He might be manifested to Israel, I came baptizing in water." John testified saying, "I have seen the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven, and He remained upon Him. I did not recognize Him, but He who sent me to baptize in water said to me, 'He upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him, this is the One who baptizes in the Holy Spirit.' I myself have seen, and have testified that this is the Son of God" (John 1:29-34). John had baptized Jesus and had heard the voice of the Father say, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased" (Matthew 3:17). We must wonder how John went from such strong confidence that Jesus was the Messiah to wondering in prison whether he had been mistaken. It seems tied to this phrase, "when John...heard of the works of Christ." When he heard the specifics of what Jesus was doing, he began to wonder if Jesus really was the Christ. Apparently Jesus was not doing the things that John thought He would do. We should recall John's words from chapter 3:11-12, "As for me, I baptize you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not fit to remove His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clear His threshing floor; and He will gather His wheat into the barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire." Instead of a ministry of judgment and wrath, Jesus was carrying out a ministry of compassion and grace. He was preaching, teaching and healing, but not winnowing and burning. John's credibility was on the line. It appeared that the

threshing floor was not being cleared and the chaff was not being burned. The unfruitful trees were not being cut down and thrown into the fire. These things will happen, of course, and Jesus clearly taught that they would happen, but it wasn't yet time for it. It wasn't yet time for Jesus to defeat the enemies of Israel and establish His rule on earth, as we have already noted. So even John began to have doubts.

God's just judgment will come, but we have to wait for it. Now is the day of God's grace. Now is the time that God is offering salvation to all through the gospel. Now is the time of God's patience as He gives us all the opportunity to repent and believe in Jesus. Peter explained in 2 Peter 3:3-13:

3 Know this first of all, that in the last days mockers will come with their mocking, following after their own lusts, 4 and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation." 5 For when they maintain this, it escapes their notice that by the word of God the heavens existed long ago and the earth was formed out of water and by water, 6 through which the world at that time was destroyed, being flooded with water. 7 But by His word the present heavens and earth are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men. 8 But do not let this one fact escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day. 9 The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance. 10 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up. 11 Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, 12 looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat! 13 But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells.

Jesus answered by telling John's disciples that they should report what they had heard and seen, that the "blind receive sight and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them." Luke's account of this says, "At that very time He cured many people of diseases and afflictions and evil spirits; and He gave sight to many who were blind" (Luke 7:21). While John's disciples were there He healed many and demonstrated His power and authority as Messiah. He let them see what He was doing. Probably Jesus is alluding to a couple of prophetic texts about His ministry. Isaiah 35:4-6 says, "Say to those with anxious heart, 'Take courage, fear not. Behold, your God will come with vengeance; The recompense of God will come, But He will save you.' Then the eyes of the blind will be opened And the ears of the deaf will be unstopped. Then the lame will leap like a deer, And the tongue of the mute will shout for joy." Yes, the Lord was coming with vengeance and recompense, but also with a ministry of healing for the blind, the deaf, the lame and the mute. Jesus was actively fulfilling this role of healing and salvation. The second passage is Isaiah 61:1-2a, which He Himself quoted when He was in the synagogue in Nazareth in Luke 4:16-19, "The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, Because the LORD has anointed me To bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to captives And freedom to prisoners; To proclaim the favorable year of the LORD." It's interesting that when Jesus read this in the synagogue, He stopped with "To proclaim the favorable year of the Lord" and did not

continue. The next phrase in verse 2 in Isaiah 61 says, "And the day of vengeance of our God." The day of God's favor had come, but the day of God's vengeance was and is still future. Jesus said that He had not come to judge the world but to save the world (John 3:17). There will be a day of judgment, but now is the day of salvation. I think John needed a reminder of this as he languished in prison. He needed to understand that there would be a day of grace and salvation, and later a day of judgment and wrath.

After telling John of what they had seen and heard, his disciples were to relay the message, "And blessed is he who does not take offense at Me." To "take offense" is *skandalizō*, to cause to stumble. We saw this word previously in Matthew 5:29 and 30 when Jesus talked about things that cause us to "stumble." The World English Bible has, "Blessed is he who finds no occasion for stumbling in me." John had been sure about Jesus being the Messiah, but now he was in danger of stumbling because of his circumstances and because Jesus wasn't doing as he had expected. He was doubting whether Jesus really was the Messiah. If John the baptist had doubts, we should not consider it odd if we have doubts also. When we find ourselves in the midst of difficult trials, this will be a temptation. Sometimes Jesus will let us down and disappoint us, as He did when Lazarus died and Martha and Mary both said to Him, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died" (John 11:21 and 32). This is why James refers to trials as "the testing of your faith" (James 1:2-3). Our confidence in Christ is tested when we go through difficulties, and we are tempted to think that Jesus has abandoned us and does not care for us. We are tempted to think that He is not listening or that He is powerless to help. Especially in times of facing difficult trials we need to keep from stumbling and maintain our faith in Christ.

#### Matthew 11:7-19

As these men were going away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John, "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? 8 "But what did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Those who wear soft clothing are in kings' palaces! 9 "But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and one who is more than a prophet. 10 "This is the one about whom it is written, 'BEHOLD, I SEND MY MESSENGER AHEAD OF YOU, WHO WILL PREPARE YOUR WAY BEFORE YOU.' 11 "Truly I say to you, among those born of women there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist! Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. 12 "From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and violent men take it by force. 13 "For all the prophets and the Law prophesied until John. 14 "And if you are willing to accept it, John himself is Elijah who was to come. 15 "He who has ears to hear, let him hear. 16 "But to what shall I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the market places, who call out to the other children, 17 and say, 'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn.' 18 "For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon!' 19 "The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Behold, a gluttonous man and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds."

When the disciples of John had left, Jesus began to speak to the crowds around Him about John. They had just heard Him remind John that healing and preaching to the poor was part of His mission, and had heard Him rebuke John for questioning what he knew to be true about Jesus. Now Jesus wanted them to understand just who John was and how great he really was. I think He did not want them to think ill of John.

Three times Jesus asks the rhetorical question, "What did you to out to see?" in verses 7-

9. They had gone out into the wilderness to see John, to hear him, and to be baptized by him in the Jordan. The first two times He asks the question He suggests absurd answers, "Did you go out to see a reed shaken by the wind?" No, they all knew that John was no reed shaken by the wind. He was a man who could not be shaken by the winds of fashion and popular opinion. He was a man who was not afraid to confront the hypocrites and powerful. Though he was having doubts about Jesus, he was no fragile reed agitated by the winds. Then Jesus asked, "Did you go out to see a man dressed in soft clothing?" No, indeed! We are told in Mark 1:6 that "John was clothed with camel's hair and wore a leather belt around his waist." The word for "soft" here is *malakos*, which is translated "effeminate" in 1 Corinthians 6:9. Jesus points out that those who wear soft clothing are those who live in king's palaces, they are those who live lives of ease and pleasure. They are not the hard-working common man. They had gone out to see a man who was neither indecisive nor soft.

Having used humorous misdirection to get them thinking, Jesus in verse 9 reveals the answer that the crowds would have given. They went out to see a prophet. Jesus affirms that John was a prophet, but then says that he was more than a prophet. He was a prophet who himself fulfilled a specific prophecy from Malachi 3:1 and Isaiah 40:3-5. John was the messenger sent ahead of Jesus to prepare the way for Him. John himself knew that he was sent to fulfill this role. In John 1:19-22 the priests and Levites sent men from Jerusalem to ask John who he was. John replied, "I am a voice of one crying in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as Isaiah the prophet said" (John 1:23). John had a unique role that no other prophet ever had, the herald of Jesus Christ.

Jesus goes on to exalt John even more in verse 11 when He says that John was the greatest man who had ever been born of women up to that point! John was greater than Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, David and all of the Old Testament prophets and great men. And yet Jesus goes on to say, "the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he." How can it be that the least or smallest person in the kingdom of heaven is greater (or larger) than John? What does Jesus mean by this? Is He saying that John is outside the kingdom of heaven? He said back in 5:19, "Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven." Surely someone who annuls one of God's commandments and advocates that others do the same is not still a greater person than John? This is a difficult statement to understand.

I think the context here is important in answering these questions. Jesus depicts John as a man who was the end of an era, the pre-kingdom era. In verse 12 He mentions "the days of John the Baptist" as if He is speaking of a time that is past. Then He says in verse 13, "For all the prophets and the Law prophesied until John." He's saying, "This is the way things were in the past until John came on the scene." The Law and the prophets pointed forward to Christ, the King and His kingdom. John came on the scene as the immediate forerunner of Christ and said, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand!" and then testified that Jesus was the King. He said that the kingdom had arrived and that Jesus was the King. Once he had carried out this purpose it was time for Jesus to "increase" and for John to "decrease" (John 3:30). John referred to himself as "the friend of the bridegroom" who "rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice" (John 3:29). While John was the friend of the groom, the church, those "in the kingdom" are the bride of Christ and are "members of His body" (see Ephesians 5:22-32). There is a relationship that all believers have with Christ that John did not have. John died before Christ went to the cross and rose from the dead and ascended into heaven and poured out the Holy Spirit on His followers. He was not among those who on Pentecost received the Holy Spirit and spoke in other languages of the glory of God. The disciples

received His promise that He would send the Holy Spirit to them and that He would be in them and He and the Father would make their abode with them (John 14:16-18, 20, 23). The death, resurrection and ascension of Christ brought in a new covenant and a new, more intimate relationship with the Father, Son and Spirit for believers which John did not experience. I think this is why Jesus says that the least in the kingdom is greater than John. It is not that new covenant believers have more impact or influence than John. Rather, it is that we have a closer relationship with God than was possible for John or anyone before him. Of course now in glory with the Lord John enjoys all the blessings of the heavenly kingdom, but on earth the lowest new covenant believer is greater than John was in his earthly life.

In verse 12 we have another difficult statement, "From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and violent men take it by force." One would think that if any kingdom would be secure from violent attack, it would be the kingdom of heaven! One would think that it would be impossible for men to take the kingdom of heaven by force! Surely God's kingdom is secure and can't be seized by men! Certainly we don't enter into God's realm through a violent attack! Some translators interpret this as a reference to attempts at taking the kingdom. The Contemporary English Version says, "From the time of John the Baptist until now, violent people have been trying to take over the kingdom of heaven by force." The Good News Bible says, "From the time John preached his message until this very day the Kingdom of heaven has suffered violent attacks, and violent men try to seize it." I guess the implication is that these attempts at taking the kingdom through violence will fail. The translators of the International Standard Version take a different view, "From the days of John the Baptist until the present, the kingdom from heaven has been forcefully advancing, and violent people have been attacking it."

To deal with this saying I think we first need to understand the verb *biazō*, "suffers violence" and the noun *biastēs*, "violent men." Thayer's Greek Definitions says *biazō* means "to use force, to apply force," and *biastēs* means "strong, forceful, using force, violent." Most translators seem to understand the verb as passive, "suffers violence," that the violence or force is something that the kingdom is experiencing. It is violence applied to the kingdom. A.T. Robertson says that the verb could be in the middle voice:

Suffereth violence (*biazetai*). This verb occurs only here and in Luk\_16:16 in the N.T. It seems to be middle in Luke and Deissmann (Bible Studies, p. 258) quotes an inscription "where biazomai is without doubt reflexive and absolute" as in Luk\_16:16. But there are numerous papyri examples where it is passive (Moulton and Milligan, Vocabulary, etc.) so that "there seems little that promises decisive help for the difficult Logion of Mat\_11:12; Luk\_16:16." So then in Mat\_11:12 the form can be either middle or passive and either makes sense, though a different sense. The passive idea is that the kingdom is forced, is stormed, is taken by men of violence like "men of violence take it by force" (*biastai harpazousin autēn*) or seize it like a conquered city. The middle voice may mean "experiences violence" or "forces its way" like a rushing mighty wind (so Zahn holds). These difficult words of Jesus mean that the preaching of John "had led to a violent and impetuous thronging to gather round Jesus and his disciples" (Hort, Judaistic Christianity, p. 26). (Robertson's Word Pictures)

So then, if the verb is in the middle voice, it could be translated as the ISV has it, "the kingdom from heaven has been forcefully advancing." The majority view, though, appears to take this as a passive verb, that violence is being inflicted on the kingdom.

Another thing to notice here is the time frame that Jesus is talking about. He says, "From the days of John the Baptist until now." He is not talking about the time before John the

Baptist. This violence, this force, began with the ministry of John and was continuing during the ministry of Jesus. John announced the coming of the kingdom and pointed to Jesus as the King, and so the opponents of the kingdom and of the King went into action. In the parallel passage to this one in Luke (Luke 7:24-35), he says, "But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected God's purpose for themselves, not having been baptized by John." These men who were in authority rejected the message of John and even saw the kingdom of God as a threat to their position. They consistently opposed both John and Jesus. When the chief priests and elders challenged Jesus and asked Him about His authority, Jesus said, "I will also ask you one thing, which if you tell Me, I will also tell you by what authority I do these things. The baptism of John was from what source, from heaven or from men?" This put them into a difficult position, and they debated among themselves saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' He will say to us, 'Then why did you not believe him?' But if we say, 'From men,' we fear the people; for they all regard John as a prophet." So they said, "We do not know" (Matthew 21:23-27). It was their fear of the people that often restrained them from seizing Jesus and putting Him to death. We see this violent intent in several places in the gospels. In His hometown of Nazareth the people tried to seize Him and throw Him off a cliff (Luke 4:28-29). In His parable about the tenants in the vineyard, Jesus pointed to the plan of the tenants to kill the son of the owner and seize the property (Matthew 21:33-44). In Matthew 26:3-5, as the Passover was approaching, it says, "Then the chief priests and the elders of the people were gathered together in the court of the high priest, named Caiaphas; and they plotted together to seize Jesus by stealth and kill Him. But they were saying, 'Not during the festival, otherwise a riot might occur among the people.'" In John 7 when Jesus went to the Feast of Booths in Jerusalem it says clearly that the Jews were "seeking to kill Him" (verses 1, 19-20 and 25). The chief priests and Pharisees even sent officers to seize Him (verses 32, 44 and 45). In John 10 as Jesus spoke with the Jews they took up stones to stone Him (verse 31) and tried to seize Him, but He "eluded their grasp" (verse 39). John 11:45-53 tells us of the plot by the chief priests, Pharisees and Caiaphas to kill Jesus. This was just after Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead, and they feared that all the people were going to believe in Jesus and the Romans would come and "take away both our place and our nation" (John 11:48). And then of course Jesus was betrayed by Judas, arrested by the Jewish authorities, condemned and crucified. Both John and Jesus suffered violence by violent men who wanted to overthrow them and take the kingdom for themselves. I think this is what Jesus means by this saying. Violence against Jesus is violence against the King and His kingdom.

Jesus provides more of an explanation in verses 13 and 14, "For all the prophets and the Law prophesied until John. And if you are willing to accept it, John himself is Elijah who was to come." John was a turning point. The prophets and the Law pointed forward to the coming King and His kingdom, and then John came along as the herald of the King. I have already commented on the connection between John and Elijah in the notes on Matthew 3:1-12, so I probably don't need to add anything to that here. The opponents were probably not willing to accept the idea that John was the "Elijah" who was to come before the Lord in order to fulfill the prophecy in Malachi 4:5-6, but Jesus says that this is the case. The angel had said to Zacharias, the father of John that John would go before the Lord "in the spirit and power of Elijah." So Malachi's prophesy has been fulfilled in John. The Jews need no longer look for the coming of Elijah to herald the coming of the King. The King has come!

It appears that verse 15 was a common saying of Jesus, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." It occurs six times in the gospels. Accepting that John was the "Elijah" who was to come was a step toward faith in Jesus as the King of the kingdom. Recognizing who John was would lead to a recognition of Christ. God gave us ears and we must use them to hear what the Lord has to say.

In verses 16-19 Jesus asks and answers the question, "To what shall I compare this generation?" He's asking, "What is this generation like? How do I picture it?" His answer is that they are like children playing in the marketplace, calling out to other children, "We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn." Essentially He depicts these children as saying, "You don't play as we expect you to play!" They tried to pretend they were at a wedding or celebration, and the other kids wouldn't play. They tried to pretend they were mourning at a funeral, but the other kids wouldn't play along with that either. I remember when I was a child playing with friends there would at times be disputes over what games we were going to play and how those games were to be played, who was going to be on what team, whether a pitch was a ball or strike, whether someone had been "tagged" and was "it" and so forth. It's common for children to have complaints against one another when they play together and to say, "I said it should be this way and you wouldn't cooperate!" Jesus says that the leaders of the Jews were behaving in this same way.

Jesus explains further in verses 18 and 19, "For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon!' The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Behold, a gluttonous man and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds." The Jewish leaders "played the flute" for John, but he wouldn't dance. He was too austere, too much of an oddball ascetic, and so they rejected him and said he was controlled by a demon. The Jews "sang a dirge" for Jesus, but He wouldn't mourn and weep. Jesus was enjoying life with people. He was eating and drinking and attending weddings and having dinner with friends. The Jews criticized Jesus as "a gluttonous man and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!" The word for "drunkard" is *oinopotēs*, a wine drinker. Jesus was not an austere ascetic like John was. He did not live a rough life in the wilderness, and the Jews characterized Him as a partier and profligate. There was no satisfying these people. Those who opposed them were going to find fault with John and Jesus no matter what they did. This is what the scribes, Pharisees and chief priests did, they looked for faults in others.

Jesus concludes, "Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds." Jesus personifies wisdom as a female entity, but is not talking about the Greek goddess Sophia. He is picking up the picture of wisdom from Proverbs 8, who calls to men to come to her for understanding. The word translated "vindicated" is *dikaioō*, which occurs often in the New Testament and is usually translated "justify" or "justified." It means "to show to be righteous, declare righteous" (New American Standard Exhaustive Concordance). A.T. Robertson comments, "God's wisdom has planned the different conduct of both John and Jesus. He does not wish all to be just alike in everything." The behavior of both John and Jesus was right and wise. John was wise to be an ascetic, and Jesus was wise to enjoy life with people and to reach out to the tax collectors and sinners. Their message about the kingdom was the same and their deeds were appropriate. It was unjust for their critics to condemn them. Their behavior was right in God's sight.

We seem to live in an age and generation like this today. People of all viewpoints are expecting others to dance to their music and then condemning them when they don't. This is true for people on the political right and left. We are too slow to listen and too quick to condemn. We are too quick to label others unfairly and we tend to jump to conclusions about the character of others when they disagree with us. We try to rationalize and defend our position by smearing the other side of things. Certainly there is objective truth that God has revealed, and real right and wrong does exist. We must not give in to the idea that we all can create our own version of truth that is just as valid as every other version. We must call people to the truth of Christ and His kingdom. But on many issues we need humility to try to see if there is wisdom in those who oppose us.

### Matthew 11:20-24

Then He began to denounce the cities in which most of His miracles were done, because they did not repent. 21 "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles had occurred in Tyre and Sidon which occurred in you, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. 22 "Nevertheless I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you. 23 "And you, Capernaum, will not be exalted to heaven, will you? You will descend to Hades; for if the miracles had occurred in Sodom which occurred in you, it would have remained to this day. 24 "Nevertheless I say to you that it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for you."

Jesus had some harsh words for the cities of the Galilee area where most of His miracles were done. He started to denounce them. The word is also translated "upbraid" in the KJV and "reproach" in the Lexham English Bible and the older version of the New American Standard. The word for "miracles" is *dunamis*, power. His miracles were demonstrations of His power and authority and were meant to help people understand who He is. He denounced these cities because they didn't repent. These cities did not change their minds and believe in Him. They did not receive Him as the Messiah. They should have, given that they saw His miracles, but they did not.

This can't mean that everyone in these cities had rejected Him. We are told that Philip, Andrew and Peter were from Bethsaida (John 1:44). What this must mean is that most of the people in these cities had refused to believe. We tend to think of repentance as an individual thing, but it is also a corporate, collective thing. These cities should have repented as communities, as did the city of Nineveh when Jonah preached there (see Jonah chapter 3). There should have been repentance from the top down as these people saw these miracles. They should have fallen on their faces and confessed that Jesus is Lord.

The cities denounced by Jesus were Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum. He denounced them by saying "Woe to you!" The Contemporary English Version has, "You people of Chorazin are in for trouble! You people of Bethsaida are in for trouble too!" When we talk about people facing "woes," we mean they are facing troubles and difficulties. It's an expression of grief. Jesus is saying that grief will be coming upon these cities. They will face grave consequences because of their unbelief.

In other cities things would have been different. If Tyre and Sidon had been privileged to see the miracles of Christ, "they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes." If even the city of Sodom had witnessed His miracles, it would have "remained to this day" and not been destroyed. Even these wicked people in these Gentile cities would have repented if they had seen His power. Jesus knows how they would have responded given the same opportunity. The Galileans had the privilege of seeing Christ work His great deeds among them, but still they didn't repent. "Sackcloth and ashes" refers to the practice of the Jews and others when they were mourning, lamenting or fasting. There are 42 references to sackcloth in the Old Testament, and 6 references to "sackcloth and ashes." Jeremiah 6:26 says, "O daughter of my people, put on sackcloth And roll in ashes; Mourn as for an only son, A lamentation most bitter. For suddenly the destroyer Will come upon us." Jonah 3:6 tells us how the king of Nineveh reacted when he heard Jonah's message of doom, "When the word reached the king of Nineveh, he arose from his throne, laid aside his robe from him, covered himself with sackcloth and sat on the ashes." He went on to order that all the people of the city and even the animals should not eat or drink and should be covered with sackcloth and turn from their wicked ways and violence. The miracles of Jesus were clear evidence that the



King had arrived and that people needed to repent. Disaster was coming upon them because they would not repent.

Back in chapter 10, verses 14 and 15 we heard Jesus say, "Whoever does not receive you, nor heed your words, as you go out of that house or that city, shake the dust off your feet. Truly I say to you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city." Now He repeats this in verses 22 and 24. He says to Chorazin and Bethsaida, "Nevertheless I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you." To Capernaum He says, "Nevertheless I say to you that it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for you." One thing to note here is that as repentance can be a collective, community thing, so judgment will be a collective thing. We will be judged as individuals, certainly, but cities will be judged as well. People will be judged as community members.

Another thing to note is this idea of variable tolerance. Sometimes we talk about "pain tolerance," how much pain a person can endure before they can't take any more. Some people have a higher pain tolerance than others. Apparently in the day of judgment there will be greater pain for some than for others. The judgment will be more harsh for some communities than for others. None of the cities mentioned by Jesus here had repented. The Galilean cities of Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum had not repented. The Gentile cities of Tyre, Sidon and Sodom had not repented. But the Galilean cities had seen the miracles of Christ and the Gentile cities had not. The Jews had more revelation from the Lord than did the Gentiles, and so they bore more responsibility. They would not be "exalted to heaven," but would "descend to Hades," the place of the dead. The Galileans would be judged more harshly because they had seen the Lord and His works and had still refused to repent and believe in Him. Moreover, Jesus says that if the Gentile communities had seen His miracles, they would have repented. They will be judged, but it will be more tolerable for them because they did not know what the Galilean cities knew. The more revelation we've been privileged to receive from the Lord, the more responsible we are to act on that revelation, to repent and believe, to turn from our sin to the Lord, to put our confidence in the Lord. The more we have refused to listen and have turned away, the less tolerable will be the day of judgment for us.

Another obvious thing to notice here is that Jesus clearly teaches that there will be a "day of judgment." Though the Lord is compassionate, gracious, loving and forgiving, nevertheless "He will not leave the guilty unpunished" (see Exodus 34:6-7). God has "fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead" (Acts 17:31). It is not wise to ignore this truth and pretend that it isn't going to happen. The idea that the love of God negates the judgment and wrath of God is a satanic deception.

#### Matthew 11:25-30

At that time Jesus said, "I praise You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants. 26 "Yes, Father, for this way was well-pleasing in Your sight. 27 "All things have been handed over to Me by My Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him. 28 "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. 29 "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. 30 "For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."

The disciples went out on their short-term preaching and healing mission and were very

excited when they returned to Jesus. They said, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name" (Luke 10:17). Luke tells us that Jesus replied, "I was watching Satan fall from heaven like lightning. Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing will injure you. Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are recorded in heaven" (Luke 10:18-20). After this we find the words that Matthew records for us here.

When the disciples returned, Jesus uttered the prayer in verses 25 and 26. Luke says that He "rejoiced greatly in the Holy Spirit" as He said this. Jesus addresses the Father and calls Him, "Lord of heaven and earth." The Father is ultimate ruler over all. Then Jesus says a thing that to me is rather startling. He praises the Father for hiding "these things from the wise and intelligent" and for revealing them "to infants," and acknowledges that He was well-pleased to do this. The startling thing to me is that God would actually be pleased to hide truth from people. We would think that God would want to disclose the truth to everyone and have everyone come to a knowledge of Christ. But here Jesus says that God has hidden truth from the wise and intelligent. Probably Jesus is referring to the scribes, Pharisees and elders of the Jews, who looked down on Jesus and the apostles as "uneducated and untrained" (Acts 4:13). They, in their wisdom and intelligence, had refused to listen to John the Baptist and had refused to listen to Jesus and believe in Him. The Father had hidden the truth from them. Paul expands on this theme in 1 Corinthians 1:17-31:

17 For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not in cleverness of speech, so that the cross of Christ would not be made void. 18 For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. 19 For it is written, "I WILL DESTROY THE WISDOM OF THE WISE, AND THE CLEVERNESS OF THE CLEVER I WILL SET ASIDE." 20 Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? 21 For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. 22 For indeed Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom; 23 but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness, 24 but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. 25 Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. 26 For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; 27 but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, 28 and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, 29 so that no man may boast before God. 30 But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, 31 so that, just as it is written, "LET HIM WHO BOASTS, BOAST IN THE LORD."

To those who rely on their own wisdom and intelligence, the message of the cross of Christ is foolishness, it is nonsense. The world has not and will not come to know God through its wisdom. Paul in fact says that God chooses the foolish to shame the wise and the weak to shame the strong, and the things that are base, despised and of no account. His purpose is to "destroy the wisdom of the wise" and set aside "the cleverness of the clever." God actually opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble (James 4:6 and 1 Peter 5:5). So God in His wisdom hides the truth from those who fancy themselves as wise, intelligent,

educated and intellectual. We will not come to know the truth of Christ through an intellectual process. This is not to say that our faith is anti-intellectual, far from it! Our faith is based on objective truth and objective evidence. But what Jesus is saying here is that the true knowledge of God requires revelation, it requires that God reveal the truth to us.

The people to whom God reveals the truth are described as “infants.” The word Matthew uses is *nēpios*, an infant, a little child or perhaps someone who is “simple minded” (Strong’s). Those who are wise and intelligent do not receive the revelation of God, but those who are humble and simple do receive it. In 6:17, when Peter confessed that Jesus is “the Christ, the Son of the Living God,” Jesus said, “Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in Heaven.” Peter came to understand that Jesus was the Christ and the Son of God not because he was so bright that he figured it out on his own, but because the Father revealed the truth to him.

What is revealed is the knowledge of the Son and the Father (verse 27). Jesus makes the incredible claim that “All things have been handed over to Me by My Father.” At some point in the past, the Father handed everything over to the Son. This is similar to 28:18 where He says, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.” There is nothing in all creation aside from the Father that is not subject to Jesus Christ. “And,” He says, “no one knows the Son except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.” The word for “knows” is *epiginōskō*, “to become thoroughly acquainted with, to know thoroughly” (Thayer’s Greek Definitions). I like the International Standard Version translation, “All things have been entrusted to me by my Father. No one fully knows the Son except the Father, and no one fully knows the Father except the Son and the person to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.” The Father has full knowledge of the Son, and the Son has full knowledge of the Father. For us the true knowledge of the Father depends on revelation from the Son. The Son wills to reveal the Father to those who are “infants.” John says, in John 1:18, “No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him.” The true disclosure of the Father comes through, and only through, the Son. It is a grave mistake to think that Jesus Christ is irrelevant to our lives. He Himself is “the way, the truth and the life,” and He said, “no one comes to the Father but through Me” (John 14:6). If we want to know God the Father we must deal with Jesus Christ. He is the only way to know God.

Having said that He is the only one who can reveal the Father to us, Jesus then says, “Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.” He commands that those who are weary from laboring and are burdened with heavy loads should come to Him and He will give them rest. He’s not thinking of literal physical labor and weariness, because He says the rest He gives is “rest for your souls.” I believe He’s referring to the spiritual burdens imposed upon them by their leaders. The word translated “heavy-laden” is used one other time, in Luke 11:46, “Woe to you lawyers as well! For you weigh men down with burdens hard to bear, while you yourselves will not even touch the burdens with one of your fingers.” The scribes and Pharisees had laid heavy burdens on people involving obedience to the Law and also to all of the traditions, rules and regulations that they had added to the Law. The Pharisees who were in the church later on tried to add the same burden to Gentile believers, saying to them, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved” (Acts 15). Paul and Barnabas took issue with them in Antioch, and they went to Jerusalem to discuss the matter with the church. In the meeting the Pharisees said of the Gentile believers, “It is necessary to circumcise them and to direct them to observe the Law of Moses” (Acts 15:5). This was a crucial moment, because there was a great danger that the church of Christ might be split into Jewish and Gentile factions. They had to discern the answer to the question of what was necessary for salvation. Is it enough to believe in Christ

and receive salvation as a free gift of His grace through faith, or is it also necessary to be circumcised and obey the Law in order to be saved? This was not a trivial question.

Thankfully, Peter had the answer born of his experience in sharing the gospel with Cornelius the Roman centurion (Acts 10:1 – 11:18). Peter stood up and said, “Brethren, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles would hear the word of the gospel and believe. And God, who knows the heart, testified to them giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He also did to us; and He made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith. Now therefore why do you put God to the test by placing upon the neck of the disciples a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? But we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they also are” (Acts 15:7-11). The Gentiles had believed the good news about Jesus Christ, had been cleansed through faith and had been saved through the grace of the Lord and received the Holy Spirit, and Peter says, “We are saved the same way.” The Lord had shown Peter clearly that salvation was by grace through faith in Christ and not through circumcision and obedience to the Law. Obedience to the Law was “a yoke” that even the Jews had not been able to bear. It was too heavy and could not successfully be carried by anyone. No one can be saved by trying to obey the Law because of our innate sinfulness. Everyone always falls short of the perfection required by the Law.

When James and the elders of the church in Jerusalem wrote their letter to the Gentile believers, they said that they had “heard that some of our number to whom we gave no instruction have disturbed you with your words, unsettling your souls” (Acts 15:24). The souls of the Gentile believers had been disturbed or agitated and unsettled by the burden that these Pharisees had tried to place upon them. It is a heavy burden we can never carry when we think we must obey the Law of God completely in order to receive His favor and be saved.

Jesus invites those staggering under this impossible weight of the requirements of the Law to come to Him and find rest. Rest comes when we cease our labor. On the Sabbath we are supposed to cease from our work and rest. The idea of regular rest was a familiar one to the Jews, but the Sabbath law itself had become burdensome because of all the picky little requirements that had been added to it in order to define “work” down to the finest detail. Jesus gives real rest that isn’t burdensome.

Though Jesus gives rest for our souls, there is still a “yoke” and a “burden” involved in coming to Him. He says, “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.” A yoke is a wooden framework that allows two animals, typically oxen, to be joined together at the neck so that they can work together in plowing or doing other heavy work. It became a symbol of subjection and slavery. In Leviticus 26:13 the Lord says, “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt so that you would not be their slaves, and I broke the bars of your yoke and made you walk erect.” After the death of Solomon the people came to his son Rehoboam and said, “Your father made our yoke hard; now therefore lighten the hard service of your father and his heavy yoke which he put on us, and we will serve you” (1 Kings 12:4). They were no doubt thinking of the “yoke” of taxes that Solomon had placed upon them. This depicts a yoke as something undesirable that should be thrown off if possible. But Jesus now invites us to willingly take His yoke upon ourselves. He will be the teacher and we will be the student. To “take His yoke” means to come alongside of Him as His student. The yoke is His yoke, and He bears most of the weight of it. As we take it upon ourselves we will learn from Him; He will show us what to do and will train us.

We can have confidence in taking His yoke upon ourselves because Jesus is “gentle and humble in heart.” He is not a harsh, angry or arrogant teacher, but treats us gently and has a lowly attitude. In taking His yoke and learning from Him, we find rest for our souls. Rest is

what we discover as we learn from Him. If we think we are learning from Him but are finding agitation, disquiet, anxiety, uncertainty, confusion and so forth, we are not really learning from Him. If we find ourselves more burdened we are missing the lessons of being yoked with Him. He says, "My yoke is easy and My burden is light." The word for "easy" is *chrēstos*, "fit, fit for use, useful; manageable, mild, pleasant" (Thayer). His yoke is appropriate, manageable and not too heavy. Instead of making the load heavier, Jesus makes it lighter.

Trying to perfectly obey the Law in order to be saved is a weight too heavy for all of us. It is impossible. James says, "For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all" (James 2:10). Then he also says, "For we all stumble in many ways. If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well" (James 3:2). Jesus is the one who has fulfilled the Law and has met this requirement for us. Paul says, "For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit" (Romans 8:3-4). What we are to do is to come to Jesus by faith, trusting in Him and His finished work, yoke ourselves to Him and learn from Him, and follow along as He leads. As we "walk according to the Spirit" by faith, the "requirement of the Law" is fulfilled in us.

#### Matthew 12:1-8

At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath, and His disciples became hungry and began to pick the heads of grain and eat. 2 But when the Pharisees saw this, they said to Him, "Look, Your disciples do what is not lawful to do on a Sabbath." 3 But He said to them, "Have you not read what David did when he became hungry, he and his companions, 4 how he entered the house of God, and they ate the consecrated bread, which was not lawful for him to eat nor for those with him, but for the priests alone? 5 "Or have you not read in the Law, that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple break the Sabbath and are innocent? 6 "But I say to you that something greater than the temple is here. 7 "But if you had known what this means, 'I DESIRE COMPASSION, AND NOT A SACRIFICE,' you would not have condemned the innocent. 8 "For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath."

It's interesting that right after Jesus promises rest for those who come to Him, Matthew gives us two stories regarding the Sabbath, the day of rest. This is probably not just coincidence. Matthew may be trying to illustrate the difference between the rest that comes from Jesus and the burdensome "rest" that the Pharisees insisted on.

It was apparently the season when wheat or barley was ripe and ready for harvest, and Jesus and the disciples were going through some grainfields on the Sabbath. The disciples were hungry and so they were picking the heads of the grain and eating them. Luke tells us that they were "rubbing them in their hands and eating the grain" (Luke 16:1). We must not think that the disciples were stealing this grain, because the Law allowed the poor to glean from the fields of farms. Leviticus 19:9-10 says, "Now when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very corners of your field, nor shall you gather the gleanings of your harvest. Nor shall you glean your vineyard, nor shall you gather the fallen fruit of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the needy and for the stranger. I am the LORD your God." The disciples were taking advantage of this right to glean from these grainfields, so the eating of the grain was not the problem. They were following the command from Deuteronomy 23:25, "When you enter your neighbor's standing grain, then you may pluck the heads with your hand, but you shall not wield a sickle in your neighbor's standing grain." The problem

was that they were doing this on the Sabbath. The Pharisees were there and saw what they were doing and confronted Jesus. They said, "Look, your disciples do what is not lawful to do on a Sabbath." To the Pharisees, when they picked the heads of grain, they were harvesting, and when they rubbed them in their hands to separate the kernel from the husk, they were winnowing. Both of these things the Pharisees considered "work" and were therefore prohibited on the Sabbath.

It's interesting as Jesus answers these men that He doesn't get into an argument with them over what really constituted "work" on the Sabbath. He didn't try to argue that what the disciples were doing could not really be considered "work." He didn't try to say that what they were doing wasn't really harvesting or winnowing. He took another approach to answering the charge.

Six times in Matthew it is recorded that Jesus asked the rhetorical question, "Have you not read...?" We see two of these examples here as He answers the Pharisees. First, He points to the example of David and his men eating the consecrated bread which was not to be eaten by anyone except the priests. He asks, "Haven't you read about this?" David was fleeing from Saul, who was trying to kill him. He and his men became hungry, entered the house of God, and ate the consecrated bread. Surely the Pharisees were familiar with the story. The incident is recorded in 1 Samuel 21:1-6:

Then David came to Nob to Ahimelech the priest; and Ahimelech came trembling to meet David and said to him, "Why are you alone and no one with you?" 2 David said to Ahimelech the priest, "The king has commissioned me with a matter and has said to me, 'Let no one know anything about the matter on which I am sending you and with which I have commissioned you; and I have directed the young men to a certain place.' 3 "Now therefore, what do you have on hand? Give me five loaves of bread, or whatever can be found." 4 The priest answered David and said, "There is no ordinary bread on hand, but there is consecrated bread; if only the young men have kept themselves from women." 5 David answered the priest and said to him, "Surely women have been kept from us as previously when I set out and the vessels of the young men were holy, though it was an ordinary journey; how much more then today will their vessels be holy?" 6 So the priest gave him consecrated bread; for there was no bread there but the bread of the Presence which was removed from before the LORD, in order to put hot bread in its place when it was taken away.

Jesus says explicitly that this bread was "not lawful for him to eat" but was "for the priests alone." Nevertheless he was allowed to eat it and was not condemned for doing so. It was a special circumstance that called for the violation of the letter of the law in order to meet an urgent need. The hunger of David and his men was more important than ceremonial law. Another thing we might note here is not only did David eat the consecrated bread, but he also lied to Ahimelech about what was going on. Instead of saying that he was fleeing for his life from Saul, he told him that he was on a special secret mission from the king, and so Ahimelech was willing to help him. Again, he felt this was necessary to preserve their lives. It's the same thing Rahab did when she lied about the spies she had hidden (Joshua 2:1-7). It seems that Jesus is saying that what David and his men did was appropriate under the circumstances, though technically unlawful.

The second time Jesus asks, "Or have you not read in the Law, that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple break the Sabbath and are innocent?" What Jesus means is that the priests were required to prepare sacrifices on the Sabbath (Numbers 28:9-10), and to prepare the showbread as well (1 Chronicles 9:32). John records another incident when Jesus was

criticized for healing a man on the Sabbath. Jesus pointed to the fact that if the eighth day of a boy's life, when the Law required him to be circumcised, fell on a Sabbath, the priests would go ahead and circumcise the boy (John 7:23). Jesus asked, "If a man receives circumcision on the Sabbath so that the Law of Moses will not be broken, are you angry with Me because I made an entire man well on the Sabbath?" So then even the priests violated the strict definition of "work" on the Sabbath in order to keep other requirements of the Law. Though they are breaking the Sabbath, Jesus says they are innocent; they are not held guilty.

If serving and working in the temple allowed the priests to break the Sabbath in order to do their duty, how much more serving the Messiah should allow a man to break the Sabbath! Jesus says, "I say to you that something greater than the temple is here." He is of course talking about Himself. He is greater than the temple. He is "Lord of the Sabbath." If the Lord of the Sabbath allows you to do something on the Sabbath, you can do it without incurring guilt.

For the second time in Matthew, Jesus quotes from Hosea 6:6 in verse 7, "But if you had known what this means, 'I desire compassion, and not a sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the innocent." In 9:13 He had told the Pharisees to "go and learn what this means," and here again He says that they do not know what it means. Their lack of understanding caused them to condemn the innocent. We all see the fundamental injustice of condemning the innocent. The innocent are to be acquitted, not condemned. Only the guilty are to be condemned. Jesus is saying that His disciples are innocent of any wrongdoing in this matter because they were following Him and He allowed them to do what they needed to do to satisfy their hunger. It is not compassionate to say to the needy on the Sabbath, "No, we can't help you today because it is the Sabbath." If we are passionately concerned about people keeping the Law, then we need to understand this principle. We may find ourselves unjustly condemning the innocent if we are not careful about this. Sometimes urgent human needs will override strict adherence to the Law. The Lord prefers compassion and grace to condemnation.

#### Matthew 12:9-14

Departing from there, He went into their synagogue. 10 And a man was there whose hand was withered. And they questioned Jesus, asking, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?"—so that they might accuse Him. 11 And He said to them, "What man is there among you who has a sheep, and if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will he not take hold of it and lift it out? 12 "How much more valuable then is a man than a sheep! So then, it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath." 13 Then He \*said to the man, "Stretch out your hand!" He stretched it out, and it was restored to normal, like the other. 14 But the Pharisees went out and conspired against Him, as to how they might destroy Him.

It's possible that this was on the same day as the previous incident, and Jesus may be talking to the same men. We are told that "He went into their synagogue." A man with a withered hand was in the synagogue on the Sabbath and the Pharisees asked Jesus, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?" They asked the question because they were looking for a reason to accuse Him. He had said that He is "Lord of the Sabbath" and so they asked Him for a ruling on whether it was lawful to heal someone on the Sabbath, knowing that He would answer in the affirmative. In both Mark's and Luke's version of this encounter (Mark 3:1-6 and Luke 6:6-11) it is Jesus who poses the question, knowing that the scribes and Pharisees were watching Him to see what He would do. Luke writes,

6 On another Sabbath He entered the synagogue and was teaching; and there was a man there whose right hand was withered. 7 The scribes and the Pharisees were watching Him closely to see if He healed on the Sabbath, so that they might find reason to accuse Him. 8 But He knew what they were thinking, and He said to the man with the withered hand, "Get up and come forward!" And he got up and came forward. 9 And Jesus said to them, "I ask you, is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath, to save a life or to destroy it?" 10 After looking around at them all, He said to him, "Stretch out your hand!" And he did so; and his hand was restored. 11 But they themselves were filled with rage, and discussed together what they might do to Jesus.

The question was in the minds of the scribes and Pharisees, and Jesus knew it. This was their issue, and whether they asked it or Jesus asked it doesn't really matter all that much. The question was raised and brought to the surface. If He healed this man on the Sabbath, they believed they would have a valid basis for accusing Him of violating the Sabbath. Mark says that when Jesus asked the question, He looked "around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart" (Mark 3:5). He was both angered and grieved that these men were so hardened in heart they couldn't see the truth.

It's a good thing we have Matthew's account of this incident because he records the answer to the question that Jesus gives in verses 11 and 12. Jesus asks, "What man is there among you who has a sheep, and if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will he not take hold of it and lift it out?" They would not leave their sheep in the pit until the next day. They value their sheep and they would certainly do what they could to lift the sheep out of the pit, even if it were the Sabbath. They would "work" on the Sabbath to save their sheep. Then Jesus says, "How much more valuable then is a man than a sheep! So then, it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath." This is the third time in Matthew Jesus has said that people are more valuable than animals (Matthew 6:26, 10:31 and here). If you would pull your sheep out of a pit on the Sabbath, how much more should you help a man who is in distress? People have far more value than sheep! Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath, and if we do so it should not be condemned as "work."

Luke tells us of a couple of other incidents on the Sabbath where Jesus used a similar argument. In Luke 13:10-17 is the story of Jesus healing a woman who had been sick for 18 years. Again, it was in the synagogue on the Sabbath. The synagogue official was upset because Jesus healed on the Sabbath and said, "There are six days in which work should be done; so come during them and get healed, and not on the Sabbath day." Jesus responded by saying, "You hypocrites, does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the stall and lead him away to water him? And this woman, a daughter of Abraham as she is, whom Satan has bound for eighteen long years, should she not have been released from this bond on the Sabbath day?" They would release their animals and lead them to water on the Sabbath, why then should this woman not be released from her bond and be given freedom on the Sabbath? Luke uses the same Greek word, *luō*, for "untie" in 13:15 and "released" in 13:16. If it's proper to release an animal on the Sabbath, how much more is it proper to release a woman on the Sabbath!

Again in Luke 14:1-6 there is a very similar situation. Jesus was in the home of one of the leaders of the Pharisees on a Sabbath and there was a man there who had an illness called "d Dropsy." They were watching Jesus to see what He would do. So again Jesus posed the question, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, or not?" They did not answer Him, so He healed the man and sent him away. Then Jesus said, "Which one of you will have a son or an ox fall into a well, and will not immediately pull him out on a Sabbath day?" The implication again is that naturally any man would do this in the case of such an emergency on the Sabbath. No



man would leave his son or even his ox stuck in a well until the Sabbath was over. They would do whatever work they needed to do to save them, even on the Sabbath, and they would be right to do so.

The Sabbath should be observed and honored. We should cease our normal work in order to rest one day out of seven. This is one of the Ten Commandments and is rooted in the pattern that God established in the beginning when He rested on the seventh day. But we must see that there are circumstances where we are allowed to technically “break” the Sabbath in order to meet needs that should not be neglected. We must act with compassion rather than strict legalism.

In John’s gospel we find that some of the Pharisees used these incidents as an excuse for their refusal to believe in Jesus. John 9:16 says, “Therefore some of the Pharisees were saying, ‘This man is not from God, because He does not keep the Sabbath.’ But others were saying, ‘How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?’ And there was a division among them.” Jesus had healed a man who had been born blind, and again it was on the Sabbath, and the Pharisees were questioning the man who had been healed. Instead of acknowledging Jesus as Messiah because of the obvious miraculous signs He was performing, many decided that He must not be “from God” because He didn’t “keep the Sabbath.” They said He was a sinner because He violated the Sabbath. Others asked the obvious question, “How can a sinner perform such signs?” The opponents of Jesus tried very hard to find a reason to accuse Him and dismiss Him, and many of them found it in the issue of the Sabbath.

Having made His point that it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath, Jesus told the man with the withered hand to stretch it out, and it was restored to normal (Matthew 12:13). Jesus made sure that everyone in the synagogue could see the man’s hand healed. His withered hand was made normal again like his other hand. They could not deny that the man had been healed. That Jesus could heal and would do so on the Sabbath was undeniable.

Instead of believing in Jesus and confessing Him as Messiah and glorifying God for the healing of the man, the Pharisees went out and conspired, or “took council” (KJV) together against Him. Their meeting was not about whether Jesus was Messiah or not, but the only item on the agenda was how to destroy Jesus. I think this was not just because Jesus was, in their eyes, violating the Sabbath, but also because He was exposing their hypocrisy and making them look bad.

People are still looking for reasons to reject Jesus. They are still desperate to find excuses for their unbelief. They still want to take Him down and show that He must not be who He is. They look for evidence that maybe He didn’t really even exist, that maybe the stories of Jesus are simply myth or legend or outright fiction. They accuse the New Testament writers of inventing a divine Jesus when really He was just an ordinary man who was an itinerant rabbi. But the divine Jesus keeps breaking through and cannot be so easily dismissed.

#### Matthew 12:15-21

But Jesus, aware of this, withdrew from there. Many followed Him, and He healed them all, 16 and warned them not to tell who He was. 17 This was to fulfill what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet: 18 "BEHOLD, MY SERVANT WHOM I HAVE CHOSEN; MY BELOVED IN WHOM MY SOUL is WELL-PLEASED; I WILL PUT MY SPIRIT UPON HIM, AND HE SHALL PROCLAIM JUSTICE TO THE GENTILES. 19 "HE WILL NOT QUARREL, NOR CRY OUT; NOR WILL ANYONE HEAR HIS VOICE IN THE STREETS. 20 "A BATTERED REED HE WILL NOT BREAK OFF, AND A SMOLDERING WICK HE WILL NOT PUT OUT, UNTIL HE LEADS JUSTICE TO VICTORY. 21 "AND IN HIS NAME THE

## GENTILES WILL HOPE."

Jesus knew the Pharisees were planning to kill Him, so He simply withdrew from the area. While they were plotting He left. He healed all those who followed Him. I presume this means He healed those who needed healing. As He ministered to these people He warned them not to tell who He was. At this point Jesus was stern about this. Apparently Jesus wanted at this point to remain concealed from His opponents. Maybe He did not want to attract any more attention in this area.

Matthew tells us that in doing this Jesus was fulfilling the prophecy in Isaiah 42:1-4. I think Matthew points to this passage because it references the Gentiles. Jesus was turning His attention away from those Jews who rejected Him to those who would listen to Him and follow Him. He went to other peoples in other areas, and some of them may have been Gentiles.

The quote from Isaiah 42 in verses 18-21 give us a string of characteristics of Jesus from the Father's perspective. He invites us to look at Him and consider who He is.

First, the Father says He is "My Servant whom I have chosen." Though the Greek word for "servant" here is *pais* and could be translated "child" or "boy," the Hebrew word in Isaiah 42:1 clearly means "servant" or "slave." Thus *pais* here is translated "servant" as it often is in the New Testament. Jesus is God's chosen servant. Jews today will argue that the "servant" in the book of Isaiah is the nation of Israel, and we must not dismiss this point. Isaiah makes this plain. Isaiah 41:8-9 says, "But you, Israel, My servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, Descendant of Abraham My friend, You whom I have taken from the ends of the earth, And called from its remotest parts And said to you, 'You are My servant, I have chosen you and not rejected you.'" Isaiah 43:10 says, "'You are My witnesses,' declares the LORD, 'And My servant whom I have chosen, So that you may know and believe Me And understand that I am He. Before Me there was no God formed, And there will be none after Me.'" Isaiah 44:1-2 says, "But now listen, O Jacob, My servant, And Israel, whom I have chosen: Thus says the LORD who made you And formed you from the womb, who will help you, 'Do not fear, O Jacob My servant; And you Jeshurun whom I have chosen.'" Isaiah 45:4 says, "For the sake of Jacob My servant, And Israel My chosen one, I have also called you by your name; I have given you a title of honor Though you have not known Me." It is clear that often Isaiah speaks of Israel as God's chosen servant. But the word is also applied to Isaiah himself in 20:3 and to Eliakim, son of Hilkiyah in 22:20, so the designation of "God's servant" is not exclusive to Israel. Jesus is the embodiment and fulfillment of what God intended Israel to be, God's chosen servant to bring salvation to the world.

Second, God says that Jesus is "My beloved in whom My soul is well-pleased." The Father had said this same thing when Jesus was baptized in Matthew 3:17. He will say it again in 17:5. Jesus is more than a servant, He is God's beloved. He is the only one of whom God says He is "well-pleased." There is no one else who pleases the Father as does the Son. In John 8:29 Jesus says, "And He who sent Me is with Me; He has not left Me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to Him." I think this is why Jesus is well-pleasing to the Father, because they are in perfect harmony with one another. Jesus said that His food is to do the will of His Father (John 4: 34) and that He had come down from heaven to do the will of the Father (John 6:38). Jesus never does anything that is displeasing to the Father.

Third, God says, "I will put My Spirit upon Him." The Spirit of the Father is in the Son. This is why they are in perfect harmony. The Father is in the Son and the Son is in the Father (John 14:10-11). This is why Jesus was able to be well-pleasing to the Father and in perfect harmony with Him.

Because Jesus is the Servant of God, the Beloved of God and God's Spirit is upon Him, there are things He will do and things He will not do. What He will do has to do with justice. Verse 18 says, "He shall proclaim justice to the Gentiles." Verse 20 says "He leads justice to victory." The word for justice is *krisis*, which has to do with rendering a judgment or handing down a decision, particularly in a court of law. The word has been translated "court" in 5:21 ("liable to the court") and 5:22 ("guilty before the court"). It has been translated "judgment" when Jesus referred to "the day of judgment" in 10:15, 11:22 and 11:24. In Matthew 23:33 the word is translated "sentence" ("how will you escape the sentence of hell?"). Jesus said in John 16:8 that the Holy Spirit would "convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment" (*krisis*). He explained in John 16:11, "and concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged." Paul used the verb *krinō* when he proclaimed judgment to the people of Athens and said that God has "fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead" (Acts 17:31). A day is coming when God will justly judge all people and all nations. Everyone will be subject to His court. The guilty will be condemned and the innocent will be acquitted. This is the essence of justice. It is unjust to acquit the guilty or to condemn the innocent, and God will not and cannot make this mistake. God's justice is perfect. Jesus proclaimed this justice to the nations. Today we see injustice all around us, but one day God will bring about peace and righteousness. He will remove the wicked in His judgment. He will not leave the guilty unpunished (Exodus 34:6-7). One day justice will have full victory and Jesus will lead that victory. One aspect of preaching the gospel is proclaiming this truth. It is something that should prompt us to repent and to seek God's forgiveness and the righteous standing that comes through faith in Christ.

The ultimate victory of God's justice in Christ is our hope (verse 21). It is good news that God will not allow evil and wickedness to triumph over righteousness and goodness. The proclamation of God's justice is something that we need to recover. This goes hand-in-hand with proclaiming repentance for the forgiveness of sins in the name of Jesus, as He says in Luke 14:46-47, "Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem." We need to repent and find forgiveness in Christ because of His just judgment.

Verses 19 and 20 list five things that the Servant will not do. He will not quarrel, He will not cry out, He will not allow His voice to be heard in the streets, He will not break off a battered reed and He will not put out a smoldering wick. I think the first three things are really making one point, that He would not be quarrelsome. The Messiah would not be one who would constantly be arguing and shouting and disputing with people. Certainly Jesus answered questions and sometimes was critical, contradicted His opponents and pointed out their hypocrisy, but He was not a man we would label as quarrelsome. He was not combative, was not a man who came looking for a fight.

As for battered reeds and smoldering wicks, I think the point is that, rather than being quarrelsome, Jesus seeks to mend things. He won't take what is weak and damaged and destroy it. He wants to fix the battered reed. He wants to fix the smoldering wick. Many of us are battered reeds and smoldering wicks. We are damaged and weak. Jesus comes to repair and restore rather than to destroy.

#### Matthew 12:22-32

Then a demon-possessed man who was blind and mute was brought to Jesus, and He healed him, so that the mute man spoke and saw. 23 All the crowds were amazed, and were

saying, "This man cannot be the Son of David, can he?" 24 But when the Pharisees heard this, they said, "This man casts out demons only by Beelzebul the ruler of the demons." 25 And knowing their thoughts Jesus said to them, "Any kingdom divided against itself is laid waste; and any city or house divided against itself will not stand. 26 "If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself; how then will his kingdom stand? 27 "If I by Beelzebul cast out demons, by whom do your sons cast them out? For this reason they will be your judges. 28 "But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. 29 "Or how can anyone enter the strong man's house and carry off his property, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house. 30 "He who is not with Me is against Me; and he who does not gather with Me scatters. 31 "Therefore I say to you, any sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven people, but blasphemy against the Spirit shall not be forgiven. 32 "Whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come.

A man was brought to Jesus who had big problems. He was demon-possessed, blind and mute. Someone thought that Jesus could help this man, and Jesus did. He healed him completely. He cast out the demons and healed his blindness and his inability to talk. The man could both speak and see. The crowds who witnessed this were amazed and asked "This man cannot be the Son of David, can he?" A.T. Robertson points out, "The form of the question expects the answer 'no,' but they put it so because of the Pharisaic hostility towards Jesus. The multitudes 'were amazed' or 'stood out of themselves' (*existanto*), imperfect tense, vividly portraying the situation. They were almost beside themselves with excitement." ([Robertson's Word Pictures](#)) They didn't say, "Wow! This guy is the Son of David!" There were those who were more certain about it (Matthew 9:27, 15:22, 20:30, 21:9), but this crowd was being careful. They were mindful of the hostility of the Pharisees. John 12:42 says that many believed in Him but would not confess Him because they feared the Pharisees. But at least here they entertained the possibility that He might be the Messiah, the Son of David.

The Pharisees had a quick explanation, "This man casts out demons only by Beelzebul the ruler of the demons." How could Jesus do these things? What was the source of His ability to heal and do these miracles? They knew of only two sources of supernatural power, the divine and the demonic, and not wanting to recognize Jesus as divine, they attributed His power to the demonic, to Satan rather than God.

Jesus knew what they were thinking, and he addressed the issue head-on. First He points out that any kingdom, city or house that is divided against itself will not stand. A kingdom will not survive if it is split into warring factions. It will be "laid waste." I like how the [Good News Bible](#) renders this, "Any country that divides itself into groups which fight each other will not last very long. And any town or family that divides itself into groups which fight each other will fall apart." Somalia today is a nation with a weak central government that has been torn apart by rival factions. It illustrates the truth of what Jesus says here. This is as true of Satan's kingdom as it is of any other. If Satan's kingdom is divided into factions, his kingdom cannot stand. Satan's got a big problem if he's driving out himself! It is absurd to think that Satan has any interest in casting out his own servants and thwarting his own authority and purpose. His purpose is to afflict humans and not heal them, to destroy them and not save them.

Second, Jesus asks them a rhetorical question, "If I by Beelzebul cast out demons, by whom do your sons cast them out?" Apparently some of the followers of the Pharisees were casting out demons, or at least attempting to cast them out. What was the source of their

authority? Men cannot cast out demons of their own authority. The authority must come from a higher source, a more powerful source. There is an interesting and somewhat amusing illustration of this in Acts 19:11-17:

11 God was performing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, 12 so that handkerchiefs or aprons were even carried from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out. 13 But also some of the Jewish exorcists, who went from place to place, attempted to name over those who had the evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, "I adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preaches." 14 Seven sons of one Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, were doing this. 15 And the evil spirit answered and said to them, "I recognize Jesus, and I know about Paul, but who are you?" 16 And the man, in whom was the evil spirit, leaped on them and subdued all of them and overpowered them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded. 17 This became known to all, both Jews and Greeks, who lived in Ephesus; and fear fell upon them all and the name of the Lord Jesus was being magnified.

These Jewish exorcists tried to use the name of Jesus without really being His disciples. They were not authorized to act in His name or to use His name, and so the demons did not recognize their authority. Paul preached and represented Jesus but they did not. The question Jesus asked put these critics in a tough spot. If demons are cast out by Beelzebul, then they would have to admit the same thing about those among them who were casting out demons. Jesus says, "For this reason they will be your judges." They would tell these men that Satan does not cast out Satan. They would agree with Jesus that this is not the way this works.

Demons are cast out by the Spirit of God. Jesus says, "But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you." Luke 11:20 puts it this way, "But if I cast out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you." The Spirit of God is the "finger" of God, the power of God active in Christ, in the world, and in those who follow Christ. Jesus says if the former is true, then the latter is true. If His authority and power comes from God, then God's rule has come. He is the king and demonstrates His authority in what He is doing. It is an authority to which the evil spirits in the world are subject.

Jesus continues to point out the absurdity of their charge by pointing out that one cannot plunder the house of a strong man unless he first binds the strong man. A strong man will try to prevent a thief from breaking into his house and stealing his property. It's an interesting picture of what Jesus is doing to Satan in verse 29. Jesus has come into the house of the "strong man," has tied him up, and is going to carry off his property and plunder his house. Jesus depicts Himself as a thief breaking into Satan's home in order to carry off his property. The man He had healed had belonged to Satan and was bound and made captive by him. But Jesus came along and freed him from Satan's power. It is the purpose of Jesus to free those held captive by Satan (Luke 4:18). Hebrews 2:14-15 says, "Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives." Jesus came to set us free from the prison of Satan. He has bound Satan and rendered him powerless. Satan cannot resist the authority of Christ.

Then Jesus says in verse 30, "He who is not with Me is against Me; and he who does not gather with Me scatters." When you are "with" Jesus you will be working alongside Him in the work of gathering. When He healed the demon possessed man, He "gathered" another soul into the kingdom and freed him from the clutches of Satan. This is the enterprise of Jesus; He is gathering a harvest of souls. One is either "with" Jesus or against Him. Jesus does not

allow for any neutral ground. If we are not with Him we are against Him. If we are not gathering with Him we are scattering. If we are not subjects of His kingdom we remain under the dominion of darkness. We will see this truth emphasized in the next chapter.

I'm not sure why there is so much confusion and debate over what is "the unforgivable sin," because Jesus spells it out explicitly here, and the Pharisees He was talking to had just committed it. Any sin and blasphemy will be forgiven except for blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. The Pharisees had attributed the work of the Holy Spirit to Satan. They had spoken against God's Holy Spirit. In Mark's version of this we read that Jesus said, "Truly I say to you, all sins shall be forgiven the sons of men, and whatever blasphemies they utter; but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin," then Mark explains, "because they were saying, 'He has an unclean spirit'" (Mark 3:28-30). The Spirit in Christ was not an unclean spirit, but was the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of the Living God. This is blasphemy of the Holy Spirit and is the sin that will not be forgiven.

#### Matthew 12:33-37

"Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for the tree is known by its fruit. 34 "You brood of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak what is good? For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart. 35 "The good man brings out of his good treasure what is good; and the evil man brings out of his evil treasure what is evil. 36 "But I tell you that every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the day of judgment. 37 "For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned."

Again Jesus throws out another "either/or" statement in verse 33. He has just said that people are either with Him and are gathering with Him, or are against Him and are scattering. Now He says that a tree is either good and its fruit good, or it is bad and its fruit bad. Jesus has used this metaphor previously in Matthew 7:15-20 when He talked about how to know false prophets by their fruit. The nature of a tree is known by its fruit. In our back yard we have an orange tree, a loquat tree, and an apricot tree. I know what they are because of the fruit they produce. If they didn't produce fruit, I might not know what kind of trees they are. I know what they are because of their fruit. We know whether people are good or bad by their fruit, particularly the fruit of what they say, by what comes out of their mouths.

For the second of three times in Matthew we find this phrase "brood of vipers." John the baptist used the phrase in Matthew 3:7 when he said to the Pharisees and Sadducees, "You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" Speaking to the same sort of men in Matthew 23:33 Jesus will say, "You serpents, you brood of vipers, how will you escape the sentence of hell?" Note that each time there is a rhetorical question attached to the charge. Here Jesus asks, "How can you, being evil, speak what is good?" Since they are a brood of vipers and have an evil nature, how can they say what is good? They are incapable of it. What they say cannot be good, cannot be true. They had just said that Jesus cast out demons by the ruler of the demons, which was an evil, blasphemous, unforgivable thing to say. He explained, "For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart." A bad tree produces bad fruit and a bad heart produces bad speech. These Pharisees, who pretended to be righteous, were actually vipers at heart and evil at the core.

The good man has a good treasure and brings out of it that which is good. The evil man has an evil treasure and brings forth what is evil. The words "brings out" translate the word *ekballō*, to expel or to send out. Vincent says, "But the translation is feeble. The word means *to throw or fling out*. The good or evil things come forth out of the *treasure* of the heart (Matt.

12:34). 'Out of the *abundance* of the heart the mouth speaketh.' The issues of the heart are *thrown* out, as if under pressure of the abundance within" (Vincent's Word Studies). It is inevitable that the goodness or badness of what is within will come to the surface and will be manifested. The good man can't help but bring forth what is good, and the evil man can't help but bring forth evil. I suppose the evil man, like the Pharisees, can fake it for a while and put on a good face, but eventually the evil of his heart and soul will come out. The evil heart of the Pharisees came out in their blasphemy against God's Holy Spirit. Somehow we must become good people with a good treasure in order to bring forth what is good. This can only be a work of God. We must be "transformed by the renewing of" our minds (Romans 12:2). We must be made new creatures in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17). Of ourselves we cannot become good, but we must be made good by Christ.

Jesus wraps up His condemnation of the Pharisees by saying that in the day of judgment people will give an account for every careless word they speak, and that they will be justified or condemned by their words. The word for "careless," *argos*, means "inactive, idle, useless" (New American Standard Exhaustive Concordance). It is a word that is useless, accomplishes nothing and serves no good purpose. The word for "accounting" here is *logos*, "word," used here in the sense of giving a reckoning, of answering for careless utterances. Jesus says that people on the day of judgment will have to answer for every careless word they've said. This seems to be a rather scary thing. Surely most of us have often said careless, unthinking things, especially in the midst of frustration and anger. There is no excuse or justification for many of the careless things we say. If a recording is played back of every careless word we've said and we're asked to answer for them, it could take a very long time and be very uncomfortable!

In the day of judgment we will either be justified or condemned. To be "justified" is to be declared "not guilty" in God's court, and to be condemned is the opposite. Jesus here says we will be either justified or condemned on the basis of our words. We might call this "justification by speech." Protestants are very insistent on justification by faith, and rightly so. Scripture is clear that we are not justified by the works of the Law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. Romans 3:28 says, "For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law." Galatians 2:15-16 says, "We *are* Jews by nature and not sinners from among the Gentiles; nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified." So how does being justified by our words fit in with this? I think the answer is that words express faith. The Pharisees spoke against Jesus and the Holy Spirit because of their unbelief. Their refusal to put their faith in Jesus determined what they said about Him. The apostles spoke in favor of Jesus as the Messiah and affirmed their faith by their words. As Jesus said in 10:32-33, "Therefore everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven." In Romans 10:9-10 Paul writes, "If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation." Belief in Jesus and confession of Jesus go hand-in-hand. If we really believe we will affirm it verbally. If we believe we will say so, we will confess Jesus as Lord.

Matthew 12:38-42

Then some of the scribes and Pharisees said to Him, "Teacher, we want to see a sign

from You." 39 But He answered and said to them, "An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign; and yet no sign will be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet; 40 for just as JONAH WAS THREE DAYS AND THREE NIGHTS IN THE BELLY OF THE SEA MONSTER, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. 41 "The men of Nineveh will stand up with this generation at the judgment, and will condemn it because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, something greater than Jonah is here. 42 "The Queen of the South will rise up with this generation at the judgment and will condemn it, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, something greater than Solomon is here.

If verses 22 through this passage cover the same time and the same encounter, then these scribes and Pharisees had just seen Jesus heal the man who had been demon-possessed, blind and mute. The crowds were asking the question about whether Jesus was the Messiah. Now the scribes and Pharisees have the audacity to ask Jesus to show them a sign. ("Jews ask for signs" - 1 Corinthians 1:22.) They are asking Him to perform a miracle in order to prove He's the Messiah. They had already seen His signs and heard of them, but now they demand more.

Rather than performing on demand, Jesus rebuffed them strongly. He said, "An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign." He will repeat this answer again in Matthew 16:4 when He is again asked to perform a sign. Their demand did not come from sincerity and honesty, but from evil and unfaithful hearts. To demand supernatural proof as a condition of faith is evil. It comes from a settled position of skepticism and unbelief rather than a true willingness to believe. As Jesus said to Thomas after appearing to him, "Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed" (John 20:29). The Lord wants us to believe without visible proof. He commends faith that does not demand a sign. We tend to be quick to believe those things we prefer to believe without proof of any kind, but when it comes to things we don't prefer to believe, we demand proof. Even when that proof is offered we often still refuse to believe. Even after Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead His opponents refused to believe in Him, but rather plotted to kill Him (John 11:45-57).

No sign would be given to that evil and adulterous generation except the sign of Jonah the prophet. There will be one great sign that will provide the proof that Jesus is the Son of God, the Messiah. What is this "sign of Jonah"? Jesus explains in verse 40, "for just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." Luke's version of this says, "This generation is a wicked generation; it seeks for a sign, and yet no sign will be given to it but the sign of Jonah. For just as Jonah became a sign to the Ninevites, so will the Son of Man be to this generation" (Luke 11:29-30). If you read the book of Jonah you find that the sailors aboard the ship were forced to throw Jonah overboard because the Lord had hurled a horrendous storm against them because Jonah was trying to flee from the Lord and His command to go to Nineveh. Once they threw Jonah overboard, the sea became calm. As far as they knew, Jonah was dead. But God would not let Jonah die. He provided the great fish to swallow Jonah, and then three days later the fish vomited him up on land. This man whom everyone assumed to be dead came back! Jonah then "became a sign" to the people of Nineveh. I speculate that the story of what had happened to Jonah spread rapidly and even went ahead of him to Nineveh. Nineveh is about 600 miles from Jerusalem, so it took Jonah quite a while to travel there. I think the people of Nineveh may have heard of Jonah before he arrived there, and when He came with his ominous message of impending judgment from



God, they were ready to listen to him and believe his message and turn from their wickedness.

We should note that Jesus treats the story of Jonah as history and not myth. There is so much skepticism surrounding the story of Jonah that we may be tempted to dismiss it as myth or legend. But we must note this fact that Jesus treats it as history. Regarding the “sea monster,” the language of Jonah 1:17 indicates the fish that swallowed Jonah was a specially “appointed” or equipped fish, prepared by God for this purpose. Speculation over what kind of fish or whale or shark it was is of little value.

As Jonah in a sense had returned from the dead, so Jesus, whom everyone knew was dead, having been crucified, came back from the dead and appeared to many people over the course of 40 days! Acts 1:3 says, “To these He also presented Himself alive after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God.” Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 15:6 that after appearing to Peter and the twelve apostles after His resurrection, Jesus then appeared to “more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep.” In fact, 1 Corinthians 15 is an entire chapter devoted to this theme and its importance. Paul says that if Christ has not been raised from the dead, then we are still dead in our sins and our faith is vain. If it can be conclusively proven that Jesus has not risen from the dead, then the Christian faith collapses and its hope dies. The resurrection of Christ from the dead is the great sign, the great proof, that Jesus is the Lord, the Christ, the Messiah and King. And Paul said in Athens that it is the proof that there will be a day of judgment (See Acts 17:31).

Jesus said that He would be “three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.” Elsewhere Jesus made the point that He would be raised from the dead “on the third day” (Matthew 16:21, 17:23 and 20:19). We know that Jesus died on Friday afternoon and was put into the tomb, that He was in the tomb all day Saturday, and rose from the dead early Sunday morning. Some might say that since it was only a partial day on Friday and Sunday, He was not really there for “three days and three nights.” The commentators I’ve read seem to agree that the Jews counted a part of a day as a full day. Jesus did not say He would be in the tomb for 72 hours and then rise. The Jamieson Fausset and Brown Commentary says, “The period during which He was to lie in the grave is here expressed in round numbers, according to the Jewish way of speaking, which was to regard any part of a day, however small, included within a period of days, as a full day. (See 1Sa. 30:12, 1Sa. 30:13; Est. 4:16; Est. 5:1; Mat. 27:63, Mat. 27:64, etc.)” So according to the Jewish way of thinking, Jesus was in the tomb for three days, Friday, Saturday and Sunday, though certainly not for 72 hours.

The men of Nineveh, to whom Jonah had become a sign, will stand up at the judgment and condemn the unbelieving generation of Jews of Jesus’ time. They had repented when Jonah came and preached to them. They had listened to him and heeded his warning and had repented of their wickedness. As Gentiles they had none of the advantages of the Jews. They did not know the Law of God. They did not have the history of the patriarchs and the prophets and the word of God. Yet God had compassion on them and sent Jonah to them so that they might repent and not be destroyed. These men who had responded to the message of Jonah will rise to testify against these Jews who would not respond to the message of Jesus, the One who is greater than Jonah. They would say, “Hey, you guys! We listened and repented when the prophet Jonah came to share God’s message with us, why didn’t you guys listen when you got to hear the Son of God Himself?” The unwillingness of this “generation” to give heed to Jesus is amazing!

Jesus gives another another example in verse 42, “The Queen of the South will rise up with this generation at the judgment and will condemn it, because she came from the ends of

the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, something greater than Solomon is here." Jesus is referring to an account from 1 Kings 10:1-13:

1 Now when the queen of Sheba heard about the fame of Solomon concerning the name of the LORD, she came to test him with difficult questions. 2 So she came to Jerusalem with a very large retinue, with camels carrying spices and very much gold and precious stones. When she came to Solomon, she spoke with him about all that was in her heart. 3 Solomon answered all her questions; nothing was hidden from the king which he did not explain to her. 4 When the queen of Sheba perceived all the wisdom of Solomon, the house that he had built, 5 the food of his table, the seating of his servants, the attendance of his waiters and their attire, his cupbearers, and his stairway by which he went up to the house of the LORD, there was no more spirit in her. 6 Then she said to the king, "It was a true report which I heard in my own land about your words and your wisdom. 7 "Nevertheless I did not believe the reports, until I came and my eyes had seen it. And behold, the half was not told me. You exceed *in* wisdom and prosperity the report which I heard. 8 "How blessed are your men, how blessed are these your servants who stand before you continually *and* hear your wisdom. 9 "Blessed be the LORD your God who delighted in you to set you on the throne of Israel; because the LORD loved Israel forever, therefore He made you king, to do justice and righteousness." 10 She gave the king a hundred and twenty talents of gold, and a very great *amount* of spices and precious stones. Never again did such abundance of spices come in as that which the queen of Sheba gave King Solomon. 11 Also the ships of Hiram, which brought gold from Ophir, brought in from Ophir a very great *number of* almug trees and precious stones. 12 The king made of the almug trees supports for the house of the LORD and for the king's house, also lyres and harps for the singers; such almug trees have not come in *again* nor have they been seen to this day. 13 King Solomon gave to the queen of Sheba all her desire which she requested, besides what he gave her according to his royal bounty. Then she turned and went to her own land together with her servants.

This queen heard incredible things about Solomon and the Lord and came a great distance to see for herself if there was any truth to what she had heard. Her purpose was "to test him with difficult questions." She was skeptical and says that she "did not believe the reports, until I came and my eyes had seen it." In fact, she said, "the half was not told me." The reality she discovered exceeded the report she had heard. Not only did she end up believing in the reports about Solomon, but she also believed in Yahweh, the God of Solomon and of Israel, and blessed His name. She could see that there was more than human wisdom in evidence with Solomon, that God Himself was the source of his wisdom. She recognized how blessed the people around Solomon were to have the privilege of hearing his wisdom day after day. This woman, another foreigner, will rise up at the judgment and condemn the opponents of Jesus because of their unbelief. Jesus is greater than Solomon, and yet these men would not listen to Him. They had the privilege of actually hearing the words of the Son of God, yet they rejected Him and would not listen. They deserve to be condemned.

For the third time in this chapter, Jesus says that He is "something greater." He said in verse 6, "something greater than the temple is here." In verse 41 He says He is greater than Jonah, and in verse 42 that He is greater than Solomon. He said this not as a boast, but as a fact. There is nothing and no one who compares to Jesus. No one else is the unique Son of God. No one else is the Messiah, the King. If we refuse to listen to Him and believe in Him we will be justly condemned.

### Matthew 12:43-45

"Now when the unclean spirit goes out of a man, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, and does not find it. 44 "Then it says, 'I will return to my house from which I came'; and when it comes, it finds it unoccupied, swept, and put in order. 45 "Then it goes and takes along with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there; and the last state of that man becomes worse than the first. That is the way it will also be with this evil generation."

Jesus is still talking here to the scribes and Pharisees who asked for a sign. He's warning them about what is going to happen to "this evil generation." In the process He reveals some important things to understand about unclean spirits and their relationship to men.

First He tells us that when an unclean spirit goes out of a man, it goes through desert places looking for rest and doesn't find it. Demons are unclean, they are defiled and evil, and are apparently irredeemable. They cannot be reformed, but only exist to do evil, to oppose God and to corrupt mankind. They are restless and wander about looking for rest, but they don't find it. They are like us in that they want to be at rest and they want to be comfortable, and evidently they find it more comfortable to inhabit a human than to wander in their disembodied state.

Having not found a place of rest, the unclean spirit will decide to return to its former house. The demon refers to the man as "my house from which I came." The man is seen as a dwelling place owned by the evil spirit. When it returns, it finds that the place is unoccupied, swept and put in order. No other spirit has moved in and trashed the place, the person squared away and cleaned up, and the place is ready to move into again. The person is like an apartment between tenants. The cleaners and maintenance people have come through, have put down new carpet, have painted, have patched holes, fixed things that were broken and have prepared the place for new tenants.

Having found his former house in good order, the evil spirit takes along seven other evil spirits more wicked than itself and they all move into the man. Jesus says "the last state of that man becomes worse than the first." The man would have been better off if the evil spirit had not left him in the first place. It's never a good thing to be inhabited by an evil spirit, but it's far worse to be inhabited by eight evil spirits! The man Jesus had just healed had been blind and mute because of an evil spirit. If through unbelief and sin the man opens himself again to occupation by evil spirits, things will be worse for him. In addition to being blind and mute, the man may find seven other spirits involved who afflict him in other ways. Evil spirits do not bring any goodness or anything of a positive nature to men's lives. They intend to destroy us rather than help us. They intend to use us for their pleasure and amusement rather than enhance our lives for our good. They find delight in afflicting people.

Jesus indicates that this is an illustration of what will happen to this evil generation. The whole unbelieving Jewish culture will be like the man who is re-inhabited by evil spirits. Jesus came among them preaching the kingdom and healing and casting out demons. He did much to clean things up, but the majority still rejected Him and would not receive Him. His presence restrained, restricted and pushed back the influence of evil spirits, but once He had departed they would come rushing back to poison and corrupt the culture. Its not only individuals who can be occupied by evil spirits, but whole people groups and cultures as well can be under their influence.

It is clear that evil spirits are not the product of ignorant and primitive superstition, nor are they mere metaphors for evil. They are real spiritual entities that literally do exist. They want

to make a home in humans and feel more comfortable when they inhabit a human body. They are not good tenants, but rather want to use and destroy the people they inhabit. They are cast out and defeated by the power and authority of God's Holy Spirit, and it is the presence of the Holy Spirit that prevents their return. People who do not believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and do not follow Him are subjects of their domain and subject to their influence. We will see this clearly in the next chapter.

Matthew 12:46-50

While He was still speaking to the crowds, behold, His mother and brothers were standing outside, seeking to speak to Him. 47 Someone said to Him, "Behold, Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside seeking to speak to You." 48 But Jesus answered the one who was telling Him and said, "Who is My mother and who are My brothers?" 49 And stretching out His hand toward His disciples, He said, "Behold My mother and My brothers! 50 "For whoever does the will of My Father who is in heaven, he is My brother and sister and mother."

Mark, after describing the appointment of the twelve apostles, tells us that Jesus "came home, and the crowd gathered again, to such an extent that they could not even eat a meal." Then Mark says in 3:21, "When His own people heard of this, they went out to take custody of Him; for they were saying, "He has lost His senses." The Greek word for "lost His senses" is *existeimi*, "to displace, to stand aside from" (New American Standard Exhaustive Concordance). The King James Version says "He is beside himself," the International Standard Version says, "He's out of his mind!," and the World English Bible has, "He is insane." They did not attribute His behavior to Beelzebul, but at the least they thought that He was behaving in an unusual way that indicated some sort of mental difficulty. Evidently Jesus had not behaved this way in the past and this was a new pattern for Him. Up until He was baptized by John He had been a normal Jewish man, but now He was doing all these crazy things, traveling around, preaching, teaching, healing, gathering men around Him, arguing with the Pharisees and scribes, etc. They probably feared for Him and so thought they should go "take custody of Him." The word means "seize." They meant to take Him by force if necessary. They wanted to keep Him from getting into trouble, from causing trouble for Himself and for the family. They probably were aware that His life was already being put in jeopardy because of what He was doing, and they wanted to keep things from escalating.

Fear of danger or embarrassment may keep us from the ministry that God wants us to accomplish. If we are moving forward in bold faith to share the gospel of Christ with people, some people close to us may try to restrain us. Jesus warned of this in Matthew 10. We see this now in His life as His mother and brothers come to try to restrain Him.

His mother and brothers arrived and sent word to Him and called Him (Mark 3:31). They did this "while He was still speaking." They interrupted the meeting, thinking that since they were His family, they had the priority to get to Him and gain His attention. Matthew says "behold" three times in this paragraph. Some translations leave this out, but I think it's important. The word is *idou*, a particle that says, "look at this" or "take note of this." I think Matthew is saying, "Look at this unusual thing that happened!" This was a noteworthy event, this was something unusual and significant.

Some individual then said to Jesus, "Behold, Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside seeking to speak to you." He wanted Jesus to take note of the fact that His family was there wanting to speak to Him. There is no mention of Joseph. It may be that Joseph had died and Mary was a widow at this point, and this may be part of the background to this encounter.

As the oldest son Jesus had an important role in the family after the death of His father. It was expected that He should have primary responsibility for the care of His mother after the death of His father, her husband. Instead of staying at home making a living and helping care for the family, Jesus was out preaching, teaching, healing and traveling around with twelve disciples. To their way of thinking, He was not fulfilling His responsibilities to His family. I think Jesus did recognize this responsibility, though. When He was hanging on the cross, Jesus saw His mother and John standing there and said to His mother, "Woman, behold, your son!" To John He said, "Behold, your mother!" John then writes, "From that hour the disciple took her into his own household" (John 19:26-27). I'm not entirely sure why this was necessary, since Mary had other sons and daughters, but this is what was done. His brothers were unbelievers at this point (John 7:5), and perhaps part of His reason for doing this. John was more of a brother to Him than His brothers in the flesh.

Jesus is fond of rhetorical questions, and so replies by saying "Who is My mother and who are My brothers?" He indicated that His disciples were His mother and brothers. This was a surprise. He seems to be saying that the people out there asking to talk to Him are not really His mother and brothers. He seems to be disowning them! He gives the answer to the question in verse 50, "For whoever does the will of My Father who is in heaven, he is My brother and sister and mother." The disciples were his "mother and brothers" because they did the will of the Father. By believing in and following Him and participating in His ministry they were doing the will of the Father. At this point Mary and her sons were trying to hinder His ministry. The will of the Father in heaven took precedence over the will of His family on earth. In this instance He could not and would not submit Himself to His earthly mother. The will of the earthly family would not hinder Him from carrying out the will of the heavenly Father. Here He demonstrated to the disciples the truth of what He told them in chapter 10 about how following Him would put them at odds with their family members. He showed them that sometimes they would have to say "no" to family in order to say "yes" to God's will.

#### Matthew 13:1-23

That day Jesus went out of the house and was sitting by the sea. 2 And large crowds gathered to Him, so He got into a boat and sat down, and the whole crowd was standing on the beach. 3 And He spoke many things to them in parables, saying, "Behold, the sower went out to sow; 4 and as he sowed, some *seeds* fell beside the road, and the birds came and ate them up. 5 "Others fell on the rocky places, where they did not have much soil; and immediately they sprang up, because they had no depth of soil. 6 "But when the sun had risen, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away. 7 "Others fell among the thorns, and the thorns came up and choked them out. 8 "And others fell on the good soil and \*yielded a crop, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty. 9 "He who has ears, let him hear."

10 And the disciples came and said to Him, "Why do You speak to them in parables?" 11 Jesus answered them, "To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been granted. 12 "For whoever has, to him *more* shall be given, and he will have an abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him. 13 "Therefore I speak to them in parables; because while seeing they do not see, and while hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. 14 "In their case the prophecy of Isaiah is being fulfilled, which says, 'YOU WILL KEEP ON HEARING, BUT WILL NOT UNDERSTAND; YOU WILL KEEP ON SEEING, BUT WILL NOT PERCEIVE; 15 FOR THE HEART OF THIS PEOPLE HAS BECOME DULL, WITH THEIR EARS THEY SCARCELY HEAR, AND THEY HAVE CLOSED THEIR EYES, OTHERWISE THEY WOULD SEE WITH THEIR EYES, HEAR WITH THEIR EARS, AND UNDERSTAND WITH THEIR

HEART AND RETURN, AND I WOULD HEAL THEM.' 16 "But blessed are your eyes, because they see; and your ears, because they hear. 17 "For truly I say to you that many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see *it*, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear *it*.

18 "Hear then the parable of the sower. 19 "When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil *one* comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is the one on whom seed was sown beside the road. 20 "The one on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, this is the man who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; 21 yet he has no *firm* root in himself, but is *only* temporary, and when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he falls away. 22 "And the one on whom seed was sown among the thorns, this is the man who hears the word, and the worry of the world and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful. 23 "And the one on whom seed was sown on the good soil, this is the man who hears the word and understands it; who indeed bears fruit and brings forth, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty."

Here in chapter 13 Matthew strings together for us eight of the parables of Jesus that are, for the most part, concerned with illustrating the kingdom of God. We find here the Parable of the Sower, the Parable of the Wheat and the Tares, the Parable of the Mustard Seed, the Parable of the Leaven, the Parable of the Treasure Hidden in the Field, the Parable of the Pearl of Great Value, the Parable of the Dragnet, and the Parable of the Scribe.

The word "parable" is a transliteration of the Greek word *parabolē*, and means "a placing beside, a comparison" (NASEC). Vincent's Word Studies says, "From παρά, *beside*, and βάλλω, *to throw*. A parable is a form of teaching in which one thing is *thrown beside* another. Hence its radical idea is *comparison*." The parables of Jesus are illustrations of spiritual or heavenly or kingdom truth that employ earthly parallels. At the beginning of a number of His parables He will say that the parable is meant to be a comparison with the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 13:24 for example).

At this point Jesus is still around the Sea of Galilee. He went out and was sitting by the sea, and again there were large crowds present. He got into a boat and sat down in order to teach.

The first parable is the "Parable of the Sower," and I think what I'll do is to study the parable in verses 3-9 and the explanation of the parable in verses 18-23, then we will come back to examine verses 10-17 about why Jesus taught in parables.

The sower went out to sow. This is what sowers do, they sow, they plant seeds. And of course this is a purposeful activity. There is a reason for doing this. It is an essential part of a process that leads to a desired end – the production of a crop. The sower is sowing because he wants to reap a harvest in the future. He won't obtain the crop unless he sows. Some have said that this should be called "The Parable of the Soils" because it is all about the response of the four types of soils that represent four types of responses to the seed. But Jesus calls this "the parable of the sower" in verse 18. This parable is all about the sower and the result he expects and desires from planting the seeds. Three types of soil do not produce the crop he is pursuing, but one type does. This is important to keep in view as we consider the meaning of this parable.

Some of the seeds fell beside the road or path. This was beside the field and had not been plowed. It was hard soil that was not prepared to receive the seeds. It was easy for the birds to come down and eat the seeds. These seeds don't have any chance of taking root and growing to produce part of the crop.

Some of the seeds fell on the rocky places where there wasn't much soil. These seeds sprang up right away because there was no depth of soil. The reason for this is that since there is no depth to the soil, the initial growth of the seed will become visible right away as the plant breaks through the surface of the soil immediately. A seed planted in deeper soil will take longer to break the surface. It will appear initially that the seed sown on rocky soil is healthy and vigorous, but the seed will not be able to put down roots. The energy of the seed will go toward vertical growth, but not toward root growth, and therefore the seed will not survive. The appearance of health and vigor is illusory. Though it started growing quickly, it "had no root" and "withered away" when the sun rose and scorched the plant. A plant has to have good roots in order to survive the hot sun. A plant with insufficient roots will wither and die.

Some of the seeds fell among the thorns, among the weeds, and the weeds came up and choked them out. In this fallen and cursed world it always seems like the weeds are more vigorous and grow more quickly and easily than the desirable plants. This soil has too much competition for its resources, and the seed can't compete with the thorns.

The seed that fell on the good soil produced a crop and gave the sower what he wanted. Some seeds produced a hundredfold, some sixty and some thirty. There were varying rates of yield among the seeds, but all the seeds in the good soil produced some sort of crop.

The meaning of this parable is not plain, so Jesus explained it to the disciples in verses 18-23. He told them if they had ears they should hear in verse 9, then in verse 18 He says, "Hear then the parable of the sower."

Mark tells us that "The sower sows the word" (Mark 4:14) and Luke says, "The seed is the word of God" (Luke 8:11). In Matthew Jesus refers to the seed as "the word of the kingdom." What is being sown is the message, the good news, about the kingdom of God that was preached by John the baptist, by Jesus and by the apostles. It is the message about Jesus as the King, the Messiah and the coming of His rule. The soil represents the response of those who hear the message. The people represented by the roadside soil hear the word of the kingdom but do not understand it. The evil one (Satan in Mark 4:15 and the devil in Luke 8:12) "snatches away what has been sown in his heart." Luke tells us Satan's purpose, "so that they may not believe and be saved" (Luke 8:12). The message of the gospel is meant to lead us to faith in Christ and salvation in Him, and Satan wants to prevent people from believing. It is easy for him to snatch away the seed when the soil is hard and people are unwilling to hear and understand the word.

The word translated "understand" is an important term in this context. The Greek word is *suniēmi*, meaning "to set together" ([NASEC](#)), to "join together in the mind" ([Thayer](#)), to perceive or comprehend. Matthew uses the word in verse 13, "nor do they understand," verse 14, "but will not understand," verse 15, "and understand with their heart," verse 19, "When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it," and again in verse 23 He says the man represented by the good soil, "hears the word and understands it." The word of the kingdom must not only be heard, but comprehended. There are many who have hard hearts who cannot understand God's message. They do not see how it is relevant to their lives. They can't comprehend why it is necessary for them to believe the gospel. They have hardened hearts and blinded minds. Their unwillingness to see and hear is a big part of the problem (verses 13-15).

Scripture exhorts us not to be hard-hearted. It warns us against hardening our hearts if we want to hear the word of God:

Today, if you would hear His voice,  
Do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah,

As in the day of Massah in the wilderness;  
When your fathers tested Me,  
They tried Me, though they had seen My work.  
For forty years I loathed *that* generation,  
And said they are a people who err in their heart,  
And they do not know My ways.  
Therefore I swore in My anger,  
Truly they shall not enter into My rest.  
(Psalms 95:7-11 NASB)

This passage is quoted and discussed in the New Testament book of Hebrews, in chapters 3 and 4. There it says that our hearts are hardened by the "deceitfulness of sin" (Hebrews 3:13) and we will refuse to listen to or believe the word of God. A hard heart will keep us from entering into the rest that God offers in His kingdom.

The rocky soil people are those who hear the word and immediately receive it with joy. Their response is quick and they are delighted to believe what they have heard. They see the good of the good news and joyfully embrace it. They want the benefits of the gospel. But there is a problem, "yet he has no firm root in himself, but is only temporary." Matthew and Mark use this word *proskairos*, "temporary," and Luke says, "they believe for a while" (Luke 8:13). They believe for a time or for a season. Their faith is temporary and fleeting. In this thin soil there is no room for firm roots. The seed can grow up for a bit, but can't fully take root in order to grow to maturity. Their faith endures only until "affliction or persecution arises because of the word." It is probable that this will happen. The message that brings us salvation also brings to us the opposition of a world that hates Jesus. Jesus warned the apostles about this in His instructions in chapter 10, "You will be hated by all because of My name, but it is the one who has endured to the end who will be saved" (10:22). He had said in chapter 5, verses 10-12, "Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you." These are ominous words for those who drop their faith in Christ because of affliction and persecution. Since they don't "endure to the end" they must not be saved. The kingdom of heaven is not theirs and there will be no great reward for them in heaven.

As quickly as they had received the word, those in the rocky places give it up and "fall away." Matthew says, "immediately he falls away." The word translated "falls away" here is *skandalizō*, the same word we encountered in chapter 5 when Jesus talked about things that cause us to stumble, and in chapter 11 verse 6 where Jesus said to John the baptist, "blessed is he who does not take offense at Me." The word is used 13 times in Matthew and is translated "to stumble," to "take offense" (Matthew 11:6, 13:57), "offended" (15:12, 17:27), to "cause to stumble" (18:6 and 8-9), and to "fall away" (13:21, 24:10, 26:31, 26:33). This person was not ready for the affliction and persecution that comes with believing, and so when it came, they stumbled and fell away. If they had understood this would happen when they heard the word, they probably would not have received it because they were not willing to pay this kind of price for believing. They wanted the benefits without the opposition.

To be fair, we should recognize that this kind of person probably did not receive the word thinking that it would only be a short-term, temporary commitment. They were sincere about joyfully believing in the beginning. It's like getting married and then later discovering that your spouse has some undesirable characteristics that you didn't see previously, and then deciding



to split up. Because there is a great spiritual battle between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan on this earth for the hearts of people, those who come out of the darkness into the light will be persecuted by those still in the darkness. It's more comfortable for many to retreat into the darkness. The wide path is easier than the narrow path (Matthew 7:13-14).

Another thing to note about the rocky soil people is that their belief in the word of the kingdom is conditional. Again, they may not say this up front, but it becomes evident when others start giving them a hard time for their faith. They will think, "I want forgiveness and salvation, but I didn't sign up for this!" They want the joy but won't accept the pain. When they see that faith in Christ brings the hatred of the world, they decide that faith in Christ is not worth it. This is why Jesus said what He did in chapter 10 about loving Him more than anyone else. The true believer puts Jesus first above all others, and the opposition that comes from family and friends because of it will not cause him to abandon his commitment to Christ.

A third type of response to the word of the kingdom is the person represented by the thorny soil. He is "the man who hears the word, and the worry of the world and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful." Matthew mentions two "thorns" that choke the word, the worry of the world and the deceitfulness of riches. Mark adds "the desires for other things" (Mark 4:19) and Luke mentions the "pleasures of this life" (Luke 8:14). These are the things that take precedence over the word of the kingdom in our lives and make it unfruitful.

Jesus talked about the worry of the world back in Chapter 6, verses 25-34, that worry that says, "What will we eat?" or "What will we drink?" or "What will we wear for clothing?" Obsession with these concerns and pursuing them as our top priority will choke out the concerns of the kingdom. That's why Jesus said, "But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you" (Matthew 6:33).

Jesus describes wealth as "deceitful." The pursuit of riches and wealth is based on the illusion that if we are rich enough, we will be secure and free from the worry of the world. This is why Jesus talked about both of these things in Matthew 6, and told us not to lay up treasures on earth, but in heaven. Wealth gives us false hope for the future and even makes us feel less secure because we have to worry about protecting and preserving our wealth. Believing in Christ gives us true security and true hope for the future that cannot be destroyed by moths or rust or thieves. A sincere commitment to the gospel of Christ will lead us to invest in the kingdom rather than the wealth of the world.

When He mentions "the desires for other things" in Mark 4:19, the text uses the word *epithumia*, often translated "lust" in the New Testament. The word means a strong or passionate desire, a longing. It is sometimes used in a positive sense, as when Jesus said, "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer" (Luke 22:15). Where there is a strong desire to pursue things other than the seed of the word of the kingdom, the seed cannot bear fruit and is choked out. Again, there is something else that takes priority and Christ does not rule the life of this person.

Another thing that chokes the word is the "pleasures of this life" (Luke 8:14). The Greek word for "pleasures" is *hēdonē*, from which we get our word "hedonism." The hedonist is one who sees pleasure as the highest good and pursues pleasure above all else. The ethic is, "If it feels good, do it!" Things that do not produce pleasure are not pursued, and as we've seen, the seed of the word of God can bring about things that are not always pleasurable. When pleasure for ourselves is our highest value, then we are not likely to pursue God's will and His pleasure.

Because of these "thorns" in the soil, the seed of the word becomes unfruitful. Luke says that they "bring no fruit to maturity." Unfruitful soil does not give the sower what he wants and is useless. Unfruitful people do not produce what God wants and face destruction. John had

told the Pharisees and Sadducees, “Bear fruit in keeping with repentance,” and, “Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire” (Matthew 3:8 and 10). Jesus taught the same thing in a number of places, in John 15:6, “If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned.” In Luke 13:6-9 is the parable of the unfruitful fig tree that faces destruction if it fails to produce figs. In a passage about people who fall away from the faith, the author of Hebrews uses the same picture and says, “For ground that drinks the rain which often falls on it and brings forth vegetation useful to those for whose sake it is also tilled, receives a blessing from God; but if it yields thorns and thistles, it is worthless and close to being cursed, and it ends up being burned. But, beloved, we are convinced of better things concerning you, and things that accompany salvation, though we are speaking in this way” (Hebrews 6:7-9). In chapter 19 we will read of the rich man who came to Jesus asking what he needed to do to obtain eternal life, and we will find that his wealth was a “thorn” that choked out the gospel in his life and prevented him from following Jesus (Matthew 19:16-26).

I think most people in our culture are represented by this third type of soil. There is not yet in our culture a lot of serious affliction or persecution coming upon believers, but for most, there are other things that are a higher priority than the word of the kingdom. So called “political correctness” is very important for many today. It is important to them that they stay in step with liberal ideas of “social justice,” “equality” and “tolerance.” There are many for whom a relationship is all-important and keeps them from faith. For many it is the pursuit of wealth and pleasure and the things of this life. They are too busy with this life to have any thought of eternity. If we want to bear the fruit of the kingdom that will glorify God, we need to eliminate these “thorns” in our lives.

Finally, there is good soil that yields a crop. This is the man “who hears the word and understands it; who indeed bears fruit and brings forth, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty.” This man not only hears, but understands. He puts it together and comprehends the message. He sees the truth and wisdom of it. He understands the value and importance of receiving the word and what it will do for him. He understands that the word of the kingdom is the most important message given to people and that he has an obligation to believe it and submit to it. He makes a solid commitment to the word and allows it to grow to maturity and fruitfulness in his life. Luke’s version says, “These are the ones who have heard the word in an honest and good heart, and hold it fast, and bear fruit with perseverance” (Luke 8:15). These people have a different kind of heart, a heart that is “honest and good.” The Greek phrase is *kalei kai agathēi*. I like A.T. Robertson’s comment about this:

The Greeks used *kalos k' agathos* of the high-minded gentleman. It is probable that Luke knew this idiom. It occurs here alone in the N.T. It is not easy to translate. We have such phrases as “good and true,” “sound and good,” “right and good,” no one of which quite suits the Greek. Certainly Luke adds new moral qualities not in the Hellenic phrase. The English word “honest” here is like the Latin *honestus* (fair, noble). The words are to be connected with “hold fast” (*katechousin*), “hold it down” so that the devil does not snatch it away, having depth of soil so that it does not shrivel up under the sun, and is not choked by weeds and thorns. It bears fruit (*karpophorousin*, an old expressive verb, *karpos* and *phoreo*). That is the proof of spiritual life. (Robertson’s Word Pictures)

These people hear the word and hold it fast. It becomes their prized possession that they hang on to and protect and guard. They are the ones who “bear fruit with perseverance.” They are steadfast and endure. They do not “fall away” when affliction or persecution comes

along because of the word. They do not allow other things to choke it out. Thayer's Greek Lexicon says of this word for perseverance, "in the NT the characteristic of a man who is not swerved from his deliberate purpose and his loyalty to faith and piety by even the greatest trials and sufferings."

Every individual who hears the word of the kingdom may be characterized by one of these four responses. If we want to do the will of God, we will want to be the fourth sort of person. We want to be the one with the honest and good heart, who hears the word and embraces it as the highest value and holds it fast and becomes fruitful. The good seed in good soil will in time produce a good crop. It will take a while and it will require patience and perseverance, but a good crop will come about. Some will be more productive than others, but all fruitful people will produce for the divine Sower that which He desires and will experience His pleasure.

Now let's rewind a little bit and consider verses 10-17. Jesus "spoke many things" to the people in parables, and the disciples were curious as to why He was doing this, so they asked Him, "Why do You speak to them in parables?" Jesus replied that the privilege of knowing the "mysteries of the kingdom" has been granted or given to them, but not to the crowds. A "mystery" (the Greek word *mustērion*) is a hidden thing or a secret thing that is not disclosed to everyone. To keep something secret means to hide it from people who should not know it. The Allies during World War 2 kept the D-Day Normandy plans a secret from the Germans and employed deception to make the Germans think that the main attack was going to take place at Calais and that the operations in Normandy were a diversion. The true plans were made known in advance only to those who had to know. To know the mysteries of the kingdom requires a disclosure from God. God must grant the knowledge of these mysteries, and He does so to those who are true followers and disciples of Christ. To those on the outside this knowledge is not granted.

Jesus explains further in verse 12, "For whoever has, to him more shall be given, and he will have an abundance; but whoever does not have even what he has shall be taken away from him." Jesus says this very same thing again in Matthew 25:29 at the conclusion of the parable of the talents, when the master takes the one talent away from the worthless slave who buried it and gives it to the slave who had ten talents. This is one of those surprising statements of Jesus that does not seem right or fair. Many today are upset about income inequality, about how the "haves" keep getting more, and the "have nots" keep falling further behind and don't have enough. The rich keep getting richer and the poor get poorer. We want to reverse this saying of Jesus and take wealth from the rich and give it to the poor. We admire Robin Hood because of this. But in the kingdom of God, those who have will be given more, and the little that others have will be taken away. We must remember that He's talking about the knowledge of the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, and not about economics.

To have an "abundance" means to have more than you need, to have an overflow that goes beyond the bare necessities. That's what it means to be rich; it means that they have more than they really need and are able to live lavishly because of it. The disciples will be rich in the knowledge of the mysteries of the kingdom, but unbelievers will have what little insight they have taken away. This is why the truth that seems obvious to believers and followers of the Lord is nonsense to those who don't know Him. The believers eyes have been opened while the eyes of the unbelievers have been blinded.

Jesus spoke in parables to the people, "because while seeing they do not see, and while hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand." They can see physically, but there is no perception of the truth in their seeing. They can hear physically, but there is no comprehension of the truth of what they hear. The prophecy of Isaiah from Isaiah 6:9-10 is being fulfilled in them. The verb means that the prophecy is being filled up or completed. They

will “keep on hearing” and they will “keep on seeing” but they will not understand and they will not perceive. There will be repeated opportunities to hear and to see. There will be no lack of chances to hear and to see the word of the kingdom, but they will continue in their failure to understand and to perceive.

The reason that these people hear without really hearing and see without really seeing is in verse 15. Their heart has become dull, their ears scarcely hear and they have closed their eyes. The Greek word translated “become dull” is *pachunō*, “to make thick, to make fat, fatten” (Thayer’s Greek Definitions). The King James Version translates it “waxed gross,” and the World English Bible says “this people’s heart has grown callous.” They have hearts that have become hardened and unresponsive. They “scarcely hear,” they are hard of hearing. The English Standard Bible has, “they can barely hear.” Toward the end of his life my father’s hearing progressively worsened and he could barely hear. I had to speak very loudly, almost shout, for him to hear me, and it was very difficult to get him to understand what I was saying. The problem wasn’t that I could not communicate, it was that he couldn’t hear. Of course, he recognized the problem and continually apologized that he couldn’t hear well, even with his hearing aids. The people Jesus is speaking of did not admit the problem.

They had also closed their eyes. They were responsible for this. I remember when my son Ian was very young we were watching an animated video about a snowman. When it became apparent that the snowman was going to melt, he became very upset and would not watch any more of the film. He in a sense “closed his eyes” to the truth the film was depicting because he didn’t want to face it. We never watched the film again. The truth about ourselves, about our sin, failure and corruption, and about God’s wrath and judgment is not something we want to face. We may want to close our eyes to these truths. We sometimes try hard to maintain the fiction of our goodness and righteousness and virtue. But it is not good for us to allow our hearts to become hardened and our ears to become hard of hearing, and our eyes to be closed to the truth God has for us. If we take this path we will shut ourselves off from healing.

If they had hearts that were not dull, ears that could hear, and eyes that were not closed, then they would be able to see, hear, understand and return and be healed by God. Seeing and hearing leads to understanding with the heart, and understanding enables a turn around. Here we have the verb *epistrephō* again, to turn back or to return. Healing from God depends on understanding and turning to Him. It’s not that God is unwilling to heal, it’s that people are unwilling to see, hear, understand and return to Him. When we fall down before the Lord and cry out to Him for His forgiveness and mercy we demonstrate that we have heard and have understood the message. Real repentance is the evidence that we have heard and understood what God has to say. Those who maintain that they do not need to repent show that they have not heard nor understood the message.

By contrast, the disciples of Jesus are blessed (verse 16). Their eyes are blessed because they see and their ears are blessed because they hear. They have open eyes and are not hard of hearing. They see and hear what many prophets and righteous men of the past wanted to see and hear and were not able. The prophets of the past had heard that the Messiah was coming, but they did not have the privilege of seeing Him and hearing Him. The writer of Hebrews, speaking of Abraham and other great people of faith, says, “All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth” (Hebrews 11:3). We must recognize the great blessing we have in actually knowing Christ. We have His Spirit dwelling in us! We hear His words and we see His works and are part of His kingdom on earth! There is no greater blessing!

The mysteries of the kingdom are in the parables, but they are not evident to those who do not believe. To the hard-hearted who have eyes that don't see and ears that scarcely hear, they may be interesting stories, but they perceive no transcendent truth in them. But those who really see and hear and believe will be saved and healed. People sometimes say, "If I see, I will believe," but Jesus said the exact opposite. He said to Martha in John 11:40, "Did I not say to you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?" Seeing the glory of God is conditioned on faith. Some who saw Jesus raise Lazarus from the dead did not believe, but went and told the Pharisees what He had done. When the Pharisees and chief priests heard about it, they did not believe in Him, but said, "What are we doing? For this man is performing many signs. If we let Him go on like this, all men will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation" (John 11:47-48). Even when they saw the undeniable "signs" that Jesus performed, they would not believe in Him; they would not turn and be healed. If you want to be healed, if you want the gift of eternal life in Christ, do not harden your heart when you hear the message of Christ (see Hebrews 3 and 4). Do not close your eyes or refuse to listen, but hear and turn and believe.

#### Matthew 13:24-43

Jesus presented another parable to them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field. 25 "But while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went away. 26 "But when the wheat sprouted and bore grain, then the tares became evident also. 27 "The slaves of the landowner came and said to him, 'Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?' 28 "And he said to them, 'An enemy has done this!' The slaves \*said to him, 'Do you want us, then, to go and gather them up?' 29 "But he \*said, 'No; for while you are gathering up the tares, you may uproot the wheat with them. 30 'Allow both to grow together until the harvest; and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, "First gather up the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them up; but gather the wheat into my barn.'"

31 He presented another parable to them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field; 32 and this is smaller than all *other* seeds, but when it is full grown, it is larger than the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that THE BIRDS OF THE AIR come and NEST IN ITS BRANCHES."

33 He spoke another parable to them, "The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three pecks of flour until it was all leavened."

34 All these things Jesus spoke to the crowds in parables, and He did not speak to them without a parable. 35 *This was* to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet: "I WILL OPEN MY MOUTH IN PARABLES; I WILL UTTER THINGS HIDDEN SINCE THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD."

36 Then He left the crowds and went into the house. And His disciples came to Him and said, "Explain to us the parable of the tares of the field." 37 And He said, "The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man, 38 and the field is the world; and *as for* the good seed, these are the sons of the kingdom; and the tares are the sons of the evil *one*; 39 and the enemy who sowed them is the devil, and the harvest is the end of the age; and the reapers are angels. 40 "So just as the tares are gathered up and burned with fire, so shall it be at the end of the age. 41 "The Son of Man will send forth His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all stumbling blocks, and those who commit lawlessness, 42 and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. 43 "Then THE RIGHTEOUS WILL SHINE FORTH AS THE SUN in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.

Once again here we see that we have the “Parable of the Wheat and Tares” in verses 24-30, and then the disciples ask about it and Jesus interprets it for them in verses 36-43. So let’s first look at this parable and it’s interpretation, and then we will come back to the material in verses 31-35.

This parable is a parable about the kingdom of heaven, and Jesus is making a comparison so that we can understand what has happened in God’s kingdom. I think this is an extremely important parable for our understanding of the Christian/Biblical world view. It addresses clearly the issue of the existence of evil in God’s world.

The kingdom of heaven is compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field, but at night while everyone was asleep his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat. The Greek word translated “tares” is *zizanion*, which is a type of darnel that looks like wheat as it grows. The Wycliffe Bible Encyclopedia has this to say:

The tares referred to in our Lord's parable are without doubt the bearded darnel, *Iolium temulentum*. This destructive weed is almost indistinguishable from wheat in its early growth. At harvest time its true nature is disclosed and the farmer (or his women and children) separates the weed, poisonous both to man and beast, from the good wheat.

The enemy of the farmer was stealthy and cunning. He did his work of sabotage at night under cover of darkness and used a type of weed seed that would look just like wheat at the beginning. It appears he was watching what the farmer was doing and was prepared with plenty of darnel seed to try to ruin the crop. This was a well planned attack and not a last-minute thing. The enemy was ready to strike when the time came.

The tares were not noticed until the wheat got to the “heading” stage, when the grain starts to form. Generally, it takes about four months from planting until wheat is ready to be harvested. The tares had been growing among the wheat for quite a while before they were noticed.

The slaves of the landowner asked him, “Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?” They knew that this was very unusual and unexpected. When you plant wheat seeds you don’t get tares. This was a big problem, and they were puzzled by it. It was natural and obvious that they should ask these questions. This is a very important element in this parable. The existence of evil in God’s good creation is a puzzling thing. It’s an anomaly; it’s not the way things should be. We seem to know this instinctively. Atheists and unbelievers use this problem as “proof” that either God does not exist, or if He does exist, He is not good. We all have this sense that things are not as they should be if God really is good. The Lord knows we ask these questions, and we should ask them. We must face this issue head-on and see how the Lord answers these questions.

To the first question, the answer is, yes, the landowner had sown good seed in his field. He would not have mixed the weeds in with the wheat. He would not sabotage his own crop. So the second question is the crux of the issue, how does the field have tares? Where did they come from? The landowner is quick and unequivocal with his answer, “An enemy has done this!” He didn’t scratch his head and say, “Gee, I have no idea!” It was obvious to him what had taken place. The word “enemy” translates the Greek *echthros anthrōpos*, a hateful or hostile man, an adversary. Neither the landowner nor his slaves held any responsibility for the existence of the tares in his field. They had followed the proper practice with the proper seeds to produce a good crop of wheat. The presence of the tares was a malicious act by an enemy.

The next question from the slaves was, "Do you want us, then, to go and gather them up?" The slaves suggested that they should act immediately to eliminate the problem and remove the tares. They could see the necessity of removing the tares and that this stuff could not be allowed to mix in with the wheat at the harvest. But the landowner decided to wait until the harvest. He said, "No; for while you are gathering up the tares, you may uproot the wheat with them. Allow both to grow together until the harvest; and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, 'First gather up the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them up; but gather the wheat into my barn.'" The roots of the wheat and the tares were growing in the same soil, and were intertwined with each other. Pulling up the tares might uproot the wheat also just when it was about to be ready for harvest. Part of the crop could be ruined if the wheat were uprooted due to the effort to eliminate the tares. For the sake of the wheat, the tares were left in place until the wheat was fully mature. When the harvest time came, the tares would first be gathered up and bundled for burning, then the wheat would be gathered into the barn. At harvest there would be no more need to worry about uprooting the wheat because the time would have come for harvesting anyway, and the grain would be ready.

Thankfully the disciples came and asked Jesus to explain this parable, and He tells them the specific meaning of each element in verses 36-43.

First note the elements of the parable. The landowner, the one who sows the good seed, is Jesus Himself, the Son of Man. He did not sow the darnel in His field, but only planted good seed. He is good and all He does is good. The field is the world. Jesus is talking about the entire world and not just a little corner of it. Somehow some commentators have interpreted this parable as applying to the church and corruption in the church, but clearly Jesus is not talking about the church, but about the world as a whole. The good seed sowed by the Son of Man represents the "sons of the kingdom." They are those who have repented and believed in Him and are following Him. The tares are the "sons of the evil one" and have been planted by the devil. The devil is the enemy of Jesus the landowner. The world is not his field and he is not the owner, and he is sowing his evil seed on land that is not his property. His works are evil and illegitimate. The harvest represents the end of the age and the reapers are angels.

It's critically important to see here that the "sons of the kingdom" and the "sons of the evil one" represent the two great divisions of humanity. Jesus is talking about people. The good seed represents those who belong to His kingdom, who have heard the word, received it, believe in Jesus and follow Him. The tares are those who belong to Satan and his dominion. Jesus does not allow for any other category. There is no one who is not in one camp or the other, who belongs in some third category. This idea is consistent throughout the scriptures. Scripture often contrasts the wicked and the righteous. Psalm 1:5-6 says, "Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, Nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous. For the LORD knows the way of the righteous, But the way of the wicked will perish." Proverbs 3:33 says, "The curse of the LORD is on the house of the wicked, But He blesses the dwelling of the righteous." There are many other passages we could cite as well. We've seen Jesus teach this truth already as well. Back in chapter 7 He said that there are only two roads, the wide road that leads to destruction and the narrow road that leads to life (Matthew 7:13-14). He said that there are good trees and bad trees and that we must be one or the other (Matthew 7:17-19). He said that the wise build their house on the rock and the foolish build their house on the sand (Matthew 7:24-27). If we are not children of the kingdom and followers of Jesus, then we are children of the evil one.

In John 8 as Jesus was speaking with His opponents who wanted to kill Him, the subject of their paternity came up. In verse 39 they said, "Abraham is our father." Jesus replied, "If you are Abraham's children, do the deeds of Abraham. But as it is, you are seeking to kill Me, a man who has told you the truth, which I heard from God; this Abraham did not do. You are

doing the deeds of your father.” Then they said, “We were not born of fornication; we have one Father: God.” Then Jesus said, “If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and have come from God, for I have not even come on My own initiative, but He sent Me. Why do you not understand what I am saying? *It is* because you cannot hear My word. You are of *your* father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own *nature*, for he is a liar and the father of lies. But because I speak the truth, you do not believe Me. Which one of you convicts Me of sin? If I speak truth, why do you not believe Me? He who is of God hears the words of God; for this reason you do not hear *them*, because you are not of God” (John 8:42-47).

Of course, no one likes to be called a child of the devil. No one wants to accept the idea that they are evil and are children of Satan, but Jesus actually says this; He really teaches this. Our response to Jesus Himself reveals whether we are children of the kingdom or children of the devil. The children of the kingdom embrace the King, the one sent by the Father. They listen to Him and follow Him and recognize that He speaks the truth. The children of the devil do not love Jesus, do not believe in Him, and do not listen to His words.

The sons of the evil one will be allowed to exist side-by-side with the sons of the kingdom until the harvest at the end of the age. There will be an end of the age when Jesus sends His angels to gather up the tares and burn them up. The sons of the evil one will be gathered “out of His kingdom” and thrown into “the furnace of fire.” These people do not belong in His kingdom and must be removed. Only the children of the kingdom are allowed to remain in His kingdom. The order given to the reapers is, “First gather up the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them up.” The gathering of the tares comes first. We won’t find the so-called “pre-tribulation rapture” here. The sons of the evil one are taken out from among the sons of the kingdom.

Those gathered are described as “all stumbling blocks and those who commit lawlessness.” A “stumbling block” is someone who entices or causes someone else to sin. It is one thing for a man to stumble himself and fall into sin, but it is a much more serious matter to cause others to stumble. Leviticus 19:14 gives the command, “You shall not curse a deaf man, nor place a stumbling block before the blind, but you shall revere your God; I am the LORD.” Cursing the deaf and making the blind stumble is cruel and demonstrates a lack of reverence for the Lord. Proverbs 4:14-17 tells us that making others stumble is a characteristic of the wicked:

Do not enter the path of the wicked,  
And do not proceed in the way of evil men.  
Avoid it, do not pass by it;  
Turn away from it and pass on.  
For they cannot sleep unless they do evil;  
And they are robbed of sleep unless they make someone stumble.  
For they eat the bread of wickedness,  
And drink the wine of violence.

Jesus already has told us to deal severely with things in our lives that cause us to stumble (Matthew 5:29-30) and in chapter 18 He’s going to repeat the same thing and warn strongly against causing others to stumble (Matthew 18:5-9). Those who promote sin in others and seek to turn them away from the Lord will be among those cast out of the kingdom.

Along with those who are stumbling blocks, those “who commit lawlessness” will also be removed. The word for “lawlessness” is *anomia*, to be without law. This is the person who has



no regard for the Law of God, who lives without paying any attention to it. This person is either ignorant of God's commands or knows them but is contemptuous of them. It is possible, even, to acknowledge and claim obedience to the Law while in fact you are living in violation of the Law. This is what the Pharisees and scribes did and is the reason that Jesus denounced them as hypocrites. In Matthew 23:27-28 Jesus said, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. Even so you too outwardly appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness." Jesus illustrated how this was true of them in Mark 7:9-13:

He was also saying to them, "You nicely set aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition. For Moses said, 'Honor your Father and your Mother'; and, 'He who speaks evil of Father or Mother, let him be put to death'; but you say, 'If a man says to his father or his mother, anything of mine you might have been helped by is Corban (that is to say, given to God),' you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or his mother; thus invalidating the word of God by your tradition which you have handed down; and you do many things such as that."

The Pharisees and scribes fancied themselves as those who both taught and kept the Law of Moses. But Jesus pointed out that they had actually exalted their tradition over the Law of God. Instead of honoring their Fathers and Mothers, as God's Law commands, they observed their tradition which allowed them to sidestep this requirement by claiming that their wealth had been dedicated to God and so could not be used to support their parents. This is lawlessness.

Any time we sin we commit lawlessness, according to 1 John 3:4, "Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness." Sin is by definition a violation of the Law of God. Sin is an objective thing, like violating the speed limit. When God says "Don't do this," and we do it, we have sinned. Likewise, when God says "Do this," and we do not do it, we have sinned. Sin is not simply doing things that God has prohibited, it is also failing to do things that God has commanded. Honoring Father and Mother is a good example. If we fail to honor our parents and care for them when they are old, we sin and are committing lawlessness. The "sons of the kingdom" are not lawless. They are concerned about God's law and are obedient to it. Many will claim on the day of judgment that they were loyal to the name of Jesus, but He will say to them, "I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness." (Matthew 7:23.) The sons of the kingdom will observe the Law. Not perfectly, perhaps, but they will not be antinomians, those who disregard the Law of God. Those who live in submission to the rule of God will love His Law. We should recall Matthew 5:17-19, "Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass away from the Law, until all is accomplished. Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and so teaches others, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven." A "Christian" who disregards the Law of God is a contradiction.

The furnace of fire is a place where there is "weeping and gnashing of teeth." This phrase occurs six times in Matthew and once in Luke. It's repeated in verse 50. This place is also called the place of "outer darkness" in 8:12, 22:13 and 25:30, and "a place with the hypocrites" in 24:51. Jesus teaches that this is a real place of misery, darkness, sadness and suffering. There is no joy or fun there. It is not desirable to go to this place.

Once the sons of the evil one are removed from the kingdom, then, “the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.” There seems to be an implication that the light of the righteous is hindered by the darkness of the wicked. The wicked are like dark clouds that cover the sun. The sun is there shining, but has trouble getting through to the earth because of the dark clouds. Jesus here may be alluding to Daniel 12:3, and probably means that we should think of this passage and its context. The passage talks about the resurrection:

Now at that time Michael, the great prince who stands guard over the sons of your people, will arise. And there will be a time of distress such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time; and at that time your people, everyone who is found written in the book, will be rescued. And many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life, but the others to disgrace *and* everlasting contempt. And those who have insight will shine brightly like the brightness of the expanse of heaven, and those who lead the many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever. (Daniel 12:1-3)

Once the righteous, the sons of the kingdom, are raised and perfected, they will shine in a new way, unhindered by the sons of the evil one.

This parable teaches us some crucial things about the hard question of the existence of evil. First, it tells us that evil exists because of the activity of Satan. He is the one who has planted the darnel. He is the one who deceived the original man and woman and convinced them to follow a path of disobedience and rebellion. The Lord has only sown good seed, but the devil has sown evil in the world.

Second, this parable explains why God has continued to tolerate evil in His world. He is concerned about the wheat. He wants a maximum crop, and does not want to harm the wheat by pulling up the weeds prematurely.

Third, this parable shows us that there will be an “end of the age” when evil will be removed. One day the Lord will sweep away evil from the earth. He will not allow the current conditions to persist forever.

Fourth, it's plain from this parable that Jesus is talking about people. The good wheat seed and the bad darnel seed represent the two great categories of humanity to which we all belong. We are either children of the kingdom or children of the evil one.

Though Jesus does not mention it here, there is good news. It is possible through the miraculous working of God for a “tare” to become wheat. It is possible for those subject to Satan to become children of the kingdom, and this is the good news of the gospel of Christ that we proclaim. Jesus died and rose again to make this possible. Colossians 1:13-14 says that God has “rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.” If you find that you are not really a child of the kingdom, God can and will rescue you from the domain of darkness and bring you into the Son's kingdom if you will call out to Him and trust in Christ. In Christ you can be redeemed and granted forgiveness of your sins.

Now let's go back to verses 31-35 to examine the text there. First we encounter the “Parable of the Mustard Seed” in verses 31 and 32. Jesus says the kingdom of heaven itself is like a mustard seed which a man sowed in his field. This man wanted to grow this mustard plant, so he deliberately planted it; it was not accidental. God wanted to plant His kingdom on the earth, and sent His Son to “plant” it here.

Both here and in His statements about faith in Matthew 17:20 and Luke 17:6, Jesus uses the mustard seed to illustrate something that is very small but has a powerful potential. He

says that the kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed. At first, it is a very small thing. Note that Jesus says, "though it is smaller... yet... it becomes larger." The word for "garden plants" means herbs or vegetables grown in a garden. He is not saying that the mustard plant is the biggest of all plants. The kingdom has very small beginnings. Thayer's Lexicon says this about the mustard seed:

mustard, the name of a plant which in oriental countries grows from a very small seed and attains to the height of a tree, 10 feet (3 m) and more; hence a very small quantity of a thing is likened to a mustard seed, and also a thing which grows to a remarkable size.

The kingdom of heaven is a growing thing. In the parable of the sower, the seed represented the word of God. In the parable of the wheat and tares the seeds represented either the sons of the kingdom or the sons of the evil one. Here the seed represents the kingdom of heaven itself. It begins as a very small seed, but once it is planted it grows until it is full grown, and then it is the largest of all the garden plants. Though it is not actually a tree, it attains tree-sized proportions so that the birds even treat it as a tree.

The parable about the leaven makes the same point as the parable of the mustard seed about the kingdom of heaven. The kingdom is like a little bit of leaven that a woman mixed into her bread dough. That little tiny bit of leaven had a huge impact on the entire lump of dough and on the bread that resulted. Though the kingdom has almost imperceptible beginnings, it eventually impacts everything.

John the Baptist's message was that the kingdom of heaven was at hand (Matthew 3:2). Jesus said the same thing as He preached (Matthew 4:17). This same message Jesus told the disciples to preach (Matthew 10:7). In Jesus the kingdom of heaven got its start on earth. He came as the anointed one, the Messiah, the King, and the first to come under His rule and to enter His kingdom were the disciples. From these small beginnings the kingdom of heaven has expanded and continues to expand around the world as more people come under the authority of Jesus Christ.

In verses 34-35 there is a further explanation about why Jesus was speaking in parables. It was His regular practice to speak to the crowds in parables. Matthew explains that Jesus did this in order "to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet: 'I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter things hidden since the foundation of the world.'" In the parables Jesus was speaking of things that had been hidden. There are things that have been concealed from us until Jesus came and spoke of them. Recall that Jesus told the disciples in verse 11 that they were privileged to know the mysteries of the kingdom. We will learn things from Jesus that we will not learn anywhere else.

Matthew 13:44-46

"The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field, which a man found and hid *again*; and from joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. 45 "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking fine pearls, 46 and upon finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.

These two parables obviously make the same point, that the kingdom of heaven is a thing of such great value that if we understood it, we would gladly give up everything in order to obtain it. In the first parable it is probable that the man found this treasure unintentionally, that is, he was not going around searching for hidden treasure in fields. Probably his discovery was accidental. Having discovered this valuable treasure he then hid it again rather

than removing it. His discovery filled him with joy and he did not hesitate to sell everything in order to buy the field and thereby obtain the right to the treasure in the field. We may question the honesty of this man. Apparently the one who owned the field was unaware of the treasure, or if he was aware of it, did not value it. Evidently the treasure was left by a prior owner or hidden there by someone else. Why didn't he tell the owner of the property about the treasure? I think we should not over-think this aspect of the parable. Jesus is talking about how a man would behave if this happened rather than how he should behave.

The discovery of the kingdom of heaven should be a cause of great joy to us. It should override all other values in our lives. Everything else is of lesser value and importance. Knowing Christ and being in His kingdom is the greatest grace and privilege extended to us. There should be no reluctance on our part to trade the shabby and worthless things of this life for the riches of the kingdom.

In the second parable we have a man who is a pearl merchant. The word for "merchant" is *emporos*, someone who travels for the purpose of conducting trade. His business is buying and selling fine pearls. This is a man who knows pearls, knows what he's doing, and is deliberate about it. He is an earnest seeker of quality pearls. Upon finding a magnificent pearl that was of great value, he liquidated all his assets in order to buy that one pearl. If he wanted this pearl, it would cost him everything. Again it does not appear that there was any hesitation on the part of this merchant. He appreciated the value of what he was getting and did not think he was losing anything.

I think there are a few people like this merchant; people who are sincere seekers for truth and for God and eternal life, who, when they hear the message of Christ, are eager to turn from everything else to embrace Him and His kingdom. Paul talks about how he had done this in Philippians 3:7-11:

7 But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. 8 More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, 9 and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from *the* Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which *comes* from God on the basis of faith, 10 that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; 11 in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

The value of knowing Christ is something that surpasses all other values. There is no treasure greater than Christ Himself.

#### Matthew 13:47-52

"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet cast into the sea, and gathering *fish* of every kind; 48 and when it was filled, they drew it up on the beach; and they sat down and gathered the good *fish* into containers, but the bad they threw away. 49 "So it will be at the end of the age; the angels will come forth and take out the wicked from among the righteous, 50 and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. 51 "Have you understood all these things?" They \*said to Him, "Yes."

52 And Jesus said to them, "Therefore every scribe who has become a disciple of the kingdom of heaven is like a head of a household, who brings out of his treasure things new and old."

Jesus now shifts the picture from that of farmers and sowers and seeds, and men seeking treasure to fishermen. Many of the people to whom Jesus was speaking there near the Sea of Galilee were familiar with the fishing business and its importance to their economy. At least four of the apostles, Peter, Andrew, James and John, were commercial fishermen. They were concerned with catching quantities of fish. For them, wealth was embodied in catching large quantities of quality fish that they could bring to market. This is why it was so discouraging for them to have worked hard all night and caught nothing. I love the story from Luke 5:1-11:

1 Now it happened that while the crowd was pressing around Him and listening to the word of God, He was standing by the lake of Gennesaret; 2 and He saw two boats lying at the edge of the lake; but the fishermen had gotten out of them and were washing their nets. 3 And He got into one of the boats, which was Simon's, and asked him to put out a little way from the land. And He sat down and *began* teaching the people from the boat. 4 When He had finished speaking, He said to Simon, "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch." 5 Simon answered and said, "Master, we worked hard all night and caught nothing, but I will do as You say *and* let down the nets." 6 When they had done this, they enclosed a great quantity of fish, and their nets *began* to break; 7 so they signaled to their partners in the other boat for them to come and help them. And they came and filled both of the boats, so that they began to sink. 8 But when Simon Peter saw *that*, he fell down at Jesus' feet, saying, "Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man!" 9 For amazement had seized him and all his companions because of the catch of fish which they had taken; 10 and so also *were* James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, "Do not fear, from now on you will be catching men." 11 When they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed Him.

A similar thing happened again after the resurrection of Christ. Peter and the others had returned from Jerusalem to the Sea of Galilee, and Peter decided to go fishing. Four of the other apostles, Thomas, Nathanael and probably James and John decided to go with him. The story is in John 21:1- 14:

1 After these things Jesus manifested Himself again to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias, and He manifested *Himself* in this way. 2 Simon Peter, and Thomas called Didymus, and Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, and the *sons* of Zebedee, and two others of His disciples were together. 3 Simon Peter *said* to them, "I am going fishing." They *said* to him, "We will also come with you." They went out and got into the boat; and that night they caught nothing. 4 But when the day was now breaking, Jesus stood on the beach; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. 5 So Jesus *said* to them, "Children, you do not have any fish, do you?" They answered Him, "No." 6 And He said to them, "Cast the net on the right-hand side of the boat and you will find *a catch*." So they cast, and then they were not able to haul it in because of the great number of fish. 7 Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved *said* to Peter, "It is the Lord." So when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put his outer garment on (for he was stripped *for work*), and threw himself into the sea. 8 But the other disciples came in the little boat, for they were not far from the land, but about one hundred yards away, dragging the net *full* of fish. 9 So when they got out on the land, they *saw* a charcoal fire *already* laid and fish placed on it, and bread. 10 Jesus *said* to them, "Bring some of the fish which you have now caught." 11 Simon Peter went up and drew the net to

land, full of large fish, a hundred and fifty-three; and although there were so many, the net was not torn. 12 Jesus \*said to them, "Come *and* have breakfast." None of the disciples ventured to question Him, "Who are You?" knowing that it was the Lord. 13 Jesus \*came and \*took the bread and \*gave *it* to them, and the fish likewise. 14 This is now the third time that Jesus was manifested to the disciples, after He was raised from the dead.

Someone took the time to count the fish they had caught and evaluate them. There were 153 large fish, worth quite a bit of money at the market. There was both quantity and quality, a great catch, thanks to Jesus! When John saw that this was happening again, he realized that the guy on the shore was Jesus, and immediately Peter quit fishing to go be with Him. Apart from Jesus their efforts had resulted in nothing, but when He arrived, there was a great harvest of fish.

I point to these to stories to illustrate how these men went about their profession and what they were after. They did not go out with a rod and reel to catch a couple of fish as a fun recreational activity. Fishing was their livelihood, and they used nets in order to catch large quantities of fish. They wanted large and marketable fish. Hastings Dictionary of the Bible says that there is a species of catfish in Galilee that do not have scales, and are therefore "unclean" to the Jews and could not be eaten.

The dragnet gathers in fish of every kind, the good and the bad, the valuable and the worthless. The net cannot discriminate. When the fishermen have dragged the net onto the beach they can then evaluate the fish individually and separate them into good fish and bad fish. The bad are thrown away and the good are put into containers and saved. Jesus says this is the way it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and take the wicked out from among the righteous and cast them into the furnace of fire where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. This is the same point He made in the Parable of the Wheat and Tares. (verses 40-42). The bad fish are unacceptable. There is no profit in them. Again this tells us that there are two categories among humans, the wicked and the righteous, and that the wicked must be removed from among the righteous. This will be carried out by angels at the end of the age. The net will be cast and we will all be gathered, and then the wicked will be taken and cast out.

Jesus then asked, "Have you understood all these things?" and they answered in the affirmative. As we saw earlier, understanding the message is the key. Probably here Jesus was talking to the disciples. They were the ones who understood the message and responded to it by faith. They were those who were the good soil, the sons of the kingdom and the good fish. They were those who understood the surpassing value of the kingdom of heaven and had left everything behind in order to follow Jesus. Understanding leads to true repentance and healing.

From their affirmation Jesus draws a conclusion, "Therefore every scribe who has become a disciple of the kingdom of heaven is like a head of a household, who brings out of his treasure things new and old." This is really the eighth parable in this chapter. A scribe who has become a disciple of the kingdom is compared to a man who is the head of a household who goes to his store of valuables, and brings out things for his family that are both new and old. A man's treasury is not just for him to hoard for himself, but is something that should be used for the benefit of his family and others. A scribe is not someone who is to gather knowledge and understanding for himself, but is to take from his store of knowledge and share it with others and feed their souls. A Jewish scribe who thoroughly understood the old covenant, and then came to understand the mysteries of the kingdom in Christ and becomes a student of the kingdom of heaven is able to bring forth both old truth and new truth. He is

able to see how the new builds on the old and how the old points to the new. He comprehends both Law and grace and how the Law leads us to God's grace in Christ. The old is not set aside, but is fulfilled in the new.

I think Jesus is saying to His disciples that they are now to be these kinds of people, who bring good things out of their "treasure" of understanding that are both old and new and use them to bless others. They are students of the kingdom of heaven who are learning from the King Himself. Their task is to take from what they have learned and go teach others.

#### Matthew 13:53-58

When Jesus had finished these parables, He departed from there. 54 He came to His hometown and *began* teaching them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished, and said, "Where *did* this man *get* this wisdom and *these* miraculous powers? 55 "Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not His mother called Mary, and His brothers, James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? 56 "And His sisters, are they not all with us? Where then *did* this man *get* all these things?" 57 And they took offense at Him. But Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and in his *own* household." 58 And He did not do many miracles there because of their unbelief.

Jesus left this place near the Sea of Galilee and went to His hometown of Nazareth, which is about 15.5 miles west and a little south of the Sea of Galilee. He was teaching in their synagogue there as they gathered, and they were astonished at Him. They asked a string of questions showing their familiarity with Him and His family. They knew Joseph and Mary and His brothers, James and Joseph and Simon and Judas. They knew His sisters and asked, "Are they not all with us?" His family was right there in Nazareth and there was nothing especially remarkable about them. So their question is, "Where did this man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers?" They could not see how He, having grown up in this family and community, could have acquired such wisdom and power. As Nathanael said when he heard that Jesus was from Nazareth, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" (John 1:46). Great prophets and rabbis did not come from such a place as Nazareth, nor from such inconsequential families. So they "took offense at Him." The word for offense is again the word *skandalizō*, to stumble, to trip and fall. Familiarity bred contempt and they could not conceive that He could be the Messiah or anyone great.

Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and in his own household." This was probably a familiar proverb. A prophet has honor everywhere except at home. Jesus was due honor and respect. He is worthy of honor and we err if we do not recognize who He is, respect Him and listen to Him. More than a prophet, He is the Son of God, God incarnate, God with us. If we honor no one else, we must honor Him!

Because of the unbelief of the people of Nazareth, Jesus did not do many miracles there. Evidently He did a few, but not many. Because of their unbelief, the people of Nazareth missed out on great blessings that others had experienced. Unbelief will cause us to miss out on what the Lord wants to do for us. Jesus wanted to teach and heal in Nazareth as He had done elsewhere, but because of their skepticism and unbelief, He didn't do much there. Faith in Christ and honoring Him for who He is will bring His blessings and power into our lives.

#### Mat thew 14:1-12

At that time Herod the tetrarch heard the news about Jesus, 2 and said to his servants, "This is John the Baptist; he has risen from the dead, and that is why miraculous powers are at work in him." 3 For when Herod had John arrested, he bound him and put him in prison

because of Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip. 4 For John had been saying to him, "It is not lawful for you to have her." 5 Although Herod wanted to put him to death, he feared the crowd, because they regarded John as a prophet. 6 But when Herod's birthday came, the daughter of Herodias danced before *them* and pleased Herod, 7 so *much* that he promised with an oath to give her whatever she asked. 8 Having been prompted by her mother, she \*said, "Give me here on a platter the head of John the Baptist." 9 Although he was grieved, the king commanded *it* to be given because of his oaths, and because of his dinner guests. 10 He sent and had John beheaded in the prison. 11 And his head was brought on a platter and given to the girl, and she brought it to her mother. 12 His disciples came and took away the body and buried it; and they went and reported to Jesus.

This Herod was Herod Antipas, one of three sons of Herod the Great, who had been made tetrarch of one fourth of Herod the Great's kingdom. The word tetrarch means "ruler of a fourth." He governed the area of Galilee and Perea. Archelaus was his brother and Philip was his half-brother.

Herod heard about Jesus and said to his servants that Jesus must be John the Baptist risen from the dead. Mark tells us that this was what the people were saying about Jesus and that Herod adopted this view (Mark 6:14-16), though some thought Jesus was Elijah or a prophet. Herod acknowledged that miraculous powers were at work in Jesus. The miraculous works of Jesus were the things that made Him famous. They were the reason that so many came to see Him and crowded around Him. Some came to be healed, and other came just to see Him do something miraculous. Evidently Herod began to hear about Jesus after he had put John to death, because he would not have thought that Jesus was John had he heard about Jesus while John was still alive. Herod did not have the full story.

In his prophetic role, John had been saying to Herod that it was not lawful for him to have his brother's wife, Herodias. Rather than repent and correct the situation, Herod had John arrested and put in prison. Matthew tells us that Herod wanted to put John to death, but fear of the people restrained him, because they considered John to be a prophet. Mark tells us, "Herodias had a grudge against him and wanted to put him to death and could not *do so*; for Herod was afraid of John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and he kept him safe. And when he heard him, he was very perplexed; but he used to enjoy listening to him" (Mark 6:19-20). Not only was Herod afraid of the crowds, but he was also afraid of John himself. He knew that John was "a righteous and holy man" and even enjoyed listening to him. Herod was a politician and would not do what was right because of his image. This is a big problem with most politicians, that they are more concerned with their image and how they appear to others than they are with doing what is right and good.

When the daughter of Herodias danced for Herod and his guests, she pleased him so much he promised to give her whatever she asked from him. She didn't know what to ask for, so she consulted with her mother, who did not hesitate to tell her to ask for the head of John the Baptist. Herod didn't want to do this, but because he had sworn an oath and because of his image before his dinner guests, he ordered that John be beheaded. He hadn't thought this thing through very well and put himself into a bad situation because of his oath. It could be that this whole performance was a setup by Herodias intended to bring about this result. She may have known that Herod would want to reward her daughter for her performance. Herodias got what she wanted and John's head was presented to her by her daughter. What an awful way to conclude one's birthday party!

John's disciples came and took away his body and buried it and then went and reported it to Jesus. First they needed to take care of John's remains and then the second priority was to



inform Jesus. Whatever focus had remained on John as the forerunner of the Messiah was now shifted to Jesus. The disciples of John now needed to go to the One to whom John had pointed.

#### Matthew 14:13-21

Now when Jesus heard *about John*, He withdrew from there in a boat to a secluded place by Himself; and when the people heard *of this*, they followed Him on foot from the cities. 14 When He went ashore, He saw a large crowd, and felt compassion for them and healed their sick. 15 When it was evening, the disciples came to Him and said, "This place is desolate and the hour is already late; so send the crowds away, that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves." 16 But Jesus said to them, "They do not need to go away; you give them *something* to eat!" 17 They *said* to Him, "We have here only five loaves and two fish." 18 And He said, "Bring them here to Me." 19 Ordering the people to sit down on the grass, He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up toward heaven, He blessed *the food*, and breaking the loaves He gave them to the disciples, and the disciples *gave them* to the crowds, 20 and they all ate and were satisfied. They picked up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve full baskets. 21 There were about five thousand men who ate, besides women and children.

The account of the feeding of the five thousand is in all four of the gospels, including the gospel of John. We find it here in Matthew, in Mark 6:32-44, in Luke 9:10-17 and John 6:1-15. Mark and Luke tell us that this took place after the apostles had returned from their short-term mission and reported to Jesus about what they had done, and Mark says that He invited them to withdraw to a secluded place to rest (Mark 6:31). It appears that the return of the apostles coincided with the news about the execution of John the Baptist, and so Jesus felt that both He and the apostles needed to withdraw from the crowds for a while, but this was not to be. The people heard about Him and followed Him on foot. He could not escape the crowds that followed Him. If sometimes the plans of Jesus had to be modified due to the actions of others, we should not be surprised if sometimes our plans don't go the way we want them to!

Luke tells us that the place to which Jesus withdrew was Bethsaida, on the northern tip of the Sea of Galilee. Mark says after the feeding of the five thousand that "Jesus made His disciples get into the boat and go ahead of Him to the other side to Bethsaida" (Mark 6:45). Evidently there may have been two places called "Bethsaida," Bethsaida Julias, east of the Jordan river on the north end of Galilee, and Bethsaida of Galilee on the west side of the Sea of Galilee, a little south and west of Capernaum. The word "bethsaida" means "house of fish," and since fishing was a major industry around the Sea of Galilee, it's probably not unusual that two places might go by such a name.

Seeing the crowd as He arrived, Jesus felt compassion for them and healed their sick. It's at this point that Mark says "He felt compassion for them because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and He began to teach them many things" (Mark 6:34). This is the same thing that Matthew had mentioned in Matthew 9:36 that provided part of the rationale for sending the apostles out to teach and heal. Jesus did not resent the crowds for ruining His retreat, but felt compassion for them and ministered to them. He had come for this purpose.

The place they had gone is described as "secluded" and "desolate." It was away from big cities and there were no resources there. The people would need to travel a distance to find food to buy, so the disciples suggested to Jesus that He should send the people away. Jesus surprised them with His answer, "They do not need to go away; you give them something to eat!" The disciples saw only one solution to the need of the crowd for food, that they should

go away and find something to eat. But Jesus said that they did not need to go away, and ordered the disciples to feed them. They pointed out that they did not have near enough to feed the crowd. They said, "We have here only five loaves and two fish." John 6:5-9 gives us more specifics about the discussion, "Therefore Jesus, lifting up His eyes and seeing that a large crowd was coming to Him, said to Philip, 'Where are we to buy bread, so that these may eat?' This He was saying to test him, for He Himself knew what He was intending to do. Philip answered Him, 'Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, for everyone to receive a little.' One of His disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to Him, 'There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are these for so many people?'" It was clear that they did not have enough food to feed everyone, nor did they have enough money to buy food for everyone. Clearly what Jesus told them to do was impossible. The boy had graciously given them his five barley loaves and two fish, but among thousands this was clearly far from adequate.

It's funny how little kids will do this kind of thing. They will hear of an enormous need, thousands of people starving somewhere, and they will give their few cents or few dollars thinking that it will help. They do not see that the pittance they are giving will really not do anything to meet the need. But their spirit is right. They will give what they can, and the Lord will use it in miraculous ways.

Jesus told them to bring Him the five loaves and two fish, and He blessed them and started breaking the loaves and the fish and giving them to the disciples who gave them to the crowds. It must have taken quite a while to distribute the bread and fish to all of these people. The men who were there numbered about 5,000, but there were also women and children there. It appears that the disciples had baskets that they could use to carry the food to the people, and they must have been astonished as they saw Jesus continually breaking the bread and fish and giving them more and more to give to the people. They kept going back and forth, getting food from Jesus and then taking it to serve to the people. Everyone ate and everyone was satisfied, and there were even twelve baskets full of broken leftover pieces, one for each of the disciples! There was more left over than what they had at the beginning! John tells us that Jesus gave the order to the disciples, "Gather up the leftover fragments so that nothing will be lost" (John 6:12).

Regarding the baskets, [Vincent's Word Studies](#) says, "These were small hand-baskets, specially provided for the Jews to carry levitically clean food while travelling in Samaria or other heathen districts. The word for *basket* used in relating the feeding of the *four* thousand ([Matt. 15:37](#)) is σπυρίς, a *large provision-basket* or *hamper*, of the kind used for letting Paul down over the wall at Damascus ([Acts 9:25](#)). In [Matt. 16:9](#), [Matt. 16:10](#), Christ, in alluding to the two miracles, observes the distinctive term in each narrative; using κοφίνους in the case of the five thousand, and σπυρίδας in the other." I wonder what they did with the leftovers? I wonder if Jesus gave the twelve baskets to the boy who had come with one basket? After all, the original five loaves and two fish had been his, and it would be fun if he had left with twelve baskets full of food after having come with only one!

As we look at our world, the needs will almost always be greater than our resources. Who we are and what we have will always be inadequate to meet the needs around us. This fact must be acknowledged, but a greater fact must be acknowledged as well. Our Father and our Lord are more than adequate. The Lord Jesus Christ is greater than the need and greater than the lack of resources. He does not ask us what we don't have, but what we do have. He will take the little that we have to offer and will multiply it and use it as we trust Him and obey Him to do far more than we could ever ask or imagine! Paul says in Ephesians 3:20-21, "Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him *be* the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all

generations forever and ever. Amen.” When we only have what we have, then we don’t have much and can’t do much. But if we have Jesus, we have all we need to do what He wants to do.

#### Matthew 14:22-33

Immediately He made the disciples get into the boat and go ahead of Him to the other side, while He sent the crowds away. 23 After He had sent the crowds away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray; and when it was evening, He was there alone. 24 But the boat was already a long distance from the land, battered by the waves; for the wind was contrary. 25 And in the fourth watch of the night He came to them, walking on the sea. 26 When the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were terrified, and said, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out in fear. 27 But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, "Take courage, it is I; do not be afraid." 28 Peter said to Him, "Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water." 29 And He said, "Come!" And Peter got out of the boat, and walked on the water and came toward Jesus. 30 But seeing the wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!" 31 Immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and took hold of him, and \*said to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" 32 When they got into the boat, the wind stopped. 33 And those who were in the boat worshiped Him, saying, "You are certainly God's Son!"

John tells us that after the feeding of the five thousand the people were so impressed by this sign that they concluded that Jesus was “the Prophet who is to come into the world,” and intended to take Him by force and make Him king. This is why Jesus sent them away and withdrew from them to pray by Himself on the mountain. He would not allow them to try to force Him to become king. We don’t force Jesus to do anything. If we do anything to Him like arresting Him and crucifying Him, it is because He has allowed it and is cooperating with it.

Right after the feeding of the five thousand, Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and head to the other side of the Sea of Galilee. There seems to be an implication that they were reluctant to go. They did not want to go without Jesus. It had been a long and busy day and they were tired. It was evening, it was windy and the sea was rough. The disciples probably thought it was a bad idea to get into the boat at that time and cross the lake, so Jesus had to compel them to go. Also I think Jesus did not want these guys to get swept up in the movement to make Him king, and so He wanted to dismiss the crowds by Himself.

Traveling by boat at night was not so strange as we might think. The fishermen among the disciples were used to being out on the lake all night fishing (Luke 5:5). But they also knew about the perils of being out on this lake when the weather was stormy. We’ve already seen in chapter 8 that they came close to perishing in the storm at sea when the boat was being swamped by the waves (8:23-27). Despite all these things the disciples followed the directions of the Lord and got into the boat and shoved off to cross the sea.

Somehow Jesus succeeded in sending the crowds away and went up to pray on the mountain. As He was there praying the disciples were having trouble making progress because the wind was contrary and the boat was being battered by the waves. Mark tells us that Jesus could see them “straining at the oars” (Mark 6:48). It was tough going for them as they worked hard to row against the wind and the waves. Though He had stayed behind and was there alone, He was still mindful of them and was still looking out for them.

Jesus finished praying and then came to the disciples in the “fourth watch of the night,” walking on the water. Prior to their subjection to the Romans, the Jews observed three “watches” during the night, the first from about sunset to 10 PM, the second from 10 PM to 2

AM, and the third from 2 AM to sunrise. At this time they had apparently adopted the Roman system of four watches, and the fourth watch was from about 3 AM to 6 AM (Smith's Bible Dictionary). It was during this time frame that Jesus came to them, walking on the water. Mark tells us that Jesus was intending "to pass by them" (Mark 6:48). But the disciples saw Him walking on the water and were terrified, thinking He was a ghost. The Greek word translated "ghost" is *phantasma*, an apparition or spectre. It's obvious why they would think this, because we all know that people can't walk on water. Again He surprised them by doing something that normal people can't do.

While they cried out in fear, Jesus right away said, "Take courage, it is I; do not be afraid." He wanted them to know that it was not some malevolent spirit that was coming out to attack them, but it was He Himself. Because it was Him, they could take courage and not be afraid. There was no cause to be afraid, but He was looking after them. Here again was another situation on the sea where for the disciples there was cause for great fear and anxiety. Not only were they battling the contrary wind and waves, but now there was a ghost pursuing them! But the message of Jesus was one that gave them courage and set aside their fears. With Him present there was no reason for fear. He had made them get into the boat and cross the sea, and there was no reason for them to fear or to think that they would sink. He would look after them. When He sends us into dangerous situations, He will look after us, will come to us and will be with us.

Peter was skeptical and wanted to make a test to see if it really was Jesus. He said, "Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water." It's an interesting request. He didn't say, "If it is You, then make the wind and waves stop like you did before." He didn't say, "If it is You, then push the boat to the other side." Instead, He asked Jesus to issue the command that he should get out of the boat and walk to Him on the water. Peter knew that if Jesus commanded it, he could do it. He had learned this much, that if Jesus said it should be done, it could and would be done. He is the Lord and what He commands is to be done, even if it is humanly impossible.

Jesus granted Peter's request and said, "Come!" Peter obeyed and got out of the boat and began to walk toward Jesus on the water. This is the great thing about Peter, he was always going toward Jesus; he always wanted to be with Jesus. After the resurrection when Peter and the guys were fishing, when John recognized that it was Jesus who was standing on the shore, Peter threw himself into the sea and swam ashore to be with Jesus (John 21:7). This is the great characteristic of a real disciple of Jesus, they want to be with Him. Mark 3:14-15 tells us that when Jesus chose the twelve, He appointed them, "that they would be with Him and that He could send them out to preach and to have authority to cast out the demons." The first task of a disciple of Jesus is simply to be with Jesus. A real disciple is one who is always heading toward Jesus, always pursuing Him.

Peter's faith and confidence was short-lived at this point, though. His focus shifted from Jesus to the wind. Verse 30 says, "But seeing the wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, 'Lord, save me!'" When Peter stepped out of the boat and onto the water, it wasn't like stepping onto land. There were waves, and the water was in constant movement. It must have been a strange sensation to be standing on top of a liquid surface that was shifting and undulating under his feet. Peter was used to standing on his boat as it floated on top of the water, but walking on the water was a whole new experience, and like any new experience, it would take some practice to adapt to it. I can understand how his focus shifted! Because of his shift in focus, Peter's faith gave way to fear. Having started well, he now began to sink. He could have come to Jesus and had some fun walking around on the water for a while, and maybe the others would have been inspired to ask that they might do

the same. But because he gave in to fear, this unique experience was cut short. He cried out, "Lord, save me!" This is often the best prayer we can pray, to simply cry out for rescue.

Jesus reached out and grabbed Peter and said, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" He had asked a similar question during the storm at sea in chapter 8 verse 26, "Why are you afraid, you men of little faith?" Here again Jesus uses the adjective *oligopistos*, "little faith." And again in this setting the question seems a little odd. It should be obvious why Peter doubted. The water was stirred up by the wind, the experience was unprecedented, and everyone knows that people can't walk on water. We might think that it would be weird if Peter hadn't doubted in this situation. But Jesus asks, "Why did you doubt," and the word for "doubt" is a verb, *distazō*. It was something Peter did. AT Robertson says the word means "pulled two ways" ([Robertson's Word Pictures](#)). Peter began by believing that if Jesus commanded it, he could walk on the water, and indeed he did for a few steps, but then he focused on the wind and began to think that maybe he couldn't walk on the water, and so began to sink. He gave in to doubt.

Doubt is wavering. It is hesitating between two options. Elijah asked the question of the people of Israel in 1 Kings 18:21, "Elijah came near to all the people and said, 'How long *will* you hesitate between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him.' But the people did not answer him a word." They were not making up their minds to believe one thing or the other.

Let's illustrate doubt with another example. We have been told that NASA has landed men on the moon six times beginning with Apollo 11 in July of 1969. We have seen the videos and photos of the events. We saw them return and splash down into the ocean, bringing samples of moon rocks to be studied. Millions of people witnessed these things through the media. But then suppose we read an article about an elderly former employee of NASA who claims that the whole thing was faked, and that they never really set foot on the moon (<https://www.ozy.com/true-story/how-i-faked-the-apollo-moon-landing/68714>). We may begin to waver in our belief that man has really gone to the moon. If we do more study and pay more attention, we will find that the idea that the moon landings were faked has been thoroughly discredited and has no merit. In fact, if you read to the end of the article referenced above, you will find that the article was an April Fools joke, and was a complete fabrication. Sometimes doubts of this nature can be easily set aside. Ultimately the solution to doubt is to make a decision about what we believe. Jesus was asking Peter why he doubted. He was asking why he had decided to waver in his confidence that he could walk on the water. Jesus had commanded him to come, and he was walking on the water, and rather than being delighted and enjoying the experience, Peter started doubting.

There are many things in life that will assail our faith. There will be misfortune, illness, death, violence, accidents and injuries. There will be conflicts with others. There will be those who ridicule our faith and are skeptical of God and His word. We must decide to believe despite the roadblocks. We must decide to keep our focus on Christ rather than the wind and waves.

After rescuing Peter, Jesus and Peter got into the boat and another miracle occurred, the wind stopped. Mark tells us the disciples were "utterly astonished" (Mark 6:51). Again Jesus had calmed the storm, in addition to walking on the water to them. The effect was that the disciples in the boat worshiped Jesus and said, "You are certainly God's Son!" The word for worship, *proskuneō*, means to bow down in reverence before someone or something. We should notice, though, that they worshiped Jesus by saying something. They acknowledged that He was certainly God's Son. It became obvious to them that Jesus was no ordinary mortal man, but that He was indeed divine and deserved their worship. Worship is recognizing who Jesus is, bowing before His glory, and acknowledging and verbalizing the

truth about Him. Here again they had another demonstration of the uniqueness of Jesus and His power and authority, and again they were amazed, and it prompted worship.

When our eyes are opened to Jesus in this way we will worship Him, and He is worthy of it. It is appropriate and necessary that we bow before Jesus and acknowledge Him for who He is, and He receives our worship. In Matthew 21:15-16 when the children in the temple were worshipping Him by shouting "Hosanna to the Son of David," the chief priests and scribes got upset and confronted Jesus and said, "Do You hear what these children are saying?" Jesus said, "Yes; have you never read, 'Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babies you have prepared praise for yourself?'" It was appropriate that the children were praising Him, and it was appropriate that the disciples worshiped Him, and it is appropriate and fitting and even necessary that we should worship Him.

#### Matthew 14:34-36

When they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret. 5 And when the men of that place recognized Him, they sent *word* into all that surrounding district and brought to Him all who were sick; 36 and they implored Him that they might just touch the fringe of His cloak; and as many as touched *it* were cured.

Gennesaret was a region or district on the west side of the Sea of Galilee, a fertile plain about 3 or 4 miles long and two miles wide. This is where Capernaum was. According to Luke 5:1 it appears that another name for the Sea of Galilee was "lake of Gennesaret." Jesus and the disciples came to this area and were recognized. They will not yet be able to rest. The word went out and all those who were sick were brought to Him. They were begging that they might just touch the fringe of His cloak, and those who did so were healed. Somehow these people had come to believe that the key to being healed by Jesus was touching the fringe of His cloak. The centurion knew that Jesus could just issue the order and healing would take place, even from a distance, but these people thought that touching Jesus' cloak was necessary. Jesus did not correct them or deny them their superstition. When they touched His cloak, He healed them. There was no power in the fringe of His cloak, but there was power in this simple faith that looked to Him and implored Him.

We should come to Jesus and implore Him for what we need. We should pursue Him vigorously. We should trust that when we come to Him, we will find the true healing and salvation we need. We should also spread the word so that others will come to Him.

#### Matthew 15:1-9

Then some Pharisees and scribes \*came to Jesus from Jerusalem and said, 2 "Why do Your disciples break the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread." 3 And He answered and said to them, "Why do you yourselves transgress the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition? 4 "For God said, 'HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER,' and, 'HE WHO SPEAKS EVIL OF FATHER OR MOTHER IS TO BE PUT TO DEATH.' 5 "But you say, 'Whoever says to *his* father or mother, "Whatever I have that would help you has been given *to God*," 6 he is not to honor his father or his mother.' And *by this* you invalidated the word of God for the sake of your tradition. 7 "You hypocrites, rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you: 8 'THIS PEOPLE HONORS ME WITH THEIR LIPS, BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR AWAY FROM ME. 9 'BUT IN VAIN DO THEY WORSHIP ME, TEACHING AS DOCTRINES THE PRECEPTS OF MEN.'"

Probably these Pharisees and scribes from Jerusalem came for the purpose of observing Jesus and catching Him in some violation so they could accuse Him of wrongdoing. Jesus was continually watched by these men. They saw that the disciples ate without first washing their hands, and seized upon this violation. Mark 7:1-5 gives us more detail, “The Pharisees and some of the scribes gathered around Him when they had come from Jerusalem, 2 and had seen that some of His disciples were eating their bread with impure hands, that is, unwashed. 3 (For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they carefully wash their hands, *thus* observing the traditions of the elders; 4 and *when they come* from the market place, they do not eat unless they cleanse themselves; and there are many other things which they have received in order to observe, such as the washing of cups and pitchers and copper pots.) 5 The Pharisees and the scribes asked Him, “Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat their bread with impure hands?” We see that this “tradition of the elders” with regard to washing hands before eating was an important thing not only to the Pharisees, but also to “all the Jews.” It was a common practice carefully done and observed, and yet some of the disciples were not doing it.

Regarding tradition, the [International Standard Bible Encyclopedia](#) says this:

The term in the New Testament has apparently three meanings. It means, in Jewish theology, the oral teachings of the elders (distinguished ancestors from Moses on) which were revered by the late Jews equally with the written teachings of the Old Testament, and were regarded by them as equally authoritative on matters of belief and conduct. There seem to be three classes of these oral teachings: (a) some oral laws of Moses (as they supposed) given by the great lawgiver in addition to the written laws; (b) decisions of various judges which became precedents in judicial matters; (c) interpretations of great teachers (rabbis) which came to be prized with the same reverence as were the Old Testament Scriptures.

Jesus quickly turned the tables on these men and asked them why they transgress the commandment of God for the sake of their tradition. A commandment of God must always take precedence over a contrary tradition of men, but these men opted for their tradition over God’s command. The example Jesus gives is the fifth of the ten commandments, “Honor your father and mother” (Exodus 20:12 and Deuteronomy 5:16). Then Jesus also quotes Exodus 21:17, “He who speaks evil of father or mother is to be put to death.” He contrasts what God said in verse 4 with what the Pharisees and scribes said in verse 5. God said “Honor your father and mother,” but they said “Whoever says to his father or mother, ‘Whatever I have that would help you has been given to God.’” Mark gives us the Hebrew word they used and translates it for us, “whatever I have that would help you is Corban (that is to say, given to God)” (Mark 7:11). They were actually providing a way for people to bypass the obligation of honoring their parents and supporting them when they were elderly. Using this method they could even make it sound pious and virtuous, “Oh, Mom and Dad, I would love to help you, but my resources have been given to God and can’t be used for your benefit.” It would even sound as if it were out of their hands. By their tradition they were saying that a person was “not to honor his father or his mother.” Mark says, “you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or his mother” (Mark 7:12). In effect, using this tradition they were prohibiting what God commanded! And so Jesus points out that they had “invalidated the word of God for the sake of your tradition.” The Greek word for “invalidated” is *akuroō*, from the negative particle *a*, and *kuros*, authority. They had nullified or denied the authority of the commandment by their tradition.

Traditions are not always a bad thing. It's probably a good idea to wash your hands before dinner, but if you don't it won't make you "unclean" in any spiritual sense. I think that we must beware of traditions that contradict the word of God. When we think of these things in the Christian church we probably think of churches that emphasize certain traditions like the Roman Catholic church and the Eastern Orthodox church. Traditions like the authority of the Pope and the idea that Mary is "co-redemptrix" alongside of Christ are things that should be rejected. But I think that we Protestants and Evangelicals also have traditions that we cling to that should be examined to see if they are really biblical. One such tradition is the "Senior Pastor" tradition, the idea that a local church should revolve around one person who is the professional leader of the church. The New Testament seems to teach that a local congregation is to be pastored (shepherded) by multiple elders who share leadership (see Acts 20:17-35 and 1 Peter 5:1-4). A related evangelical tradition is that the sermon by the Senior Pastor is the central thing in our worship services, that we gather in order to hear the professional perform and deliver his (or sometimes her) message. But 1 Corinthians 14:26 says that when we assemble, each one has something to contribute for the edification of the church. I'm not saying that we shouldn't have preachers who preach. If there are people who are gifted to preach, they must preach. But maybe in a church there will be more than one person who is gifted to do so. There are probably other traditions that we should examine as well to see if they are really biblical, or if we have set aside what God has said in order to observe our traditions.

Jesus was not afraid to denounce these men to their faces as hypocrites, play actors who pretended to be righteous. He said that Isaiah rightly prophesied about them in Isaiah 29:13. These men honored God with their lips, with their speech, but their hearts were far from Him. What they said in honoring God was mere lip-service, just empty words without sincerity. They may have said things that were true, things that one should say when honoring God, but they did not mean what they said in their hearts. In John 4:23 Jesus told the woman at the well that God seeks true worshipers who worship Him in spirit and truth, whose worship is sincere and from the heart. Real worship comes out from within, just as Jesus is about to talk about how defilement comes out from within as well. The worship of these men was in vain, was fruitless and empty and served no purpose. They may as well have not wasted their time with their empty pretense at worship.

We must examine whether we really mean the things we say when we worship. We must ask whether we are worshiping sincerely or merely going through the motions out of obligation or routine or out of a desire to put on a good show to impress others. To honor God as God is the essence of worship. Those who turn away from God and suppress the truth about Him do not honor Him, nor do they give thanks (Romans 1:21).

At the time I'm writing this Donald Trump is the President of the United States. Many do not honor him as the President and oppose him, thinking that he is unworthy of the office and is incompetent. Nonetheless, he is the President, whether people honor him as such or not. It is a fact that he holds the office, and it does little good to try to pretend that he does not. It is probable that there are some who honor him as the President with their lips, but in their hearts think that He is unworthy and incompetent. They do not say what they really think about him because they want to uphold some sort of image before others. The God who is there is the God of all, whether we honor Him or not. We do not eliminate Him by denying Him. He deserves to be honored by all, and honored sincerely.

These men taught the precepts of men as if they were the precepts of God. In the Greek text the word translated "teaching" is *didaskō* (our word didactic), and the word translated "doctrines" is *didaskalia*. They were teaching the commands of men as the teachings of God.



They were misrepresenting God in their teaching and thereby dishonored Him, invalidating their worship.

I'm afraid there is too much of this sort of thing among Christians, though we probably aren't aware of it most of the time. I think we have traditions that have taken the place of the word of God. I think there are traditions of men we teach instead of the truth of God's word. I think in particular we need to beware of some of our "church growth" teachings and leadership teachings. I think we need to beware of following practices that are driven by research and opinion surveys and polls instead of what God has said.

#### Matthew 15:10-20

After Jesus called the crowd to Him, He said to them, "Hear and understand. 11 *"It is not what enters into the mouth that defiles the man, but what proceeds out of the mouth, this defiles the man."* 12 Then the disciples \*came and \*said to Him, "Do You know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this statement?" 13 But He answered and said, "Every plant which My heavenly Father did not plant shall be uprooted. 14 "Let them alone; they are blind guides of the blind. And if a blind man guides a blind man, both will fall into a pit." 15 Peter said to Him, "Explain the parable to us." 16 Jesus said, "Are you still lacking in understanding also? 17 "Do you not understand that everything that goes into the mouth passes into the stomach, and is eliminated? 18 "But the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man. 19 "For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders. 20 "These are the things which defile the man; but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile the man."

Jesus wanted the crowd to understand this seemingly simple point, so he called them and told them that it is not what goes into a man's mouth that defiles him, but what comes out of it. He is still responding here to the complaint of the Pharisees and scribes. Their idea was that the disciples had defiled themselves by not washing their hands before eating (verse 20). Jesus contradicted this idea and offended the Pharisees. The disciples seemed to think that Jesus should have been sensitive to the feelings and views of the Pharisees. They seemed to be concerned that He didn't care that He had offended them. Of course He was aware that what He said was offensive to them and contradicted their beliefs, and their beliefs needed to be contradicted. Jesus was not afraid to do this. This common misconception needed to be set aside by the Jews.

Sometimes we need to offend people. We need to speak the truth even if it offends people. Sometimes error needs to be confronted head-on, and Jesus often did this with regard to the Pharisees and scribes. We need to do away with this idea that we must never say anything that is offensive to powerful and sensitive groups.

Jesus did not answer directly the "Do you know" question. He didn't say, "Yes, of course I know that I offended them." Instead, He answered by saying, "Every plant which My heavenly Father did not plant shall be uprooted. Let them alone; they are blind guides of the blind. And if a blind man guides a blind man, both will fall into a pit." The disciples were worried about offending these powerful men, but Jesus pointed to their real nature and eventual fate by using these two pictures. They were plants which were not planted by the Father, and as such they would be pulled out by the roots. If you really want to permanently eliminate a weed, you must pull it out by the roots. If you just cut it off it will grow back and keep spreading. The Pharisees had not been planted by the Father and would be eliminated from His world. Whatever they claimed for themselves, they did not have their origin in God, their teaching did not come from God, they did not represent God and one day God would uproot them and cast

them out. Their tradition about ceremonial hand washing did not originate from the Father, and so could be set aside. They did not teach with the authority of the Father.

The Pharisees were blind guides of the blind. Both they and those they were guiding would fall into a pit. Those who are blind need those who can see to lead them. Guiding others requires vision, both literal and metaphorical. Leaders must be able to see where they are going. They must see the right way to go and know how to get there. We must avoid following people who don't have a clear vision of what is right to do and how to do it. The Pharisees were guiding people into error. The blind who followed them were confident that the Pharisees could see and were reliable guides, but they were deceived and ended up following their leaders to ruin. Before you begin to follow someone, make sure that they can see, that they have a clear biblical vision and are not substituting their own traditions and erroneous notions for the truth of God's word.

Peter felt like he needed an explanation of the parable, and so he asked. It sounds like Jesus was a bit taken aback by this request, implying by His questions in verses 17 and 18 that Peter should by now be able to understand what Jesus was talking about. Was Peter "still lacking in understanding"? Did he not understand? The word "understanding" in verse 16 is *asunetos*, "without understanding" or "unintelligent" (Thayer). There is a different word translated "understand" in verse 17, *noieō*, meaning "to perceive with the mind" (Thayer). Peter could not perceive the truth that Jesus was teaching, though he should have been able to by that time. Peter and the others had heard all their lives that certain foods were "unclean" and would defile them if they were eaten. Indeed, Leviticus 11 deals with this subject in depth. Later, when Peter had the vision of the sheet being lowered from heaven with all kinds of animals in it, and he was told, "Get up, Peter, kill and eat!" he said, "By no means, Lord, for I have never eaten anything unholy and unclean." A voice replied, "What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy" (Acts 10:9-15). So Peter, even after the resurrection and the Day of Pentecost, still held to this strong commitment to avoid eating anything unclean.

So, Jesus explained that "everything that goes into the mouth passes into the stomach, and is eliminated," and Mark at this point says, "Thus He declared all foods clean" (Mark 7:19). This is the lesson that Peter would finally learn from the vision of the sheet. Nothing we eat will "defile" us spiritually, morally or ceremonially. We eat, what we eat passes through the stomach, and then the Greek text says, it is expelled into the "place of sitting," the privy or toilet. The food just passes through the body without impacting soul or spirit.

The things that defile a man are the things that come out of the mouth, the things that come from the heart. Jesus lists these things in verse 19, "evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders." The first thing, "evil thoughts," is general, "*dialogismoi poneroi*" in the Greek text. Our word "dialogue" comes from *dialogismos*. Thayer's Greek Definitions defines this word as "the thinking of a man deliberating with himself, inward reasoning." This is the general foundation of the rest of this list. All the other things that Jesus mentions come from evil reasoning and thinking. Plans to commit murder, adultery, fornication and theft come from evil thoughts. False witness and slander come out of an evil plan to injure others. Evil deeds and evil words come from evil thoughts, and all of these things come from an evil heart.

Eating with unwashed hands does not defile the man. The tradition of the elders could safely be ignored and set aside. Failing to wash one's hands before eating would have no spiritual effect of any kind. Observing the tradition would neither hurt nor help.

Matthew 15:21-28

Jesus went away from there, and withdrew into the district of Tyre and Sidon. 22 And a

Canaanite woman from that region came out and *began* to cry out, saying, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is cruelly demon-possessed." 23 But He did not answer her a word. And His disciples came and implored Him, saying, "Send her away, because she keeps shouting at us." 24 But He answered and said, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." 25 But she came and *began* to bow down before Him, saying, "Lord, help me!" 26 And He answered and said, "It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." 27 But she said, "Yes, Lord; but even the dogs feed on the crumbs which fall from their masters' table." 28 Then Jesus said to her, "O woman, your faith is great; it shall be done for you as you wish." And her daughter was healed at once.

Jesus withdrew from the area near the Sea of Galilee and went northwest to the coastal area around Tyre and Sidon. He had just offended the Pharisees by the things He had said about them and about their traditions, and He may have withdrawn from the area because of their hostility toward Him. Mark writes, "Jesus got up and went away from there to the region of Tyre. And when He had entered a house, He wanted no one to know *of it*; yet He could not escape notice" (Mark 7:24).

A Canaanite woman came out and kept crying out to Jesus for help because her daughter was demon-possessed. Mark tells us that she heard of Him and describes her as "a Gentile, of the Syrophenician race" (Mark 7:26). This is a way of saying that she was not a Jew, but was of the Canaanite people who lived in this area. Though she was a Gentile, yet she acknowledged who Jesus was. She called Him "Lord, Son of David." She recognized Him as the Lord and the Messiah. She had heard of Him and had come to believe in Him. She was determined to seek healing from Him for her daughter. Mark says she "kept asking him to cast the demon out of her daughter" (Mark 7:26).

At first, Jesus did not answer her at all and ignored her pleas. As she kept on crying out to Him, the disciples got annoyed and said, "Send her away, because she keeps shouting at us." The word for "shouting" is *kradzo*, meaning to "croak" (as a raven) to scream, or call aloud (Strong's Dictionary). We might say she was "causing a scene" that was annoying and maybe embarrassing to the disciples. She was persistent, insistent, and would not be ignored. Her need was desperate, and she knew Jesus could meet her need.

Jesus answered as the disciples expected Him to answer, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." Jesus had used this same phrase in His instructions to the disciples when He sent them out to preach and heal in 10:5-6, "Do not go in the way of the Gentiles and do not enter any city of the Samaritans; but rather go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." There were many Jews who were "lost sheep" and Jesus felt compassion for them (Matthew 9:36-38). There was much need among the Jews, and it is true that the focus of the ministry of Jesus was toward the Jews almost exclusively. But here He was in a place where there were many Gentiles, and this woman, believing He was the Messiah, pursued Him and kept pleading with Him. She bowed before Him and cried, "Lord, help me!"

Again, Jesus replied to her in a way that would have found approval with the disciples, "It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." Anyone can see the truth of this statement. You don't take the food meant for your children and toss it to the dogs. The word for "dogs" here means little dogs, puppies. Jesus is evidently not talking about the feral dogs that roamed the country, but domesticated pet dogs. In Mark's version Jesus says, "Let the children be satisfied first, for it is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs" (Mark 7:27). The children have priority and the dogs have to wait until the children have had their portion. The Jews have first claim on the blessings of Christ. Paul points to this three times in the book of Romans. In Romans 1:16 he writes, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel,

for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek." In Romans 2:9-10 he says, "*There will be* tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek, but glory and honor and peace to everyone who does good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek." Because of God's choice of the Jews and covenant with them, they have first priority when it comes to the gospel and the blessings of Christ. They also are first in line for "tribulation and distress" if they reject the gospel. When the Jews rejected Paul and his message, he turned to the Gentiles (see Acts 18:5-6).

This desperate woman did not deny the truth of what Jesus had said. She did not try to argue with Him. She did not become angry because of the implication that she and her daughter were "little dogs" who were unworthy of His attention. She didn't start crying and ask why He was treating her this way. Instead, she said, "Yes, Lord; but even the dogs feed on the crumbs which fall from their masters' table." In Mark she says, "Yes, Lord, but even the dogs under the table feed on the children's crumbs" (Mark 7:28). The food is for the children, but the little dogs get the leftovers and morsels that fall from the table. Our dog is constantly sniffing around the floor in our kitchen looking for little bits that have fallen on the floor during food preparation. He has learned that sometimes he will find a little crumb here and there. This woman cleverly put an additional perspective on what Jesus was saying. The table is the table of their master. The same master who feeds his children will allow the little dogs to eat from the morsels the children let fall from the table. The dogs are his dogs and he will care for them as well.

I think Jesus was delighted with her response. He exclaimed, "O woman, your faith is great; it shall be done for you as you wish." In her persistence and in her insightful retort she had demonstrated great faith. We should recall that Jesus has said once before that someone had "great faith," and that was the Roman centurion in chapter 8. It's fascinating that the only two people to whom Jesus attributed "great faith" were both Gentiles and not Jews! The centurion had recognized that Jesus could simply issue the order from a distance, and whatever He commanded would be done. This woman came to Him and persisted in her pleas for healing for her daughter, putting full confidence in Jesus and His ability to heal. As with the centurion, the theme of unworthiness is here, though somewhat in the background. This woman was not one of "the children," but was an outsider. She was not worthy to receive what was meant for the children. She recognized that she needed mercy from Jesus and not justice. She did not come to Jesus proclaiming her worthiness and insisting that she was entitled to His healing power. She was persistent, however, and refused to give up or be put off. What she sought was done at once; Jesus granted her request.

We must address the issue of the apparent cruelty of Jesus toward this woman. Why did He treat her this way? This is the only time we find Him being rude and cruel toward a person who came to Him asking for healing. He was harsh with the hypocrites who deserved harshness, but He was always compassionate toward those who sought His mercy and who trusted in Him. Surely this encounter was out of character for Jesus. We must speculate here, but I think this was primarily a lesson for the disciples. They had come to this place where Gentiles predominated, maybe for the express purpose of meeting this woman. Jesus treated this woman as the disciples would have treated her. She was a Gentile woman, as such she was "unclean" and they would have had nothing to do with her. But then as she persisted and answered His analogy with a clever and true point, He surprised the disciples by commending the woman's faith and granting her request. According to Mark 7:29 Jesus said to her, "Because of this answer go; the demon has gone out of your daughter." She went back home and found her daughter lying on her bed, and the demon had gone. Again Jesus healed from a distance. He healed the woman's daughter because of the faith expressed in her answer.

Her words expressed her faith, humility and the recognition of her position before the Lord. This was a powerful lesson for the disciples, teaching them again that even believing Gentiles could and would receive His blessings. I think His apparent cruelty was an act He put on, knowing that this woman would rise to the occasion and respond well.

We mustn't miss the lessons of this encounter with this woman. A person of great faith seeks out Jesus and pursues Him. A person of great faith is persistent in pleading for what is needed that only the Lord can grant. They recognize that He is the Lord, the King, and that they need His mercy. They are humble and admit their lowly position before Him and that they have no standing to demand His blessings. We must turn from the arrogant and entitled attitudes of our day and humble ourselves before the Lord. We must stop swaggering into His presence demanding that He do this or that. We must do away with this idea that God Himself should conform to our ideas and submit to our will. We must also recognize that those whom we think are "dogs" or reprehensible are still loved by the Lord and can still receive His mercy and grace.

#### Matthew 15:29-39

Departing from there, Jesus went along by the Sea of Galilee, and having gone up on the mountain, He was sitting there. 30 And large crowds came to Him, bringing with them those who were lame, crippled, blind, mute, and many others, and they laid them down at His feet; and He healed them. 31 So the crowd marveled as they saw the mute speaking, the crippled restored, and the lame walking, and the blind seeing; and they glorified the God of Israel.

32 And Jesus called His disciples to Him, and said, "I feel compassion for the people, because they have remained with Me now three days and have nothing to eat; and I do not want to send them away hungry, for they might faint on the way." 33 The disciples \*said to Him, "Where would we get so many loaves in this desolate place to satisfy such a large crowd?" 34 And Jesus \*said to them, "How many loaves do you have?" And they said, "Seven, and a few small fish." 35 And He directed the people to sit down on the ground; 36 and He took the seven loaves and the fish; and giving thanks, He broke them and started giving them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people. 37 And they all ate and were satisfied, and they picked up what was left over of the broken pieces, seven large baskets full. 38 And those who ate were four thousand men, besides women and children. 39 And sending away the crowds, Jesus got into the boat and came to the region of Magadan.

Jesus went back to the Sea of Galilee and again attracted large crowds of people who brought those who were lame, crippled, blind and mute as well as many others who had other illnesses and problems. They "laid them down at His feet." The word for "laid them down" is *rhiptō*, to throw or to cast or to toss.. I don't think this means that they were rough with these sick people, but rather that there were many of them and that people were desperate for healing. We aren't told how this was done, whether Jesus dealt with each person individually, or if He waved His hand and healed all of them at once. I like to think He healed each one individually, because this is what we've seen Him do all along. There was a time when He healed ten men who were lepers at once (Luke 17:11-19), but they came to Him as a group, all had the same affliction, and all asked for His mercy at the same time. I think Jesus liked to have individual interaction with people as He healed them.

The crowd was amazed and marveled when they saw these people healed. Those who had been mute were now speaking. Those who had been crippled had been restored. The lame were now walking. The blind could now see. This would indeed be an amazing thing to

witness! As a result they “glorified the God of Israel.” The healings led to amazement and amazement led to worship. Our worship is prompted by what God has done. As we see Him work, we see the amazing quality of it and we bow before Him and honor and glorify Him.

The crowd stayed with Jesus for three days watching Him heal and listening to His teaching. Perhaps it took three days to heal all those who had come for healing. It was time for Jesus to move on, but the people had run out of food. Jesus called His disciples and shared His concern with them. He explained that He felt compassion for these people because they had nothing to eat and He didn’t want to send them away hungry. He didn’t want them to faint on the way home. Mark adds that Jesus said, “some of them have come a great distance” (Mark 8:3). He felt responsible for them and wanted them to have the strength for their journey home.

There is a responsibility laid on you when you attract big crowds. We may want to deny that responsibility, but I believe it is there nonetheless. Many churches today are very concerned about attracting big crowds. If we do so, we will be held responsible for how we treat these people. We must exhibit the compassion of our Master and Lord and concern ourselves with physical as well as spiritual ministry.

The amazing thing here, of course, is that the disciples again are focused on the inadequacy of their resources to meet the need. They asked “Where would we get so many loaves in this desolate place to satisfy such a large crowd?” Even if they had the money, there was no place to obtain all the food that was needed to feed all of these people. What’s amazing is that they did not say, “Well, Jesus, let’s just do what we did before with the five thousand! We have seven loaves this time and a few fish, so just bless the food, break it, give us the pieces, and we will feed these people.” I don’t know if they had failed to perceive what had happened in the first incident, or if they had forgotten, but Jesus is going to remind them of these two incidents in the next chapter, and get after them for their lack of understanding. They didn’t get the lesson when He fed the five thousand, so here He will do it again with this crowd. Again He is going to take the little they have and do the impossible with it.

Jesus does not focus on the lack, but on the supply. He asked them, “How many loaves do you have?” They had seven loaves when they probably needed seven thousand or more loaves. They had a few fish when they needed several thousand fish. He will again take the little that they had to feed these thousands, and He will use the same procedure as when He fed the previous crowd. He gave thanks, broke the loaves and the fish, gave the food to the disciples who distributed it to the crowd, and everyone ate and was satisfied. You can’t feed four thousand plus people with seven loaves and a few fish, but Jesus did!

When they picked up the leftovers, they had seven large baskets full of food. As we noted earlier, these were larger baskets than those mentioned at the feeding of the five thousand. So they ended up with far more food at the end than what they had when they started. In the hands of Jesus seven loaves and a few fish were more than enough.

Someone took the time to count the number of men who were there. Probably the disciples could come up with a fairly accurate count because they were carrying the food to everyone. There were probably far more than four thousand there because they didn’t count the women and children.

Jesus did not send these people away hungry. He had healed them, and He also fed them. He made sure they had the strength for their journey home. Maybe He also made sure that they had some of the leftovers to take with them in case they had come from a long distance away. But the time came for Him to send the crowds away and move on to another place. He would not stay there and feed these people on and on as a permanent way of life. Sometimes when we attract a crowd we want to hold on to the crowd. We become dependent on the crowd and the affirmation and appreciation and financial support of the crowd and we

then are in danger of compromising the truth in order to continue to appeal to the crowd. Jesus was not impressed or held by crowds. Certainly He ministered to them, but He was not afraid to send them away. He was not afraid to say things that caused people to leave. In John 6:22-71, after feeding the five thousand, Jesus says that He is the “bread of life” and that if one wants eternal life they must eat His flesh and drink His blood. Naturally, many who were following Him said, “This is a difficult statement; who can listen to it?” Even though He explained that the words He had spoken were “spirit and are life” and did not pertain to the flesh, we are told in John 6:66, “As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore.” Jesus did not run after them, but let them go. His core disciples remained with Him, committed to the fact that He was the “Holy One of God” and had the “words of eternal life” (John 6:68-69). So Jesus always sent the crowds away or left them behind. He felt compassion for them, but He would not allow them to control or possess Him.

I think that in our churches today we are far too concerned about “church growth” and about attracting and holding crowds of people, many of whom are not really believers in Christ or really committed to Him. We may say that we are trying to move these people toward real faith and the real knowledge of Christ, but the fear of offending people, I believe, causes us to avoid saying things that need to be said and teaching what needs to be taught. There are passages of scripture that won’t be preached because they might offend some in the crowd. We must find a balance between compassionate ministry toward the masses and an uncompromised presentation of the truth that might offend. We must not be afraid to allow people to walk away.

After sending the crowds away, Jesus got into the boat and went to the “region of Magadan,” which was southwest of Capernaum and Gennesaret on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. It appears that Jesus preferred to travel by boat when He was near Galilee, possibly as a means of getting away from the crowds.

#### Matthew 16:1-4

The Pharisees and Sadducees came up, and testing Jesus, they asked Him to show them a sign from heaven. 2 But He replied to them, "When it is evening, you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red.' 3 "And in the morning, 'There will be a storm today, for the sky is red and threatening.' Do you know how to discern the appearance of the sky, but cannot discern the signs of the times? 4 "An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign; and a sign will not be given it, except the sign of Jonah." And He left them and went away.

As had happened previously in Matthew 12:38-42, some Pharisees and Sadducees came to Jesus asking Him to show them a sign from heaven. The Jews all expected that when the Messiah came, He would perform great signs. John 7:31 says, “But many of the crowd believed in Him; and they were saying, ‘When the Christ comes, He will not perform more signs than those which this man has, will He?’” Jesus had already performed many powerful and obvious signs which had been witnessed by thousands, yet these men came testing Him and asking Him for another sign so that they might see. It was not enough that they had heard what He had done, they wanted Him to perform on cue for them.

In His reply, Jesus points out that they can discern, or judge, the appearance of the sky and determine what kind of weather was approaching, but they are unable to discern the “signs of the times.” The morning and evening skies gave them “signs” of what kind of weather was on the way. In the same way the times in which they lived were giving them “signs” of what was coming, but they could not discern them. The signs of the times were

wasted on these men, and so a sign performed by Jesus would also be wasted, because they were settled in their unbelief and hostility toward Him. They did not have the discernment necessary to see that He was the Messiah.

Jesus then says to these men the same thing He had said in Matthew 12, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign; and a sign will not be given it, except the sign of Jonah." The resurrection would be the big "sign" that Jesus is the Messiah. (See the full discussion of the "sign of Jonah" in the commentary on Matthew 12:38-42.)

#### Matthew 16:5-12

And the disciples came to the other side of the sea, but they had forgotten to bring any bread. 6 And Jesus said to them, "Watch out and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees." 7 They began to discuss this among themselves, saying, "He said that because we did not bring any bread." 8 But Jesus, aware of this, said, "You men of little faith, why do you discuss among yourselves that you have no bread? 9 "Do you not yet understand or remember the five loaves of the five thousand, and how many baskets full you picked up? 10 "Or the seven loaves of the four thousand, and how many large baskets full you picked up? 11 "How is it that you do not understand that I did not speak to you concerning bread? But beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees." 12 Then they understood that He did not say to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

It's embarrassing when you travel and forget something crucial. A couple of years ago we went to spend a couple of days at the coast, at Monterey. Somehow I forgot to take my CPAP machine, which helps me breathe through the night and prevents sleep apnea. I survived without it, but didn't sleep well those two nights. On this trip with Jesus the disciples had forgotten to bring bread. Mark says they "did not have more than one loaf in the boat with them" (Mark 8:14). I presume this means they only had one loaf. Obviously one loaf would not be enough for thirteen men. It's evident that Jesus left these details to the disciples and trusted them to take care of these kinds of things. He didn't run through a checklist of things before they departed to make sure they had covered things. Jesus was not a "micro-manager" of His men.

Jesus tried to warn them about the "leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees." He told them to "watch out and beware" of their leaven. The word for "watch out" is *horaō*, "to see with the eyes." They are to see this leaven and be wary of it. Instead of asking Jesus to explain more, they jumped to the conclusion that He was talking about the fact that they had forgotten to bring bread. They may have thought that He was simply warning them not to buy bread from the Pharisees and Sadducees, which was not His point at all. They missed His point because they were focusing on the wrong thing. Again they were focusing on the shortage they were facing rather than the capability of Jesus.

Jesus was aware of what they were saying and confronted them with four questions. First, He again calls them "men of little faith," the fourth time He has used this expression in Matthew. This concern about bread demonstrated a small and weak faith. There was a problem with their belief and trust in Him. By now their faith should have grown greater, but they still exhibited little faith. It takes time and experience and practice for faith to grow. The more we see the Lord come through and meet needs, the more we learn to trust Him. This should have been true of these men. They had missed important lessons that should have strengthened their faith.



The first question is, "Why do you discuss among yourselves that you have no bread?" The implication is that this was an unnecessary discussion. They need not have worried about the fact that they forgot the food. They were saying "What will we eat?" as Jesus had mentioned in Matthew 6:31 when He talked about worry. They were fretting over something unnecessary.

The second and third questions are reminders about the feeding of the five thousand and the feeding of the four thousand, and how many baskets of leftovers they had picked up. In Mark's account the disciples answered the questions. In Mark 8:18-21 He says, "'And do you not remember, 19 when I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces you picked up?' They said to Him, 'Twelve.' 20 'When I broke the seven for the four thousand, how many large baskets full of broken pieces did you pick up?' And they said to Him, 'Seven.' 21 And He was saying to them, 'Do you not yet understand?'" It appears that somehow the disciples did not see the miracle that had taken place when Jesus fed these crowds. Somehow they failed to understand that Jesus had multiplied the loaves and the fish to feed these thousands, and so Jesus is incredulous that they had missed the point. Mark includes some other rhetorical questions Jesus asked them, "Why do you discuss the fact that you have no bread? Do you not yet see or understand? Do you have a hardened heart? Having eyes, do you not see? And having ears, do you not hear?" (Mark 8:17-18). It's like He's asking, "What is the matter with you guys; what is your problem?" They saw what He had done without understanding or perception. The fact that they had one small loaf for thirteen men was not a problem, and was not what He was talking about. If Jesus was there and they were following Him and doing as He intended, then one loaf was more than enough for all of them.

After this embarrassing rebuke, the disciples then understood what Jesus was saying about the "leaven" of the Pharisees and Sadducees. He was talking about their teaching. They needed to be wary of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees. We've already seen in chapter 15 how the Pharisees taught that one could set aside the commandment of God to honor one's father and mother by observing their tradition (Matthew 15:3-9). Jesus said that by this tradition they were "invalidating the word of God by your tradition which you have handed down; and you do many things such as that" (Mark 7:13). There were many other examples of their teaching that nullified the word of God.

Here in Matthew we see that the "leaven" of the Pharisees and Sadducees is their teaching, but in Luke 12:1 Jesus says, "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy." I think these two things go together. Their teaching was hypocritical teaching. They taught one thing and did another. Their pupils learned to be hypocrites just like their teachers. Hypocritical leaders produce hypocritical followers. When we get to chapter 23 we will see much more about these men and why Jesus so often took them to task.

#### Matthew 16:13-20

Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, He was asking His disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" 14 And they said, "Some say John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets." 15 He \*said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" 16 Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." 17 And Jesus said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. 18 "I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. 19 "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven." 20 Then He warned the disciples that they should tell no one that He

was the Christ.

Caesarea Philippi was north of the Sea of Galilee, about 25 miles, at the base of Mount Hermon. Albert Barnes says this about Caesarea Philippi:

There were two cities in Judea called Caesarea. One was situated on the borders of the Mediterranean (See the notes at [Acts 8:40](#)), and the other was the one mentioned here. This city was greatly enlarged and ornamented by Philip the tetrarch, son of Herod, and called Caesarea in honor of the Roman emperor, Tiberius Caesar. To distinguish it from the other Caesarea the name of Philip was added to it, and it was called Caesarea Philippi, or Caesarea of Philippi. It was situated in the boundaries of the tribe of Naphtali, at the foot of Mount Hermon.

Jesus asked the disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” I’m sure Jesus was aware of the various viewpoints among the people concerning Him, but He is leading up to a more important point. The disciples also were aware of what people were saying as they speculated about Jesus. This is a crucial question that people are still debating today. It was clear that Jesus was an extraordinary man who was doing extraordinary things, so naturally people were trying to figure out who He was.

It appears that the most common view about Jesus was that He was John the Baptist. We’ve already seen that this was the view of Herod (Matthew 14:2). Many people had not heard that Jesus and John had met one another and that John had baptized Jesus, and therefore they could not be the same man. They reasoned, as Herod did, that John had been raised from the dead and that is why these miraculous powers were at work in Him. A second popular opinion was that Jesus was Elijah, the same thing people speculated about John the Baptist. As we saw when we studied Matthew 3:1-12, John denied that he was Elijah, but Jesus had said that John had come in the “spirit and power of Elijah.” Now people were speculating that Jesus was Elijah, the one who was to come before the great and terrible day of the Lord. Then some other people thought that Jesus was Jeremiah or one of the prophets. Why they did not think that He was a new prophet, I’m not sure.

Having covered popular opinion, Jesus then asked, “But who do you say that I am?” There were many opinions out there about Jesus, but who do they know Him to be? These guys knew He wasn’t John the Baptist nor Elijah, but did they really know who He was? They had been following Him as His students for some time, but had they understood who He was? He had said to them in 10:32-33, “Therefore everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven.” What they believed about Him and therefore what they said about Him before others was vitally important.

Peter had the answer, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” This was not the first time this had been said of Him. John the Baptist had said that Jesus was the “Lamb of God,” a man who had a “higher rank” than he, “the One who baptizes in the Holy Spirit,” who “is the Son of God” (John 1:29-34). Andrew, Peter’s brother, had heard John say these things. He went and found Peter and said, “We have found the Messiah” (John 1:41). When Jesus called Nathanael, Nathanael said, “Rabbi, You are the Son of God; You are the King of Israel” (John 1:49). We saw in Matthew 14:33 that when Jesus came to them walking on the water and they received Him into the boat, they worshiped Him and said, “You are certainly God’s Son!” These men had come to realize that Jesus was no ordinary man, no run-of-the-mill prophet or rabbi, but that He was the Anointed One, the King, the Son of God.

Peter did not simply refer to Jesus as the “Son of God,” but as the “Son of the living God.” We see this phrase used a number of times in the Old Testament, and it is a thing that distinguishes Yahweh from the gods of the other nations. He is the only “living” God, the only true and real God. Jeremiah 10:1-10 contrasts the idols of the nations which are made with wood and silver and gold, which cannot speak nor walk, cannot do any harm nor any good, with the true and living God of Israel. Jeremiah 10:10 says, “But the Lord is the true God; He is the living God and the everlasting King. At His wrath the earth quakes, and the nations cannot endure His indignation.” Jesus is the true Son of the only true and living God.

In reply Jesus pronounced “Simon Barjona” (Barjona means “son of Jonah”) blessed, because this knowledge had not been revealed by flesh and blood, but by the Father in heaven. Jesus indicated that what Peter had said was true. He did not deny that He was the Christ and the Son of God, but put His stamp of approval on what Peter had said. Peter had not come to this understanding on his own or because other people told him, but through the revelation of the Father. The Father had disclosed to Peter and the others the truth of who Jesus was. We don’t come to know who Jesus is apart from revelation from the Father. Recall what Jesus said in Matthew 11:27, “All things have been handed over to Me by My Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.” So now we see that knowing the Son requires revelation from the Father, and knowing the Father requires revelation from the Son. In fact, the Father is revealed in the Son. When Philip said, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.” Jesus replied, “Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how *can* you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on My own initiative, but the Father abiding in Me does His works” (John 14:8-10). The Son is Himself the revelation of the Father.

Now in verses 18 and 19 we come to this blessing of Peter by Jesus that has been used as the basis for the idea that Jesus made Peter the first Pope of the Roman Catholic Church. The idea is that Jesus was saying that Peter would be the foundation upon which the church would be built and that He and therefore the church would have the “keys of the kingdom” and the power to bind and loose things on earth and in heaven. So it’s important that we understand clearly, if we can, what Jesus is saying here.

Peter had said, “You are the Christ,” and now Jesus says, “You are Peter.” The word “Peter” (*petros*) means a rock or stone. When He says “upon this rock I will build My church,” Matthew uses the word *petra*, which is a larger rock formation. We must see, though, that Jesus was probably speaking Aramaic and not Greek. In John 1:42 when Jesus first met him, Jesus said, “You are Simon the son of John; you shall be called Cephas.” John adds, “which is translated Peter.” A.T. Robertson says, “*Petros* is usually a smaller detachment of the massive ledge. But too much must not be made of this point since Jesus probably spoke Aramaic to Peter which draws no such distinction (*Kēphā*)” ([Robertson’s Word Pictures](#)). It’s interesting to note that aside from John 1:42 the only time the name “Cephas” is used for Peter in the New Testament is in the epistles of Paul. Paul uses the name eight times, but only twice refers to him as “Peter.”

So, is Jesus saying that Peter will be the foundation upon which He builds His church? Some Protestants react against this idea and say, no, the “rock” Jesus is referring to is not Peter himself, but rather the confession of Peter that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. And indeed we should say that the confession of Peter and the faith it expresses is foundational to our salvation and our relationship to Christ. We must recognize Christ for who He really is. But this interpretation does not seem to fit the context. Jesus goes on to talk about what He’s going to give Peter and about the authority he will have, which we will

examine in a bit. I think we must bring in a couple of other passages here to see what Jesus is saying about the foundation of the church.

Writing to Gentile believers in Ephesians 2:19-22 Paul says, “So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, 20 having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, 21 in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, 22 in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.” Paul pictures the church as God’s household which is built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets. Christ Himself is the most important element in the foundation as the corner stone. It is Christ Himself, along with the apostles and prophets and their teaching, that form the foundation of the church, the household, of Christ.

When John described the New Jerusalem that he saw come down out of heaven in Revelation 21, he said in verse 14, “And the wall of the city had twelve foundation stones, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.” Again we see the idea that the apostles are the foundation of the New Jerusalem, the dwelling place of the saints. So then Peter is not the sole foundation of the church, but is part of it, along with the other apostles and prophets and the Lord Himself. Peter is a piece of the foundation, but not the whole foundation.

Jesus will build His church upon the rock. This is the first occurrence of the word “church” in the New Testament, and it’s very important that we understand the word. If we want to know what this thing is that Jesus is building, we must understand the word. The Greek word most often translated “church” in the New Testament, including here, is *ekklēsia*, from *ek*, “out of” and *kaleō*, to call, and means “an assembly, a congregation” (New American Standard Exhaustive Concordance). Hasting’s Dictionary of the Bible says:

The word *ecclesia*, which in its Christian application is usually translated ‘church,’ was applied in ordinary Greek usage to the duly constituted gathering of the citizens in a self-governing city, and it is so used of the Ephesian assembly in Act 19:39. It was adopted in the LXX to translate a Hebrew word, *qāhāl*, signifying the nation of Israel as assembled before God or considered in a religious aspect (Jdg 21:8, 1Ch 29:1, Deu 31:30 etc.). In this sense it is found twice in the NT (Act 7:38 RV ‘church,’ Heb 2:12 RV ‘congregation’).

The “church” then, is the congregation of those who have been “called out” of the world by Christ. They are those who believe in Him and are members of His family who assemble together for worship and edification. What Jesus is building is a congregation, a fellowship of those who trust in Him and follow Him. The church is not a place nor an event but a family and a congregation of those who follow Christ. It’s been well said that we don’t “go to church,” but we “gather as the church.” I like how the World English Bible translates *ekklēsia* here and elsewhere as “assembly” rather than “church.” Because we have come to think of a “church” as a building or an event or as an institution rather than a group of people who love the Lord, I think it would be wise to use the word “assembly” for this thing rather than “church.”

Jesus says that the assembly He builds will not be overpowered by the gates of Hades. The New American Standard gives a literal translation of the Greek here, whereas some other translations attempt an interpretation of the text. The Contemporary English Version has “On this rock I will build my church, and death itself will not have any power over it.” The Good News Bible has the same idea, “On this rock foundation I will build my church, and not even death will ever be able to overcome it.” Some versions use the word “hell” instead of “hades” (King James Version, International Standard Version, English Standard Version). So this

raises questions. Is “Hades” synonymous with “hell”? Does “Hades” mean “death”? Does Jesus mean that hell is assaulting the church, or that the church is assaulting the gates of hell? Clearly, we must get to the meaning of “Hades.”

In the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the Septuagint, the word “Hades” is used to translate the Hebrew word “Sheol,” which clearly indicates the place of the dead. In fact, some Old Testament passages draw a parallel between Sheol and death. 1 Samuel 2:6 says, “The LORD kills and makes alive; He brings down to Sheol and raises up.” 2 Samuel 22:6 says, “The cords of Sheol surrounded me; The snares of death confronted me.” Psalms 6:5 says, “For there is no mention of You in death; In Sheol who will give You thanks?” Psalms 49:14 says, “As sheep they are appointed for Sheol; Death shall be their shepherd.” These passages and others tell us that “Sheol” was often used as a synonym for death.

In the New Testament, the word “Hades” is used ten times. We’ve already seen it in Matthew 11:23 when Jesus warned Capernaum that it would descend to Hades rather than being exalted to heaven. So it seems that the word is used there as a synonym for hell, as it is contrasted with heaven. Also in the story of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16:23, it appears that Hades is a place of torment, and therefore also is synonymous with hell. But elsewhere it is clear that Hades is a place or container where the dead are kept until the resurrection. Revelation 20:13-15 says, “And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.” The sea, death and Hades are pictured as places where the dead are held until the judgment before the great white throne (Revelation 20:11-12). Hades will give up the dead who are there and then they will be judged, and Hades itself will be thrown into the lake of fire. In Revelation 1:18 Jesus says that He is the one who has the “keys of death and of Hades.” He is the one who can open the “gates of Hades” and free those imprisoned there.

When Peter preached about Jesus on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2 he emphasized the resurrection of Christ and said, “But God raised Him up again putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power” (Acts 2:24). He then quoted from Psalm 16:10 in verses 27 and 31, “You will not abandon My soul to Hades, nor allow your Holy One to undergo decay.” Jesus was not abandoned to Hades (Sheol), the place of the dead, because it was impossible for death to hold Him. He was there briefly, but on the third day He was raised from the dead.

In light of all of this, I think that what Jesus was saying in Matthew 16:18 is that death will not overpower those who are of His assembly, His church. The gates of Hades will not permanently imprison those who belong to Christ. As it was impossible for death to hold Jesus, so it is impossible for death to hold those who belong to Jesus.

We’re not yet finished with the difficult sayings here. Jesus says to Peter, “I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven.” I suppose this is the basis for the common picture that Peter is the gatekeeper of heaven, standing before the “pearly gates” deciding who gets in and who doesn’t. Needless to say, I don’t think this is an accurate interpretation of what Jesus means. I think, first, that Jesus is speaking to Peter as the representative of all of His disciples. Peter is the one who answered the question about who they all believed Jesus to be. When He says that He will give Peter the “keys of the kingdom of heaven,” I think He means these keys will be given to all of the disciples. One of these “keys,” I think, is the understanding that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God. Believing in Jesus as the Christ and the Son of God is required in order to enter the kingdom.

One does not enter into the heavenly kingdom without faith in Jesus. This would be the message they all would proclaim.

It seems also that these “keys” have something to do with “binding” and “loosing.” Peter would have authority to “bind” and “loose” things on earth, and the corresponding thing would have also been done in heaven. Again here some translations give us an interpretation. The CEV says, “I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven, and God in heaven will allow whatever you allow on earth. But he will not allow anything that you don’t allow.” The Good News Bible has, “I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of heaven; what you prohibit on earth will be prohibited in heaven, and what you permit on earth will be permitted in heaven.” Similarly, the ISV says, “I will give you the keys to the kingdom from heaven. Whatever you prohibit on earth will have been prohibited in heaven, and whatever you permit on earth will have been permitted in heaven.” Robertson’s Word Pictures exposes why these versions would use “permit” and “prohibit” instead of “bind” and “loose”:

To “bind” (*dēsēis*) in rabbinical language is to forbid, to “loose” (*lusēis*) is to permit. Peter would be like a rabbi who passes on many points. Rabbis of the school of Hillel “loosed” many things that the school of Schammai “bound.” The teaching of Jesus is the standard for Peter and for all preachers of Christ. Note the future perfect indicative (*estai dedemenon, estai lelumenon*), a state of completion. All this assumes, of course, that Peter’s use of the keys will be in accord with the teaching and mind of Christ.

Vincent’s Word Studies says, “No other terms were in more constant use in Rabbinic canon-law than those of *binding* and *loosing*. They represented the *legislative* and *judicial* powers of the Rabbinic office.” According to this understanding Peter and the apostles would have the authority to decide what was permitted among believers and what was prohibited.

I think to try to fully understand what Jesus is saying we must note that He repeats this in chapter 18, verse 18, “Truly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven.” In the context He is speaking to all of the disciples and is talking about how to deal with a brother who sins. If the sinning brother refuses to listen and turn from his sin, Jesus says, “let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector” (verse 17). Then He says, “Truly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven. Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven. For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst” (verses 18-20). Jesus says He is in the midst of those who gather in His name, and if two or more agree on what they will ask, it will be done by the Father in heaven. This seems tied to the idea of “binding” and “loosing.” The assembly decided to treat the sinning brother as an unbeliever, and the decision was in accord with the will of heaven. I think in both places there is the idea that what the disciples do on earth is actually an affirmation or a ratification of what has already been decided in heaven. It happened in heaven first, and then was affirmed by the disciples on earth. The impetus for the “binding” and “loosing” comes from heaven. I don’t think Jesus gave them a situation where they could get together and decide arbitrarily what to allow and what to prohibit among believers. Some might want to ban card playing and others might want to allow it. I don’t think this is what Jesus means.

This is not a new idea. Jesus, in His model prayer in Matthew 6:10, taught us to say, “Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” God wants His will to be accomplished on earth just like it is in heaven. The pattern for earth is heaven, and not vice-

versa. Jesus said in John 5:30, "I can do nothing on My own initiative. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is just, because I do not seek My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me." In John 8:28-29 He says, "When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He, and I do nothing on My own initiative, but I speak these things as the Father taught Me. And He who sent Me is with Me; He has not left Me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to Him." In John 12:49 He again says, "For I did not speak on My own initiative, but the Father Himself who sent Me has given Me a commandment as to what to say and what to speak." And in John 14:10 He says, "Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on My own initiative, but the Father abiding in Me does His works." The point is that Jesus did not speak and work apart from the Father, and the disciples do not "bind" and "loose" on their own apart from Jesus, but He is in their midst, showing them what to do.

This last statement in verse 20 seems paradoxical, "Then He warned the disciples that they should tell no one that He was the Christ." He had just asked them, "Who do you say that I am," and He had affirmed Peter's answer, and now He tells them not to say it. I think the reason He did not want them to proclaim Him as the Christ, the Messiah was because the Jews were looking for a political Messiah who would "restore the kingdom to Israel" (Acts 1:6). They were not to spread the word because the Jews would take it the wrong way, just as the disciples did. They were not looking for a Messiah who would lay down His life for their sins, but for a Messiah who would defeat the Romans and take over as their King.

#### Matthew 16:21-23

From that time Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day. 22 Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, "God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to You." 23 But He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's."

This follows right on the heels of Jesus telling them not to tell others that He was the Christ. He began to show them that though He was the Messiah, His mission was not to go to Jerusalem and ascend to the throne of Israel, but to go there to die. He presented this as a necessity, as something that "must" be done. Luke tells us that Jesus said this right after He warned the disciples not to tell anyone He was the Christ. Luke 9:21-22 says, "But He warned them and instructed them not to tell this to anyone, 22 saying, 'The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed and be raised up on the third day.'" This is the first time that He began to disclose to the disciples that He was going to Jerusalem to suffer, be killed and be raised on the third day. He will tell them these things again in Matthew 17:22 and 20:17-19. They needed to understand that He was not going to Jerusalem as a conquering King, but as the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53. The leaders there would not recognize Him, but would reject and abuse Him. One day Jesus will reign, but the time had not yet come. The redemption of mankind had to be accomplished first.

This idea was totally outside of Peter's understanding of the mission of the Messiah. He could not conceive of the Messiah being rejected and killed. He was fully convinced that this could never happen to the Messiah. He took it upon himself to take Jesus aside and rebuke Him, as if Jesus didn't know what He was talking about. The words "God forbid it" translate one word, *hileōs*, meaning to be propitious, gracious or merciful. Strong's Concordance says,

“Adverbially (by Hebraism) God be *gracious!*, that is, (in averting some calamity) *far* be it: - be it far, merciful.” The KJV, RV and WEB bibles translate it, “far be it from you.” He says, “This shall never happen to you.” In the Greek there is a double negative. Peter denies this could happen to Jesus in the strongest of terms. When the time came for Jesus to be arrested, Peter drew his sword and tried to prevent it, but Jesus rebuked him, pointed out that He had power to escape the situation if it had been appropriate to do so, and then said, “How then will the Scriptures be fulfilled, which say that it must happen this way?” (Matthew 26:54). His betrayal, suffering, death and resurrection were all part of the plan of the Father and were foretold in the Scriptures. It had to happen this way. (See also Luke 24.)

Jesus turned and (according to Mark 8:33) looked at the other disciples. They were observing what was going on and had heard what Peter had said. No doubt they fully agreed with Peter and were anxiously waiting to see what Jesus would say. He said to Peter, “Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God’s interests but man’s.” To them, this was a shocking and surprising thing to say! Jesus had just affirmed Peter’s confession about Jesus being the Christ. He had just said that Peter had received this knowledge due to a revelation from the Father. In a moment Peter had gone from speaking truth from God to being a spokesman for Satan. Peter was well-meaning and certainly did not intend to speak for the Devil, but this is often the case for us. We may speak for Satan without realizing we are doing so. The suggestion that Jesus should avoid the suffering, the cross and the resurrection was a Satanic suggestion. Peter went from being a rock upon which Jesus would build His congregation to being a stumbling block standing in Jesus’ way.

Jesus explained that Peter had become a spokesman for Satan and a stumbling block because of the way he was thinking. He was not setting his mind on God’s interests, but on the interests of man. Probably a more literal translation is the World English Bible, “you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of men.” When Jesus told them of the necessity of His suffering, death and resurrection, He was telling them of “the things of God;” He was expressing what God’s plan was for Him. Peter’s thinking was all wrong and contrary to the will of God. Peter and the others were thinking that they would have privileged positions alongside Christ in the glory of His kingdom when He ascended to the throne in Jerusalem and defeated the enemies of Israel. Knowing Jesus was the Christ, they were excited to think that they would rule with Him. Now, it is true that these men would and do have important positions in the kingdom, but it was not to be an earthly kingdom as they were thinking. They were thinking of earthly, human things, and Jesus was focused on heavenly things. The Father had commanded Him to lay down His life and to take it up again (John 10:17-18), and He was focused on this, but Peter was contradicting this and trying to steer Jesus away from the will of the Father. This is what Satan does.

Like Peter, we often are focused on thinking of the things of man rather than the things of God, and the things of man are at odds with the things of God. The flesh is against the Spirit and the Spirit against the flesh (Galatians 5:16-17). Paul says in Romans 8:5-9, “For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. 6 For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, 7 because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so, 8 and those who are in the flesh cannot please God. 9 However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him.” Peter was speaking in accord with the flesh at this point and was not setting his mind on the “things of the Spirit.” Colossians 3:1-4 says “Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right



hand of God. 2 Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. 3 For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.” Because we have been “raised up with Christ,” we are able to seek “the things above” and to set our minds on “the things above” and not on the “things that are on earth.” Our way of thinking must be transformed so that our mindset shifts from the things of men to the things of God. This is why the Word of God is so important, and why we must spend lots of time meditating on what God has said, so that we will learn more and more about the mind of God and the thinking of God as the Spirit of God guides us and illuminates us.

#### Matthew 16:24-28

Then Jesus said to his disciples, “If anyone desires to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. 25 For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, and whoever will lose his life for my sake will find it. 26 For what will it profit a man, if he gains the whole world, and forfeits his life? Or what will a man give in exchange for his life? 27 For the Son of Man will come in the glory of his Father with his angels, and then he will render to everyone according to his deeds. 28 Most certainly I tell you, there are some standing here who will in no way taste of death, until they see the Son of Man coming in his Kingdom.”

Jesus has begun to tell these men that it was necessary for Him to go to the cross. It was necessary as the Messiah that He should suffer and die. As we’ve seen, this was unacceptable to them. They could not conceive of the Messiah dying. Now Jesus tells them what this means for those who would follow Him. Following Jesus will not mean near-term exaltation, but humiliation.

Jesus first lays down the requirements for following Him in verse 24, then explains the reasoning in verses 25 through 27. If anyone has the desire to come after Christ, they must deny themselves, take up their cross and follow Him. The first step in following Christ is to have the desire to do so. There must be the intent, the willingness, the determination to follow Him. This determination comes from our understanding of who He is. If we’ve become convinced that He is the Christ and that He is the Son of God and that there is nothing more important than following Him, then we will want to follow Him.

If one wants to follow Christ, then the first thing he must understand is that it requires self-denial. Self must be disowned. The Greek word for “deny” is used again three more times in Matthew in reference to Peter’s denial of Christ. Jesus told him that he would deny Him three times before the rooster crowed. Peter and the others said that they would not deny Him, and after Peter did deny Him, he remembered that Jesus had told him he would. (See Matthew 26:34-75). Peter denied that he was with Jesus and said twice, “I do not know the man” (Matthew 26:69-74). Affirming Christ means denying self. We can’t have it both ways. The self is tied up with interests of man and not God. The self is dominated by the flesh and not the Spirit, and must therefore be denied and disowned. When self-preservation and self-aggrandizement is the supreme thing in our lives, we will disown Christ and will not be able to follow Him. We will also be slaves of fear. If Christ and His will is supreme in our lives and we lay aside our lives for Him, we can do His will without fear and will really be following him.

The one who would follow Christ must also “take up his cross.” The disciples and people of that time and place knew what this meant. They had seen or heard of condemned criminals carrying their own crosses to the place where they would be crucified. They knew this was the procedure the Romans followed for crucifixions. Jesus was going to willingly take up His cross

and die, and those who follow Him must do the same. When you take up your cross there is no going back. There is no escape, but you are going to die.

Having had the desire to come after Christ and having denied ourselves and taken up our cross, we may then follow Jesus. We emulate what He has done. We serve others as He served others, we give as He gave, we lay down our lives as He laid down His life.

He begins to explain in verse 25, "For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it." Jesus had already said this to His disciples in His instructions in chapter 10. He said "And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who has found his life will lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake will find it" (Matthew 10:38-39). A key thing to notice here is the contrast between the wish to come after Christ in verse 24 and the wish to save one's life in verse 25. These two things are at odds. If it is our wish to save our lives, we will not be able to come after Christ. John's version of this saying clarifies that Jesus was talking about our life "in this world," "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it to life eternal" (John 12:24-25). The one following Jesus does not have the preservation of his temporal earthly life as his primary purpose. His desire to follow Christ supersedes his desire to protect himself and avoid harm. He will lose his life for the sake of Christ and the gospel in order to save his soul (Mark 8:35 adds "the gospel"). Peter's denial of Christ illustrates what happens to us when we are trying to save our lives in this world. We find true life when we lose our lives for the sake of Christ.

The explanation continues in verse 26 with two rhetorical questions, "For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" The Greek word translated "soul" in this verse is the same word translated "life" in verse 25, *psuchē*. Why the translators decided to switch from "life" to "soul," I'm not sure. The word basically means "breath" and comes from the verb *psuchō*, to breathe. Genesis 2:7 tells us, "Then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being." God took inanimate dust, formed it into a man, and animated him with the breath of life. This life can be forfeited. We can gain the whole world and yet suffer the loss of our life. I think the story of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16:19-31 illustrates this truth. The rich man lived in splendor and comfort every day of his earthly life, but when he died, all of that was forfeited and he was in agony in Hades. His wealth was worthless and did not profit him after death.

When Jesus talked about avoiding greed He told the parable of the rich fool in Luke 12:16-21:

And He told them a parable, saying, "The land of a rich man was very productive. 17 "And he began reasoning to himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no place to store my crops?' 18 "Then he said, 'This is what I will do: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. 19 'And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years to come; take your ease, eat, drink and be merry.'" 20 "But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your soul is required of you; and now who will own what you have prepared?' 21 "So is the man who stores up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."

The man had "many goods," but he lost his soul at just the time that he thought he would be able to take it easy. Someone else would own his wealth, and God called him a fool. He was focused on gaining wealth, but lost his soul, and his wealth did not profit him.

Jesus Himself faced this very temptation. We saw it back in chapter 4 when the devil was tempting Him in the wilderness and offered to give Him all the kingdoms of the world if He would worship him. It would not have profited Jesus to have done so. There really is such a thing as selling your soul to the devil when we exchange the true life God offers for the deceptive substitutes of Satan.

The second question is, "Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" The question implies that there is nothing we can give in exchange for our souls. Albert Barnes comments, "...if the soul is lost, nothing can be given in exchange for it, or that it can never afterward be saved. There is no redemption in hell" (Albert Barnes' Notes on the Bible). Even if we have "gained the whole world" it will not pay for the redemption of our lives. If we have failed to follow Christ, there is no way to make up for it later. The word "give" here is a future tense verb. There is no opportunity in the future, after physical death, to purchase back your life if you have lost it. We will have no currency for such a transaction if we have not lost our lives for the sake of Christ.

Jesus then looks to the future, to the day when He will come in the glory of His Father with His angels and will "repay every man according to his deeds." When Jesus was born of Mary in Bethlehem He did not come "in the glory of His Father," but had laid aside the glory of deity and had come humbly as a man to dwell among men (Philippians 2:5-11). Peter, James and John got a glimpse of the true glory of Jesus when He was transfigured on the mountain and met with Moses and Elijah (Matthew 17:1-8). The next time Jesus comes, He will come in glory and He will come "in His kingdom." Those who see Him will see the divine Jesus and there will be no questioning who He is and whether He is the King. It will be a terrifying thing for those who do not follow Him.

The next time Jesus comes it will not be for salvation but for judgment. Every person will be repaid according to their deeds. The older version of the New American Standard used the word "recompense" rather than "repay." The King James uses the word "reward," and the Revised Version says "render unto." Our deeds demand recompense. I think we all understand this. We want criminals to be caught, prosecuted and punished. If a drunk driver on the freeway hits me and totals my car and I end up in the hospital with multiple injuries, I expect to be compensated. They are responsible for the damage and injury I've suffered, and I expect them to reimburse me. This is what justice is all about, and God is just. He is gracious and forgiving, but He will not leave the guilty unpunished (Exodus 34:6-7). This is not unfair. He would be unjust if He did not repay us according to our deeds.

Finally Jesus says, "Truly I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom." It seems clear to me that He is referring to the same event as in verse 27, when He comes in the glory of His Father with His angels. That is the time when people will see Jesus coming in His kingdom. It would not be until that day that some standing there would "taste death." I don't think that Jesus was saying that some standing there would not physically die until that day when He comes in His glory. The reason is obvious. All those to whom Jesus was speaking have died, and Jesus has not yet come in His glory and in His kingdom. Clearly they have experienced physical death. I think the context helps us understand what He means. There were those standing there who would not deny themselves and take up their crosses and follow Jesus. There were those there who would try to save their lives in this world instead of losing them for the sake of Christ, who would forfeit their souls for the sake of worldly gain. They are the kinds of people Jesus talked about in Matthew 7:21-23 who will say to Him on the day of judgment, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?" They will be surprised when He says to them, "I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness." They thought they were

following Him because they called Him “Lord” and did things in His name, but they did not do the will of the Father and practiced lawlessness. They heard His words but did not act on them (Matthew 7:24-27).

When Jesus comes in the glory of the Father to repay everyone according to their deeds, there will be some who will be surprised, who held to a false confidence. They will be subject to what Revelation calls “the second death.” Describing this day of judgment, Revelation 20:11-15 says,

Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. 12 And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. 13 And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds. 14 Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. 15 And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

Many who think they know Christ will “taste death,” the second death, on this day because they didn’t really follow Him. They didn’t lose their lives for His sake, but pursued their own path of self-preservation.

#### Matthew 17:1-13

Six days later Jesus \*took with Him Peter and James and John his brother, and \*led them up on a high mountain by themselves. 2 And He was transfigured before them; and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light. 3 And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him. 4 Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, I will make three tabernacles here, one for You, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah." 5 While he was still speaking, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and behold, a voice out of the cloud said, "This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him!" 6 When the disciples heard this, they fell face down to the ground and were terrified. 7 And Jesus came to them and touched them and said, "Get up, and do not be afraid." 8 And lifting up their eyes, they saw no one except Jesus Himself alone. 9 As they were coming down from the mountain, Jesus commanded them, saying, "Tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man has risen from the dead." 10 And His disciples asked Him, "Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?" 11 And He answered and said, "Elijah is coming and will restore all things; 12 but I say to you that Elijah already came, and they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they wished. So also the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands." 13 Then the disciples understood that He had spoken to them about John the Baptist.

As we begin to think about the transfiguration, we must recognize that it is tied in with the things that Jesus had just said to the disciples in chapter 16 about His impending death and resurrection. Matthew and Mark tell us that Jesus was speaking on the mountain with Elijah and Moses, but Luke tells us that they were talking “about His departure which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem” (Luke 9:31). It seems that this experience for Peter, James and John was meant to underscore what Jesus had just told them.

Matthew and Mark tell us that it was “six days later” that Jesus took the three men up onto the high mountain, while Luke says it was “some eight days after these sayings” (Luke 9:28). The word translated “some” here is *hōsei*, meaning “about” or “nearly.” I think Luke means to say, as the Good News Bible translates it, that it was “about a week after he had said these things.” I don’t think the precise time frame is critically important.

Jesus led these three men up on the mountain by themselves. This was a very deliberate thing on the part of Jesus. Peter, James and John were the inner circle of the apostles, and Jesus had an agenda for leading these men up on the mountain, and this would be a very important experience for them. The verbs “took” and “led” here are present active verbs. AT Robertson says they are the “historical present” tense. A more literal translation would be “Six days later Jesus takes with Him Peter and James and John his brother, and leads them up on a high mountain by themselves.” Luke 9:28 tells us that they went up on the mountain to pray, and it was while Jesus was praying that He was transfigured.

There on the mountain Jesus was “transfigured before them; and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light.” Mark says, “His garments became radiant and exceedingly white, as no launderer on earth can whiten them” (Mark 9:3). Luke 9:29 says, “while He was praying, the appearance of His face became different, and His clothing became white and gleaming.” The Greek word for “transfigured” is *metamorphōō*, our word “metamorphosis.” It means a change of form, a transformation. The true heavenly glory of Jesus as the Son of God was revealed and made visible to Peter, James and John. The transformation is described in terms of bright shining light and radiant whiteness. The true nature of Jesus as a heavenly being was revealed. Here indeed was no ordinary man, but God incarnate.

Again, Luke tells us that this transformation happened while Jesus was praying, and he also discloses that Peter, James and John “had been overcome with sleep” (Luke 9:32). We will again find these same men sleeping while Jesus prays later in the Garden of Gethsemane. As soon as they woke up, they saw the glory of Jesus and that He was talking with Moses and Elijah. They were sleeping at a critical moment. Something important was happening, but they missed a bit of it because they were asleep. Sometimes we miss things because we are, in a sense, asleep. We aren’t paying attention to Jesus and what He’s doing. We must learn to be alert to the Lord and what He’s up to.

Moses and Elijah were there, talking with Jesus, and as we’ve noted, they were “speaking of His departure which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem” (Luke 9:31). The word Luke uses for “departure” is *exodos*, our word “exodus.” It means to take a road out of a place, hence, to depart, to leave, to exit. It is a euphemism for His death. Peter uses this word in reference to his imminent death in 2 Peter 1:15. Death is a departure, an exit from this life to the next in glory. Jesus was going to Jerusalem to complete this task. It would be the great accomplishment of His life.

No doubt this was a very impressive experience for Peter, James and John! Not only did they see Jesus in His glory, but they also got to see Moses and Elijah! For some reason Peter felt he had to say something, so he said, “Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, I will make three tabernacles here, one for You, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” Luke 9:33 tells us that Peter said this as Moses and Elijah were leaving, and he didn’t realize what he was saying. As he often did, Peter spoke impulsively without really thinking. Mark puts it this way, “For he did not know what to answer; for they became terrified” (Mark 9:6). Because of his fear, he spoke without knowing what to say. I imagine there was a mixture of this fear along with excitement and the realization that this was an extremely extraordinary moment, and as Moses and Elijah began to leave, Peter wanted to preserve it and extend it. He proposed that he would erect three tabernacles, one for each of them, so they might spend

the night there. I think he was saying, "Hey, Jesus! Moses and Elijah don't have to leave, I'll make tabernacles for You and them and we can all stay here for a while." We want to preserve and extend the mountaintop experiences we have that give us those extraordinary feelings of connection to the Lord that we don't feel in normal daily life. Peter saw the transcendence of Jesus, saw His glowing glory, saw Moses and Elijah, and wanted to stay there in that place. But we have to go back to the daily humdrum. The experience, though, will transform the daily humdrum. Once you have glimpsed the glory of Christ it changes everything. Everything is seen in light of His glory.

Even as Peter spoke, "a bright cloud overshadowed them." This wasn't a typical cloud, but a bright one. Usually clouds are darker, but this one was a shining cloud. The word for "overshadowed" means, well, overshadowed, to cast a shadow over something. Luke tells us that they entered the cloud (Luke 9:34). And then a voice came out of the cloud. The Father spoke. He said, "This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him!" Recall that when John baptized Jesus the same voice had said, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased" (Matthew 3:17). Often in the Old Testament we find the presence of God is associated with a cloud. Exodus 13:21-22 tells us that the Lord led the nation of Israel in a pillar of cloud. Exodus 19:9 says, "The LORD said to Moses, 'Behold, I will come to you in a thick cloud, so that the people may hear when I speak with you and may also believe in you forever.' Then Moses told the words of the people to the LORD." It was from this thick cloud that the Lord spoke to the people and gave them the ten commandments (Exodus 20:21). So now with Peter, James and John the Father manifested His presence in the form of a cloud, and gave them the message He had for them. The most important person there was not Moses nor Elijah, but His beloved Son. Moses was the great Lawgiver, and Elijah was the great representative of the prophets, but Jesus alone was God's beloved Son who was well-pleasing to Him.

The Father had one command for them: "Listen to Him!" This was the message for them in this experience. They were to understand who Jesus was and pay attention to what He had to say. The word "listen" is a present active imperative verb. They were to continually listen to Him. Jesus uses the same word in John 10:27-28 when He says, "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand." Those who are the sheep of Jesus continually listen to Him and follow Him. Following depends on listening, and so is the first priority for one who would follow Him.

The disciples were terrified when they heard the voice out of the cloud and fell on their faces to the ground. When God manifests His presence like this it is a frightening thing. When God appeared in the cloud to the Israelites and gave them the ten commandments, they "trembled and stood at a distance." They said to Moses, "Speak to us yourself and we will listen; but let not God speak to us, or we will die" (Exodus 20:18-19). The pure light of the holy presence of God is a thing that exposes our sin and terrifies us.

Jesus came over to where they were and touched them and said, "Get up, and do not be afraid." Jesus reassured them with touch as well as speech. They were not in danger, but they needed Jesus to assure them of this. When Jesus leads you to a place and is there with you, there is no reason for fear. You may experience fear, but He will say this same thing to you.

In obedience to Jesus the disciples lifted their eyes and saw no one except Jesus. Moses and Elijah were gone, the cloud was gone, and I assume that Jesus looked like His normal human self again. It was just the four of them standing on top of this mountain. Mark says, "All at once they looked around and saw no one with them anymore, except Jesus alone" (Mark 9:7). This happened suddenly. At one moment the cloud enveloped them, the Father

spoke, and then suddenly it all disappeared and there was Jesus alone. They looked around, as anyone would, and no one was there except Jesus. It was a tremendous experience, but they didn't need Moses, they didn't need Elijah, and they didn't even need the bright cloud. They only needed Jesus. They didn't even need the bright, shining Jesus going forward, just the One they were to listen to and follow. This was a brief experience with a powerful point that would not be extended or repeated.

The Law and the Prophets are important, but Jesus transcends them. Hebrews 1:1-4 says, "God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, 2 in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. 3 And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, 4 having become as much better than the angels, as He has inherited a more excellent name than they." The author of Hebrews goes on to demonstrate that Jesus is greater than the angels, greater than Moses, and greater than any of the prophets or great people of faith.

As they returned to the other disciples, coming down from the mountain, Jesus commanded them not to tell anyone about the vision until He had risen from the dead. The word "vision" simply means "that which is seen." What they had seen was proof to them that Jesus was no mere ordinary man, but that He was indeed the Son of God. They had gotten a glimpse of His divine glory which He had laid aside when He humbled Himself to take on flesh (see Philippians 2:5-11). Again, though, they were not to disclose to others what they had seen until after the resurrection. They were not to make a big deal about knowing that Jesus was the Messiah and the Son of God because of the misunderstandings about His purpose and mission and because of the opponents who would try to destroy Him before the time.

The disciples didn't understand what Jesus meant by "rising from the dead." Mark tells us, "They seized upon that statement, discussing with one another what rising from the dead meant" (Mark 9:10). The idea that Jesus would die and then rise from the dead was a very foreign idea. After He died they still did not expect that He would rise, even though He explicitly told them He would. Only in hindsight, after His resurrection, did they comprehend it.

Though Peter, James and John discussed among themselves what rising from the dead meant, they did not ask Jesus about it. Instead they asked, "Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?" Now they knew for sure that Jesus was the Messiah, and they had just seen Elijah, and they were confused. The scribes taught that Elijah would come before the Messiah, but here was the Messiah and Elijah had not come. Malachi 4:5 said that Elijah would come before the great and terrible day of the Lord. Jesus replied, "Elijah is coming and will restore all things; but I say to you that Elijah already came, and they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they wished. So also the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands." The disciples then understood that He was talking about John the Baptist. Jesus had said in Matthew 11:14 that John was the "Elijah" who was to come, and we've already dealt with this at some depth as we looked at Matthew 3 and Matthew 11, so I don't feel like we need to say much more about the identification of John with Elijah.

When "Elijah" came in the person of John the Baptist, the scribes and Pharisees did not recognize him, they did not know (*epiginōskō*) him. Recall that Luke 7:30 says that these men had "rejected God's purpose for themselves, not having been baptized by John." Instead, these men "did to him whatever they wished" and he ended up being put to death by Herod. Jesus says that they will treat Him the same way and he will suffer at their hands. His suffering will come from these men who failed to recognize John as a prophet and also failed to recognize Jesus as the Son of God and Messiah. Failing to recognize Jesus for who He is is a tragic failure. Many say that Jesus was a great religious leader or great moral teacher, but

totally reject the idea that He is the Son of God, God incarnate and the King of the kingdom. They accept His humanity but reject His divinity, and this is a fatal mistake.

Matthew 17:14-21

When they came to the crowd, a man came up to Jesus, falling on his knees before Him and saying, 15 "Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is a lunatic and is very ill; for he often falls into the fire and often into the water. 16 "I brought him to Your disciples, and they could not cure him." 17 And Jesus answered and said, "You unbelieving and perverted generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring him here to Me." 18 And Jesus rebuked him, and the demon came out of him, and the boy was cured at once. 19 Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, "Why could we not drive it out?" 20 And He \*said to them, "Because of the littleness of your faith; for truly I say to you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible to you. 21 ["But this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting."]

Again, Mark and Luke both cover this story as well, and Mark includes much more detail, which we should note as we think about this incident. Here is Mark 9:14-29:

When they came back to the disciples, they saw a large crowd around them, and some scribes arguing with them. 15 Immediately, when the entire crowd saw Him, they were amazed and began running up to greet Him. 16 And He asked them, "What are you discussing with them?" 17 And one of the crowd answered Him, "Teacher, I brought You my son, possessed with a spirit which makes him mute; 18 and whenever it seizes him, it slams him to the ground and he foams at the mouth, and grinds his teeth and stiffens out. I told Your disciples to cast it out, and they could not do it." 19 And He \*answered them and \*said, "O unbelieving generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring him to Me!" 20 They brought the boy to Him. When he saw Him, immediately the spirit threw him into a convulsion, and falling to the ground, he began rolling around and foaming at the mouth. 21 And He asked his father, "How long has this been happening to him?" And he said, "From childhood. 22 "It has often thrown him both into the fire and into the water to destroy him. But if You can do anything, take pity on us and help us!" 23 And Jesus said to him, " 'If You can?' All things are possible to him who believes." 24 Immediately the boy's father cried out and said, "I do believe; help my unbelief." 25 When Jesus saw that a crowd was rapidly gathering, He rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, "You deaf and mute spirit, I command you, come out of him and do not enter him again." 26 After crying out and throwing him into terrible convulsions, it came out; and the boy became so much like a corpse that most of them said, "He is dead!" 27 But Jesus took him by the hand and raised him; and he got up. 28 When He came into the house, His disciples began questioning Him privately, "Why could we not drive it out?" 29 And He said to them, "This kind cannot come out by anything but prayer."

Jesus, Peter, James and John did not come back to a scene of peace and quiet, but to a scene of rancor and commotion. There was, as usual, a crowd around the disciples, and the scribes were arguing with them. When they saw Jesus they immediately ran up to Him to greet Him, and Jesus asked what they were discussing. Apparently He asked this of the scribes. At this point the man who had brought his son to the disciples for healing spoke up



and explained the situation. He fell on his knees before Jesus and begged for mercy for his son. He explained that his son was “a lunatic and is very ill.” The word translated “lunatic” is *selēniazomai*, which literally means “to be moonstruck.” Some English versions translate this as meaning he was an epileptic (CEV, ESV, ISV and WEB). The supposition was that this condition was influenced by the changes in the moon. This condition caused him to often fall into the fire and into the water. No doubt it was an exhausting thing to keep watching this boy so that he would not be killed.

Mark gives us much more information. The boy’s condition was caused by an evil spirit who made him mute, would slam him to the ground, make him grind his teeth and stiffen out. As soon as the boy was brought to Jesus and saw Him, one of these episodes came upon him and the spirit threw him into a convulsion and he thrashed around on the ground. It’s interesting that Jesus asked how long this had been happening before He healed the boy. We don’t know how old this boy was, but evidently it had been happening for a long time, since he was a young child.

When the man came with his son, he was hoping to see Jesus, but found that Jesus was not there, so he asked the disciples to cast out the spirit, but they could not do it. They did not have the power or ability to heal the boy. No doubt they had tried what they had been able to do previously when Jesus sent them out, but this time they did not have success. There was frustration all around in this situation. The father was frustrated because of the condition of his son and the inability of the disciples of Jesus to cure him. The disciples were frustrated because they couldn’t cast out this demon. Jesus was frustrated as well because of the lack of faith in evidence. The father was on the verge of giving up hope. He said, “if You can do anything, take pity on us and help us!” He questioned whether even Jesus Himself could do anything. Maybe Jesus was as powerless as His disciples had proved to be. Maybe this demon was even too powerful for Jesus to handle. But Jesus replied, “If you can?” All things are possible to him who believes.” There is power or ability for all things to the one who believes. The man was expressing doubt. He wasn’t sure Jesus could do anything. He was hesitating between belief and unbelief, so he cried out, “I do believe; help my unbelief.” He wanted to fully trust Jesus, but was wavering. He made the best request that any of us can make at times like this, “Help my unbelief.” He came bringing his son in the first place because of his faith. His faith had brought him, but the failed attempts of the disciples caused him to waver.

We will often face circumstances that cause us to waver in our faith, to be frustrated and entertain doubts about our faith. Maybe we’ve been praying for a thing we need or deeply desire and we’re not seeing results. Maybe it seems like God isn’t listening and doesn’t care, or that our request is unworthy, or that we don’t have sufficient standing before Him to ask for anything. These are the times we should cry out, “Help my unbelief!”

In expressing His frustration, Jesus said, “You unbelieving and perverted generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring him here to Me.” Jesus had already condemned this generation as “evil and adulterous” in Matthew 12:39 and 16:4. He called it an “evil generation” in 12:45. Now He describes it as “unbelieving and perverted.” The generation in which He lived was one that refused to believe. They required signs and saw His signs, but still would not believe. Jesus looked for faith among them, but did not find it. It was also perverted. The word means crooked or twisted or warped. Something that is perverted is something that has been distorted or corrupted. It’s something that should be straight that has been bent and twisted out of shape. It’s something that’s designed for one thing that has been altered for an illegitimate use. Sexual perversion is an example. God’s good design for the sexual relationship between a man and wife has been twisted and perverted in many ways. The generation of Jews at the time when Jesus appeared should

have welcomed Him with open arms, believed in Him as their Messiah and followed Him enthusiastically. Instead they opposed Him and rejected Him. Their Judaism was an unbelieving and perverse Judaism.

That His generation was unbelieving and perverse was a source of grief to Jesus and was a burden to Him. He had to “put up” with it while He was on earth. Just as we sometimes have to “put up” with the bad attitudes and behavior of others, so Jesus had to put up with the evils of the people all around Him, and He was more conscious of those evils than we will ever be. He saw them more clearly than we do. There’s a sense in which the Lord actually “puts up with” all of us. Paul mentions this in Romans 2:3-4, “But do you suppose this, O man, when you pass judgment on those who practice such things and do the same yourself, that you will escape the judgment of God? 4 Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?” He mentions it again in Romans 9:22, “What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction?” Though we are not all “vessels of wrath,” nonetheless Jesus must still put up with our lack of faith, our sin and our twisted nature. He must work with us in our weaknesses and failures, and thank God, He does this with great patience and grace.

Jesus ordered that the boy be brought to Him, and He rebuked the demon, the demon came out of him, and he was “cured at once.” Mark tells us what Jesus said, “You deaf and mute spirit, I command you, come out of him and do not enter him again.” The spirit came out, but first it threw the boy into convulsions and it appeared to most of the people there that the boy was dead. But Jesus took him by the hand and raised him up. The evil spirit was compelled to obey the command of Jesus. The boy was no longer controlled by the spirit and the request of the father was granted. This spirit was not too powerful for Jesus. The spirits who exist are all subject to Jesus and to those who belong to Jesus and are authorized to act in His name.

The disciples were puzzled as to why they were unable to drive out the demon. They went into the house with Jesus (Mark 9:28) and asked Him why they couldn’t drive it out. Matthew gives us one answer and Mark gives us another. Jesus tells them straight out, “Because of the littleness of your faith.” We’ve already seen Jesus use the phrase “little faith” four times in Matthew. In the storm at sea He said that they were men of “little faith” (Matthew 8:26). When Peter began to sink as he walked on the water Jesus asked, “You of little faith, why did you doubt?” (Matthew 14:31). When the disciples discussed the fact that they had forgotten to bring bread, Jesus said, “You men of little faith, why do you discuss among yourselves that you have no bread?” (Matthew 16:8). Their faith was inadequate to deal with this demon they confronted. Faith that is too small will keep us from doing what we should do. This is a huge problem with us and is the thing that Jesus laments here. A big part of our twisted, perverted sin nature is our inability and unwillingness to believe in and trust the Lord as we should.

It’s not that they needed huge faith, however. They just needed faith the size of a mustard seed. If their faith were even that size, they could command mountains to move and they would obey. Mustard seed sized faith would give them ability to order things in the natural and spiritual realms. Nothing would be impossible for them. This points to the fact that our faith is not even this size. I’ve never seen any believer do anything like this. None of us wields the authority of Christ the way we should because our faith is so feeble. I don’t think Jesus is saying that we should literally go around ordering mountains to move, but He’s saying those huge things that oppose us, that stand in our way and in the way of the gospel and the knowledge of God could be removed if we had adequate faith. The demon in the boy was a “mountain” that needed to be moved, and with a word Jesus did so.

Clearly the disciples needed, and we today need, bigger faith. So how do we grow our faith? I think it takes time and experience in relationship with the Lord. As we abide in Him and follow Him and see Him work, our confidence in Him grows. As we step out in faith to trust Him for small things and we see Him work, our faith grows so that we can trust Him with bigger things. It's like any relationship. As we get to know someone better we either grow in our confidence in them and appreciation for them, or maybe we begin to see that they aren't that trustworthy or competent. If we get on board with what Jesus is doing we will see more and more that we can trust Him. This incident itself was a thing that would build the faith of the disciples.

Verse 21 is most likely something that was added to the text at a later date. The NASB note on this verse says that early manuscripts of Matthew do not contain the verse. No doubt some copyist picked this up from Mark 9:29, "And He said to them, 'This kind cannot come out by anything but prayer.'" This particular kind of demon would not be cast out except through prayer. Their faith was too small and they did not pray. They tried something and then were frustrated because the boy was not healed. I think Jesus is saying that they should have gathered around the boy and prayed earnestly for him to be healed. They needed to get God involved in this process rather than relying on their own procedure. The Lord and His power show up when we gather to pray and seek Him and His help.

#### Matthew 17:22-23

And while they were gathering together in Galilee, Jesus said to them, "The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men; 23 and they will kill Him, and He will be raised on the third day." And they were deeply grieved.

Jesus is soon going to leave Galilee and head to Judea (19:1) and He wants again to get this message across to the disciples that He is not going there to take the throne, but to be delivered up to men and killed and then be raised on the third day. He wanted them to know that this was not a mere possibility, but a necessity; that it wasn't something that may happen, but that would certainly happen. They needed to be prepared for what was going to occur.

The disciples were grieved by this. This was something they had not expected when they committed themselves to following Him. Though the prophetic scriptures are explicit about this, the idea that the Messiah would die was unthinkable to them. Mark tells us also that "they did not understand this statement, and they were afraid to ask Him" (Mark 9:32). Luke says, "But they did not understand this statement, and it was concealed from them so that they would not perceive it; and they were afraid to ask Him about this statement" (Luke 9:45). It's like Jesus was speaking a foreign language and they could not comprehend it. I think they were still caught in their entrenched way of thinking about the Messiah and could not get their heads around the idea that He would suffer and die. We will see going forward that they forgot He had said He would rise from the dead until after He had been raised.

I'm not entirely sure why they were afraid to ask Jesus about this statement. After all, they were His students and He was their teacher. Students should ask about the things that they have trouble understanding. Sometimes, though, students are afraid to ask because they don't want to appear foolish. The concepts being taught may seem elementary to others, and so it would be embarrassing to ask for clarification. Asking might subject the one asking to ridicule and rebuke. Asking might frustrate the teacher and make him angry. Jesus is going to have to talk to them some more about this.

#### Matthew 17:24-27

When they came to Capernaum, those who collected the two-drachma tax came to Peter and said, "Does your teacher not pay the two-drachma tax?" 25 He \*said, "Yes." And when he came into the house, Jesus spoke to him first, saying, "What do you think, Simon? From whom do the kings of the earth collect customs or poll-tax, from their sons or from strangers?" 26 When Peter said, "From strangers," Jesus said to him, "Then the sons are exempt. 27 "However, so that we do not offend them, go to the sea and throw in a hook, and take the first fish that comes up; and when you open its mouth, you will find a shekel. Take that and give it to them for you and Me."

The two-drachma tax was an annual tax for the maintenance of the temple that all Jewish men twenty years of age and older were expected to pay. The two-drachma was the equivalent of the Jewish half-shekel. Robertson's Word Pictures says that it was not a compulsory tax, but was voluntary. It was collected in the Jewish month of Adar, March, and was apparently overdue. Thus, these tax collectors asked Peter whether Jesus paid the tax, and Peter replied in the affirmative. Peter knew that Jesus had paid this tax in the past. They wanted to know if it was the practice of Jesus to pay this tax, and Peter said that yes, it was. It appears these men deliberately came looking for Jesus and His disciples. It's likely they wanted to find some reason to accuse Him.

When Peter came into the house where Jesus was, Jesus asked his opinion regarding these kinds of taxes. Jesus spoke first and did not wait for Peter to say something about the situation. Usually Peter is the one to speak first, but now Jesus speaks first. He asked, "From whom do the kings of the earth collect customs or poll-tax, from their sons or from strangers?" Jesus gave him two alternatives, and Peter answered correctly. The kings of the earth collect taxes from strangers and not their own sons. Jesus pointed out that the sons are exempt, they are free. The family of the king is not under obligation to pay taxes, but rather they are the beneficiaries of those taxes. Jesus is the King, and Peter was part of His "family," and as such they were exempt from any taxes related to the property of the King. Jesus was Lord of the temple. It was His Father's house (Luke 2:49 and John 2:16) and He could have legitimately refused to pay this tax.

Jesus decided, however, to go ahead and pay the two-drachma tax so that He would not offend these men and give them a reason to denounce Him. Apparently He didn't have the money at this point, so He sent Peter to the sea to "throw in a hook" and catch a fish that would have a shekel in its mouth. Normally Peter and his associates fished with nets and were going for fish in bulk, but now he only needs to catch one fish. This is the only time that fishing with a hook is mentioned in the New Testament. The Greek word translated "shekel" here is *statēr*, which was equivalent to a Jewish shekel and equal to four Attic drachmas (Thayer's Greek Definitions). This would cover the tax for Jesus and Peter. I don't know where the other disciples were at this time. Again Jesus provided for the need in a miraculous, though perhaps unspectacular way. I presume things went exactly as Jesus had said, the fish was caught, the coin was found and the tax was paid.

I think it's important to note that Jesus deliberately avoided offending these men. He didn't do so because He was afraid of them, but because it was unnecessary and would accomplish nothing. If He had said, "No, My followers and I are exempt from this tax because I am the Messiah and Lord of the temple," it would have provoked them and would have taught them nothing. He wanted Peter to understand this, but these men would just have been offended. I think that too often in our contentions with the world these days Christians are being unnecessarily offensive. We repay evil with evil, name-calling with name-calling, anger with anger, sarcasm with sarcasm and so forth. We need to remember what Paul said

in 1 Thessalonians 5:15, "See that no one repays another with evil for evil, but always seek after that which is good for one another and for all people." Peter also said in 1 Peter 3:9, "not returning evil for evil or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead; for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing." Sometimes we should resist the urge to correct someone's mistaken beliefs or answer someone's unfair accusations or criticisms. These men came and asked Peter if Jesus paid the two-drachma tax, and he had said yes. Instead of getting into an argument about why they were really exempt, Jesus chose to pay the tax. We need not always be adversarial toward those who oppose us. Instead we should be gracious when we can. Of course, if it is a matter of doing what God requires versus what men require, we must do God's will. When the apostles were ordered not to speak any longer in the name of Jesus, they said, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge; for we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:19-20).

#### Matthew 18:1-14

At that time the disciples came to Jesus and said, "Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" 2 And He called a child to Himself and set him before them, 3 and said, "Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. 4 "Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. 5 "And whoever receives one such child in My name receives Me; 6 but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him to have a heavy millstone hung around his neck, and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.

7 "Woe to the world because of its stumbling blocks! For it is inevitable that stumbling blocks come; but woe to that man through whom the stumbling block comes! 8 "If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; it is better for you to enter life crippled or lame, than to have two hands or two feet and be cast into the eternal fire. 9 "If your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out and throw it from you. It is better for you to enter life with one eye, than to have two eyes and be cast into the fiery hell. 10 "See that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that their angels in heaven continually see the face of My Father who is in heaven. 11 ["For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost.]

12 "What do you think? If any man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go and search for the one that is straying? 13 "If it turns out that he finds it, truly I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine which have not gone astray. 14 "So it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones perish.

All along Jesus had been teaching the disciples about the kingdom of God, the rule of God, and as we've seen they had come to believe that He was the Messiah, the King of the kingdom. He is the one who is to rule. He had told Peter that he was the rock, and that He would build His congregation on the rock, giving the impression that Peter was the number one man among the disciples. He had taken Peter, James and John up to the mountain where He was transfigured, giving the impression that they were the top three. Though He had told them He was going to suffer, die and rise again, I think these men were still thinking of an earthly kingdom. They were still thinking about the high positions they would have alongside Jesus the King in His kingdom. They were dreaming of greatness. This was a topic of conversation and dispute among them (Mark 9:33-34, Matthew 20:20-28, Luke 22:24).

Jesus had told them that those who set aside one of the least of the commandments and teach others to do the same would be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but those who kept and taught them would be called great (Matthew 5:19). He had said that the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than John the Baptist (Matthew 11:11). So now they asked Him, "Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" They wanted to know how to achieve greatness in the kingdom. How can we rise to the highest positions in the heavenly hierarchy?

I think we should note that Jesus did not rebuke them for asking this question. Aspiring to greatness is not necessarily a bad thing, especially if we are aspiring to greatness in God's sight. To want to excel in the heavenly kingdom is a good thing. It drives us to lay up treasure in heaven rather than on earth. It drives us to seek to please God rather than men, to pursue our reward from Him rather than men. We should aspire to greatness in the eyes of God. It's a good thing to ask how we can become great in His eyes. The thing is, though, that we don't attain greatness in His sight in the way we think we will.

Jesus called a little child to come to Him and said, "Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven." He continues talking about "little ones" through verse 14. It is required that we "be converted and become like children" if we want to even enter the kingdom. The Greek word for "converted" here is *strephō*, meaning "to turn, to turn around" ([Thayer's Greek Definitions](#)). There must be a turn around. Conversion is a turn around, a reversing of course. Before thinking about becoming great in the kingdom they needed to make sure they were entering the kingdom in the first place. It may be a good thing to desire to be great in God's sight, but their desire to exalt themselves over others was not so good. Their desire for earthly positions of authority and privilege were not so good.

The primary characteristic of a child that Jesus points to is humility. The greatest in the kingdom of heaven is the one who humbles himself like a child. Humility is lowliness. Little children know they are not powerful or capable. They don't think they know everything. They ask questions because they sincerely want to know the answers and believe there are answers. They believe the answers they are given. They have not yet learned to be cynical and skeptical. They will become so as they go through life and are tricked and deceived and caused to stumble. They will learn not to trust people. They know they are dependent on their parents and others. They know they need help. This is the kind of humility that God wants to see in our lives before Him.

John the Baptist modeled humility when he said that he was not worthy to untie the sandals of Jesus. The Roman Centurion modeled humility when he said he was not worthy to have Jesus come under his roof. Jesus gave us a picture of humility when He talked about taking the lowest place at a wedding feast instead of the "place of honor." He said, "But when you are invited, go and recline at the last place, so that when the one who has invited you comes, he may say to you, 'Friend, move up higher'; then you will have honor in the sight of all who are at the table with you. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted" (Luke 14:10-11).

Jesus Himself is the ultimate exemplar of humility. We've referenced Philippians 2 a number of times already, which exhorts us to have the same attitude as Christ who, he says, "although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" (Philippians 2:6-8). He willingly became a "bond-servant," a type of slave. He humbled Himself by means of becoming obedient even to the point of being crucified like the worst kind of criminal! The proud person is a disobedient person. The proud person is one who will not submit his will to the will of others. The proud

person is the one who is too important to serve others in simple ways. We find greatness in the kingdom through humility, submission and obedience.

Jesus also modeled humility when he washed the feet of the disciples during the Passover observance. In John 13:1-17 we read:

Now before the Feast of the Passover, Jesus knowing that His hour had come that He would depart out of this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end. 2 During supper, the devil having already put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon, to betray Him, 3 Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come forth from God and was going back to God, 4 \*got up from supper, and \*laid aside His garments; and taking a towel, He girded Himself. 5 Then He \*poured water into the basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded. 6 So He \*came to Simon Peter. He \*said to Him, "Lord, do You wash my feet?" 7 Jesus answered and said to him, "What I do you do not realize now, but you will understand hereafter." 8 Peter \*said to Him, "Never shall You wash my feet!" Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me." 9 Simon Peter \*said to Him, "Lord, then wash not only my feet, but also my hands and my head." 10 Jesus \*said to him, "He who has bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all of you." 11 For He knew the one who was betraying Him; for this reason He said, "Not all of you are clean." 12 So when He had washed their feet, and taken His garments and reclined at the table again, He said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? 13 "You call Me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am. 14 "If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. 15 "For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you. 16 "Truly, truly, I say to you, a slave is not greater than his master, nor is one who is sent greater than the one who sent him. 17 "If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.

I think it's important to note here that Jesus did this "knowing" certain things. He knew that His "hour had come" to return to the Father. He knew that "the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come forth from God and was going back to God." He knew who He was, where He had come from, where He was going, and what power and authority had been given to Him. Knowing these things He humbled Himself to take the role of the lowest kind of slave, the slave that would wash people's feet as they came into a home. Humility does not mean that we deny who we are and our competencies and capabilities. Humility is not saying that we are worthless no-good nobodies. Humility is knowing and acknowledging our abilities and still willingly taking the role of a lowly servant. Jesus told the disciples that He had given them an example. He was their Lord and Teacher. They were not greater than Him, and yet He became their lowly slave. We are to do the same. We must get away from the idea that we are here to be served by others and that we are too important to serve others in the lowliest of ways.

In verses 5 and 6 Jesus talks about little ones who believe in Him like the child He had called to Himself, and He gives them a contrast. He mentions two alternatives. If someone receives one such child in His name, he receives Jesus. To welcome such a child is to welcome Jesus. But if someone causes such a child to stumble, "it would be better for him to have a heavy millstone hung around his neck, and to be drowned in the depth of the sea." It seems like He is saying that we either "receive" these children who believe in Jesus or we cause them to stumble. We welcome them or we reject them, we value them and protect

them or we devalue them and neglect them. This is going to come up again in the next chapter.

If we cause a little one who believes in Jesus to stumble, we are in big trouble! You would be better off to be drowned in the sea with a heavy millstone around your neck than face the consequences of causing a little one to stumble! Jesus pronounces woe on those who cause others to stumble. There are many stumbling blocks in the world, and they are inevitable and unavoidable. The Greek word for "inevitable" is *anagkē*, which some versions translate "necessary." The World English Bible says, "Woe to the world because of occasions of stumbling! For it must needs be that the occasions come; but woe to that man through whom the occasion comes!" In a fallen world there will be many stumbling blocks, many traps and snares that will catch us and trip us up. We must expect and avoid them, and we certainly don't want to be one who causes others to stumble! Satan is the ultimate source of stumbling blocks, but people can lead others to stumble as well. If we are leading others into sin we are in big trouble with the Lord!

In verses 8 and 9 Jesus repeats what He had taught in chapter 5, verses 29 and 30. If your hand or foot or eye causes you to stumble, get rid of it. Cut off your hand or foot, pluck out your eye. Losing your hand, foot or eye is better than facing the penalty for sin. There are two ways to go, to "enter life," or to "be cast into the eternal fire," the "fiery hell." Stumbling will keep us from entering life and we will end up being thrown into the eternal fire.

The Good News Bible has an interesting approach here to what it means to "stumble." It says in Matthew verses 8 and 9, "If your hand or your foot makes you lose your faith, cut it off and throw it away! It is better for you to enter life without a hand or a foot than to keep both hands and both feet and be thrown into the eternal fire. And if your eye makes you lose your faith, take it out and throw it away! It is better for you to enter life with only one eye than to keep both eyes and be thrown into the fire of hell." I think there is some merit to this interpretation. In the parable of the sower Jesus used this word to describe the one who "falls away" (stumbles) when affliction or persecution arises because of the word he had believed (Matthew 13:21). He uses this word again when He says that many will "fall away" during the period of tribulation in Matthew 24:10. He warned the disciples that they would all "fall away" from Him when He was betrayed (Matthew 26:31). It seems that sometimes to "stumble" means to fall away from faith, from believing in Christ and following Him, or to be hindered from believing in Him in the first place. Stumbling blocks are impediments to faith and they must be removed. We will not enter life if we do not have faith in Christ.

Jesus not only warns against causing one of the little ones who believe in Him to stumble, but He also warns against despising them in verse 10. The word for "despise" is *kataphroneō*, to "think little of" or to "look down" on someone. The reason He gives for this is, "for I say to you that their angels in heaven continually see the face of My Father who is in heaven." The idea seems to be that these little ones have angelic representatives who continually stand before the Father and look out for their interests. They have the attention of the heavenly Father. I think this is a way of saying that the Father is acutely interested in what happens to the little ones who believe in Jesus. He does not appreciate it if we despise His little ones. He values them highly and so we must as well.

The NASB margin notes indicate that most ancient manuscripts of Matthew do not contain verse 11, but the saying does occur in Luke 19:10 when Jesus came bringing salvation to the home of Zaccheus the tax collector in Jericho. Some copyist at some point probably inserted it here in Matthew thinking that it fit the context of what Jesus was about to say. The mission of Jesus was a search and rescue mission. He came to find and save those who were lost. Twice in Matthew He has mentioned the "lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matthew 10:6 and 15:24). Sometimes Jesus seeks and saves people we may think are



unworthy, as people thought Zaccheus was unworthy, but we must be careful not to despise such people. Jesus cares for them, and so we must as well.

The parable about the lost sheep in verses 12-14 also occurs in Luke 15:4-7. If a man has 100 sheep and one goes astray, he will leave the 99 and go search for the one that strayed. If he finds it, he will rejoice. Jesus indicates that it isn't certain that the shepherd will find his sheep, He says, "If it turns out that he finds it." It may be that the sheep is irretrievably lost. It may have been killed by a predator. This is why he goes looking for the sheep, he doesn't want it to perish. If he finds it, he will have more joy over finding his wandering sheep than over the 99 that did not wander. His joy comes from finding and recovering his sheep. In Luke 15:5-7 "He says, "When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!' I tell you that in the same way, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance." The wandering sheep represents a sinner who is not in his rightful place before God, but is brought to repentance and faith, who makes a turnaround like the Prodigal son and is restored back home. Now certainly the shepherd prefers that the sheep not wander off; he does not want to have to go searching for a wandering sheep, but when they do, he comes looking for them.

The truth of the matter is that we all are wandering sheep. Isaiah 53:6 says, "All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all To fall on Him." We all need to be "found," to turn around and return to the Lord. Everyone is a sinner who needs to repent. Those who in their pride think they are "righteous persons who need no repentance" bring no joy to the Lord.

Jesus sums it up by saying in verse 14, "So it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones perish." God seeks those who wander because He doesn't want them to perish. It is not God's will that people perish. That is why Jesus told us to take the narrow gate and the narrow road to life rather than the broad road to destruction (Matthew 7:13-14). In Ezekiel 33:11 the Lord says, "Say to them, 'As I live!' declares the Lord GOD, 'I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn back, turn back from your evil ways! Why then will you die, O house of Israel?'" God does not wish for any to perish but for all to come to repentance (1 Peter 3:9). God does not delight in condemning people but in saving people.

The Lord tells us that we must become like the little kids who believe in Him. We must be humble and have a simple faith in Him. He tells us that we must never cause simple believers in Him to stumble and sin or fall away from faith in Him. We must not look down on the little ones who believe in Him and view them with contempt or devalue them. We must become those who take part in His mission to seek and save them, to find those who have strayed and bring them back.

#### Matthew 18:15-20

"If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. 16 "But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that **BY THE MOUTH OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES EVERY FACT MAY BE CONFIRMED.** 17 "If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. 18 "Truly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven. 19 "Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven. 20 "For

where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst."

Having just talked about how the shepherd goes to seek the one sheep that strays, now Jesus tells us that we have a responsibility to go after those who fall into sin. There may be times when a brother or sister in Christ may sin. They may stumble and be ensnared in sin. If we compare translations of verse 15 we find that some versions include the words "against you." The World English Bible reads, "If your brother sins against you, go, show him his fault between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained back your brother." The footnotes for the New American Bible say, "The bracketed words, **against you**, are widely attested but they are not in the important codices Sinaiticus and Vaticanus or in some other textual witnesses. Their omission broadens the type of sin in question." If the words "against you" are not original, then it definitely does broaden the application of this principle. I think the context is helpful here. A brother may be straying and wandering away from the Good Shepherd, but he may not have sinned against me personally. He may not have wronged me, but still I may have a responsibility to pursue him. Someone who is aware of his sin needs to go to him and try to restore him.

Jesus tells His disciples to go show the sinning brother his fault in private. The words "show him his fault" translate one word, *elegcho*, which means to "expose, convict, reprove" (New American Standard Exhaustive Concordance). He is to be admonished or reprimanded in private, just brother-to-brother. The aim is to get him to listen so that he might be "won." The word for "won" is also translated "gain" elsewhere and "profit" in James 4:13. It is the opposite of loss. We want to prevent the loss of our brother. We don't go to the sinning brother to blast him and drive him away, but to win him back to faith, faithfulness and obedience to the Lord. God wants to recover the straying sheep, and so should we as well.

The brother may listen and be "won," or he may not listen. If he does not listen to the individual who went to him, that individual is to take one or two others with him to talk to their brother. Jesus explains the reason for this by quoting Deuteronomy 19:15 "A single witness shall not rise up against a man on account of any iniquity or any sin which he has committed; on the evidence of two or three witnesses a matter shall be confirmed." Deuteronomy goes on to explain that a single malicious witness may falsely accuse someone of wrongdoing. The judges were to investigate the situation to determine the guilty party. The two or three witnesses were needed to confirm the facts. Thayer's Greek Definitions says that the word for "confirmed," *histēmi*, means "to cause or make to stand, to place, put, set." The one or two additional witnesses were to confirm the word of the first witness. If they could not confirm that the brother in question had sinned, then the process should stop at this point. If the brother accused of sin denied having sinned, and the accusing brother could not prove it to the witnesses, then the matter should end at that point. But Jesus here is talking about how to deal with a brother who has genuinely sinned, who has objectively committed a sin that has become known to others. This brother is to be convicted on the testimony of at least two people.

The sinning brother may refuse to listen to the two or three witnesses. He may turn a deaf ear to them and refuse to turn from his sin. The witnesses have confirmed the first man's word and have said, "Yes, brother, you need to turn from your straying path and return to obedience to Christ." If the man will not listen, the matter is to be disclosed to the assembly of believers. Jesus does not say that the man is to be brought before the church, but that the church is to be told of the issue. The assembly is to affirm the judgment of the witnesses. If the man refuses to listen to the whole assembly, Jesus says, "let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector." Gentiles and tax collectors were, to the Jewish mind, the embodiment of

sinful unbelievers. Jesus had pointed to this attitude in Matthew 5:46-47, "For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?" So here Jesus is telling them to treat the unrepentant brother as an unbeliever. When people who claim to be followers of Jesus continue on in sin as a lifestyle and refuse to repent and turn from it, they demonstrate that they are not really followers of Jesus. It is a characteristic of a genuine follower of Christ that they will turn away from sin. John makes this clear in 1 John 1:5-10:

This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all. 6 If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; 7 but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. 8 If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us.

If we say we have fellowship with God but continue to walk in the darkness, we are lying and we do not truly have fellowship with God. Walking in the light with the Lord requires that we admit and confess our sin and receive forgiveness and cleansing from Him. If we don't listen and don't admit that we have sinned and are sinners, we actually accuse the Lord of lying and His word is not in us. The person who says he's a believer but continues to live like an unbeliever is not really a believer.

Now in verse 18 we encounter again the words that Jesus spoke to Peter in 16:19, where we discussed the meaning of this saying in some depth. Jesus told us how to deal with brothers who sin, and if heaven has "bound" him, he is to be "bound" on earth. If heaven has "loosed" him, he is to be loosed. The assembly of believers is to recognize the judgment of heaven in these matters.

The mission of Jesus, according to the angel who told Joseph about Him, was to "save His people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21). Jesus said in John 8:34-36, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin. The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son does remain forever. So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed." Sin is our enemy and our captor and our master apart from Christ. Sin is the thing that we strive against, as Hebrews 12:4 says, "You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin." Romans 6 points out that we have died to sin, are no longer slaves of sin and no longer have to submit ourselves to sin. We do not have to allow it to reign over us and "obey its lusts" (Romans 6:12). We have a responsibility to one another to help the sinning brother or sister turn away from sin back to obedience to the Lord. We must strive against sin individually and collectively.

We should notice as we move forward that verse 18 is speaking of the disciples collectively, the "you" is plural; and so Jesus continues speaking of them collectively in verses 19 and 20. Verse 18 also talks about things done on earth and in heaven, and so Jesus continues that theme in verse 19. If two disciples agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by the Father in heaven. Jesus explains that the reason it works this way is that where two or three have gathered in His name, He is there in their midst. The Greek term for "agree" is *sumphōneō*, from which we get our word "symphony." It means to "sound together," that is, to be in harmony, hence, to agree together with one another. If two disciples agree on a matter that they need to ask the Lord to do on the earth, it will be done

by the Father in heaven. It will be done because Jesus is in the middle of it. The harmony is there because Jesus is there. The conviction that this thing needs to be asked and granted has come from Him, and not just from the whims of the two disciples. This is what it means to ask in His name. We ask on His behalf for His glory to accomplish His purposes. This is not a "blank check" promise we can use to get whatever we want.

Matthew 18:21-35

Then Peter came and said to Him, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" 22 Jesus \*said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven. 23 "For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. 24 "When he had begun to settle them, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him. 25 "But since he did not have the means to repay, his lord commanded him to be sold, along with his wife and children and all that he had, and repayment to be made. 26 "So the slave fell to the ground and prostrated himself before him, saying, 'Have patience with me and I will repay you everything.' 27 "And the lord of that slave felt compassion and released him and forgave him the debt. 28 "But that slave went out and found one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and he seized him and began to choke him, saying, 'Pay back what you owe.' 29 "So his fellow slave fell to the ground and began to plead with him, saying, 'Have patience with me and I will repay you.' 30 "But he was unwilling and went and threw him in prison until he should pay back what was owed. 31 "So when his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were deeply grieved and came and reported to their lord all that had happened. 32 "Then summoning him, his lord \*said to him, 'You wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. 33 'Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, in the same way that I had mercy on you?' 34 "And his lord, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him. 35 "My heavenly Father will also do the same to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart."

The things that Jesus had just said about dealing with a brother who sins probably prompted Peter to ask this question about the limits of forgiveness. He wanted to know how many times he needed to forgive a brother who sins against him. Peter suggested that maybe seven times would be reasonable or generous. He thought that surely there must be a limit. If a brother keeps sinning against us over and over, then there must be a limit! Jesus replied that no, it's not seven times, but seventy times seven. So Jesus put the limit at 490. Does this mean that we are to count the number of sins a brother commits against us and when it reaches 491, we say, "No, you've exceeded the limit, and I can't forgive you any more"? Certainly this is not what Jesus means. He means we don't put a limit or ceiling on forgiveness. Surely His point is that we don't keep a tally. As many times as our brother sins against us and asks forgiveness, we are to forgive him. In Luke 17:3-4 Jesus says, "Be on your guard! If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. 4 And if he sins against you seven times a day, and returns to you seven times, saying, 'I repent,' forgive him." The grace of forgiveness is not to be limited, and we are not to keep a tally of sins.

The question of Peter provides the impetus for the parable of the unforgiving slave in verses 23-35. It is another kingdom parable, giving us an earthly picture of a heavenly reality. The king of the kingdom wanted to settle accounts with his slaves. Evidently he had a number of slaves who were managing his finances and he wanted to check up on them to see how they were doing. We will see this same expression in Matthew 25:19 in the parable of the

talents. One was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. There seems to be an implication that the man was retrieved and brought before the king. He had been summoned.

So, we must ask, how much is ten thousand talents? It sounds like quite a bit, and so it is! The talent was a unit of weight and was equal to 3,000 shekels of silver weighing 94 3/7 pounds (<https://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionary/talent/>). If this is correct, then we are talking about over 940,000 pounds of silver! If it is gold, it was probably a higher weight. As of this writing, silver is priced at \$14.25 per ounce. There are 16 ounces in a pound, so if we multiply \$14.25 by 16 we get \$228 per pound, and if we multiply \$228 by 940,000 we get a total of \$214,320,000! If it were the same weight in gold, we would be looking at a current value of over 19 billion dollars! 1 Kings 10:14 talks about the great wealth of Solomon and says that one year the weight of gold that came to him was 666 talents. Obviously when Jesus talks about ten thousand talents, He is talking about a staggering sum! I think He deliberately used this exaggerated figure so that everyone would see that He was talking about a debt that could never possibly be repaid.

It was a foregone conclusion that the slave did not have the means to repay the debt. In fact, he would never be able to repay such a debt. The king ordered that he and his family should be sold so that some small repayment might be made. This slave had probably been in a fairly privileged position in the service of the king, and being sold was both humiliating and would put him in a much lower position. There was the possibility also that his family would be split up. He was about to lose everything he had. He fell on the ground, prostrating himself before the king and said, "Have patience with me and I will repay you everything." The Greek word for "patient" is *makrothumeō*, from *makros*, long, and *thumos*, passion, anger. The King James Version translates the word "longsuffering" in 2 Peter 3:9 and "suffereth long" in 1 Corinthians 13:4. The slave was asking the king to defer his anger for a while longer and he would repay the entire debt. It's important to note here that the slave did not admit that he couldn't repay the debt. He didn't confess that he had mismanaged the money and had lost it all. He didn't ask for mercy and forgiveness, but simply asked the king to give him more time to repay the debt.

The king, the "lord of that slave," felt compassion for him and released him from the debt and forgave him. The king understood that the man could never repay the debt. He didn't grant the man more time, because he knew it would be useless to do so. He went beyond what the slave requested and forgave the entire debt and released him from the obligation to repay it. The man was set free from a crushing debt in an instant due to the king's compassion and mercy.

What did the slave do after having been released from the debt? It's not recorded that he thanked the king. He didn't go celebrate with his family. He didn't spread the word of how gracious the king had been to him. He went and found a fellow slave who owed him 100 denarii, seized him, was choking him, and demanded repayment. The denarius was one day's wage for a laborer (Matthew 20:2). Today it would not translate into a large sum, but it was adequate at that time. Compared to what the first slave had owed the king, this debt was very insignificant and could probably have been repaid if the slave had been patient. The fellow slave did the very same thing that the first slave had done, he fell to the ground and was pleading with his creditor saying, "Have patience with me and I will repay you." But he was unwilling to give him more time, and threw him into prison until he paid back the debt. He was violent, unreasonable and impatient. He would not grant mercy or grace to his fellow slave.

We must wonder why he did this. I think one of two possible motives were involved here. First, having been released from his enormous debt, the man may have thought that the 100 denarii owed to him would now become his own rather than having to be paid to the king. This would be profit for him rather than a partial offset of his own debt. The second possibility is

that the man behaved this way because he was still trying to pay off the debt. I think this is more likely. I think he did not accept the forgiveness that was given. He still was operating under the illusion that he could and would repay the king. He would not accept that he needed forgiveness and would work hard to do so, and woe to anyone who owed him money! He would aggressively pursue this goal.

Other slaves observed what he had done and were “deeply grieved.” The words are very strong. The Lexham English Bible translates it, “they were extremely distressed.” The man’s behavior was out of bounds and very disturbing. He had done this in front of others and not privately. They went to the king and reported what had happened. Though the slave had been forgiven his enormous debt, still he was a servant to the king and subject to the king. He belonged to the king and was to act on the king’s behalf. The other slaves knew that the king would not want his servant to behave in this way, so they were not hesitant to tell him what had happened.

The king called for the slave and said to him, “You wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, in the same way that I had mercy on you?” The slave was a wicked man with an evil character. It’s not just that what he had done was wicked, but he himself was wicked. Wicked deeds come from a wicked nature. In Luke 6:45 Jesus says, “The good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth what is evil; for his mouth speaks from that which fills his heart.” Because this man was evil, the things he said and did were evil.

The king had forgiven this slave out of his mercy because the slave had pleaded with him. The slave had appealed to him for more time to repay the debt, but the king, out of his mercy and compassion, had instead forgiven him the entire debt. Then the king asked, “Shouldn’t you do the same thing? Shouldn’t you extend to others the same mercy and compassion that was extended to you?” What the slave should have done was go to the man who owed him 100 denarii and said, “Hey! The king showed me mercy and forgave all my debt, so guess what? Your debt is forgiven too! Since I don’t have to repay him, you don’t have to repay me! Let’s go celebrate the goodness of the king!” He had been set free from his debt, and so he should have set free his fellow slave. There should be a chain-reaction from God’s forgiveness so that having received it, we pass it down to others.

The king went from compassion and mercy toward this man to anger. He did not give the man an opportunity to reply to his questions, but handed him over to the torturers until he should repay his entire debt. The slave had put his fellow slave into prison “until he should pay back what was owed,” and so the king gave this man over to the torturers until he should do the same thing. The word for “torturers” is *basanistēs*, which Thayer’s Greek Definitions says denotes “one who elicits truth by the use of the rack.” The king didn’t just put the man in prison, but wanted the man to suffer there as a result of his treatment of his fellow slave. He wasn’t tortured because of his debt, but because of his unforgiveness. Of course, since the man’s debt was so gigantic, he would never be able to repay it, and so would be tortured perpetually.

In the Roman world a man could be put into prison and tortured because of debt. The Roman historian Titus Livius wrote this in his History of Rome:

[2.23]But a war with the Volscians was imminent, and the State was torn with internal dissensions; the patricians and the plebeians were bitterly hostile to one another, owing mainly to the desperate condition of the debtors. They loudly complained that whilst fighting in the field for liberty and empire they were oppressed and enslaved by their fellow-citizens at home; their freedom was more secure in war than in peace, safer

amongst the enemy than amongst their own people. The discontent, which was becoming of itself continually more embittered, was still further inflamed by the signal misfortunes of one individual. An old man, bearing visible proofs of all the evils he had suffered, suddenly appeared in the Forum. His clothing was covered with filth, his personal appearance was made still more loathsome by a corpse-like pallor and emaciation, his unkempt beard and hair made him look like a savage. In spite of this disfigurement he was recognised by the pitying bystanders; they said that he had been a centurion, and mentioned other military distinctions he possessed. He bared his breast and showed the scars which witnessed to many fights in which he had borne an honourable part. The crowd had now almost grown to the dimensions of an Assembly of the people. He was asked, "Whence came that garb, whence that disfigurement?" He stated that whilst serving in the Sabine war he had not only lost the produce of his land through the depredations of the enemy, but his farm had been burnt, all his property plundered, his cattle driven away, the war-tax demanded when he was least able to pay it, and he had got into debt. This debt had been vastly increased through usury and had stripped him first of his father's and grandfather's farm, then of his other property, and at last like a pestilence had reached his person. He had been carried off by his creditor, not into slavery only, but into an underground workshop, a living death. Then he showed his back scored with recent marks of the lash.

Jesus concludes the parable with an ominous warning, "My heavenly Father will also do the same to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart." What Jesus is saying is not unclear. He had said to them in the "Lord's Prayer" in Matthew 6 that they should ask, "And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors," and had then explained, "For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions" (Matthew 6:12 and 14-15). This is a settled policy for the Father. If we have received His forgiveness, we must forgive others. He will forgive us as we forgive others. In fact, Jesus showed us that we are to ask Him to do so.

So we must confront the issue that Jesus raises here. Having forgiven us all of our sins out of His compassion and mercy, will God really rescind His forgiveness and reinstate our debt and cast us into hell if we do not forgive our brother? Having been saved, will God then take away our salvation and cast us out for failing to forgive others? I think we find the answer by looking at the nature and character of the slave in this parable.

First, as we've noted the slave had not asked for forgiveness, but had asked for more time. It appears he didn't think he needed to be forgiven and thought that by his own efforts he could pay off his debt. He would not admit his inability to repay the debt. His pride would not allow him to admit his failure. People who will not see their sin, who will not admit it and confess it, will not seek forgiveness. They think that they can balance the ledger by doing good things that will offset the bad things they've done. Many in our world today are blind to the enormity of their debt to God and will not seek His forgiveness.

Second, once the king had forgiven him, there was no change in him. The king said that there should have been. The king expected that having been forgiven, the slave should have become forgiving. Having received mercy, he should have become merciful. God's forgiveness, genuinely and gratefully received, brings about a transformation in our lives. The saving grace of God frees us from our bondage to sin and sets us free to extend to others the same kind of grace we have received. True salvation brings about true transformation. Our minds are renewed (Romans 12:1-2), we receive the Holy Spirit, and He washes us,

regenerates us and renews us (Titus 3:5). You can't truly receive the forgiveness and saving grace of God without being transformed. Having been forgiven, we become forgiving people.

Third, having not accepted the king's forgiveness and having not been changed at all by it, the slave remained subject to the king's wrath. The slave insisted on continuing to try to repay the debt, and so ultimately the king said, "Have it your way! You will go to the torturers until you have repaid your debt." Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 5:9-10, "For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep, we will live together with Him." If we are really saved through Jesus Christ, we will not be subject to God's wrath. I don't believe that Jesus is teaching here that we can lose our salvation through unforgiveness toward others, but that truly receiving God's forgiveness will invariably make us forgiving, and if it does not, we were never saved in the first place.

We must recognize that the debt we owe to God because of our sin is a debt we can never, by our own efforts, repay. We must acknowledge our sin and receive the forgiveness that God offers in Christ. If we have little appreciation for the grace of God we should pray that God would open our eyes to the enormity of the debt we had that He has forgiven. The more we see and understand the depth of our sinfulness, the more we will appreciate God's grace and the more we will love Him. Jesus pointed this out in the parable of the moneylender and two debtors in Luke 7:40-43.

Having gained an appreciation for the enormity of our debt to God, we then should also see that the debt owed us by others is comparatively tiny. We should celebrate our forgiveness by extending that forgiveness to others. The compassion and mercy God has shown us we must show to others. The attitude must be, "I can release you from your debt because I've been released from my debt."

It's interesting that Jesus depicts sin and forgiveness in terms of financial debt and a release from that debt. I think it helps us understand that we can do this even if we still feel emotionally upset, irritated and bitter. I can cancel someone's debt against me even if I still don't feel very friendly toward them. This is something we can decide to do even if our emotions say otherwise. It is a legal transaction. When we forgive someone we let go of the requirement that they compensate us or be punished for failing to do so. We say, "You owe me nothing, you are free to go!" This is what those who are really forgiven do.

#### Matthew 19:1-12

When Jesus had finished these words, He departed from Galilee and came into the region of Judea beyond the Jordan; 2 and large crowds followed Him, and He healed them there. 3 Some Pharisees came to Jesus, testing Him and asking, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any reason at all?" 4 And He answered and said, "Have you not read that He who created them from the beginning MADE THEM MALE AND FEMALE, 5 and said, 'FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND BE JOINED TO HIS WIFE, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH'? 6 "So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate." 7 They \*said to Him, "Why then did Moses command to GIVE HER A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE AND SEND her AWAY?" 8 He \*said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart Moses permitted you to divorce your wives; but from the beginning it has not been this way. 9 "And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery." 10 The disciples \*said to Him, "If the relationship of the man with his wife is like this, it is better not to marry." 11 But He said to them, "Not all men can accept this statement, but only those to whom it has been given. 12 "For there are eunuchs who were born that way from their mother's womb; and there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by



men; and there are also eunuchs who made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. He who is able to accept this, let him accept it."

Most of the focus in Matthew so far has been on the activities of Jesus in the area around the Sea of Galilee. Now Matthew tells us that Jesus finished what He had to say there, left that area and went to Judea beyond the Jordan. He had just recently started to tell the disciples that He had to go to Jerusalem to suffer and die and then be raised up on the third day (Matthew 16:21 and 17:22-23), and now it was time for Him to head to Judea toward the fulfillment of these words. As usual, large crowds followed Him, and there beyond the Jordan He healed them.

Some Pharisees came, thinking that they had come up with a clever way to put Jesus on the spot before the crowds. They tested Him by asking, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any reason at all?" Robertson's Word Pictures explains the reason they would ask Jesus this question:

**For every cause** (*kata pasan aitian*). This clause is an allusion to the dispute between the two theological schools over the meaning of Deuteronomy 24:1. The school of Shammai took the strict and unpopular view of divorce for unchastity alone while the school of Hillel took the liberal and popular view of easy divorce for any passing whim if the husband saw a prettier woman (modern enough surely) or burnt his biscuits for breakfast. It was a pretty dilemma and meant to do Jesus harm with the people.

Deuteronomy 24:1-4 says, "When a man takes a wife and marries her, and it happens that she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out from his house, 2 and she leaves his house and goes and becomes another man's wife, 3 and if the latter husband turns against her and writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, or if the latter husband dies who took her to be his wife, 4 then her former husband who sent her away is not allowed to take her again to be his wife, since she has been defiled; for that is an abomination before the LORD, and you shall not bring sin on the land which the LORD your God gives you as an inheritance." We must admit that "some indecency" is kind of vague and could be taken broadly to allow almost any justification for a man to divorce his wife. We can see why the broad interpretation of this passage would be popular among men. It gave them an escape clause in case they found themselves living with a troublesome wife or if they came across a woman who was more appealing. So these Pharisees tried to put Jesus on the spot by asking Him about which interpretation He favored. Maybe they had heard that He was pretty strict and narrow-minded when it came to divorce (Matthew 5:31-32), and they were hoping to make Him unpopular with the crowds.

Jesus did not initially discuss the proper interpretation of Deuteronomy 24. Instead He pointed to an earlier passage regarding marriage. In fact, the passage He pointed to was the earliest reference to marriage. He asked, "Have you not read?" and then quoted from Genesis 1:27 and Genesis 2:24. Surely they had read these passages and should know the answer to this question. He implies that the question revealed ignorance about the most basic understanding about marriage and God's intent for marriage. Jesus pointed to the creation of the man and woman and the institution of marriage. God was the one who had made us male and female and gave us marriage. A marriage takes place when a man leaves his parents and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh. Jesus draws the conclusion, "So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate."

The Greek word translated “joined” in verse 5 is different from the word translated “joined together” in verse 6. In verse 5 it is the word *kollaō*, meaning “to glue, to glue together, cement, fasten together” (Thayer’s Greek Definitions) The Hebrew word in Genesis 2:24, *dabaq*, means “to cling, stick, stay close, cleave” (Brown-Driver Briggs Hebrew Definitions). The word in verse 6 is *suzeugnumi*, and literally means “to yoke together” (New American Standard Exhaustive Concordance). The original design and intent for marriage was that a man would leave his parents and be glued to his wife and they would become one flesh. They would cease to be two and would become one in the marital and sexual union. This is how God intended it and designed it. This is the foundation for the biblical and Christian understanding of marriage and sexuality.

Jesus tells us that God is in the middle of the marital union. God was the one who said that a man would leave his parents and be joined to his wife. The man is joined to his wife and God yokes them together. They become like two oxen yoked together to work together and move in the same direction together. Since it is God who has joined them, no man is to separate them. To separate them is do undo what God has done. Divorce is the destruction of an act of God.

The Pharisees then asked explicitly about the verse in Deuteronomy, “Why then did Moses command to give her a certificate of divorce and send her away?” They make it seem as though Moses gave them an order to divorce their wives, that there was actually an obligation to divorce them if they were displeased with them. If God has joined a husband and wife together and no man is to separate them, then why did Moses issue this command that they should divorce their wives? That is their question. They were questioning Jesus’ interpretation of Genesis 2:24. Why would God say at one point that the husband-wife bond was not to be broken by anyone, and then later order them to divorce their wives?

Jesus answered the question directly, “Because of your hardness of heart Moses permitted you to divorce your wives; but from the beginning it has not been this way.” Jesus says that it was not a command, but permission. No man is under an obligation to divorce his wife. It was not commanded, but allowed. It was a concession to their hardness of heart. “Hardness of heart” is the word *sklērokardia*, and is translated literally. Since the fall men and women have had hardened hearts toward God and one another. One aspect of a hardened heart is that it does not receive nor respond to nor learn from the word of God. We saw this illustrated in the parable of the sower. The seed of the word that fell on the hard soil of the path was taken away and eaten by the birds. A hardened heart is stubbornly resistant to the Spirit of God (Acts 7:51). It is a heart that does not listen to the voice of God and is an “evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God” (Hebrews 3:12). The sinful condition of humanity has corrupted many things that were originally good. There is nothing in our lives that has not be impacted by our sinfulness, and our sexual and marital relationships stand out as things that have clearly been harmed by it.

Jesus then says, “but from the beginning it has not been this way.” He means from the beginning and continuing until now. Permission to divorce one’s wife was not given in the beginning before the fall, and even now is not God’s purpose for marriage. God’s intent for marriage has not changed, but we have changed. We have sinned, disobeyed Him, rebelled against Him, strayed and wandered away from Him and His will for us. We have become sinful and corrupted and are “children of wrath” (Ephesians 2:3). Our love for Him and others has been corrupted and we now live to serve ourselves and our desires. This is something that we must understand, that things are not now as God originally intended them to be. Because of the fall the goodness and perfection of the original creation on earth has been lost. Things are twisted and corrupted in our world. Sin and death have invaded. We must not think that the way things are now is the way that God intends them to be. We must not

imagine that God created the evils that we see every day. God has done and will do what is necessary to restore us and all creation to the perfection He originally created through the Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus again uses the formula He used in Matthew 5 when He contrasted what they had heard with what He had to say on various points of the Law. He says, "I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery." In Matthew 5:31-32 He had said, "It was said, 'WHOEVER SENDS HIS WIFE AWAY, LET HIM GIVE HER A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE'; but I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except for *the* reason of unchastity, makes her commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery." Divorce and remarriage, in His sight, is adultery and a violation of the law of God. The only exception He allows is for "unchastity" or "immorality." (The Greek word is the same in both places, *porneia*.) If the wife has cheated on her husband and has committed adultery herself, then they husband may divorce her and send her away and remarry without violating God's law. His wife has destroyed their "one flesh" union, and so the husband is free to remarry. I presume this would apply for the wife if the husband were unfaithful as well. Again Jesus does not "lower the bar" when it comes to divorce and adultery, but raises it and points back to God's original intent for marriage and sexuality.

I think today we need to be careful about trying to enforce this rule upon people of our age, that we will not allow divorce unless one party has cheated on the other. There are some marriages where there is severe abuse that may threaten the life of the wife or sometimes even the husband. There may be mental illness or drug abuse or alcoholism that may threaten a spouse or children. Sometimes in our fallen world divorce may be the regrettable solution to a difficult situation.

At this point the disciples entered into the conversation and said, "If the relationship of the man with his wife is like this, it is better not to marry." Apparently they had the attitude that if they got married, Deuteronomy 24 gave them an escape clause. If things went wrong and their wife displeased them in some way, they could simply write her a certificate of divorce, send her away and then find a more suitable woman. The word translated "relationship" here in the NASB is *aitia*, and means "cause" or "reason." The Revised Version gives us a more literal translation, "If the case of the man is so with his wife, it is not expedient to marry." I like what Albert Barnes says at this point:

The disciples were full of Jewish notions. They thought that the privilege of divorcing a wife when there was a quarrelsome disposition, or anything else that rendered the marriage unhappy, was a great privilege; and that in such cases to be always bound to live with a wife was a great calamity. They said, therefore, that if such was the case - such the condition on which people married - it was better not to marry.

The disciples thought it preferable to avoid marriage altogether rather than to get into an exclusive bond that was inescapable. To be glued and yoked by God into a marriage to one woman for a lifetime with no option for escape except if one's wife committed adultery seemed too restrictive for these men.

The fact is that the marital relationship is this way in God's sight. Jesus has declared this truth and there is no higher authority. From the beginning God has declared that the marital relationship is to be lifelong and exclusive and that no man is to separate a husband and wife. The sinfulness of mankind does not change His original intent. It is this way between a man and his wife and there is no higher court to which we can appeal to overturn this principle.

The question we must answer as we come to verse 11 is which "statement" is Jesus referring to here? Is He talking about His statement about divorce and remarriage, or is He

talking about the statement the disciples had just made about it being better not to marry? I think, given what He says in verse 12, that He's talking about the statement the disciples just made. Jesus says that not all men can accept the statement that it is better for a man not to marry. Most of us should get married. God created us male and female for the purpose of marriage, sexuality and procreation. Most of us should marry and become "one flesh" with our spouse. Most cannot accept the celibate life. Only "those to whom it has been given" can accept the statement. Apparently a life of celibacy requires a special gift from God.

Jesus explains in verse 12, "For there are eunuchs who were born that way from their mother's womb; and there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men; and there are also eunuchs who made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. He who is able to accept this, let him accept it." There are eunuchs; they do exist. Some had no choice but were born that way. Some were forced to become eunuchs by men so that they couldn't have sexual relations. Some decided on their own to become eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of Heaven. A eunuch was an emasculated man incapable of sexual activity. It appears that this word also came by extension to denote someone who had decided to abstain from marriage and sexual activity. There are men who, though intact physically, have the drive and self-control to abstain from sex. If a man is able to accept this, Jesus says he should accept this. Those who are equipped to be single should accept their singleness and so should those around them. We should be careful about pressing single people to marry, especially if they are content, fruitful and fulfilled in their singleness.

#### Matthew 19:13-15

Then some children were brought to Him so that He might lay His hands on them and pray; and the disciples rebuked them. 14 But Jesus said, "Let the children alone, and do not hinder them from coming to Me; for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." 15 After laying His hands on them, He departed from there.

This little incident is recorded in all three of the synoptic gospels. People were bringing little children to Jesus so that He might lay His hands on them and bless them and pray for them, but this bugged the disciples. Matthew uses the word *paidion*, meaning a young child, but Luke uses the word *brephos*, which is a baby, infant or newborn (Luke 18:15). I guess the disciples thought that it was a waste of Jesus' time to have to deal with babies and little kids. He had a lot of important teaching and healing to do among adults, so they rebuked, I assume, the parents who were bringing these children to Jesus.

The disciples were bothered that people were trying to bring children to Jesus, but Jesus was bothered that the disciples were trying to hinder them. Mark says that Jesus saw what they were doing and was "indignant" (Mark 10:14). What they were doing displeased Him. They were irritated that people were bringing these little kids to Jesus, but Jesus was irritated that they were hindering them. He told them to knock it off and to let the kids come to Him and not hinder them, for, He said, "the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." Mark and Luke add that He then said, "Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it at all" (Luke 18:17 and Mark 10:15). They belong to the kingdom and the kingdom belongs to them. The kingdom, the rule of God, exists, but we must receive it like a child. We must submit to it and welcome it humbly, simply and gratefully. Jesus knocks on the door and if we open it He will come in and have fellowship with us (Revelation 3:20).

Jesus was pleased to lay His hands on these children. Mark says, "And He took them in His arms and began blessing them, laying His hands on them" (Mark 10:16). He touched

them and spoke to them and blessed them. They were blessed because theirs was the kingdom of heaven as He had said in Matthew 5:2, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

Just as an extra side observation let me point out that comparing this passage with the parallel passages in Mark and Luke demonstrates that Matthew's phrase "kingdom of heaven" is synonymous with the phrase "kingdom of God." They mean the same thing.

Ministry to children is not something that should be an after-thought or seen as worthless. On the contrary we should embrace children as did our Lord. We should welcome them and embrace them and bring them to Jesus. We should do as much as we can to establish youngsters in the faith and teach them to love and follow Jesus. If you hinder kids from coming to Jesus it upsets Him.

#### Matthew 19:16-30

And someone came to Him and said, "Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may obtain eternal life?" 17 And He said to him, "Why are you asking Me about what is good? There is only One who is good; but if you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments." 18 Then he said to Him, "Which ones?" And Jesus said, "YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER; YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY; YOU SHALL NOT STEAL; YOU SHALL NOT BEAR FALSE WITNESS; 19 HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER; and YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF." 20 The young man \*said to Him, "All these things I have kept; what am I still lacking?" 21 Jesus said to him, "If you wish to be complete, go and sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me." 22 But when the young man heard this statement, he went away grieving; for he was one who owned much property. 23 And Jesus said to His disciples, "Truly I say to you, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. 24 "Again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." 25 When the disciples heard this, they were very astonished and said, "Then who can be saved?" 26 And looking at them Jesus said to them, "With people this is impossible, but with God all things are possible." 27 Then Peter said to Him, "Behold, we have left everything and followed You; what then will there be for us?" 28 And Jesus said to them, "Truly I say to you, that you who have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. 29 "And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or farms for My name's sake, will receive many times as much, and will inherit eternal life. 30 "But many who are first will be last; and the last, first."

Someone came to Jesus. From this passage we learn that he was a young man (verse 20) and that he was wealthy (verse 22). From Luke we learn that he was a "ruler" (Luke 18:18). He was a leader of some sort who held a position of responsibility. His question to Jesus was, "Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may obtain eternal life?" In Mark and Luke the question is, "Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" (Mark 10:17 and Luke 18:18). The word "good" is applied to Jesus instead of the thing he wants to do in order to obtain eternal life. There are at least four beliefs behind this question. First, he believed that there is such a thing as eternal life that can be obtained by people. He was not an atheist and did not believe in the annihilation of the soul in death. He believed there is life after death. Second, he believed that he did not yet have eternal life; he had not obtained it, he had not grasped it, but he knew he needed it and wanted it. There was a sense in him that he fell short of eternal life, so he sought out Jesus for answers. Third, he believed that Jesus had the

answer and could steer him in the right direction. Fourth, he believed there was some good thing he could do in order to obtain eternal life, that getting eternal life depended on him performing some good deed or deeds. He thought that his good works were the key to obtaining eternal life. He was correct about everything except this last thing.

Jesus replied, "Why are you asking Me about what is good? There is only One who is good; but if you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments." In Mark and Luke the reply begins with, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone." In asking this and saying this I don't believe that Jesus was denying that He was good. I think He was simply trying to show this man that there is only one being who is truly, comprehensively and invariably "good," and that is God Himself. He had already taught that only the man with a good nature can do what is good (Matthew 7:17-19 and Matthew 12:33-35). So Jesus asked him why he was asking about what is good. There is only one who is truly good and is truly capable of doing what is good. I think Jesus was trying to steer this man away from the belief that he was capable of doing good things that would qualify him for eternal life.

Jesus said that if this man really wanted to enter into life, he needed to keep the commandments. If he was going to rely on his own works, he would need to keep all of the commandments perfectly. James 2:10-11 says, "For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all. For He who said, 'DO NOT COMMIT ADULTERY,' also said, 'DO NOT COMMIT MURDER.' Now if you do not commit adultery, but do commit murder, you have become a transgressor of the law." It only takes one incident of failing to keep one of the commandments of God to condemn us, and, James says in James 3:2, "we all stumble in many ways."

The man then asked which of the commandments he had to keep. I'm not sure why he would ask this. Maybe he was bewildered by the number of commandments he found in the Law regarding all sorts of things in life. It's easier if we can boil them down to the truly essential laws. The answer Jesus gave him is interesting. Jesus pointed to seven commandments, six from the "ten commandments" and in Matthew includes "you shall love your neighbor as yourself." The list in Mark says, "Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not bear false witness, do not defraud, honor your father and mother." So Mark includes "do not defraud," which is not one of the ten commandments. The list in Luke says, "Do not commit adultery, do not murder, do not steal, do not bear false witness, honor your father and mother." So Luke lists just five commandments, all from the ten commandments. What I find interesting is that all of these commandments deal with human-to-human relationships and not the human-to-God relationship. Jesus left out the commandments about not having any gods before the Lord, not making idols, not taking the Lord's name in vain, and keeping the Sabbath. He also left out the last commandment about not coveting, though that may be considered part of the command to love one's neighbor. We might say that the commandments Jesus mentioned are easier to fulfill than the others. They have more to do with objective, external behavior than what's going on inside our hearts. It is easier to avoid murder than it is to avoid coveting. We see that the man believed, sincerely I think, that he had kept all of the commandments Jesus mentioned. He thought that he had kept the commandments of God, and yet he was aware that something was still lacking in him. His conscience bothered him and he knew he came short in some way but couldn't figure out what the problem was.

Mark says that Jesus looked at him and "felt a love for him" and answered his question. Jesus told him what was lacking. He put His finger on the problem for this young man and told him what he had to do. He said, "If you wish to be complete, go and sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." Mark and Luke both say, "One thing you lack." There was one thing that kept this man from eternal life,

and it was his wealth. His possessions, his “treasure” was the obstacle. He had laid up treasure on earth and was like the man in the parable of the rich fool in Luke 12:16-21. He had stored up treasure for himself and was not “rich toward God” (Luke 12:21). Jesus had said that no man can serve God and wealth (Matthew 5:24). This man would have to divest himself of his wealth and come follow Jesus in order to enter into life and be “complete” or perfect. His earthly treasure had to give way to heavenly treasure. His wealth stood in the place of God in his life and had to be removed. Idols always have to be cast down so that the living God can take His rightful place in our lives.

Getting rid of his idol was the first step. The second step was to come follow Jesus. This is the key thing. Jesus invited this man to come follow Him, as He invites all of us. This is the thing that really saves us, believing in and following Jesus. This man needed to stop pursuing wealth and start pursuing Jesus. He needed to break his attachment to his wealth and attach himself to Jesus.

The young man went away grieving because he “owned much property,” and of course he could not do what Jesus had told him he must do. His wealth had too great a grip on him. He would not do what the man who found the treasure hidden in a field did or what the pearl merchant did (Matthew 13:44-46). He did not value the kingdom of heaven as they did. He failed to appreciate what he had found in Jesus and opted for his wealth instead of eternal life. It’s interesting that he did not argue the point with Jesus or try to negotiate a better deal. He didn’t say, “Well, what if I get rid of fifty percent of my wealth and follow you part-time?” He saw the truth of what Jesus had said and realized that he was in the grip of bondage to his wealth and no half-measure would suffice. Jesus, for his part, let him go. Though he felt love for this young man, Jesus did not compromise. He did not soften the requirements for him. This man’s resources would have been very useful in the ministry of Jesus and the disciples, but Jesus was not after his resources. The man had to make his own decision and Jesus would not make an exception for him.

As the man left, Jesus said to the disciples, “Truly I say to you, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.” There is an extra line in Mark 10:23-25, “And Jesus, looking around, said to His disciples, ‘How hard it will be for those who are wealthy to enter the kingdom of God!’ 24 The disciples were amazed at His words. But Jesus answered again and said to them, ‘Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! 25 It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.’” In Mark 10:24 Jesus seems to say that it is hard in general for anyone to enter the kingdom of God, and it is particularly hard for the rich to do so. Jesus doubled down on this point in Matthew and expanded it in Mark. How hard is it for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven? It is harder than getting a camel to pass through the eye of a needle! According to an entry in [Wikipedia](#), “The ‘Eye of the Needle’ has been claimed to be a gate in [Jerusalem](#), which opened after the main gate was closed at night. A camel could only pass through this smaller gate if it was stooped and had its baggage removed. This story has been put forth since at least the 15th century, and possibly as far back as the 9th century. However, there is no widely accepted evidence for the existence of such a gate.” ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eye\\_of\\_a\\_needle](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eye_of_a_needle)) No, I think Jesus was talking about a literal camel and a literal needle. This is proven by what He says in verse 26, “With people this is impossible.” He is talking about the impossible. It is impossible to get a camel to pass through the eye of a needle. Men can’t do this, but God can.

Jesus has already indicated in Matthew that it is difficult to enter the kingdom of heaven. In Matthew 5:20 He said, “For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses *that* of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.” In Matthew 7:21 He

said, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter." And in Matthew 18:3 He said, "Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven." Its almost as if He's saying that the requirements are so strict that no one can measure up.

The disciples were "very astonished" and asked, "Then who can be saved?" This hit them hard and they were amazed. They probably thought that great wealth was evidence of God's great blessing upon a man, and if it was so hard for a man so blessed to be saved, then how could anyone be saved? The answer Jesus gave them is crucial, "With people this is impossible, but with God all things are possible." The Greek for "impossible" is *adunatos*, to be incapable or powerless. The word for "possible" is *dunatos*, to have power or capability. People are incapable of saving themselves, but God is capable. We cannot save ourselves, but God can and does. Salvation is His work, not our work. Salvation is what He accomplishes, not something we can accomplish. The young man made the mistake of thinking that obtaining eternal life and being saved hinged on what he could accomplish by his behavior. He was powerless to overthrow the grip that his wealth had on him. It would require a work of God to save him. This is true for all of us. Salvation is a miracle of God. If we have been saved and have received eternal life, it is because God has given it to us as a free gift of His grace, not because we have obtained it by our works (Ephesians 2:1-10).

Peter pointed out the fact that he and the others had left everything and had followed Jesus. They had done what the young man would not do. They didn't have his wealth, but though they had less, they had left it behind to follow Him. They had left the nets and the boats and the fishing and the tax office and their other occupations and their families in order to be His students. So, Peter asks, "what then will there be for us?" Literally it is "what will be for us?" He wants to know what they will get in the future for what they have done. We should be careful about thinking that Peter's question is out of bounds. All of us are motivated by self-interest. Jesus has encouraged them to lay up treasure in heaven for themselves. He has told them that the Father who sees what is done in secret will repay them. Jesus has encouraged them to seek rewards from the Father. Peter and the others had laid aside their own plans for their lives to follow Jesus, and now it's natural for him to ask about the future rewards.

Jesus answered, "Truly I say to you, that you who have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." This statement does not occur in Mark or Luke. Matthew is writing his gospel for Jews and is concerned with portraying Jesus as the King of the kingdom, and so he includes this saying that is aimed specifically at the twelve apostles. They will have a special place in the kingdom, as He has already indicated (Matthew 16:17-19 and Matthew 18:18). As we have noted before, the apostles are part of the foundation of the kingdom (Ephesians 2:20 and Revelation 21:14). He acknowledged that they had followed Him, and would be rewarded and promoted in the future kingdom.

Jesus says that there will be something called "the regeneration" in the future when He will sit on His glorious throne. The word for "regeneration" is *paliggenesia*, and "regeneration" is actually a very good translation of the word. It means a new generation, a new birth or re-creation. In Isaiah 65:17 God promised, "For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; And the former things will not be remembered or come to mind." The "former things" will be forgotten and a new heaven and earth will be created. Peter picked up on this promise and writes in 2 Peter 3:13, "But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells." All things are going to be regenerated and renewed and restored to the state that God originally intended. Sin and suffering will be done away with and righteousness will be established. John tells us that the world and its lusts are



passing away (1 John 2:17). In the regeneration Jesus will sit on His throne in glory and He will reign in fullness. We look forward to this, we live for this and we work for this.

Jesus promised them that when He sits on his glorious throne in the regeneration, they also will sit on twelve thrones and will judge the twelve tribes of Israel. This opens the door to the idea that Jesus chose twelve men as apostles because there were twelve tribes in Israel. In His future kingdom these men would rule with him, would be promoted, and would have great responsibility. We saw in chapter 18 that these men were concerned about being great in the kingdom of heaven (18:1-4), and in fact they had even argued among themselves about which one of them was the greatest (Luke 9:46 and 22:24). Now Jesus tells them that they will be great. They will have high positions in His kingdom. Other scriptures tell us that those who follow Christ will reign with Him in glory. 2 Timothy 2:11-13 says, "It is a trustworthy statement: For if we died with Him, we will also live with Him; If we endure, we will also reign with Him; If we deny Him, He also will deny us; If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself." In Revelation 20:6 it says, "Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years." In the Parable of the Minas in Luke 19:15-19, when the king returns, it says, "When he returned, after receiving the kingdom, he ordered that these slaves, to whom he had given the money, be called to him so that he might know what business they had done. The first appeared, saying, 'Master, your mina has made ten minas more.' And he said to him, 'Well done, good slave, because you have been faithful in a very little thing, you are to be in authority over ten cities.' The second came, saying, 'Your mina, master, has made five minas.' And he said to him also, 'And you are to be over five cities.'" Those who are faithful to Christ in this life will be entrusted with authority and privilege in the fullness of His kingdom. The Lord will delegate authority and responsibility to them in His kingdom.

There are rewards for all who will leave behind property and family to follow Jesus. Jesus says, "And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or farms for My sake, will receive many times as much, and will inherit eternal life." Mark's version is more detailed and says, "Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or farms, for My sake and for the gospel's sake, but that he will receive a hundred times as much now in the present age, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and farms, along with persecutions; and in the age to come, eternal life" (Mark 10:29-30). Jesus said that there would be rewards not only in the life to come in the heavenly kingdom, but also rewards "in the present age" ("at this time," Luke 18:30). The rewards in the present age are abundant, but there will also be persecutions. Those who follow Christ leave behind both property and people. For the rich young man the problem was his property, for others it is the people to whom they are attached. Some people will not follow Christ because parents or siblings or children would not approve and it would cause a break in the relationships. For those who will leave these things behind to follow Christ, there will, in this life, be abundant compensation. I think this comes about through the community of believers as we share property and relationships with one another. When we follow Christ we join the community of all those who follow Christ and we are to love one another and care for one another as brothers and sisters.

Paul had left everything that had been important to him in order to follow Christ. He talked about it in Philippians 3:7-11 "But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in

Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.” Paul had done what the rich young man would not do. He left behind those things that were important to him and even considered them “rubbish” in order to gain Christ and be found in Him. He saw the “surpassing value of knowing Christ.” When we see and become convinced of this surpassing value ourselves, we will gladly cast everything else aside for the sake of Jesus Christ.

Finally, Jesus says, “But many who are first will be last, and the last, first.” What does He mean by this, and how does it fit in with what He’s just said? We have to continue on into chapter 20 to find the answer.

#### Matthew 20:1-16

"For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. 2 "When he had agreed with the laborers for a denarius for the day, he sent them into his vineyard. 3 "And he went out about the third hour and saw others standing idle in the market place; 4 and to those he said, 'You also go into the vineyard, and whatever is right I will give you.' And so they went. 5 "Again he went out about the sixth and the ninth hour, and did the same thing. 6 "And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing around; and he \*said to them, 'Why have you been standing here idle all day long?' 7 "They \*said to him, 'Because no one hired us.' He \*said to them, 'You go into the vineyard too.' 8 "When evening came, the owner of the vineyard \*said to his foreman, 'Call the laborers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last group to the first.' 9 "When those hired about the eleventh hour came, each one received a denarius. 10 "When those hired first came, they thought that they would receive more; but each of them also received a denarius. 11 "When they received it, they grumbled at the landowner, 12 saying, 'These last men have worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden and the scorching heat of the day.' 13 "But he answered and said to one of them, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for a denarius? 14 'Take what is yours and go, but I wish to give to this last man the same as to you. 15 'Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with what is my own? Or is your eye envious because I am generous?' 16 "So the last shall be first, and the first last."

The word “For” in verse 1 tips us off to the fact that Jesus is explaining what He means by what He has just said, “The first will be last; and the last, first.” Note that He flips the order in verse 16, “So the last shall be first, and the first last.” What is this all about? The parable explains it.

The kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who has a vineyard and hires laborers to work in his vineyard for a day. In those days the workday was twelve hours, from about 6 am until 6 pm. He went out early in the morning for the purpose of hiring laborers. He needed people to work in the vineyard, and others with vineyards needed workers as well. We should recall that Jesus said in Matthew 9:37-38, “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest.” If it was harvest time it was urgent that the grapes be harvested quickly. The vineyard owner needed a good crew of workers to get the job done. Those hired to start work at 6 am agreed to work the twelve hours for one denarius. They did not work for an hourly wage like we do today, but for a day’s wage. It’s important to see that they agreed to this. They accepted that one denarius was a fair wage for a day’s work. Having agreed with them, the landowner sent them to work in his vineyard.

Regarding the denarius, Marvin Vincent writes:

*A denarius*, the chief silver coin of the Romans at this time, and of the value of about seventeen cents. We must remember to reckon according to the rate of wages in that day. A denarius was regarded as good pay for a day's work. It was the pay of a Roman soldier in Christ's time. In almost every case where the word occurs in the New Testament it is connected with the idea of a liberal or large amount. Compare Matt. 18:28; Mark 6:37; Luke 7:41; John 12:5.  
(Vincent's Word Studies.)

Vincent's Word Studies was first published in 1887, so probably today we should consider the value of the denarius as being somewhat more than seventeen cents in today's currency.

At the third hour, about 9 am, the landowner went out again and saw people standing around in the market place doing nothing. The market place was the place where people not only bought and sold their goods, but also sold their services as workers. It was the place he went to find willing laborers. He said to them, "You also go into the vineyard, and whatever is right I will give you." He did not negotiate a wage with them, but just promised what was right. He would give them a fair, just or equitable wage. He went out at the sixth hour, noon, and again at the ninth hour, 3 pm and did the same thing. He found more people who were idle and sent them into his vineyard. At the eleventh hour, with just one hour left in the workday, he went again and found people still standing idle in the market place. He asked, "Why have you been standing here idle all day long?" He seems to be amazed that these people had done this, just standing in the market place all day doing nothing. They replied, "Because no one hired us." Why he hadn't encountered these people earlier, I don't know, since they had been there all day. Maybe they had been occupied in another area of the market place earlier and he simply hadn't come across them. These he also sent into his vineyard.

This landowner was not just concerned with getting the work done in his vineyard, but was also concerned with employing people. He was an employer who valued his employees, who was concerned for people and not just for profits. He wanted to meet their needs as well as getting work done. He didn't like to see people who were willing workers standing idle all day without employment. These were not lazy people, but people who could not get the work that they needed.

At about 6 pm the workday was over and it was time for the workers to be paid. The vineyard owner told his foreman to call the workers in from the vineyard and told him explicitly to pay them beginning with those who were hired last. He wanted those hired last to be paid first and those hired first to be paid last. Those hired last who had only worked one hour were paid a denarius, a full day's wage. Those who had worked three hours were paid a denarius, as well as those who had worked six hours and nine hours. When those who had worked a full twelve hour day saw that everyone else, including those who had only worked one hour, were being paid a denarius, they thought that they would receive more, but they also were paid the same wage.

We should reflect for a moment here on why the vineyard owner decided to do things this way. If he had paid the first workers first, they would have been happy with their denarius and headed home, unaware that he was going to pay those who had worked one hour the same wage. But he made those hired first wait until all the others hired later had been paid. He allowed those hired first to see what he was doing, and also made them wait the longest to be paid. It's almost as if he's trying to provoke them, but I think there's more going on here. Those who had waited for employment all day and then had only worked one hour would

probably expect to be paid last. They would probably expect that they would be paid very little compared to those who had worked a twelve hour day. They might have anxiety about whether they would be paid at all. They might wonder if, after all the other workers had been paid, there would still be money available for them. They would be the most anxious and discouraged workers, so the owner did a surprising thing by paying them first and by paying them a full day's wage! They did not earn a denarius, did not deserve a denarius and had no right to demand a denarius, but he gave them one anyway. They would go away overjoyed and very appreciative of his generosity. To varying degrees the other workers who had not put in a full twelve hours would probably also feel happy to have received a denarius and would have been grateful as well. He had been very gracious to them by giving them more than they deserved. This is what mercy and grace is all about. The owner demonstrated that he cared for these people and wanted to see that their needs were met.

Now of course the whole point of this parable depends on those hired first seeing and understanding what was going on and reacting to it. When those hired first came to the foreman for their pay, they assumed that, since the others who had worked fewer hours had all received a denarius, they would be paid more. When they also were paid a denarius, they were not happy. They grumbled at the landowner and said, "These last men have worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden and the scorching heat of the day." It seemed unfair and wrong to them that those who had worked only one hour should be paid the same wage as those who had toiled all day. If the landowner was paying a denarius for one hour of work, then they should be paid twelve denarii! It does seem that these people have a good point. Most people would support their argument and would feel the same way. If you had two workers on the same level doing the same work and one worked a full day and the other worked only one hour and they were both paid the same wage, it would seem unfair. These kinds of comparisons are made in workplaces all the time. This kind of complaint is very common. By comparison, these full-day workers had borne a heavier burden and had to endure the scorching heat of the day. The work was hard and unpleasant.

The core of the complaint from the twelve hour workers is "you have made them equal to us." The one hour workers were not worthy to be elevated to the same level as the all day workers, but the owner had equalized the compensation for all the workers. He had valued them all the same, whether they had made a big contribution to the work or a small one. The twelve hour workers may have harvested as much as two tons of grapes each, while the one hour workers could have harvested very little by comparison. Much of our resentment and discontent arises from these kinds of comparisons and perceived inequities. We have this tendency, if we have worked long and hard for what we have achieved, to feel superior to those who have not worked so long or so hard. The self-made millionaire resents the lazy youth who inherits his wealth. But in this case these people started and ended the day as equals. Everyone the landowner hired and sent into his vineyard was a day laborer looking for work. Some were fortunate to be hired first thing in the morning and knew they would earn a day's wage. The others hired later only knew that they would get "whatever is right."

The landowner replied to the one who was the spokesman for the complaining workers, "Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for a denarius? Take what is yours and go, but I wish to give to this last man the same as to you. Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with what is my own? Or is your eye envious because I am generous?" The Greek word used here for "friend" is *hetairos*, a clansman, fellow, or comrade. It is a kindly term of kinship. He pointed out that he was doing him and the other workers no wrong. There was no injustice or unfairness or unrighteous in what he had done. He had not wronged them in any way, but had fulfilled his obligation to them. They had agreed to work for a denarius,

and he had paid the denarius. At the beginning of the day the denarius had been agreed upon, and now at the end of the day they weren't happy about it because of the perceived unfairness of the landowner in paying others the same wage for less work. Instead of complaining these people should take the denarius that now belonged to them and go and be content with having received that which they had agreed upon. There may be an implication when he says, "take what is yours" that these workers were refusing to take their denarius in protest of this "unfairness." Having agreed upon one's compensation at the beginning of a job, one shouldn't try to change the terms upon completion of the work.

The landowner admitted that he wanted to give to "this last man" the same wage that he had paid to the all day workers. All along it was his plan and desire to pay all of the workers a denarius. He went out into the marketplace deliberately five times to see if there were people who needed work. It was his prerogative to pay them whatever he wished to pay them. What he was doing was not illegal or unjust. The funds belonged to him and he could distribute them as he pleased. The workers had no authority to tell him how to spend his money. The workers had no argument against this. What he had done was not illegal, immoral, unethical or unfair.

The real problem here is revealed in his last rhetorical question, "Or is your eye envious because I am generous?" The word translated "envious" is *ponēros*, bad or evil. Jesus had used the same word when He said in Matthew 6:22-23, "The eye is the lamp of the body; so then if your eye is clear, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light that is in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!" There was a problem with how these complaining workers were seeing things; their perception was bad. Their perception that the landowner was being unfair was simply wrong. He wasn't being unfair, but generous. The word is *agathos*, good. The King James Version translates this more literally, "Is thine eye evil, because I am good?" The workers had seen something bad in something that actually was good. They needed to change their thinking.

Jesus concluded by repeating, "So the last shall be first, and the first last." So He says the same thing He had said in 19:30, but flips from "first will be last; and the last first" to, "the last shall be first, and the first, last." So the parable has explained the meaning of this saying. The "first" were the twelve apostles. They were the first to be called and hired by Jesus and sent into His vineyard. Peter had asked about compensation, and Jesus had promised them that they would be compensated with high positions in His kingdom, sitting on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. He had agreed with them on their compensation, and they were probably pleased. They would be high officials in the kingdom. But Jesus had told them that others who would do what they had done would also be rewarded (19:29). Others who would be called and "hired" later and sent into the vineyard would also be heirs of eternal life and will sit on other thrones. The apostles were to be content with their reward and not grumble that others were coming in who had not worked as long or as hard as they had. They were not to be envious that others were receiving the same pay. Our pay is not based on how long or how hard we worked, but always on the generosity of the Lord.

I don't think Jesus is saying in this parable that everyone who is an heir of eternal life and is part of His kingdom will receive the exact same amount of authority and the same kind of position. The parables of the minas in Luke 19:11-27 and the talents in Matthew 25:14-30 reveal that the degree of authority in the kingdom is tied into the degree of fruitfulness on earth. But everyone in Christ who follows Him will receive an inheritance in His kingdom and eternal life, even though it may seem to us that there are some who don't deserve it. Some in the kingdom will be those who believed in Jesus early in life and served Him for decades, others in the kingdom will have called upon Him on their deathbeds like the thief who was

crucified with Jesus (Luke 23:42-43) who will have had no opportunity to do much at all in His service. They will all be with Him in paradise.

The Lord is generous. Whether we come early or come late, whether we work in His vineyard for a short time or for a long time, He is generous to all and compensates all of us generously, giving more than any of us earn or deserve. It's important to cultivate this perspective so that we don't resent others or the Lord Himself. We must also see that the Lord doesn't always operate the way that we operate. He may do things that seem unfair to us, but He will never be in error. Our assumptions about how He should do things will often be wrong. Our eyes can be bad and our perceptions can be wrong. We must understand this about ourselves. We often don't see things correctly, but the Lord does.

#### Matthew 20:17-19

As Jesus was about to go up to Jerusalem, He took the twelve disciples aside by themselves, and on the way He said to them, 18 "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem; and the Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn Him to death, 19 and will hand Him over to the Gentiles to mock and scourge and crucify Him, and on the third day He will be raised up."

This is the third time in Matthew that Jesus tells the twelve apostles that He is going to Jerusalem to suffer, die and rise from the dead. He had told them first in Matthew 16:21 when Peter had rebuked Him for saying it. The second time was in Matthew 17:22-23, and now here is the third time He will tell them. He was about to go to Jerusalem and all of this was going to take place soon. He "took the twelve aside by themselves." This was a private message for them and they needed to understand it.

He laid out the sequence of events for them. Together they would go to Jerusalem. The apostles would go with Him. There He would be "delivered to the chief priests and scribes." He would be handed over, betrayed, to them. We know that Judas Iscariot is the one who will hand Him over. The chief priests and scribes would condemn Him to death and then hand Him over to the Gentiles, to the Romans. The Gentiles would mock, scourge and crucify Him, but then on the third day He would be raised up. This description of events is more detailed than the previous two. Mark's parallel passage in Mark 10:32-34 tells us that as Jesus was heading to Jerusalem those following Him were amazed and fearful. They were amazed and fearful because they knew He was deliberately walking into trouble. He could have returned to Galilee or retreated to another place, but He headed right into the teeth of the opposition. He was going to go to Jerusalem and allow all these things to happen to Him.

The death and resurrection of Jesus at Jerusalem was the ultimate purpose for which He had come to earth. It was part of God's "predetermined plan" (Acts 2:23) that these things must happen. The Father had commanded the Son to lay down His life for His sheep and take it up again (John 10:17-18). John writes in John 12:23-33:

And Jesus answered them, saying, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. 24 "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. 25 "He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it to life eternal. 26 "If anyone serves Me, he must follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also; if anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him. 27 "Now My soul has become troubled; and what shall I say, 'Father, save Me from this hour'? But for this purpose I came to this hour. 28 "Father, glorify Your name." Then a voice came out of heaven: "I have both glorified it,

and will glorify it again." 29 So the crowd of people who stood by and heard it were saying that it had thundered; others were saying, "An angel has spoken to Him." 30 Jesus answered and said, "This voice has not come for My sake, but for your sakes. 31 "Now judgment is upon this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out. 32 "And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself." 33 But He was saying this to indicate the kind of death by which He was to die.

When He came to the "hour" for His suffering and death, He would not ask to be saved from it, but that the name of the Father would be glorified in it. He had come for this "hour," for this purpose, and He would not run from it.

#### Matthew 20:20-28

Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came to Jesus with her sons, bowing down and making a request of Him. 21 And He said to her, "What do you wish?" She \*said to Him, "Command that in Your kingdom these two sons of mine may sit one on Your right and one on Your left." 22 But Jesus answered, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?" They \*said to Him, "We are able." 23 He \*said to them, "My cup you shall drink; but to sit on My right and on My left, this is not Mine to give, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by My Father." 24 And hearing this, the ten became indignant with the two brothers. 25 But Jesus called them to Himself and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. 26 "It is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, 27 and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; 28 just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

Jesus had promised the twelve that in His kingdom they would sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. They would have high positions in the kingdom. But they thought that there would be two positions that would be the highest of all for any human, to sit right next to Jesus, on His right and on His left in His kingdom. These were the coveted seats. These two would be the closest confidants of Jesus and His most trusted and powerful servants. The mother of the "sons of Zebedee," that is James and John, wanted her sons to occupy these positions. They also had this ambition, as the parallel passage in Mark 10:35-45 shows. Mark tells us that it was James and John who came to Jesus to make this request (Mark 10:35-37). I wonder who initially came up with the idea that they should make this request? Was it James and John themselves, or was it their mother? Obviously there had been a family discussion about this and the plans for making this request had been decided upon. It would be interesting to know if James and John had been prompted and pushed by their mother to do this or if they had asked her to make the request on their behalf, thinking that Jesus would be more sympathetic to her than to them. In any case, it is an interesting family dynamic. Mothers want their children to excel and hold positions of influence.

She came to Jesus with James and John and bowed down to Him and let Him know that she (and they) had a request of Him. Mark says that James and John said, "Teacher, we want You to do for us whatever we ask of You" (Mark 10:35). It's almost as if they are trying to get Him to commit Himself to granting the request before He hears what they want! They appear to be using as much leverage as they can to achieve their goal. Jesus asked, "What do you wish?" She replied, "Command that in Your kingdom these two sons of mine may sit one on Your right and one on your left." The word translated "command" is *legei*, the present tense

form of *legō*, to say, to speak. The English Standard Version translates it, “Say that these two sons of mine are to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your kingdom.” When Jesus spoke, things happened. The Roman centurion had understood this when he asked Jesus to heal his servant. He said, “but just say the word, and my servant will be healed” (Matthew 8:8). James, John and their mother were asking Jesus to issue the order that these two would have these two privileged positions beside Him in His kingdom. Apparently they were still thinking that Jesus was going to Jerusalem to ascend to the throne and establish His kingdom, and they wanted to lay claim to these two top spots.

Jesus answered with a statement and a question. First, He said, “You do not know what you are asking.” They were making an ignorant request, not knowing what was involved in qualifying for or holding these positions. The question reveals what He means, “Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?” Mark adds to this, “or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?” (Mark 10:38). If they wanted these positions they would have to drink His “cup” and be baptized with His baptism. What is the “cup” He is going to drink? Just before He was betrayed and arrested, Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, “Father if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will” (Matthew 26:39). When Jesus was being arrested and Peter struck out with his sword, Jesus said to him, “Put the sword into the sheath; the cup which the Father has given Me, shall I not drink it?” (John 18:11). The “cup” is the suffering and death He was about to face in Jerusalem. It was given Him from the Father and He had to drink it. It was the baptism He was to undergo. In Luke 12:50 Jesus says, “But I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is accomplished!” He was not heading into something enjoyable, but something that was very distressing. It would not be fun to drink this cup and undergo this baptism!

James and John were confident that they were able to drink the cup. Maybe they thought He meant they would be cupbearers for the King, drinking the cup in His kingdom at His side. Surely they were able to do that! They didn’t see that He was talking about suffering and death.

Jesus assured them that they would drink His cup. Indeed, James was the first of the apostles to be martyred. Acts 12:2 tells us that Herod put James to death with a sword. John would be sent into exile on the island of Patmos. They both did suffer because of their commitment to Christ.

Even though they would drink His cup, still Jesus could not grant them their request. He couldn’t issue the order they had requested because, He said, “this is not Mine to give, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by My Father.” The Father had already prepared these positions for those who would receive them, and it was not up to Jesus to give them to anyone. The people who will occupy those positions have already been designated by the Father; the decision has already been made.

Even though Jesus has given us promises regarding prayer that seem to assure us that He will give us whatever we ask in His name (John 14:13-14), there are still times when our requests will not or cannot be granted. Here is an example of a time when Jesus said, in effect, “I can’t grant your request.” We must remember that prayer is asking, not demanding; it is making a request and not issuing orders.

The other ten apostles heard what was going on and they became indignant with James and John. They were outraged that James and John had the audacity to make such a request. This is not an unusual reaction, I suppose. When someone who is our companion and equal tries to assert themselves and exalt themselves above us, we are likely to resent it. We are likely to ask, “What makes him think he’s so important?” This is especially true if we think the person is less qualified or competent than we are.



Jesus gathered the twelve around Him to deal with this issue. He pointed to how things are among the Gentiles. Their rulers “lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them.” They are the lords of their subjects and see themselves in an exalted position over them. They wield power over their subjects. Some people pursue these positions and love holding sway over others. These are the people who seek high political offices, those who love having people subject to them who serve them and follow their orders. It is wise to beware of those who are power-hungry.

Among followers of Christ it is not this way. Greatness looks very different in the kingdom of God than it does in the kingdoms of men. The one who wants to be great shall be a servant to others, and the one who wants to be first shall be a slave. Jesus does not condemn the ambition to be great or to be first. It is not evil to want to be great or to be first. It is a good thing to want to excel and do well and to achieve. But in God’s kingdom the means of achieving greatness is through humbling ourselves and serving others. In human society the servants and slaves and domestics are the lowliest of people. They are the Downton Abbey style footmen and kitchen servants and groundskeepers. Jesus turns our notion of upper and lower classes on its head.

Jesus Himself has provided the model. He says, “just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.” His purpose was to serve and to give, not to be served and take from others. We see here the purpose in His death. He gave His life (His *psuche*, His breath or His soul) as a ransom for many. The word for “ransom” is *lutron*, the price paid for redeeming a slave. A.T. Robertson comments:

**A ransom for many** (*lutron anti pollōn*). The Son of man is the outstanding illustration of this principle of self-abnegation in direct contrast to the self-seeking of James and John. The word translated “ransom” is the one commonly employed in the papyri as the price paid for a slave who is then set free by the one who bought him, the purchase money for manumitting slaves. See examples in Moulton and Milligan’s *Vocabulary* and Deissmann’s *Light from the Ancient East*, pp. 328f. There is the notion of exchange also in the use of *anti*. Jesus gave his own life as the price of freedom for the slaves of sin. There are those who refuse to admit that Jesus held this notion of a substitutionary death because the word in the N.T. occurs only here and the corresponding passage in [Mark 10:45](#). But that is an easy way to get rid of passages that contradict one’s theological opinions. Jesus here rises to the full consciousness of the significance of his death for men. ([Robertson’s Word Pictures](#))

The death of Jesus was a payment. He came to set free those who are slaves to sin by paying the debt for their sin through the offering of His own life. Jesus said in John 8:34-36, “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin. The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son does remain forever. So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.” The idea is that we are slaves, captives and prisoners of sin and unable to free ourselves. Because of our sin there is a debt we owe that we can’t repay. We need Jesus to come along and give His life for us and pay the debt for us, and this is exactly what He did. Paul writes in Colossians 2:13-14, “When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.” Paul’s picture is not just that we were slaves and captives to sin, but that we were dead in sin,

unable to do anything at all for ourselves. The mission of Jesus was a mission of redemption and liberation for those held captive by sin and death.

In Revelation 5:9-10 the creatures and elders in heaven celebrate the worthiness of Jesus the Lamb of God and say, "Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth." The price Jesus paid to purchase people from every group of people on earth was His own blood. This was and is His mission, and He has done it. If we belong to Jesus it is because He has purchased us through His death.

#### Matthew 20:29-34

As they were leaving Jericho, a large crowd followed Him. 30 And two blind men sitting by the road, hearing that Jesus was passing by, cried out, "Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!" 31 The crowd sternly told them to be quiet, but they cried out all the more, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!" 32 And Jesus stopped and called them, and said, "What do you want Me to do for you?" 33 They \*said to Him, "Lord, we want our eyes to be opened." 34 Moved with compassion, Jesus touched their eyes; and immediately they regained their sight and followed Him.

On His way to Jerusalem Jesus passed through Jericho, and as usual large crowds were following along with Him. Again here we have a situation where Matthew mentions two blind men and the parallel passages in Mark 10:46-52 and Luke 18:35-43 speak of only one. I don't think this is a huge problem. Perhaps there were two blind men, but only one was the spokesman and cried out to Jesus on behalf of both of them. Luke tells us that the man heard the commotion as Jesus was passing and asked what was going on. He was told that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by. Mark tells us that the man's name was Bartimaeus, that is "son of Timaeus."

The men began to cry out to Jesus, "Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!" They kept this up despite being told to be quiet. They would press their opportunity and not give up as long as there was hope they could get His attention. They had heard of Jesus, as had virtually everyone, and they knew He had the ability to heal. They recognized Him as the Messiah, the "Son of David." We see here again that these men asked for mercy and not for justice or equality or that to which they were entitled. They did not demand or "claim" their healing, but asked for mercy. They recognized that if they were healed it would be because of the compassion and mercy of Christ and not because they deserved it. Jesus is not obligated to heal anyone.

They succeeded in getting the attention of Jesus. He stopped and called them. Mark tells us that the crowd called the man and said, "Take courage, stand up! He is calling for you," and that the man threw aside his cloak, jumped up and came to Jesus. He was excited that Jesus called him. Jesus simply asked, "What do you want Me to do for you?" Naturally, they answered, "Lord, we want our eyes to be opened." Out of His compassion Jesus granted them mercy, touched their eyes and immediately they regained their sight and then followed Him. They had been able to see in the past and somehow had lost their sight, and now Jesus had restored it to them. Mark and Luke add that Jesus said, "Your faith has made you well." Their restored sight could be attributed to their faith, their belief that He could and would have mercy on them and heal them if they asked. They believed, they asked, and He granted their request. This is how our faith works. This is how we get the Lord involved in our lives and see Him work.

Jesus still calls us to Him and asks, "What do you want Me to do for you?" This question should shape and guide our prayers. He won't grant every request, as we just saw with the audacious request of James and John, but Jesus is compassionate and loves to grant His mercy to those who humbly seek Him and believe in Him.

Matthew 21:1-11

When they had approached Jerusalem and had come to Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, 2 saying to them, "Go into the village opposite you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied there and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to Me. 3 "If anyone says anything to you, you shall say, 'The Lord has need of them,' and immediately he will send them." 4 This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet: 5 "SAY TO THE DAUGHTER OF ZION, 'BEHOLD YOUR KING IS COMING TO YOU, GENTLE, AND MOUNTED ON A DONKEY, EVEN ON A COLT, THE FOAL OF A BEAST OF BURDEN.'" 6 The disciples went and did just as Jesus had instructed them, 7 and brought the donkey and the colt, and laid their coats on them; and He sat on the coats. 8 Most of the crowd spread their coats in the road, and others were cutting branches from the trees and spreading them in the road. 9 The crowds going ahead of Him, and those who followed, were shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David; BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD; Hosanna in the highest!" 10 When He had entered Jerusalem, all the city was stirred, saying, "Who is this?" 11 And the crowds were saying, "This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth in Galilee."

This has been called the "Triumphal Entry" into Jerusalem and is mentioned in all four of the gospels. John tells us that this took place right after Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead, and the people who had witnessed it were talking about it. He says, "For this reason also the people went and met Him, because they heard that He had performed this sign" (John 12:18). The raising of Lazarus was a powerful demonstration that Jesus was the Christ and the Son of God, and it caused a sensation all around the area.

Jesus and His followers came to Bethphage at the base of the Mount of Olives, just east of the temple in Jerusalem. He sent two disciples into Bethphage to retrieve the donkey and her colt and told them what to say if someone questioned them. Mark and Luke tell us that they were asked why they were untying the animals and they answered as Jesus had told them and were allowed to take them (Mark 11:1-11 and Luke 19:29-40). Jesus said they would find them "immediately" and they would be sent "immediately." They would not have to search high and low. This was something that would be expedited. The time had come for Him to ride into Jerusalem and the animal He needed would be available right away. As we go along with the Lord we will find the things we need supplied when we need them. What we need for tomorrow may not be supplied today.

Riding into Jerusalem on this donkey colt was a deliberate fulfillment of the prophecy from Zechariah 9:9. The "daughter of Zion" was to be told that her King was coming, that He was gentle, riding on the colt of a donkey. Zion was another name for Jerusalem. Kings don't generally ride on donkey colts; they ride on powerful horses or in chariots or carriages. This King is gentle and humble and rides into the city on a humble animal. Jesus was declaring by this action that He was the one who fulfilled the prophecy. He was saying publicly that He was the King, the Messiah, the Son of David.

The disciples put their coats, their outer garments or cloaks, on the donkey, and Jesus took His seat on it. Most of those in the crowd similarly spread their coats in the road in front of Him. Some cut branches from trees and spread them in the road in front of Him. Mark says

they were “leafy branches” and John says they were branches from palm trees. This provides the basis for the custom of “Palm Sunday” which marks the triumphal entry. They were making it as smooth as they could for Him to ride into Jerusalem. They honored Him and expressed their faith in Him as King.

The crowds went ahead of Jesus and behind Jesus and were shouting, “Hosanna to the Son of David; Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest!” The word “hosanna” is interesting. It is of Hebrew origin and is a cry for salvation, meaning “oh save!” (Strong’s Hebrew and Greek Dictionaries). It comes from the Hebrew *yâsha’*, to save or to deliver, and *nâ’*, “I pray” or “now.” On his website “Desiring God,” John Piper writes this about the word hosanna:

Our English word "hosanna" comes from a Greek word "hosanna" which comes from a Hebrew phrase *hoshiya na*. And that Hebrew phrase is found one solitary place in the whole Old Testament, Psalm 118:25, where it means, "Save, please!" It is a cry to God for help. Like when somebody pushes you off the diving board before you can swim and you come up hollering: "Help, save me . . . *Hoshiya na!*"

But something happened to that phrase, *hoshiya na*. The meaning changed over the years. In the psalm it was immediately followed by the exclamation: "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" The cry for help, *hoshiya na*, was answered almost before it came out of the psalmist's mouth. And over the centuries the phrase *hoshiya na* stopped being a cry for help in the ordinary language of the Jews. Instead it became a shout of hope and exultation. It used to mean, "Save, please!" But gradually, it came to mean, "Salvation! Salvation! Salvation has come!" It used to be what you would say when you fell off the diving board. But it came to be what you would say when you see the lifeguard coming to save you! It is the bubbling over of a heart that sees hope and joy and salvation on the way and can't keep it in.

So "Hosanna!" means, "Hooray for salvation! It's coming! It's here! Salvation! Salvation!"

And "Hosanna to the Son of David!" means, "The Son of David is our salvation! Hooray for the king! Salvation belongs to the king!"

And "Hosanna in the highest!" means, "Let all the angels in heaven join the song of praise. Salvation! Salvation! Let the highest heaven sing the song!"

(<https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/hosanna>)

These people were celebrating the salvation that Jesus was bringing to them, but probably they were not thinking in terms of salvation from sin, but salvation from Roman rule and the oppression of other peoples. Jesus had come to give His life as a ransom for many and to save His people from their sins (Matthew 1:21), but many of these people had a different concept. This is brought out in Mark 11:9-10 where he records that the people said, “Hosanna! BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD; Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David; Hosanna in the highest!” They were celebrating the coming of the King to inaugurate His kingdom and fulfill the promise to David that his descendant would rule forever on his throne (2 Samuel 7:12-17). Recognizing Him as the “Son of David” was evidence that they expected Him to come into Jerusalem and claim David’s throne as the promised Messiah. Just before Jesus entered Jerusalem He told them the “Parable of the Minas” in Luke 19:11-27. Luke 19:11 says that He told this parable “because He was near Jerusalem, and they supposed that the kingdom of God was going to appear immediately.” The parable makes it clear that He was going to go away to receive authority as King and then return at a later date with that authority. The supposition was false.

The kingdom of God was not going to “appear immediately.” These people were going to be disappointed.

Some in the crowd were appalled by what was going on. Luke says, “Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Him, ‘Teacher, rebuke Your disciples.’ But Jesus answered, ‘I tell you, if these become silent, the stones will cry out!’” (Luke 19:39-40). They did not believe that He was the Messiah, and so thought this whole thing was inappropriate and that Jesus should repudiate what was being said about Him. But the crowds shouting these things were right. He is the Son of David, the One who comes in the name of the Lord. He is the one who was bringing salvation. What the crowds were saying was true and appropriate, and Jesus not only would not rebuke them, but if they were to be silent, then the stones themselves would cry out. Creation would recognize and acclaim Him even if people would not.

It caused quite a stir when He entered Jerusalem. The question everyone was asking was, “Who is this?” Jesus had posed the question to the disciples in Matthew 16:13-16 when Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” This is the clear and consistent answer that the New Testament gives us. It is a complete fiction to say that Jesus never claimed to be the Messiah and the Son of God. The crowds who were coming with Jesus answered, “This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth in Galilee.” This is how they introduced Him to those who were not familiar with Him.

#### Matthew 21:12-17

And Jesus entered the temple and drove out all those who were buying and selling in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who were selling doves. 13 And He \*said to them, "It is written, 'MY HOUSE SHALL BE CALLED A HOUSE OF PRAYER'; but you are making it a ROBBERS' DEN." 14 And the blind and the lame came to Him in the temple, and He healed them. 15 But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that He had done, and the children who were shouting in the temple, "Hosanna to the Son of David," they became indignant 16 and said to Him, "Do You hear what these children are saying?" And Jesus \*said to them, "Yes; have you never read, 'OUT OF THE MOUTH OF INFANTS AND NURSING BABIES YOU HAVE PREPARED PRAISE FOR YOURSELF'?" 17 And He left them and went out of the city to Bethany, and spent the night there.

John tells us that early in His ministry Jesus had gone to Jerusalem for the Passover and finding the money changers and sellers of animals in the temple area, made a scourge of cords and drove them out of the temple. He said, “Take these things away; stop making My Father’s house a place of business” (John 2:13-16). So apparently we find here in Matthew 21 a second instance of Jesus cleansing the temple. The leaders in Jerusalem had not heeded the rebuke of Jesus the first time, and had returned to business as usual when He had gone. Jesus again found that the temple area had been made into a marketplace, and clearly He was not happy about it.

As Passover approached many people from many places came to Jerusalem to observe Passover. People from other places would need to exchange their currency for the shekel of the sanctuary to pay the temple tax (Matthew 17:24). For this reason the money changers had set up shop in the Court of the Gentiles that surrounded the temple. The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia says this about the money changers:

The profession of money-changer in Palestine was made necessary by the law requiring every male Israelite who had reached the age of 20 years to pay into the

treasury of the sanctuary a half-shekel at every numbering of the people, an offering to Yahweh, not even the poor being exempt. It seems to have become an annual tax, and was to be paid in the regular Jewish half-shekel (Exodus 30:11-15). Since the Jews, coming up to the feasts, would need to exchange the various coins in common circulation for this Jewish piece, there were money-changers who exacted a premium for the exchange. This fee was a *kollubos* (about 31 cents in U.S. money, i.e. in 1915), hence, the name *kollubisteš*. The Jews of Christ's day came from many parts of the world, and the business of exchanging foreign coins for various purposes became a lucrative one, the exchangers exacting whatever fee they might. Because of their greed and impiety, Jesus drove them from the courts of the temple.

In addition to the money changers, others were there in the temple area selling doves for the offerings required at the temple as well as other sacrificial animals and probably other things. As He drove out these merchants, Jesus said, "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer'; but you are making it a robber's den." In Mark the quote is, "Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations'? But you have made it a robber's den." The first passage Jesus quoted was Isaiah 56:6-7, "Also the foreigners who join themselves to the LORD, To minister to Him, and to love the name of the LORD, To be His servants, every one who keeps from profaning the sabbath And holds fast My covenant; 7 Even those I will bring to My holy mountain And make them joyful in My house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be acceptable on My altar; For My house will be called a house of prayer for all the peoples." The temple was to be a house of prayer for all the nations and not just the Jews. It is likely that it was in the "court of the Gentiles" that surrounded the temple where the Jews had set up their marketplace. It was a large area of the temple mount where Gentiles, non-Jews, were allowed to come and worship Yahweh. Only Jews were allowed into the inner courts of the temple. It upset Jesus that they had made this place where people from other nations could come to pray and worship into a den of robbers. They were exploiting the Gentiles who came there to worship the God of Israel.

When Jesus mentioned the "robbers' den" He was alluding to Jeremiah 7:9-11, "'Will you steal, murder, and commit adultery and swear falsely, and offer sacrifices to Baal and walk after other gods that you have not known, 10 then come and stand before Me in this house, which is called by My name, and say, 'We are delivered!'--that you may do all these abominations? 11 Has this house, which is called by My name, become a den of robbers in your sight? Behold, I, even I, have seen it,' declares the LORD." Jesus pointed out that they had fulfilled this prophecy by what was being done in the court of the Gentiles. They had co-opted the purpose of the temple and had made it a marketplace instead of a holy place to worship the Lord. The fees being charged and the prices demanded for things were exorbitant and unreasonable. They established a corner on the market for animals that were approved for sacrifice at the temple, and would not accept the animals that people had brought themselves. Thus they exploited people who came to worship for their own gain.

A reasonable markup and profit on goods and services is not evil, but at some point it can become exploitative and abusive. This is why we have laws against monopolies. Today we have a situation where insulin for diabetics is priced so high that some people who are uninsured can't afford it. Some have died in their attempts to ration their insulin or because they can't get it. These companies that corner the market on the types of insulin that people need bear a heavy responsibility for their greed.

Jesus turned things in the temple into a celebration. The blind and lame came to Him and He healed them. The children were shouting "Hosanna to the Son of David!" The Son had

come into His Father's house and brought with Him healing, salvation, joy and celebration. He was doing wonderful things, and the chief priests and scribes saw them, but they were not happy. They didn't join in the celebration that the Messiah had come. They were indignant because of what they saw and heard. They were very displeased and thought the whole thing was unseemly. They were the ones who were in charge in the temple and did not accept that Jesus was the Messiah. They felt that they were the important men in the temple and in Israel and not this Galilean. They saw Jesus as a threat rather than the Savior. They would not join the party. They asked accusingly, "Do You hear what these children are saying?" The implication was that Jesus should not allow these kids to say this about Him, that He should repudiate their praise. But the children were acknowledging the truth about Him. He was the Savior and the Son of David.

Jesus answered, "Yes; have you never read, 'Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babies You have prepared praise for Yourself?'" Of course Jesus had heard the shouts of the children, and accepted and approved what they were saying. He proved it was appropriate by asking if they had read Psalm 8:2, which He quoted from the Septuagint (Greek) version of Psalms. The Greek word for "prepared" is *katarizō*, to get ready, to prepare, to complete. Matthew used the same word in 4:21 when he mentioned that the fishermen were "mending" their nets. They were getting their nets ready for the next day of fishing. God readied the praise that these children were offering. Their praise had been prepared for this time by the Father, and was therefore perfectly appropriate.

Jesus left Jerusalem for the day and went to spend the night in Bethany, about one and a half miles east of Jerusalem. Probably He stayed at the home of Martha, Mary and Lazarus (John 11:1). Today the city is called "al-Eizariya," the "place of Lazarus" in Arabic.

#### Matthew 21:18-22

Now in the morning, when He was returning to the city, He became hungry. 19 Seeing a lone fig tree by the road, He came to it and found nothing on it except leaves only; and He \*said to it, "No longer shall there ever be any fruit from you." And at once the fig tree withered. 20 Seeing this, the disciples were amazed and asked, "How did the fig tree wither all at once?" 21 And Jesus answered and said to them, "Truly I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what was done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, 'Be taken up and cast into the sea,' it will happen. 22 "And all things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive."

Since Jesus was in Jerusalem at the time of Passover, this would have been in March or April by our calendar. At this time a fig tree would have leaves and probably some immature fruit. The fruit would not be ripe and ready for harvest until June at least. I think this is why Mark says, "it was not the season for figs" (Mark 11:13). It was not yet time to harvest figs, but there should have been some fruit developing on this tree. Jesus was disappointed to find nothing but leaves on this tree. He said to the tree, "No longer shall there ever be any fruit from you." In Mark it is, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again!" (Mark 11:14). Jesus decreed that this tree would never again bear any fruit and no one would be able to eat from it again. According to Mark, Peter observed that Jesus had cursed this tree (Mark 11:21). The fig tree withered "at once" or immediately, and this amazed the disciples. They asked how this could happen at once; how could this fig tree so quickly wither? According to Mark, this happened the day after Jesus had cursed the tree; that He had cursed the tree one morning, and the next morning they saw that it had withered (Mark 11:20-21). In any case the tree had withered very quickly.

The key, Jesus replied, was having faith and not doubting. Doubt is the opposite of faith. Doubt is wavering between belief and unbelief. When someone tells us something that sounds too good or too bad to be true, we may doubt the truth of what they say. This is what happened to Thomas (John 20:24-29). The news that Jesus had risen from the dead was too fantastic for him to believe without seeing for himself. When Jesus appeared to him personally he stopped doubting and decided to believe. Jesus says that if we have faith and don't doubt, we will not only be able to do what He did to the fig tree, but we will be able to go beyond this to commanding mountains to be taken up and thrown into the sea and it will happen. He had said this to the disciples previously when they asked why they couldn't cast out a demon. In Matthew 17:20 He had said to them, "Because of the littleness of your faith; for truly I say to you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible to you." Paul mentioned this as he talked about the primacy of love in 1 Corinthians 13:2, "If I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing." The smallness of our faith keeps us from doing this kind of thing. Doubt hinders what we can accomplish, and so causing doubt is a big part of Satan's strategy. We see this all the way back in Genesis 3 when Satan said that God's word was unreliable and that if they ate the fruit they would not die, but they would become wise (Genesis 3:1-5).

So, does the Lord want us to go around withering trees and moving mountains? I don't think so, unless these things are necessary to accomplish His purpose through us. Having this kind of faith is having confidence in the Lord and what He wants to do. We must believe that He wants to wither the tree or move the mountain. If we have full confidence that there is a real or metaphorical mountain that the Lord wants removed, then we can speak the word to it and it will obey and nothing will be impossible.

Finally, Jesus said, "And all things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive." These things are done through prayer, through asking. Prayer is prompted by faith and depends on faith. We ask because we believe, and then we receive because we believe. Some minimal faith must be there or we wouldn't ask at all, but then we must move further into confidence that what we're asking is what the Lord wants to do and is what is right, and it will be done. We are not accomplishing many things the Lord would have us accomplish because of the littleness of our faith.

#### Matthew 21:23-32

When He entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to Him while He was teaching, and said, "By what authority are You doing these things, and who gave You this authority?" 24 Jesus said to them, "I will also ask you one thing, which if you tell Me, I will also tell you by what authority I do these things. 25 "The baptism of John was from what source, from heaven or from men?" And they began reasoning among themselves, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' He will say to us, 'Then why did you not believe him?' 26 "But if we say, 'From men,' we fear the people; for they all regard John as a prophet." 27 And answering Jesus, they said, "We do not know." He also said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.

28 "But what do you think? A man had two sons, and he came to the first and said, 'Son, go work today in the vineyard.' 29 "And he answered, 'I will not'; but afterward he regretted it and went. 30 "The man came to the second and said the same thing; and he answered, 'I will, sir'; but he did not go. 31 "Which of the two did the will of his father?" They \*said, "The first." Jesus \*said to them, "Truly I say to you that the tax collectors and prostitutes will get into the kingdom of God before you. 32 "For John came to you in the way of righteousness



and you did not believe him; but the tax collectors and prostitutes did believe him; and you, seeing this, did not even feel remorse afterward so as to believe him.

Jesus had driven the money changers and merchants out of the temple area and had referred to the temple as “My Father’s house.” He was teaching the crowds who gathered together in the temple. He was healing people there and accepting praise as the Messiah. As we’ve seen, this didn’t set well with the chief priests and elders. They came to Him on this second day in the temple and confronted Him. They asked, “By what authority are You doing these things, and who gave You this authority?” We’ve run into this word “authority” (*exousia*) previously in Matthew. In 7:29 it says that Jesus taught “as one having authority.” In 8:9 the centurion said that he was a man “under authority.” In 9:6 Jesus said that He had authority to forgive sins. In 10:1 Jesus gave the apostles authority over evil spirits. Throughout His ministry Jesus demonstrated His authority in what He said and what He did. There can be no doubt that Jesus acted as if He were the Messiah and the Son of God. The chief priests and elders had not recognized Him as Messiah and therefore had not themselves authorized Him to do these things in the temple. He didn’t have their stamp of approval, and so they tried to assert their authority and question His. His authority hadn’t come from them, so where did it come from? Who gave Him permission to behave this way?

Jesus very cleverly replied that if they would answer His question, He would answer theirs. He asked, “The baptism of John was from what source, from heaven or from men?” Mark adds that He also said, “Answer Me” (Mark 11:30). John, recognized by virtually all of the people as a real prophet, had put his stamp of approval on the ministry of Jesus and had pointed to Him as the Son of God and Messiah. AT Robertson comments, “The only human ecclesiastical authority that Jesus had came from John” ([Robertson’s Word Pictures](#)). Since most people accepted that John was a real prophet authorized by God to carry out his ministry of baptism, and that John had said that Jesus was greater and that he wasn’t worthy to even untie His sandal, it’s clear that Jesus had painted these men into a corner. They saw this immediately and reasoned among themselves. Jesus gave them two options. Was the baptism of John from heaven and thus from God, or was it from men? If it wasn’t from God, then it was not legitimate and John was a false prophet and deceiver. If it was from God then they had rejected his ministry and refused to believe him, and were therefore turning away from God themselves. Since they confronted Jesus publicly as He was teaching, there were a lot of people standing around who would hear their answer. If they came down on one side or the other they were in trouble, so their solution was to say, “We do not know.” They claimed ignorance and did not answer the question, and therefore Jesus refused to answer their question.

Now Jesus has a question for the chief priests and elders. He asked them for their opinion, their judgment, on a situation involving a man and his two sons. The man came to his first son and said, “Son, go work today in the vineyard.” The son answered, “I will not.” He flatly refused. Later, though, he regretted it and went to work in the vineyard. The man came to his second son and said the same thing; the command was the same. His will was made clear to both sons. The second son answered, “I will, sir,” but did not go into the vineyard. Then Jesus asked the simple question, “Which of the two did the will of his father?” The answer was obvious that it was the first son. Even though he was initially defiant and obstinate, nonetheless he was the one who regretted it later and ended up doing the will of his father.

The word translated “regretted” in verse 29 and “feel remorse” in verse 32 is the same Greek word, *metamelomai*, “to have a feeling or care, concern or regret” (International Standard Bible Encyclopedia). Marvin Vincent writes this about the word:

Μεταμέλομαι, as its etymology indicates (μετά, *after*, and μέλω, *to be an object of care*), implies an *after-care*, as contrasted with the *change of mind* denoted by μετάνοια. Not sorrow for moral obliquity and sin against God, but annoyance at the consequences of an act or course of acts, and chagrin at not having known better. “It may be simply what our fathers were wont to call *hadiwist* (had-I-wist, or known better, I should have acted otherwise)” (Trench). (Vincent’s Word Studies.)

The term, then, is not the same as *metanoia*, the typical New Testament word meaning to repent, but it means to feel regret for a bad choice. Matthew uses the word again in 27:3-4, “Then when Judas, who had betrayed Him, saw that He had been condemned, he felt remorse and returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, ‘I have sinned by betraying innocent blood.’ But they said, ‘What is that to us? See *to that* yourself!’” Judas felt badly and admitted to having sinned by betraying an innocent man, but it did not lead to a real turnaround in his life. Instead it led to suicide.

The first son at first had a bad attitude, but later regretted it and went to work. The second son initially appeared to have a good attitude, but did not obey his father. The first son said he wouldn’t obey, but did; the second son said he would, but didn’t. Jesus said that the first son represents the tax collectors and prostitutes, some of the worst kinds of sinners, and the second son represents the chief priests and elders, those men who fancied themselves as righteous and superior. Jesus said that the tax collectors and prostitutes had believed John and therefore would get into the kingdom of God before the chief priests and elders who had refused to believe him. Jesus said, “For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him.” John came, not only for the tax collectors and prostitutes, but for the chief priests and elders as well. He came to communicate the way of righteousness to all of Israel, to call them to repentance and to point them to the Righteous One, Jesus. The tax collectors and prostitutes had listened to him, had believed, repented and been baptized, and then believed in Christ. The chief priests and elders had rejected his message. They would not admit that they needed to repent or be baptized by John. They saw these sinners going to John and believing his message, and even then they felt no remorse so as to believe him. They would not say, “I need to do that too!”

We have seen in Matthew this emphasis on going beyond mere lip-service toward God to real obedience to God (Matthew 7:21-27, 15:2-9). Jesus had said in Matthew 7:21, “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter.” We enter the kingdom by doing the will of the Father, which involves doing what John told people to do, repenting of sin and believing in the Son of God, Jesus Christ. In Acts 19:4 Paul summarized the message of John by saying, “John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in Him who was coming after him, that is, in Jesus.” Repentance from sin and faith in Jesus is the “way of righteousness” and the means of entering the kingdom of God.

We have seen before in Matthew as well this idea that there are only two ways that we can go. We can take the narrow way to life or the wide way to destruction (Matthew 7:13-14). If we, in our pride and arrogance, think we do not need to repent and believe like other inferior people do, we will fail to do the will of God and will miss the kingdom.

Matthew 21:33-46

"Listen to another parable. There was a landowner who PLANTED A VINEYARD AND PUT A WALL AROUND IT AND DUG A WINE PRESS IN IT, AND BUILT A TOWER, and rented it out to vine-growers and went on a journey. 34 "When the harvest time approached, he sent his slaves to the vine-growers to receive his produce. 35 "The vine-growers took his slaves and beat one, and killed another, and stoned a third. 36 "Again he sent another group of slaves larger than the first; and they did the same thing to them. 37 "But afterward he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' 38 "But when the vine-growers saw the son, they said among themselves, 'This is the heir; come, let us kill him and seize his inheritance.' 39 "They took him, and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. 40 "Therefore when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those vine-growers?" 41 They \*said to Him, "He will bring those wretches to a wretched end, and will rent out the vineyard to other vine-growers who will pay him the proceeds at the proper seasons." 42 Jesus \*said to them, "Did you never read in the Scriptures, 'THE STONE WHICH THE BUILDERS REJECTED, THIS BECAME THE CHIEF CORNER stone; THIS CAME ABOUT FROM THE LORD, AND IT IS MARVELOUS IN OUR EYES'? 43 "Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people, producing the fruit of it. 44 "And he who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; but on whomever it falls, it will scatter him like dust."

45 When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard His parables, they understood that He was speaking about them. 46 When they sought to seize Him, they feared the people, because they considered Him to be a prophet.

Jesus had just refused to reveal to these men the source of His authority because they would not answer His question about John the baptist. Now, though, He tells this parable that makes it clear that He is the Son of God, the Owner of the vineyard, and what will happen to those who kill the Owner's Son.

The translators of the New American Standard recognize a quote from Isaiah 5 in verse 33. Isaiah 5:1-7 is a similar parable about Israel as the Lord's vineyard and how He did everything He could to allow it to produce good grapes, but it only produced worthless ones. Since it did not produce the fruit He was after, He determined to remove its hedge and let it be consumed, trampled and laid waste. Jesus here is reminding them of Isaiah 5.

The landowner did six things in verse 33. He planted his vineyard, put a wall around it, dug a wine press in it, built a tower, rented the vineyard out to vine-growers and then went on a journey. The "wall" was probably a hedge of thorns and the tower was a security measure for guarding the vineyard. He prepared everything and since he was going away, he needed people to care for the vineyard. No doubt he had a contract with the vine-growers regarding the crops and how they were to be divided at harvest time between himself and the vine-growers. The vine-growers would receive their percentage, and the owner would receive his. In effect, the vine-growers would pay their rent with a portion of the crop.

At harvest time, the landowner sent his slaves to receive his portion of the fruit of the vineyard. The versions of the parable in Mark and Luke mention single slaves rather than groups of slaves (Mark 12:1-12 and Luke 20:9-19). The vine-growers would not cooperate with the delegation from the landowner, but they beat one of them, killed another and stoned a third. The owner sent a larger group of slaves, and they were treated the same way. Mark says that the owner sent "many others" until the only one he had left to send was his beloved son (Mark 12:5-6). These tenant vine-growers were acting as if they owned the vineyard and all of its produce belonged to them. They treated the owner's slaves like thieves rather than

recognizing the authority and contract behind their errand. They violated their covenant and did not fulfill their responsibility to the landowner.

Finally, since he had no more slaves to send, the landowner sent his son. Verse 37 says, "But afterward he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.'" In Mark 12:6 it says, "He had one more *to send*, a beloved son; he sent him last *of all* to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.'" And Luke 20:13 says, "The owner of the vineyard said, 'What shall I do? I will send my beloved son; perhaps they will respect him.'" Luke indicates that the landowner deliberated over what to do and decided to send his son, and seems to say that he was not 100 percent sure that the vine-growers would respect him. He said, "perhaps they will respect him." Vincent comments on the word translated "perhaps," "Only here in New Testament. The adverb of ἴσως, *equal*. It expresses more than *perhaps*, implying rather a strong probability. Compare the phrase, *it is an even chance that*" (Vincent's Word Studies). So the landowner proceeded to send his son, thinking it probable that the vine-growers would respect him and give him the fruit they owed. The Greek word for "respect" is *entrepō*, meaning "to turn to" or "to reverence." Having failed to respect and "turn to" his slaves, he thought that probably they would recognize the authority of his son. If he had thought that they certainly would not respect his son he would not have sent him. He was reasonably sure that they would not treat his son as they had treated his slaves.

The vine-growers saw the son coming and recognized him. They consulted with each other about the situation, and instead of saying, "Oh no! Now we're really in trouble and will have to give this man what he's after!", they said, "This is the heir; come, let us kill him and seize his inheritance." The son was the one who would succeed his father as owner of the vineyard, and so these vine-growers for some reason thought that the vineyard would be theirs if they killed him. I'm not sure why they thought this. Surely their thinking was distorted and faulty, but nonetheless they carried out their plan, thinking it would pay off for them. They took him, threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.

The vine-growers had made a fatal mistake. Instead of possessing the vineyard for themselves as a result of killing the son they lost their lives and their position. The owner of the vineyard had been incredibly patient with these men, but now they had gone too far. Jesus asked, "Therefore when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those vine-growers?" The people answered, "He will bring those wretches to a wretched end, and will rent out the vineyard to other vine-growers who will pay him the proceeds at the proper seasons." In Mark and Luke it is Jesus Himself who asks and answers the question. The vine-growers are described as "miserable" (*kakos* in the Greek), and their end is described as "miserable" (*kakōs* in the Greek). The International Standard Version translates it, "He will put those horrible men to a horrible death. Then he will lease the vineyard to other farmers who will give him his produce at harvest time." The World English Bible also picks up on this play on words and translates, "He will miserably destroy those miserable men, and will lease out the vineyard to other farmers, who will give him the fruit in its season." Their death will match their character. They were wretched, horrible, miserable, evil men who deserved a wretched, horrible, miserable, evil death. Killing the landowner's son would not gain them the vineyard, but in fact it would cost their lives as well as the vineyard. Because they rejected the son they would be rejected and replaced with those who would honor the vineyard owner and give him the crop that belonged to him.

According to Luke the people understood what he was saying and said, "May it never be!" (Luke 20:16). They were horrified to think that the vineyard would be removed from them and given to others. Jesus asked, "Did you never read in the Scriptures?" and then quoted Psalm 118:22-23, "The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief corner stone. This is the Lord's doing; It is marvelous in our eyes." They had certainly read this and were

familiar with it. The “builders” had rejected this “stone,” but it had nevertheless been made the chief corner stone because it was the Lord’s doing. They could not remove this stone and cast it aside. This recalls the prophecy about God’s Son in Psalm 2.

#### Psalms 2:1-12

1 Why are the nations in an uproar And the peoples devising a vain thing?

2 The kings of the earth take their stand And the rulers take counsel together Against the LORD and against His Anointed, saying,

3 "Let us tear their fetters apart And cast away their cords from us!"

4 He who sits in the heavens laughs, The Lord scoffs at them.

5 Then He will speak to them in His anger And terrify them in His fury, saying,

6 "But as for Me, I have installed My King Upon Zion, My holy mountain."

7 "I will surely tell of the decree of the LORD: He said to Me, 'You are My Son, Today I have begotten You.

8 'Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Your inheritance, And the very ends of the earth as Your possession.

9 'You shall break them with a rod of iron, You shall shatter them like earthenware.'"

10 Now therefore, O kings, show discernment; Take warning, O judges of the earth.

11 Worship the LORD with reverence And rejoice with trembling.

12 Do homage to the Son, that He not become angry, and you perish in the way, For His wrath may soon be kindled. How blessed are all who take refuge in Him!

God has installed His Son as the King, and no human authority can overturn it. The nations and authorities that do not honor Him will be subject to His wrath.

The rebellious builders could not thwart the purpose of the Lord. Then Jesus made the point of the parable, “Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people, producing the fruit of it.” He identifies the kingdom of God with the vineyard. The chief priests, elders and Pharisees were the vine-growers who would be supplanted by others who will produce the fruit of the kingdom. The stone they had rejected would destroy them, whether they stumbled and fell on it or it fell on them. They would be broken to pieces and pulverized by the stone.

The chief priests and Pharisees understood what Jesus was saying and that He was talking about them, but they did not heed the message and change course. They all more wanted to seize Him and put Him to death. Both the two sons parable and the parable of the vine-growers are about these men. The thing that restrained them from seizing Him then was their fear of the people with whom He was popular.

Jesus has now revealed to them the source of His authority very clearly. He has declared that He is the Son of God, the landowner, the heir and ruler of the kingdom of God, the Chief Corner Stone, sent and placed by God Himself. In failing to respect Him the leaders had failed to respect the Father. In rejecting Him they had rejected the Father.

This parable has application for everyone. In a sense we are all vine-growers in God’s vineyard and are all expected to give Him the fruit He’s looking for at the proper time. Jesus has made this point before, that God is looking for fruit, good fruit. The Parable of the Sower showed us that God is looking for a good crop. The Parable of the Wheat and the Tares illustrated that there are people who produce the good crop He wants and those who are worthless weeds fit only to be burned. He said that the tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire (Matthew 7:19). As you read the teaching of Jesus in the gospels you can’t miss this message. God is looking for good fruit and those who do not produce it are cut down and destroyed.

### Matthew 22:1-14

Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying, 2 "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son. 3 "And he sent out his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding feast, and they were unwilling to come. 4 "Again he sent out other slaves saying, 'Tell those who have been invited, "Behold, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and my fattened livestock are all butchered and everything is ready; come to the wedding feast.'" 5 "But they paid no attention and went their way, one to his own farm, another to his business, 6 and the rest seized his slaves and mistreated them and killed them. 7 "But the king was enraged, and he sent his armies and destroyed those murderers and set their city on fire. 8 "Then he \*said to his slaves, 'The wedding is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy. 9 'Go therefore to the main highways, and as many as you find there, invite to the wedding feast.' 10 "Those slaves went out into the streets and gathered together all they found, both evil and good; and the wedding hall was filled with dinner guests. 11 "But when the king came in to look over the dinner guests, he saw a man there who was not dressed in wedding clothes, 12 and he \*said to him, 'Friend, how did you come in here without wedding clothes?' And the man was speechless. 13 "Then the king said to the servants, 'Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' 14 "For many are called, but few are chosen."

In the previous parable we had people who refused to cooperate with the owner of vineyard, and now Jesus depicts people who refuse the invitation of the king to his son's wedding feast and even abuse his servants. The parallels are clear, and the behavior of those who were invited to the feast are as outrageous as that of the vine-growers.

This parable is another kingdom parable, comparing the kingdom of heaven to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son. The kingdom of heaven is not an eternity of boredom, sitting on clouds playing harps, but is a party, a wedding feast prepared by God Himself! If a king throws a wedding feast for his son, it's going to be great!

Many were invited to the wedding feast, and when it was ready, the king sent out slaves to call those who had been invited to the feast. Right at the outset here I want to point out a key word in this parable, the Greek word *kaleō*, to call. The word occurs five times in the parable, twice in verse 3, "to call" and "invited." Literally it could read, "he sent out his slaves to call those who had been called." In verses 4 and 8 it is again translated "invited," and "invite" in verse 9. There is a related adjective in verse 14, *kletos*, called. We can't miss the fact that many people were called by the king to the feast.

Those who had been called were, for some reason, unwilling to come. This was a great privilege, a once-in-a-lifetime event! This was also a summons by the king and it is not a good idea to refuse the summons of one's king, especially if he had issued a gracious invitation to his special event. There was something seriously wrong with these people.

The king gave them another chance and sent some other slaves to again call the called. He told the slaves to say, "Behold, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and my fattened livestock are all butchered and everything is ready; come to the wedding feast." The king had been preparing for this feast for quite some time. The "fattened livestock" were animals that had been specially fed and prepared for this occasion. The king had put a lot of money and time and effort into this feast, and now that the time had come the only thing lacking was the guests. The slaves went out and delivered his message to his people who had been called. But again they "paid no attention" to his call and "went their way." The words "paid no attention" translate the word *ameleō*, to not care, to neglect. They didn't care about the call of

the king, it was nothing to them, and they went about their normal daily business. Jesus says that one went to his farm, and one went to his business, but “the rest seized his slaves and mistreated them and killed them.” Some merely ignored the call, but a large number were hostile and violent toward his slaves, rejecting the message and the messengers and therefore rejecting the king himself! They sent a strong and unmistakable message that they wanted nothing to do with the king, his son and the wedding feast.

Naturally, the king was enraged by this and sent troops to destroy the murderers and burn their city. The behavior of these people he had called was inexplicable and inexcusable, and it’s hard to fathom their hostility toward the king. Why these people thought they could get away with killing the messengers of the king is beyond my understanding, and that’s probably a big part of the point Jesus is making here. Their behavior makes no sense. The king had given them no reason to treat him this way.

Again the king sent out his slaves to call people to the wedding feast. The feast was still ready and still there were no guests. He said, “The wedding is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy.” The people he had called had proven themselves unworthy of the call. Jesus had used this same word for “worthy” in chapter 10 when he was giving the disciples instructions before sending them out. He said that the worker is “worthy” of his support (10:10). He told them to look for someone “worthy” with whom to lodge (10:11). In 10:13 He said that they should give the house their blessing if it is worthy. Many are not worthy of the Lord’s invitation or to receive His servants.

The king sent out more slaves with instructions to go to the “main highways” and call as many as they found to the wedding feast. These were the roads leading out of town and the intersections of the main roads where there would be a lot of people traveling. They were to invite everyone. The invitation would be thrown open to any and all and would not be exclusive. The slaves went out and did as they were ordered and gathered all they found, both evil and good, and the wedding hall was filled. There was no discrimination. The slaves were not supposed to try to discern whether these people were worthy or not, but they were just supposed to call everyone regardless of who they were or what they seemed to be like. As a result, some who came were evil and some were good. There would be many who thought that they would never have been qualified to be invited to the king’s feast. In fact, probably few of these people would be the kind one would think would be invited to a king’s feast.

The king himself came in for the purpose of looking over the dinner guests. He noticed a problem with one man; he was not dressed in wedding clothes. He said to the man, “Friend, how did you come in here without wedding clothes?” The implication is that he should not have been allowed to enter since he was not wearing the proper clothing for the occasion. Someone should have prevented him from entering. He didn’t belong there without the proper attire. I think it’s also implied here that the man knew this and had deliberately failed to put on the proper clothes. He knew he had violated the rules and that his behavior was improper. He could not offer a defense or explanation. Since the man should not have been allowed to enter with improper clothing and did not belong in the feast, the king ordered that he be tied up and cast out into the outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. Jesus explained, “For many are called, but few are chosen.” In the Greek text “called” is *klētos*, and “chosen” is *ekletos*, “called out.” AT Robertson comments, “There is a distinction between the called (*klētoi*) and the chosen (*eklektoi*) called out from the called.” The invitation goes out to many, but few are chosen from among the called. There are many who hear, but few who respond and believe and bear good fruit.

This parable again reveals how the Jews, particularly the Jewish leaders, had rejected God's invitation to the wedding feast of His Son, and how they had even abused and killed His messengers who had brought them the invitation. It reveals also how God is going to open the invitation to others who had not received the initial invitation. Samaritans will be invited, Gentiles will be invited, the good and the evil will be invited. As Jesus had just showed in the previous parable, the privilege of being in the kingdom would be removed from the Jews who rejected it and given to others. We must be careful to note, though, that Scripture is clear that there is still a future for Israel and the Jews. Paul talks about this in depth in Romans 9-11. In Romans 11:1-2a he says, "I say then, God has not rejected His people, has He? May it never be! For I too am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew." It is not the role of Christians to persecute Jews because they have rejected Christ.

The rejection of God's invitation by the Jews opens the door to the Gentiles. God invites anyone and everyone to His feast. His servants go out to all the world, and those not initially invited are invited. This depicts the mission of the church. Those who follow Jesus become His messengers to the world, urging them to come to God's feast. This is the same thing we saw in the previous parable; the vineyard is given to others and the feast is opened to others.

There is also here the rather curious case of the man who was not wearing wedding clothes. Somehow he got into the feast even though he wasn't dressed properly. What is meant in this element of the parable? It means that you don't just come to God's wedding feast just as you are, but you have to change clothes. You don't come off the street in your shorts, t-shirt and flip-flops. Probably the Jews listening would have thought of Isaiah 61:10, "I will rejoice greatly in the LORD, My soul will exult in my God; For He has clothed me with garments of salvation, He has wrapped me with a robe of righteousness, As a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, And as a bride adorns herself with her jewels." The garments that God provides to us are the garments of salvation and righteousness. You can't enter into God's feast and God's kingdom unless you are clothed with salvation and righteousness. Paul writes in Galatians 3:26-27, "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ." Christ Himself is our salvation and righteousness, and if we have believed in Him we are children of God and are clothed with Christ. He covers our unrighteousness.

For the second time in Matthew Jesus mentions the "outer darkness" where there is "weeping and gnashing of teeth." (See the comments on Matthew 8:12.) In the case of this man who had come in without wedding clothes, I think he represents a man who has tried to come into the kingdom by some means other than through the salvation and righteousness of Christ. He had put on garments of his own making and preference which were unacceptable to the king. Perhaps he represents the man who trusts in his own righteousness rather than that of Christ. Isaiah 64:6 says, "For all of us have become like one who is unclean, And all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment; And all of us wither like a leaf, And our iniquities, like the wind, take us away." When we think that we are good enough and that our own righteousness is sufficient to cover us and that God should accept us because of how good we are in ourselves, then we come into His presence in our "filthy garments" and He must toss us out. We are unacceptable clothed in our own righteousness.

#### Matthew 22:15-22

Then the Pharisees went and plotted together how they might trap Him in what He said.  
16 And they \*sent their disciples to Him, along with the Herodians, saying, "Teacher, we know that You are truthful and teach the way of God in truth, and defer to no one; for You are not



partial to any. 17 "Tell us then, what do You think? Is it lawful to give a poll-tax to Caesar, or not?" 18 But Jesus perceived their malice, and said, "Why are you testing Me, you hypocrites? 19 "Show Me the coin used for the poll-tax." And they brought Him a denarius. 20 And He \*said to them, "Whose likeness and inscription is this?" 21 They \*said to Him, "Caesar's." Then He \*said to them, "Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's; and to God the things that are God's." 22 And hearing this, they were amazed, and leaving Him, they went away.

The Pharisees tried to come up with a way to snare Jesus in what He said. They came up with this question about paying taxes to Caesar thinking that He would answer in a way that would trap Him into saying something that would get Him into trouble either with the Roman authorities or with the people. They sent their disciples "along with the Herodians" to Jesus to ask this question. Regarding the Herodians, Smith's Bible Dictionary says this:

**Hero'dians.** (*from Herod*). Matt. 22:15 ff.; Mark 12:13; ff. Canon Cook describes these persons as, "that party among the Jews who were supporters of the Herodian family as the last hope of retaining for the Jews a fragment of national government, as distinguished from absolute dependence upon Rome as a province of the empire." Supporters of the family of Herod, who held their dominions by the grant of the Roman emperor, would be in favor of paying tribute to the supreme power. Matt. 22:16.

It seems likely that the Herodians joined in this thinking that if Jesus opposed payment of taxes to Caesar then they could accuse Him of attempting to undermine the authority of Rome. Luke tells us their purpose was to "catch Him in some statement, so that they could deliver Him to the rule and authority of the governor" (Luke 20:20).

They came to Jesus and began with flattery, trying to appear sincere. They called Him "teacher" and said that He was truthful and taught the way of God in truth. Good teachers do this, they are truthful and they teach the truth. What they said about Him was true, but they did not really believe it. They said that He did not defer to anyone because He was impartial. He didn't modify His teaching out of fear of people, and He did not judge by status or appearance. He did not favor one type of person over another.

Having attempted to appear sincere, they then asked their question, "Tell us what do You think? Is it lawful to give a poll-tax to Caesar, or not?" They had just said that He taught the "way of God in truth," and this is what they have in mind. Is it the "way of God" that Jews should pay the poll-tax to Caesar? Should Jews who follow the way of God pay a tax and recognize the legitimacy of foreign rule? If Jesus had said that yes, it was legal in God's sight to pay these taxes the people would have been unhappy with Him. If He said no, it was not legal for Jews to pay the tax, then they could accuse Him of sedition and turn Him over to the governor. They thought they had Him in their trap.

Jesus "perceived their malice," more literally the Greek says He "knew their evil" or wickedness. He asked, "Why are you testing Me, you hypocrites?" He laid bare their true motives before answering their question. He knew their real reason for the flattery and for the question. Jesus knows our true motives and exposes them. It will do no good to try to trick Him or deceive Him.

He told them to show Him the coin used to pay the poll-tax, and they brought Him a denarius. He asked them, "Whose likeness and inscription is this?" and they said, "Caesar's." Tiberius was the emperor at this time, and it's likely that this denarius had his image on it. Jesus then said, "Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's; and to God the things

that are God's." The word for "render" means to give back or to return. If it came from Caesar and belongs to Caesar, then give it back to him. Similarly, if it came from God and belongs to God, then give it back to God. If Caesar had a claim on this coin, then give it to him. So Jesus did not explicitly say, "Yes, it is lawful to pay the tax," or, "No, it is not lawful to pay the tax." He did not render a judgment on what the Torah would say about this issue, but He did essentially answer the question by saying that Caesar's money should be given to Caesar. God's people are to submit to the rulers of their nation, even if those rulers are godless.

When they heard the answer that Jesus had given the Pharisees and Herodians were amazed and left. They gave up. He had stymied them.

#### Matthew 22:23-33

On that day some Sadducees (who say there is no resurrection) came to Jesus and questioned Him, 24 asking, "Teacher, Moses said, 'IF A MAN DIES HAVING NO CHILDREN, HIS BROTHER AS NEXT OF KIN SHALL MARRY HIS WIFE, AND RAISE UP CHILDREN FOR HIS BROTHER.' 25 "Now there were seven brothers with us; and the first married and died, and having no children left his wife to his brother; 26 so also the second, and the third, down to the seventh. 27 "Last of all, the woman died. 28 "In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife of the seven will she be? For they all had married her." 29 But Jesus answered and said to them, "You are mistaken, not understanding the Scriptures nor the power of God. 30 "For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. 31 "But regarding the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God: 32 'I AM THE GOD OF ABRAHAM, AND THE GOD OF ISAAC, AND THE GOD OF JACOB'? He is not the God of the dead but of the living." 33 When the crowds heard this, they were astonished at His teaching.

It is noted here that the Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection, that is, they did not believe that people would be raised from the dead. Further, we learn in Acts 23:8 that "the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, nor an angel, nor a spirit." They were the party of the high priest and his associates (Acts 5:17). They took their turn in trying to embarrass Jesus with what they thought was a clever and difficult scenario for someone who believed in the resurrection. Their question is based on the law from Deuteronomy 25:5-6, "When brothers live together and one of them dies and has no son, the wife of the deceased shall not be married outside the family to a strange man. Her husband's brother shall go in to her and take her to himself as wife and perform the duty of a husband's brother to her. 6 "It shall be that the firstborn whom she bears shall assume the name of his dead brother, so that his name will not be blotted out from Israel." The Sadducees put forward a scenario wherein seven brothers followed this law and all had the same woman as wife, all died before she did, and then she also died, leaving no children behind (Mark 12:22). So the question is, "In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife of the seven will she be? For they all had married her." She could only be the wife of one man, so which one would she belong to? The first? The last? To the Sadducees this seemed like an insuperable problem for one who believed in the resurrection of the dead.

In answer, Jesus first states that they are mistaken. The word for "mistaken" is *planaō*, to stray, to roam or wander. They had strayed from the truth because they didn't understand the Scriptures or the power of God. Clearly these men knew and used the Scriptures. They had just quoted from Deuteronomy 25 as the basis of their question. But they had strayed from truly seeing and understanding the Scriptures. He explained that those who are raised from the dead do not marry nor are they given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. Luke

records a more lengthy answer in Luke 20:34-36 "The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage, 35 but those who are considered worthy to attain to that age and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry nor are given in marriage; 36 for they cannot even die anymore, because they are like angels, and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection." This age is different from that age, and in the age of the resurrection there is no marriage. The Sadducees assumed that the doctrine of the resurrection required a continuation of the marital relationship, but Jesus simply says that it doesn't work that way. Those who are worthy to attain the resurrection can't die anymore, are like the angels, are sons of God and sons of the resurrection. There is a different state in the resurrection, and there is no need for marriage.

Then Jesus proceeded to prove to them that the resurrection of the dead is clearly taught in the Scriptures. God had said in Exodus 3:6, "I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." Hadn't these men read this? Surely they had! This was spoken to them by God Himself! Though God spoke these words to Moses, He was also speaking to these men as well. God spoke in the past directly to men and He still speaks the same words to us today through the Scriptures. Jesus pointed out, "He is not the God of the dead but of the living." Again Luke gives us more detail in Luke 20:37-38, "But that the dead are raised, even Moses showed, in the passage about the burning bush, where he calls the Lord THE GOD OF ABRAHAM, AND THE GOD OF ISAAC, AND THE GOD OF JACOB. 38 "Now He is not the God of the dead but of the living; for all live to Him." The resurrection is an idea that shows up early in the Scriptures, in the second book in the Bible. It is not a "late" idea that evolved over time and only shows up in the New Testament. True, there is more about the resurrection in the New Testament than in the old, but the idea that the godly will continue to live in God's presence is taught throughout the Scriptures. Though at the time of Moses Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had died, still they lived in God's presence. He was still their God and they still were alive in Him.

This passage raises the issue of sexuality in heaven. It appears that procreation will no longer take place among those who are raised from the dead, and thus marriage and sexual union will no longer be necessary. I do not think that we will be sexless in heaven, that is, men will still be men and women will still be women. We will still fully be who and what we are but in a sinless state. But it appears that sexual intercourse is not something that will be taking place. In a world and culture where sexual pleasure is the primary pursuit for so many, this may seem to be a great disappointment and an undesirable state. I think it's important to remember that with God there are greater pleasures and joys than sexual pleasures. Psalm 16:11 says, "You will make known to me the path of life; in Your presence is fullness of joy; in Your right hand there are pleasures forever." No true joy and no true pleasure will be missing in heaven.

#### Matthew 22:34-40

But when the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered themselves together. 35 One of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, 36 "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" 37 And He said to him, "YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND." 38 "This is the great and foremost commandment. 39 "The second is like it, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.' 40 "On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets."

The Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees and had shown them that Moses did teach the resurrection of the dead, and so in this respect stood with the Pharisees doctrinally. One of these Pharisees came forward to ask Jesus another question as a test, to see how Jesus would answer. This Pharisee was a lawyer, an expert in the Mosaic Law who had given his life over to the study of the Law. He asked the question like a professor in a class would ask a question, knowing already what he thought the answer should be. Would Jesus answer correctly? His question was, "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" Of all the commandments in the Law, which one rises to the top as the greatest and most important? This was the question.

Jesus answered such a direct question directly. The greatest commandment is, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." The commandment is found in Deuteronomy 6:4-5 "Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might." Jesus said, "This is the great and foremost commandment." The word for "foremost" is *prōtos*, first or chief. Our word prototype comes from this. There is one commandment that rises to the top and is the greatest and first, foremost and chief commandment, and it is that of loving the Lord God wholeheartedly. All of the other commandments of God depend on this one. If we do not observe this commandment we will not observe the others. Love and respect for the Lord will move us to obey His other commands. Sometimes we obey authority out of fear, but God wants us to obey Him out of love for Him. Our love for Him is to be total, 100 percent, with all the heart, all the soul and all the mind. We should recall what Jesus said in Matthew 10:37, "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me."

The lawyer hadn't asked about the second greatest commandment, but Jesus gives it to him anyway, "The second is like it, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets." These two commandments go hand-in-hand to cover what all the other laws require. The command to "love your neighbor" is found in Leviticus 19:18. It is the end of a paragraph that talks about how one is to behave toward one's neighbor, and summarizes what is being said. It is instructive to read the whole paragraph from Leviticus 19:9-18:

'Now when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very corners of your field, nor shall you gather the gleanings of your harvest. 10 'Nor shall you glean your vineyard, nor shall you gather the fallen fruit of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the needy and for the stranger. I am the LORD your God. 11 'You shall not steal, nor deal falsely, nor lie to one another. 12 'You shall not swear falsely by My name, so as to profane the name of your God; I am the LORD. 13 'You shall not oppress your neighbor, nor rob him. The wages of a hired man are not to remain with you all night until morning. 14 'You shall not curse a deaf man, nor place a stumbling block before the blind, but you shall revere your God; I am the LORD. 15 'You shall do no injustice in judgment; you shall not be partial to the poor nor defer to the great, but you are to judge your neighbor fairly. 16 'You shall not go about as a slanderer among your people, and you are not to act against the life of your neighbor; I am the LORD. 17 'You shall not hate your fellow countryman in your heart; you may surely reprove your neighbor, but shall not incur sin because of him. 18 'You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the LORD.

Paul also talks about this principle in Romans 13:8-10, "Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. 9 For this, 'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY, YOU SHALL NOT MURDER, YOU SHALL NOT STEAL, YOU SHALL NOT COVET,' and if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.' 10 Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law." The command to love one's neighbor as oneself, then, is a summation of all the laws touching on human relationships. If we love our neighbor as ourselves we fulfill the law.

In Matthew this is the end of the subject, but Mark records that the lawyer, the scribe, responded. Mark 12:32-34 says, "The scribe said to Him, 'Right, Teacher; You have truly stated that HE IS ONE, AND THERE IS NO ONE ELSE BESIDES HIM; 33 AND TO LOVE HIM WITH ALL THE HEART AND WITH ALL THE UNDERSTANDING AND WITH ALL THE STRENGTH, AND TO LOVE ONE'S NEIGHBOR AS HIMSELF, is much more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.' 34 When Jesus saw that he had answered intelligently, He said to him, 'You are not far from the kingdom of God.' After that, no one would venture to ask Him any more questions." The scribe had asked the question to test and see if Jesus would answer correctly, and Jesus had answered correctly. Jesus was an accurate teacher. The scribe acknowledged that He was right and affirmed His words. Jesus had passed his test. In addition to repeating what Jesus had said about the two most important commandments, the scribe made an allusion to 1 Samuel 15:22, "Has the LORD as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices As in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, And to heed than the fat of rams." Obedience to these two commands is far more important than sacrifices and rituals.

The first obligation of all people is to love the Lord. If we don't do this, then nothing else will be right in our lives. Our second obligation is to love others. This is the simple summary of what God commands and is the answer to the question, "What am I supposed to do?"

#### Matthew 22:41-46

Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them a question: 42 "What do you think about the Christ, whose son is He?" They \*said to Him, "The son of David." 43 He \*said to them, "Then how does David in the Spirit call Him 'Lord,' saying, 44 'THE LORD SAID TO MY LORD, "SIT AT MY RIGHT HAND, UNTIL I PUT YOUR ENEMIES BENEATH YOUR FEET"'? 45 "If David then calls Him 'Lord,' how is He his son?" 46 No one was able to answer Him a word, nor did anyone dare from that day on to ask Him another question.

Having answered questions, Jesus now has a question of His own for the Pharisees. First there is a setup question that paves the way for the big question. Jesus asked, "What do you think about the Christ, whose son is He?" They answered correctly on a human level and said, "The son of David." The Christ, the Messiah, was to be a descendant of David and therefore his "son." The first verse in Matthew says that Jesus was the "son of David," and then he goes on to trace out His genealogy to establish the fact. This was common knowledge among the Jews, that the Messiah was to be a descendant of David. The Pharisees gave the correct answer.

Having established the fact that the Christ was to be the son of David, Jesus then asked the big question, "Then how does David in the Spirit call Him 'Lord,' saying, 'The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at My right hand, until I put Your enemies beneath Your feet"'? If David then calls Him 'Lord,' how is He his son?" How is it that David calls one of his descendants "Lord"? How

can a son of David also be the Lord of David? I would not call my son, my grandson or my great-grandson "Lord." They are not greater than me and I am not subject to them, yet David calls this "son" of his "Lord." Why does he do that? That is the question.

The quote comes from Psalm 110:1 and is directly quoted five times in the New Testament (Matthew 22:44, Mark 12:36, Luke 20:42, Acts 2:34 and Hebrews 1:13), and is alluded to numerous other times. It was understood by the Jews to be a reference to the Messiah, the King descended from David who would sit at God's right hand and rule forever. In the Greek text of Matthew 22:44 the same word for "Lord," *kurios*, is used twice, and so it is properly translated, "The Lord said to my Lord." However if we look at the Hebrew text of Psalm 110:1 we find that two different words are used. The first instance is *Yahweh* or *Jehovah*, the proper name for God, the name that God gave to Moses when Moses asked for His name (Exodus 3:14-15). The second instance is *Adonay*, Lord. So it was Jehovah who said to David's "Lord," "Sit at My right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for Your feet." God the Father told the Son to take His seat at His right hand to rule over His enemies. His enemies will be made subject to Him.

There are many other references to Jesus being exalted to the right hand of God in the New Testament. In Matthew 26:63-64 it says, "But Jesus kept silent. And the high priest said to Him, 'I adjure You by the living God, that You tell us whether You are the Christ, the Son of God.' 64 Jesus said to him, 'You have said it yourself; nevertheless I tell you, hereafter you will see THE SON OF MAN SITTING AT THE RIGHT HAND OF POWER, and COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF HEAVEN.'" Peter, in Acts 2:32-36 says, "This Jesus God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses. 33 "Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth this which you both see and hear. 34 "For it was not David who ascended into heaven, but he himself says: 'THE LORD SAID TO MY LORD, "SIT AT MY RIGHT HAND, 35 UNTIL I MAKE YOUR ENEMIES A FOOTSTOOL FOR YOUR FEET.'" 36 "Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ--this Jesus whom you crucified." Again, in Acts 5:31 Peter and the apostles said to the Sanhedrin, "He is the one whom God exalted to His right hand as a Prince and a Savior, to grant repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins." In Acts 7:55-56 it says of Stephen, "But being full of the Holy Spirit, he gazed intently into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God; 56 and he said, 'Behold, I see the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.'" Paul also writes in Romans 8:34, "who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us." Paul also speaks of Jesus being at the right hand of God in Ephesians 1:20 and Colossians 3:1. The book of Hebrews mentions it also in Hebrews 1:3, 1:13, 8:1, 10:12, and 12:2. 1 Peter 3:22 says that Jesus "is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, after angels and authorities and powers had been subjected to Him." God has exalted Jesus and given Him the name above every name so that every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord (Philippians 2:9-11). The Son rules alongside the Father, and no one else can or will occupy this position.

The Lord at the right hand of Yahweh has enemies. Not everyone is friendly toward Jesus Christ. Many, perhaps most, are antagonistic toward him and many are hostile. He said that people would hate Him and hate His followers (Matthew 10:22). He warned the apostles that they would even have enemies from within their own families (Matthew 10:36). In the "Parable of the Minas" in Luke 19:12-27, Jesus tells of a nobleman who went away to a distant country to receive authority as king over his region. His citizens hated him and sent a delegation to say, "We do not want this man to reign over us." Their attempt to prevent him from becoming king failed, and he did receive authority as king and when he returned, he said, "But these

enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them, bring them here and slay them in my presence.” The parable is clearly depicting what was going to happen with Jesus. He would depart, receive full authority as King at the Father’s right hand, and then He will return and bring judgment upon His enemies.

Paul also says in Romans 5:10 that before we were reconciled to God through the death of God’s Son we were all His enemies. The enemies of God and of His Son must either be reconciled or “put under His feet.” Writing about the resurrection and speaking of the sequence of events, Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:22-28, “For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. 23 But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ’s at His coming, 24 then comes the end, when He hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power. 25 For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. 26 The last enemy that will be abolished is death. 27 For HE HAS PUT ALL THINGS IN SUBJECTION UNDER HIS FEET. But when He says, “All things are put in subjection,” it is evident that He is excepted who put all things in subjection to Him. 28 When all things are subjected to Him, then the Son Himself also will be subjected to the One who subjected all things to Him, so that God may be all in all.” If we do not willingly acknowledge and embrace the rule of Christ, we will be forcibly made subject to it and “abolished.” The word Paul used in 1 Corinthians 15:24 and 26 is *katargeō*, “to render idle or inoperative, to cause to cease, to put an end to” (Thayer’s Greek Definitions). The rulers, authorities and powers of this world will be abolished, and finally death itself, the great enemy, will be abolished as well. Every power, institution, nation and individual opposed to the reign of Christ will be done away with and nullified. It is a futile thing to oppose Jesus Christ (see Psalm 2). It is not wise to stubbornly continue as an enemy of Christ.

So now back to the question. If David calls his son, the Christ, “Lord,” then how is He his son? What is the answer to this? What point is Jesus trying to make and reveal to these men? The point is that Jesus is, in fact, both the son of David and the Lord of David because He is God incarnate. He is fully God and fully man, the Son of God and the Son of Man. He has been God the Son throughout all eternity. He existed before David, created David and all people, and took on flesh when He was born of Mary, a descendant of David. Therefore He is both Lord of David and the son of David. In His divinity He is David’s Lord, in His humanity He is David’s son.

Apparently the Pharisees did not understand this truth, as they were unable to answer His question. We can see this truth as we study the New Testament and find there the answer, but they couldn’t see it. They lost their courage to ask Him any more questions. Whenever they tried to trap Him by asking questions He frustrated them, so they finally gave up.

#### Matthew 23:1-12

Then Jesus spoke to the crowds and to His disciples, 2 saying: "The scribes and the Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses; 3 therefore all that they tell you, do and observe, but do not do according to their deeds; for they say things and do not do them. 4 "They tie up heavy burdens and lay them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are unwilling to move them with so much as a finger. 5 "But they do all their deeds to be noticed by men; for they broaden their phylacteries and lengthen the tassels of their garments. 6 "They love the place of honor at banquets and the chief seats in the synagogues, 7 and respectful greetings in the market places, and being called Rabbi by men. 8 "But do not be called Rabbi; for One is your Teacher, and you are all brothers. 9 "Do not call anyone on

earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven. 10 "Do not be called leaders; for One is your Leader, that is, Christ. 11 "But the greatest among you shall be your servant. 12 "Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted.

Jesus now, throughout most of this chapter, gives a scathing rebuke to the scribes and Pharisees. He will issue seven "woes" upon them for their hypocrisy and evil behavior (eight if you include verse 14, which appears to have been imported from Mark or Luke). Verses 1-12 set up this litany of woes.

Jesus said these things to the crowds and to the disciples as He was there in Jerusalem, probably as He was teaching in the temple. Jesus first pointed out that the scribes and Pharisees had "seated themselves in the chair of Moses." Typically Jewish rabbis sat down to teach. We saw Jesus do this in Matthew 13 when He sat down in the boat and began to tell parables. The scribes and Pharisees were teaching the Law of Moses, which was sound material. They weren't teaching falsehood, as the Sadducees were. They were very concerned about the Law of Moses and about understanding it and transmitting it accurately. So Jesus tells the people to pay attention to their teaching and to observe what they said. The teaching of the scribes and Pharisees was not to be rejected, since it came directly from Moses. God had spoken through Moses and therefore His words were to be obeyed.

The trouble with the scribes and Pharisees was that they taught the Law of Moses but did not do the Law of Moses. Jesus says, "do not do according to their deeds; for they say things and do not do them." Listen to what they say, but do not follow their example. In their teaching they tied up heavy burdens and laid them on men's shoulders, but at the same time they were unwilling to move those burdens themselves with even a finger. The Law of Moses is burdensome. There is a heavy weight of requirements put on men's shoulders due to all of the laws of the Old Testament. As we saw previously in our study of chapter 11, some of these Pharisees who later had believed in Jesus still wanted to put these burdens on the shoulders of the Gentile believers. At the church council in Jerusalem in Acts 15, they said, "It is necessary to circumcise them and to direct them to observe the Law of Moses" (verse 5). Their idea was that the Gentiles could not be saved unless they did this. Peter stood up and pointed out that when he was sent to share the gospel with Gentiles, they believed and God gave them the Holy Spirit and cleansed their hearts by faith. Then Peter asked, "Now therefore why do you put God to the test by placing upon the neck of the disciples a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear?" (verse 10). Circumcision and law-keeping is not the basis for salvation, but faith in Jesus Christ and His shed blood on the cross. Law-keeping will never save anyone, because we are incapable of keeping the Law perfectly; it is an unbearable burden that is too heavy for us. But Jesus had said that they could come to Him and find rest for their souls because "My yoke is easy and My burden is light" (Matthew 11:30). Compared to the Pharisees, the burden Jesus lays upon people is easy and light.

Good teachers not only tell others what is to be done, but they do it themselves. They teach by example as well as by word. They tell someone how to do something and then show them how to do it. The practices they prescribe are the practices they observe themselves. They "walk the talk."

Why did the scribes and Pharisees do the things they did? Jesus has pointed this out before in Matthew 6. In all of their deeds their motive was "to be noticed by men." Their piety was not sincere, but was an act, a pretense designed to draw attention to themselves and to impress others.



Jesus then mentioned some of the things they did because they wanted to be noticed by men. First, they “broadened their phylacteries.” The Greek word is *phulaktērion*, which Thayer’s Greek Definitions says first means “a fortified place provided with a garrison, a station for a guard or garrison.” But then it also goes on to give a second definition, “a preservative or safeguard, an amulet. The Jews used this word to describe small strips of parchment on which were written the following passages of the law of Moses, Exodus 13:1-10, Exodus 13:11-16; Deuteronomy 6:4-9; and Deuteronomy 11:13-21.” They took literally the command in Exodus 13:9, “And it shall serve as a sign to you on your hand, and as a reminder on your forehead, that the law of the LORD may be in your mouth; for with a powerful hand the LORD brought you out of Egypt.” These strips of parchment were put into small leather boxes called *tephillin* and were tied to the forehead and the left arm. Observant Jewish men still wear these things today and they can be purchased online. The scribes and Pharisees enlarged their phylacteries to show how serious they were about the Law.

Second, they would “lengthen the tassels of their garments.” The Lord commanded that they should make these tassels on the corners of their garments in Numbers 15:37-40, “The LORD also spoke to Moses, saying, 38 ‘Speak to the sons of Israel, and tell them that they shall make for themselves tassels on the corners of their garments throughout their generations, and that they shall put on the tassel of each corner a cord of blue. 39 It shall be a tassel for you to look at and remember all the commandments of the LORD, so as to do them and not follow after your own heart and your own eyes, after which you played the harlot, 40 so that you may remember to do all My commandments and be holy to your God.’” Even Jesus wore a garment with these tassels, according to Matthew 9:20, where it says the woman with the hemorrhage touched “the fringe of His cloak.” The scribes and Pharisees lengthened these things so they would be noticed and their piety would be acknowledged. A.T. Robertson comments, “Here again the Jewish rabbi had minute rules about the number of the fringes and the knots. They made a virtue of the size of the fringes also.” God did mean that they should literally wear these tassels or fringes as a reminder of His commandments, but there was no special virtue in making them longer or larger than those of others.

Third, Jesus mentions four things that the scribes and Pharisees love. They love the place of honor at banquets, the chief seats in the synagogues, respectful greetings in the market places, and being called Rabbi. They love to occupy the positions where they will be honored and be seen as someone important. The words “place of honor” translates the Greek word *prōtoklisia*, from *protos*, foremost or first, and *klisia*, to recline. When they ate, they actually reclined at the table. The words “chief seats” translate the word *prōtokathedria*, the foremost or first seat. They loved the VIP seating. It’s interesting that we still do this sort of thing today at Christian concerts and events. Those who have money can buy the VIP experience and actually meet the famous people backstage. The scribes and Pharisees loved and sought to take these positions for themselves.

They loved to hear people honor them. They loved to be greeted respectfully in public and be recognized as someone of prominence and importance. Probably the respectful greeting involved being called “Rabbi.” Prominent famous people often love and seek the public recognition that comes from their fame. It is an ego boost to be recognized as someone special.

Back in chapter 20 when James and John came to Jesus with their mother to ask for the chief seats in the kingdom, Jesus had said to the disciples, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.” So now again He

says to them that they should not seek to be called Rabbi because they all have one Teacher and they are all brothers. Jesus is the Teacher, the Master, the real Rabbi, and believers are all His students and brothers and sisters of one another. Among brothers it is usually an irritant when one asserts that he is greater than the others, and it causes conflict. In the community of believers we all stand as equals before our one Lord and Teacher.

In verse 9 Jesus switches from what “we” are called to what we call others. We are not to call someone on earth “father,” because we have One who is our Father, the Father in heaven. In saying this I don’t think Jesus means that we don’t call our true earthly fathers “father.” It is an objective reality that they are our fathers. Zebedee was acknowledged as the father of James and John (Matthew 4:21-22). Jesus affirmed that people are to observe the command to honor their father and mother (Matthew 15:3-6). But Jesus did put an emphasis on God as our heavenly Father, the ultimate Father, and said that we are to love Him above our earthly father (Matthew 10:37). I think Jesus means that we are not to give any man other than our actual fathers the title “father.” This is interesting considering the tradition in some branches of Christianity where priests are called “father.” This seems a clear violation of what Jesus says here.

In verse 10 Jesus returns to the passive verb and says, “Do not be called leaders; for One is your Leader, that is, Christ.” A.T. Robertson, in his Word Pictures, has an interesting note on the word translated “leaders” here:

**Masters** (*kathēgētai*). This word occurs here only in the N.T. It is found in the papyri for teacher (Latin, *doctor*). It is the modern Greek word for professor. “While *didaskalos* represents *Rab*, *kathēgētes* stands for the more honourable *Rabban*, ‘*bōn*” (McNeile). Dalman (*Words of Jesus*, p. 340) suggests that the same Aramaic word may be translated by either *didaskalos* or *kathēgētes*.

The English Standard Bible translates it “instructors,” and the King James has “masters.” Apparently it is a more exalted term than “rabbi” or “teacher.” There is only One who is worthy of this title, and that is Christ Himself. The Messiah, the Christ, the King is the one who is the true Leader, Doctor, Professor and Master.

The greatest among the followers of Christ is the one who is a servant of others and not the one who is served by others. Then Jesus gives us this great rule or principle in verse 12, “Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted.” There is little doubt that He repeated this statement more than once. It occurs on two other occasions in the gospel of Luke. In Luke 14:11 Jesus says this in the context of the parable of the wedding feast, where He advises people to take the lowest and last place at the feast so that the one who invited them might say, “Friend, move up higher” (Luke 14:10). He says it again in Luke 18:14 in the parable of the Pharisee and tax-collector who were praying at the temple. The tax-collector humbled himself and said, “God, be merciful to me, the sinner.” Jesus said, “I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted.” So this principle is, if you will, a spiritual law in the kingdom of God. The one who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted. If we advance ourselves over others as the scribes and Pharisees did, we will be humbled by God. If we humble ourselves like the tax-collector and take a lowly servant position, then God will exalt us. If we are inclined to seek a high position for ourselves we need to take heed to these words. Why do we want to be the top dog? Why do we want to be noticed and respected and recognized?

Our pride needs to be defeated so that we can see and occupy our proper position before God and others.

Matthew 23:13-36

"But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you shut off the kingdom of heaven from people; for you do not enter in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in. 14 ["Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you devour widows' houses, and for a pretense you make long prayers; therefore you will receive greater condemnation.] 15 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you travel around on sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves. 16 "Woe to you, blind guides, who say, 'Whoever swears by the temple, that is nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the temple is obligated.' 17 "You fools and blind men! Which is more important, the gold or the temple that sanctified the gold? 18 "And, 'Whoever swears by the altar, that is nothing, but whoever swears by the offering on it, he is obligated.' 19 "You blind men, which is more important, the offering, or the altar that sanctifies the offering? 20 "Therefore, whoever swears by the altar, swears both by the altar and by everything on it. 21 "And whoever swears by the temple, swears both by the temple and by Him who dwells within it. 22 "And whoever swears by heaven, swears both by the throne of God and by Him who sits upon it. 23 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others. 24 "You blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel! 25 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside they are full of robbery and self-indulgence. 26 "You blind Pharisee, first clean the inside of the cup and of the dish, so that the outside of it may become clean also. 27 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. 28 "So you, too, outwardly appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness. 29 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous, 30 and say, 'If we had been living in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partners with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.' 31 "So you testify against yourselves, that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. 32 "Fill up, then, the measure of the guilt of your fathers. 33 "You serpents, you brood of vipers, how will you escape the sentence of hell? 34 "Therefore, behold, I am sending you prophets and wise men and scribes; some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues, and persecute from city to city, 35 so that upon you may fall the guilt of all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. 36 "Truly I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation.

The litany of woes begins in verse 13, and Jesus will pull no punches here as He chews out the scribes and Pharisees. Jesus will spell out for us why He was so hard on them.

The word "woe" is an interjection, an exclamation of grief, like "alas!" The word is not much in fashion among us today. We might say, "Woe is me!", but probably we would say something more like "Oh no!" or "You're in big trouble!" Note that almost every time Jesus pronounces woe upon them, He calls them hypocrites, except when He talks about swearing oaths in verses 16-22. In Matthew we hear Jesus refer to these men as "hypocrites" 14 times.

It appears to be His primary designation for them. Hypocrisy was their defining characteristic! They were actors, posers and pretenders and not genuinely godly or righteous men.

The first “woe” in verse 13 is pronounced upon them because they “shut off the kingdom of heaven from people; for you do not enter in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in.” In a parallel passage in Luke 11:52 it says, “Woe to you lawyers! For you have taken away the key of knowledge; you yourselves did not enter, and you hindered those who were entering.” The idea is that these men had shut and locked the door into the kingdom from the outside. They would not go in themselves, and they shut others out as well. They hid the knowledge of how to get into the kingdom. They did this by trying to prevent people from believing in Jesus. He is the Messiah, the King, and when people come to Him, believe in Him and submit to Him, they enter the kingdom. The Pharisees and scribes were actively opposed to Jesus and tried to turn people away from Him. As we’ve seen, they refused to believe John the Baptist and they also refused to believe in Jesus. I don’t know if there’s anything people can do that is worse than this. It is one thing to turn away from Christ yourself and refuse to believe, but it is much worse to actively try to prevent others from believing in Him. Those who do this will face a terrible judgment!

The second “woe,” as I mentioned earlier, appears to have been imported into Matthew by a copyist at some point because scholars say it does not occur in the earliest manuscripts of Matthew. The saying occurs in Mark 12:40 and Luke 20:47 in reference to the scribes, and so doubtless it is appropriate that it would fit in this context. Jesus proclaims woe upon them because they “devour widows’ houses.” Despite the fact that God makes it clear in the Law that He has a special concern for widows, these men in some way were taking advantage of widows and taking their property. Perhaps they pretended to be caring for them when they were actually victimizing them. Perhaps it had to do with requiring them to give at the temple what little they had. Widows were completely dependent upon either sons or other family or friends for their sustenance, and it appears that these men were oppressors of widows.

While they devoured widows’ houses they also made long prayers as a pretense. Lengthy prayer is not always an indicator of real piety. The Lord’s model prayer in Matthew 6:9-13 is very short and takes only moments to pray. These men pretended to pray for long periods of time, but they weren’t really praying. In His parable of the tax-collector and the Pharisee in Luke 18:9-14 Jesus depicted the Pharisee as one who was “praying to himself” as he boasted about his virtues. Because of these things they will receive “greater condemnation.” The word for “greater” means “abundant.” There will be lots of condemnation coming their way. Evidently in the judgment there will be degrees of condemnation. Some will receive more condemnation than others. These men deserve more than most people.

Sometimes I feel guilty that I don’t spend more time in prayer. I hear stories of great godly people who get up at four in the morning so that they can pray for three hours before heading to work. I’ve never seemed to be able to do anything approaching that. I’ve heard preachers say that if we can’t pray for half an hour, then we shouldn’t bother. I’ve come to think that how long we pray is not so important as the fact that we do pray and seek communion with the Lord. Sincerity is more important than the length of time spent. If we are setting some sort of timer for prayer and then are relieved when the time has finally expired and we can move on to other things, then we should ask if we really mean it when we pray. Maybe we are just observing a meaningless ritual instead of really talking to the Lord. If I say that I must talk to my wife for half an hour every day in order to be a good husband, and set aside that time during the day and then at the end of the 30 minutes say, “OK, time’s up!” and walk away, I’m not sure my wife would think I really cared about talking to her. Prayer is communicating with God, and if we love Him we will want to do it. It won’t be a burdensome chore.

Our word “proselyte” comes right from the Greek *prosēlutos*. The word comes from *prosechomai*, to approach or to come near. Thayer’s Greek Definitions says it denotes “one who has come over from a Gentile religion to Judaism.” I think when it came to the scribes and Pharisees, they not only sought converts to Judaism, but also to Pharisaism. They wanted to make these people like themselves. They traveled around looking not only for God-fearing Gentiles, but for Gentiles who would join the camp of the Pharisees. When a man became a Pharisee, they would make him “twice as much a son of hell” as themselves. Albert Barnes writes:

The Jewish writers themselves say that the proselytes were “scabs of Israel,” and “hindered the coming of the Messiah” by their great wickedness. The Pharisees gained them either to swell their own numbers, or to make gain by extorting their money under various pretences; and when they had accomplished that, they took no pains to instruct them or to restrain them. They had renounced their superstition which had before somewhat restrained them, but the Pharisees had given them no religion in its place to restrain them, and they were consequently left to the full indulgence of their vices. (Albert Barnes’ Notes on the Bible.)

In the Parable of the Wheat and the Tares in Matthew 13:24-43 Jesus told us that there are “sons of the evil one” who are sown in the world by the devil. The Pharisees and their proselytes are classed among them. Sons of the evil one beget sons of the evil one. They do not bring people into the kingdom of God.

The fourth “woe” here has to do with swearing oaths in verses 16-22. Jesus gives two examples of what the scribes and Pharisees would say regarding swearing oaths. They would say, “Whoever swears by the temple, that is nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the temple is obligated.” The second example is “Whoever swears by the altar, that is nothing, but whoever swears by the offering on it, he is obligated.” What did they mean by this? The word for “obligated” is *opheilō*, meaning “to owe, to be in debt.” The King James Version says, “Whosoever shall swear by the temple, it is nothing; but whosoever shall swear by the gold of the temple, he is a debtor.” The English Standard Bible uses the word “bound,” “if anyone swears by the gold of the temple, he is bound by his oath.” In saying these things they were making up loopholes in the Law that people could use to swear oaths that were not binding. If someone did not intend to keep their word, they could swear on the temple or by the altar and they would not be obligated to keep their oath. They could appear to be sincere without really being sincere. But if they swore by the gold of the temple or by the offering on the altar, they would be obligated. They would have to fulfill their word or be guilty. We examined this issue previously when we looked at Matthew 5:33-37 where Jesus said that we should not make vows and take oaths at all, but rather should simply mean sincerely what we say.

Jesus asked, “Which is more important, the gold or the temple that sanctified the gold?” And, “which is more important, the offering, or the altar that sanctifies the offering?” He is asking which is greater (the Greek word is *meGas*), and the answers are obvious. The temple that sanctifies the gold in it is greater. The altar that sanctifies the offering on it is greater. When you swear by the temple or the altar you are swearing by the greater thing, not the lesser thing. For some reason these scribes and Pharisees were blind to this obvious truth. Note how often Jesus points to their blindness in verses 16, 17, 19, 24 and 26. They are blind guides. The blind need to be guided by someone who can see and can’t serve as reliable guides themselves. Jesus had pointed this out before in Matthew 15:14 regarding the Pharisees, “They are blind guides of the blind. And if a blind man guides a blind man, both will fall into a pit.” To follow the teaching of these men regarding oaths would be disastrous.

Jesus points to the implications in verses 20-22. If you swear by the altar, you swear by the altar and the offering on it. If you swear by the temple, you swear by the temple and Him who lives in it. If you swear by heaven, you swear by the throne of God and the One who sits upon it. In any case you are obligated. God will hold you liable for your oaths whatever you swear by or upon; He will hold you to your word. He will expect you to pay your vow.

In addition to calling them “blind men” Jesus also called them “fools” in verse 17. This is interesting because in Matthew 5:22 He had said, “whoever says, ‘You fool,’ shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell.” Now here is Jesus using the same word (*moros*) to describe these men. The fact is that there are people who are fools. Jesus said that the foolish man builds his house on the sand in Matthew 7:26. In His parable of the ten virgins Jesus describes five of them as foolish because they failed to bring extra oil for their lamps (Matthew 25:2). Jesus could judge these men to be fools because of their foolish teaching and behavior. We can discern foolish people by their foolish words and foolish behavior. What they were saying about swearing oaths was foolish teaching taught by fools. It was stupid and absurd. Jesus was right to call these men fools.

In His fifth “woe,” Jesus denounces the way that the scribes and Pharisees would tithe from even the herbs of their gardens, mint, dill and cummin, but neglected “weightier provisions of the law” like justice, mercy and faithfulness. In Deuteronomy 14:22 the Lord commanded, “You shall surely tithe all the produce from what you sow, which comes out of the field every year.” The tithe was a tenth of what was produced, and Jesus pointed out that these men were scrupulous in giving one tenth of these herbs. Note that Jesus does not say it was wrong for them to do this, but it was a big mistake to think that being careful about doing this would compensate for overlooking more important aspects of the Law. They might congratulate themselves for their faithfulness and care in tithing on everything they received, but they faced condemnation for neglecting things that were much more important. They neglected heavier things.

The first weightier thing they neglected was justice. The word is *krisis*, a decision or judgment. Justice concerns itself with right judgment. It is unjust to punish the innocent and acquit the guilty. When the Pharisees criticized the disciples of Jesus for picking grain and eating it on the Sabbath, Jesus said to them, “But if you had known what this means, ‘I desire compassion, and not a sacrifice,’ you would not have condemned the innocent. For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath” (Matthew 12:7-8). On that occasion the Pharisees had neglected justice, they had judged incorrectly and unfairly and had condemned men who were innocent because they didn’t understand what God had said. We are liable to make unjust judgments if we don’t understand God’s word.

The second thing they neglected was mercy. I like the definition in Thayer’s Greek Definitions, “kindness or good will towards the miserable and the afflicted, joined with a desire to help them.” The scribes and Pharisees were about judgment of others, but were not about mercy. The Pharisee had no mercy toward the tax-collector. They cared about condemning people, not saving them. Woe to us if we are more concerned with condemning than with saving, with judgment rather than mercy!

The third neglected thing was faithfulness. A faithful person is someone who can be counted upon, someone who sticks with their commitments. They are at work on time every day and carry out their responsibilities without having to be nagged or hounded or threatened or supervised. If they have said they will do something, they will do it. If they are supposed to carry out a task, it will be carried out. The scribes and Pharisees said things but didn’t do them. They made vows and swore oaths, but did not fulfill them. They were models of unfaithfulness.

We shouldn't miss the principle here that some "provisions of the Law" are indeed weightier than others. Compassion is more important than sacrifice. The command that we love the Lord our God with all our heart and soul and mind is the greatest commandment, and loving our neighbor as ourselves is the second (Matthew 22:37-40). When it comes to keeping the Law, we should emphasize and pursue first the greatest of the commandments. Too many people think they are good Christians because they attend church, give, sing the songs and take communion. These things should be done, but we must also pursue a real relationship with the Lord and care for others around us.

I think verse 24 ties into verse 23, "You blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!" Both gnats and camels were unclean, and the Jews were not to eat them, and so they were careful to strain their wine so they wouldn't inadvertently swallow an insect (Vincent's Word Studies). At the same time, though, they swallowed camels. The word for "swallow" means, "to drink down, swallow down." This is another of Jesus' absurd, hyperbolic pictures we've heard Him use before. Of course no one could really swallow a camel, but it is a picture of what they did when they were fastidious about tithing herbs while at the same time neglecting justice, mercy and faithfulness. This is similar to what He said about the man who tried to remove specks from another man's eye while overlooking the log that is in his own eye (Matthew 7:3-5). It is much easier for us to nitpick about small issues than to deal with weightier and more significant things.

The next two "woes" in verses 25-28 deal with the outward appearance of the scribes and Pharisees in contrast to their true inner character. They cleaned the outside of the cup and dish, but neglected to wash the inside. Of course it's the inside that matters most because that's where the food and drink goes. If you only wash the outside of your cups and bowls it won't be long until the inside is pretty nasty and contaminated. Similarly, Jesus says, they are like whitewashed tombs that look beautiful on the outside, but inside they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. No matter how beautiful a tomb is, it is still a tomb, a place of death and decay. Inwardly the scribes and Pharisees were "full of robbery and self-indulgence" (verse 25) and "hypocrisy and lawlessness" (verse 28). The word translated "self-indulgence" is *akrasia*, meaning a lack of self-control or a lack of power. The self-indulgent person is one who lacks self-control. He does not restrain his lusts and urges and does what he feels regardless of how it impacts others. Despite the appearance of righteousness outwardly, these men were full of lawlessness. They pretended at righteousness. Really they did not care for God's Law at all. This is why they made up loopholes which became part of their tradition, in order to negate the Law of God.

Hypocrisy is all about having an appearance to others that does not match the inward reality that God sees. These men appeared righteous to men, but the Lord knew their hearts and their inward character, and so He strongly denounced them. When the Lord sent Samuel to anoint one of Jesse's sons as the next king to succeed Saul, Samuel was very impressed with Eliab. He thought for certain that Eliab was the one, but then it says in 1 Samuel 16:7, "But the LORD said to Samuel, 'Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.'" The heart is the important thing, not the outward appearance. To varying degrees we are all good at pretending to be something we are not. The Lord wants us to face up to our true inward character and deal with it.

Jesus gave these men a prescription, "first clean the inside of the cup and of the dish, so that the outside of it may become clean also." Again, this is the same thing He said about the log in the eye of the hypocrite that must be removed so that they might see. True outward cleanliness depends on true inward cleanliness. 1 John 1:7 tells us that "if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another and the blood of

Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.” Then in 1 John 1:9 he says, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” We are cleansed through the blood of Christ as we confess our sins. We must come to Him confessing our sins in order to be forgiven and cleansed. The scribes and Pharisees were not cleansed because they thought they were righteous and did not need to confess sin or seek forgiveness. They would not see nor admit that they were sinners and unclean.

The eighth and last “woe” is in verse 29. The scribes and Pharisees were building the tombs of the prophets and adorning the monuments of the righteous. The verbs “build” and “adorn” are present active verbs. They were then building these tombs and adorning these monuments. They were honoring the prophets and the righteous of the past by doing these things. There is literally a place on a slope of the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem called “The Tomb of the Prophets” that has been dated to the first century. It honors the prophets Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi. Here is a link to the Wikipedia article:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tomb\\_of\\_the\\_Prophets\\_Haggai,\\_Zechariah\\_and\\_Malachi](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tomb_of_the_Prophets_Haggai,_Zechariah_and_Malachi)

Vincent’s Word Studies suggests that this tomb may have been within sight of Jesus as He spoke these words. He may have been able to point toward this place as He pronounced woe upon these men.

As they built these tombs and adorned these monuments, the scribes and Pharisees said, “If we had been living in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partners with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.” They claimed that they were not the kind of men that their fathers had been. They claimed they certainly would not have participated in the killing of the prophets, but they honored the prophets. In making this claim, Jesus says that they were testifying against themselves and admitting that they were the sons of those who killed the prophets. They inherited the legacy and attitude of their fathers. Jesus invites them to “Fill up, then, the measure of the guilt of your fathers.” The words “the guilt of” are inserted by the NASB translators. Literally it says, “Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers.” The “measure” of their fathers was not yet “full.” The “measure” was a vessel for measuring the quantity of things, like a quart measuring pitcher. He tells them to fill it up. It will fill up as they put Him to death and then continue to kill and persecute those He will send to them. Jesus says that He is going to send them prophets and wise men and scribes, some of whom they will kill, crucify, scourge and persecute. They will do as their fathers had done, rejecting the prophets and their message. They will not be cleansed on the inside, but will follow the path of their fathers.

Jesus echoes the words of John the Baptist in verse 33, “You serpents, you brood of vipers, how will you escape the sentence of hell?” When John saw the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to him, he had said, “You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?” (Matthew 3:7). After the Pharisees had accused Jesus of casting out demons using the power of Satan, Jesus said in Matthew 12:34, “You brood of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak what is good? For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart.” These men were snakes and the offspring of vipers, which represent Satan himself. They were “sons of hell” and would not escape the sentence of hell. Wrath was coming upon them and the sentence of hell had been determined for them and they would not be able to flee or escape. They had rejected the One who was the only means of escape. They would go to the place where they belonged with the one to whom they belonged.

It is a gravely serious thing to reject Jesus Christ. He is the one way to the Father and the one Savior. If we turn from Him there is nowhere else to flee from God’s wrath and no way to escape the sentence of hell.



Even though they had rejected Christ, He will still send them more prophets, wise men and scribes. They will continue to hear the message from His apostles and messengers. The scribes and Pharisees will reject them as well. They will continue to turn a deaf ear to the Lord and refuse to repent and turn to Him. Jesus says He will do this “so that upon you may fall the guilt of all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar.” There is a bit of a problem here in Matthew regarding Zechariah. The Zechariah who was murdered between the temple and the altar was not the Zechariah the son of Berechiah who wrote the book of Zechariah, but was an earlier Zechariah, the son of Jehoiada. Zechariah the son of Jehoiada was “stoned to death in the court of the house of the Lord” according to 2 Chronicles 24:20-21. There is no record that the later Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, was put to death. I don’t know for sure why, then, Matthew says that he was the son of Berechiah rather than the son of Jehoiada. The parallel passage in Luke 11:51 does not mention the father of Zechariah. Regarding this, the International Standard Bible Encyclopedia says, “As 2 Chronicles is the last book in the Hebrew Old Testament, Zechariah was regarded as the last of the Old Testament martyrs, and hence, is coupled with Abel (the first martyr) in Matthew 23:35 parallel Luke 11:51. The words ‘son of Barachiah’ in Matthew are due to confusing this Zechariah with the prophet.”

Jesus is saying that the scribes and Pharisees of His generation would be held liable for the blood of all the righteous of the Old Testament who were murdered, from Abel to Zechariah. There was a concept among the Jews that a man was present in the “loins” of his fathers, his ancestors. We see this idea in Hebrews 7 where the author discusses how Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek. Hebrews 7:9-10 says, “And, so to speak, through Abraham even Levi, who received tithes, paid tithes, for he was still in the loins of his father when Melchizedek met him.” Levi was present there in the loins of Abraham when Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek. I think this is the idea that Jesus is getting at when he says to these scribes and Pharisees that they were the ones who had murdered Zechariah, even though they weren’t born until hundreds of years later. They were there in the loins of their fathers who murdered the prophet. Their murderous fathers were their agents in killing the prophets. The judgment for these murders would come upon that generation. They would fill up the legacy of their fathers by killing Jesus the Messiah, and in 70 AD the Romans would come and destroy Jerusalem.

#### Matthew 23:37-39

"Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling. 38 "Behold, your house is being left to you desolate! 39 "For I say to you, from now on you will not see Me until you say, 'BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD!'"

Jesus now shifts from pronouncing woe upon the scribes and Pharisees to lamenting over the behavior of Jerusalem. I think Jesus is talking not just of the city itself and those who lived there, but of all Israel in general. Jerusalem was the central city for the Jews and the place where they all gathered to worship the Lord at the temple. Jews from all over were gathering for Passover at this time. It is not the place that grieved Him, but the people of the place.

He first states that Jerusalem “kills the prophets and stoned those who are sent to her.” These are parallel ideas. The prophets were those who were sent to Jerusalem, and the city

killed them and stoned them. The prophets were sent by God and brought to the city the message of God, and the people of Jerusalem rejected the message and the messengers. They would not listen to God's message and thought that the problem would go away if they killed His messengers.

Then Jesus expresses that He often wanted to gather Jerusalem's children together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but they would not cooperate. A hen will gather her chicks under her wings in order to shelter and protect them. It is for their good and benefit that she gathers them. A chick that refuses to come under its mother's wings is liable to lose its life. The Lord wanted to gather the people of Israel to Himself for their good, to protect them and provide for them. Twice in this sentence the word *thelō* (or *ethelō*) is used, which means "to will, have in mind, intend" (Thayer). It was often the *will* of Jesus to gather these people, but they were not *willing* to be gathered. They had no intention to submit to His intention; their purpose was at odds with His purpose. He had talked about this in chapter 22 in the parable of the wedding feast and said that those who had been invited "were unwilling to come" (Matthew 22:3). They would not accept His invitation and would not be gathered to Him.

We might ask in light of verse 37 about what it says regarding the "Calvinist" doctrine of "irresistible grace," the idea that the grace of God that saves us is not dependent on our will, but entirely on His will. Salvation is entirely the work of God because we are dead in sin and incapable of making ourselves alive. Salvation is a gracious work of God. Jesus did say in John 6:37, "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out." And again in John 6:44, "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day." John 1:11-13 He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him. 12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, 13 who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God." So then it is not our will that saves us, but God's will. Just after I wrote the above, I found an article about irresistible grace written by R.C. Sproul. He writes:

However, the idea of irresistibility conjures up the idea that one cannot possibly offer any resistance to the grace of God. However, the history of the human race is the history of relentless resistance to the sweetness of the grace of God. Irresistible grace does not mean that God's grace is incapable of being resisted. Indeed, we are capable of resisting God's grace, and we do resist it. The idea is that God's grace is so powerful that it has the capacity to overcome our natural resistance to it. It is not that the Holy Spirit drags people kicking and screaming to Christ against their wills. The Holy Spirit changes the inclination and disposition of our wills, so that whereas we were previously unwilling to embrace Christ, now we are willing, and more than willing. Indeed, we aren't dragged to Christ, we run to Christ, and we embrace Him joyfully because the Spirit has changed our hearts. They are no longer hearts of stone that are impervious to the commands of God and to the invitations of the gospel. God melts the hardness of our hearts when He makes us new creatures. The Holy Spirit resurrects us from spiritual death, so that we come to Christ because we want to come to Christ. The reason we want to come to Christ is because God has already done a work of grace in our souls. Without that work, we would never have any desire to come to Christ. That's why we say that regeneration precedes faith.

I have a little bit of a problem using the term *irresistible* grace, not because I don't believe this classical doctrine, but because it is misleading to many people. Therefore, I

prefer the term *effectual* grace, because the irresistible grace of God effects what God intends it to effect.

The entire article is available at this link: <https://www.ligonier.org/blog/tulip-and-reformed-theology-irresistible-grace/>

So then people do resist the invitation of God. Many are unwilling to do what God wants them to do and turn away. Many will not come to Christ, and this is a grief to Him.

As a result their unwillingness to be gathered to Him, the “house” of Jerusalem is being left “desolate.” He could mean that the temple would be left without the divine presence, that the glory of God would depart from the temple and it would be left without an occupant. Since they would not come to Him, He would desert them. It may be more likely that He means that the city of Jerusalem as a whole would be left desolate. In Luke 19:41-44 it says, “When He approached Jerusalem, He saw the city and wept over it, saying, ‘If you had known in this day, even you, the things which make for peace! But now they have been hidden from your eyes. For the days will come upon you when your enemies will throw up a barricade against you, and surround you and hem you in on every side, and they will level you to the ground and your children within you, and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not recognize the time of your visitation.’” And then also in Luke 21:20 He says, “But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then recognize that her desolation is near.” Jerusalem would be made a desolation by the Romans in 70 AD, fulfilling the word of Jesus. Jesus knew this was going to happen, and so He wept over the city. If they had recognized Him and come to Him, their desolation could have been avoided.

Jesus explains further in verse 39, “For I say to you, from now on you will not see Me until you say, ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!’” The presence of Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God will be removed from them. They will see Him no more until a future date when they will recognize that He is the one who comes in the name of the Lord. The quote appears to come from Psalms 118:26, “Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the LORD; We have blessed you from the house of the LORD.” In the future they will “look on Me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over Him like the bitter weeping over a firstborn” (Zechariah 12:10).

This is probably the last time before His arrest and crucifixion that Jesus spoke publicly in the temple area. From now on He will spend time with His disciples and will withdraw from the public and from the scribes and Pharisees until He is arrested.

#### Matthew 24:1-2

Jesus came out from the temple and was going away when His disciples came up to point out the temple buildings to Him. 2 And He said to them, "Do you not see all these things? Truly I say to you, not one stone here will be left upon another, which will not be torn down."

According to Mark, it was one of the disciples who exclaimed about the greatness of the temple. Mark 13:1-2 says, “As He was going out of the temple, one of His disciples said to Him, ‘Teacher, behold what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!’ 2 And Jesus said to him, ‘Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left upon another which will not be torn down.’” Luke’s version puts it this way, “And while some were talking about the temple, that it was adorned with beautiful stones and votive gifts, He said, ‘As for these things which you are looking at, the days will come in which there will not be left one stone upon another which will not be torn down’” (Luke 21:5-6). The temple which Herod had built was

indeed very magnificent and impressive. Obviously the disciples were impressed by it and proud of it. But Jesus looked ahead to its future destruction. Not one of the magnificent stones of the temple would be left on top of another, but they would all be torn down. The Romans would destroy this temple in 70 AD.

Matthew 24:3-14

As He was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things happen, and what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?" 4 And Jesus answered and said to them, "See to it that no one misleads you. 5 "For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will mislead many. 6 "You will be hearing of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not frightened, for those things must take place, but that is not yet the end. 7 "For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and in various places there will be famines and earthquakes. 8 "But all these things are merely the beginning of birth pangs. 9 "Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations because of My name. 10 "At that time many will fall away and will betray one another and hate one another. 11 "Many false prophets will arise and will mislead many. 12 "Because lawlessness is increased, most people's love will grow cold. 13 "But the one who endures to the end, he will be saved. 14 "This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come.

Jesus now in verse 4 begins a lengthy and very important answer to the question of the disciples, "Tell us, when will these things happen, and what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?" The answer encompasses chapters 24 and 25.

Jesus had departed from the temple for the last time and went and sat on the Mount of Olives with the disciples. He had just told them that in the future the temple would be torn down, and so they were curious about how and when events would unfold. Mark says that it was Peter, James, John and Andrew who were asking this question (Mark 13:3). They asked about the sign of His coming, but Jesus will give them a number of signs for which they should look.

First, He warned them to look out for false Christs. Many will come in His name claiming to be the Christ and they will succeed in misleading many. He warns of this in verses 4 and 5, in verse 11, and again in verse 23 through 26. They will even "show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect." As much as we would like to deny it, people are often easily led astray into falsehood and error. This is the very purpose of Satan himself, to deceive us and lead us away from the Lord. So Jesus commanded them to see to it that they did not allow themselves to be misled by anyone. Paul warned the elders of the church in Ephesus about the same thing in Acts 20:29-30, "I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them." All believers need to be alert to this threat, and especially elders in the church need to be on guard against them.

Second, Jesus says that they would hear of "wars and rumors of wars." Word would come to them that nations were in conflict. As they were to see that they weren't deceived, so they are to see that they are not frightened. The Good News Bible puts it this way, "You are going to hear the noise of battles close by and the news of battles far away; but do not be troubled. Such things must happen, but they do not mean that the end has come." Wars and growing conflicts among nations and peoples do not mean that the end has come. Especially

when these things come close to us it can be frightening and we may think that the end has come, but Jesus assures us that these things are just the “beginning of birth pangs.” They indicate, not the end, but just the beginning signs of the end. Human history is the history of wars and conflicts. Jesus also mentions that there will be famines and earthquakes. There will be man-made and natural disasters. These things must take place. We should not be surprised when these things happen. We should not allow them to shake our faith because Jesus told us they would happen. Human evil and natural calamities confirm the word of Christ. When some terrible thing happens and people suffer and die and we ask why it happened, we should remember that Jesus told us that these things would happen. These things don’t nullify the word of God but confirm it.

A third thing for believers to look for is persecution. In verse 9 Jesus uses the same word for “nations” that He used in verse 7, *ethnos*. The nations that will wage war against each other will also hate those who follow Christ and deliver them to tribulation. It is the policy of some nations to persecute Christians. China, India and Muslim nations are among those who officially oppose Jesus and His followers. Believers will be persecuted, killed and hated because of the name of Jesus Christ. Jesus had told them this previously. He said in Matthew 5:10-12, “Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” In Matthew 10 He told them that they would be “hated by all because of My name” (Matthew 10:22) and that even their family members would be their enemies. He said in the explaining the Parable of the Sower that some will fall away from faith in the word when affliction or persecution arises because of it (Matthew 13:21). Jesus wants us to understand that if we believe in Him, follow Him and proclaim Him we will face hatred and persecution and death. He does not say that we will be kept safe from this. There is no promise from Jesus that we will be exempt from tribulation.

When believers are delivered to tribulation many will fall away as Jesus said. Many will stumble and turn away from the faith and turn against other believers and betray them. Many who had professed faith in Christ will turn from that faith and actually hate those who believe. I just recently saw part of a video about former pastors who have abandoned their faith in Christ and now actively oppose it. These things confirm the word of Christ. Here again, we should not be surprised when this happens. I have often been dismayed by friends who have abandoned their faith in Christ, some of whom even became hostile toward it. But Jesus said that many would do this, and so when we see it happen we know that it must happen. It must not shake our faith when former friends become enemies and turn against us. We must even expect this to happen.

As there will be false Christs, there will be false prophets. Jesus has told us that they wear sheep’s clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves (Matthew 7:15). They will succeed in misleading many. They will say things that are popular and sound good, but are lies and deceptions. They may even call Jesus “Lord” and claim to have done great things in His name, but He will say to them, “I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness” (Matthew 7:21-23). Notice that Jesus here in chapter 24 ties lawlessness with false prophets as He does in chapter 7. The false prophets will lead people into lawlessness. With the increase of falsehood and deception will come an increase in lawlessness. People will turn away from the Law of God and follow the false prophets and their own desires. They will have no interest in doing the will of God and will hate those who do. As falsehood spreads and increases, so lawlessness will spread and increase as well, and the result will be that most people will grow cold in their love. Love will diminish when lawlessness increases. The

Law of God nurtures love, and when we turn from it and disdain it, we turn away from real love. Jesus said that to love God and to love our neighbor is the essence of the Law (Matthew 22:36-40). We must not think that the Law of God is inimical to love.

By contrast Jesus says in verse 13, "But the one who endures to the end, he shall be saved." From the context it seems clear what He means. The one who endures the tribulation and hatred, who does not fall away, who is not misled into lawlessness, who does not allow his love to grow cold, who remains faithful through it all to the end, he will be saved. Evidently those who fall away are not saved. Those who are misled by the false prophets are not saved. Those who abandon their faith in Christ and betray and hate those who retain their faith are not saved.

When is this "end"? The "end" is defined in the next verse, verse 14, "This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come." The end is not in 70 AD with the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. The end comes after the gospel of the kingdom has been preached in the whole world to all the nations. This is the task of those who are followers of Christ, who are subjects of His kingdom. They are to be "fishers of men" (Matthew 4:19) and His witnesses (Acts 1:8), testifying to all the nations of the world about the good news of rule of Jesus Christ. The book of Revelation makes it clear that people from every tribe, tongue, people and nation will be in the kingdom, "And they sang a new song, saying, 'Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation'" (Revelation 5:9). There is no nation or people group or language group or culture that will not hear of the gospel of the kingdom. It is our task as followers of Christ to take this message to every people group on earth, and there is still much to be done. According to the Joshua Project ([joshuaproject.net](http://joshuaproject.net)), there are 17,019 "people groups" in the world. Of those 7,066 (41.5%) have not been reached with the gospel message. Jesus says the end will not come until this task is finished.

#### Matthew 24:15-31

"Therefore when you see the ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), 16 then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains. 17 "Whoever is on the housetop must not go down to get the things out that are in his house. 18 "Whoever is in the field must not turn back to get his cloak. 19 "But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! 20 "But pray that your flight will not be in the winter, or on a Sabbath. 21 "For then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will. 22 "Unless those days had been cut short, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short. 23 "Then if anyone says to you, 'Behold, here is the Christ,' or 'There He is,' do not believe him. 24 "For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect. 25 "Behold, I have told you in advance. 26 "So if they say to you, 'Behold, He is in the wilderness,' do not go out, or, 'Behold, He is in the inner rooms,' do not believe them. 27 "For just as the lightning comes from the east and flashes even to the west, so will the coming of the Son of Man be. 28 "Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather.

29 "But immediately after the tribulation of those days THE SUN WILL BE DARKENED, AND THE MOON WILL NOT GIVE ITS LIGHT, AND THE STARS WILL FALL from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. 30 "And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the SON

OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY with power and great glory. 31 "And He will send forth His angels with A GREAT TRUMPET and THEY WILL GATHER TOGETHER His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other.

Another sign they should look for is this thing called the "abomination of desolation" that the prophet Daniel mentioned. When they see this standing in the holy place those in Judea must flee. There are three passages in Daniel that mention this. The first is Daniel 9:26-27, "Then after the sixty-two weeks the Messiah will be cut off and have nothing, and the people of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. And its end will come with a flood; even to the end there will be war; desolations are determined. And he will make a firm covenant with the many for one week, but in the middle of the week he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering; and on the wing of abominations will come one who makes desolate, even until a complete destruction, one that is decreed, is poured out on the one who makes desolate." The second is Daniel 11:31, "Forces from him will arise, desecrate the sanctuary fortress, and do away with the regular sacrifice. And they will set up the abomination of desolation." The third is Daniel 12:11, "From the time that the regular sacrifice is abolished and the abomination of desolation is set up, there will be 1,290 days." An "abomination" is something detestable, often associated with idols and idolatry. A desolate place is a wasteland, a place devoid of life, a place that has been forsaken and abandoned. This abomination will make the holy place desolate. These passages from Daniel are the basis for the idea that the tribulation period will be seven years in length. Daniels "seventy weeks" are thought to be seventy "weeks" of years, that is, 490 years (70x7). The seventieth week, the last week, will be the seven years of the tribulation.

In Luke's parallel passage in Luke 21:20 Jesus says, "But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then recognize that her desolation is near." Evidently the "holy place" is Jerusalem and the "abomination" that will make her desolate is the Roman army. At least we see that the Romans would be responsible for this "abomination of desolation."

Jesus told them that when they see this standing in the holy place, those in Judea must flee to the mountains. It would be imperative that they flee to save their lives. A.T. Robertson notes, "Eusebius (*H.E.* iii,5, 3) says that the Christians actually fled to Pella at the foot of the mountains about seventeen miles south of the Sea of Galilee. They remembered the warning of Jesus and fled for safety" (Robertson's Word Pictures). Evidently this would be a sudden thing because Jesus warns them not to try to go home to retrieve things to take with them. The houses had flat roofs and one could actually pass from one roof to another. They would need to leave hastily and there would be no time to gather things up for the journey.

At that time it will be especially hard for pregnant women and those who are nursing babies. Jesus expresses woe to them. Jesus urges them to pray that they won't have to flee in the winter or on a Sabbath day. Long journeys were forbidden on the Sabbath, but if they were forced to flee on a Sabbath they would have to violate the law. For those in Judea the necessity of flight was inevitable. They could not avoid it, so He told them to ask that it not be in winter or on a Sabbath.

Jesus explains more in verses 21 and 22, "For then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will. Unless those days had been cut short, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short." At this point we should also consider Luke's account of the words of Jesus in Luke 21:21-24, "Then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains, and those who are in the midst of the city must leave, and those who are in the country must not enter the city; 22 because these are days of vengeance, so that all things which are written will be

fulfilled. 23 "Woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days; for there will be great distress upon the land and wrath to this people; 24 and they will fall by the edge of the sword, and will be led captive into all the nations; and Jerusalem will be trampled under foot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled." Clearly in Luke Jesus is talking about the destruction of Jerusalem which was coming in 70 AD when the Roman general Titus besieged and then destroyed Jerusalem and the temple. They were "days of vengeance" and a time of "great distress" and "wrath to this people." The people of Jerusalem would be killed or taken captive. Jerusalem would be trampled by the Gentiles. There would be a time called "the times of the Gentiles." We see now looking back that the words of Jesus have been fulfilled. Jerusalem has been and is being trampled by the Gentiles. What has happened is not due simply to the wrath of the Romans, but the wrath of God. It is a continuation of what has happened over and over to the Jews because of their rebellion against the Lord.

It seems to me that two things are in view here. One is short-term and has reference to what would happen in 70 AD, and the other is long-term and will happen later. It will be unprecedented in human history that will apparently threaten all life on earth. Jesus calls it "a great tribulation." The days of the great tribulation will be cut short for the sake of the elect so that some will be spared. Some have taken this to mean that the siege of Titus was not as long as it could have been, and therefore some in Jerusalem did not die. But from the context Jesus seems to be speaking of a later, more monumental period of tribulation. It is thought that chapters 6 through 18 in the book of Revelation describe the events of this future period of tribulation.

During those days of tribulation false Christs and false prophets will arise. If believers hear claims that Christ is here or there, they are not to believe it. People will say that Christ has returned and is this person or that person, but it will not be true. These false Christs and false prophets will even "show great signs and wonders" in order to mislead people. They will even try to mislead the elect. I think the implication is that it is not possible to mislead the elect, but through their signs and wonders they will make the attempt. How is it possible that these false Christs will be able to perform signs and wonders? We should recall that Jesus said that many would say to Him on the day of judgment, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?" (Matthew 7:22). He won't deny that they did these things, but He will say, "I never knew you; depart from Me." We should also recall that the wise men, sorcerers and magicians of Egypt were able to duplicate some of the miracles of Moses in Exodus 7 and 8. The "beast" of Revelation will have the power to perform miracles and signs in order to deceive people. Revelation 13:11-15 says:

Then I saw another beast coming up out of the earth; and he had two horns like a lamb and he spoke as a dragon. 12 He exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence. And he makes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast, whose fatal wound was healed. 13 He performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down out of heaven to the earth in the presence of men. 14 And he deceives those who dwell on the earth because of the signs which it was given him to perform in the presence of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who had the wound of the sword and has come to life. 15 And it was given to him to give breath to the image of the beast, so that the image of the beast would even speak and cause as many as do not worship the image of the beast to be killed.

Evidently evil spirits are able to do things that appear to us to be legitimate miracles, and we



are gullible enough to believe that they come from God. This is why we must be careful to be discerning regarding things that seem to be miraculous. John urges us not to “believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1). He adds in verses 2 and 3, “By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world.” The key to uncovering a false prophet is to examine what they have to say about Jesus. Do they teach the truth about Jesus, or is there some distortion in their concept of Him? Do they present Him as something or someone other than who He really is? If they do, then they are antichrists and false prophets and we must not listen to them, even if they perform signs and wonders. Our faith must not rely on signs and wonders, but on the word of God. We are forewarned by Christ Himself and He orders us not to believe reports that He is here or there.

When the Son of Man comes again, there will be no question about it. His coming will be like lightning flashing from east to west (verse 27). His coming won't be secret or invisible. Jehovah's Witnesses teach that Jesus returned invisibly in 1914 and thus prove that they are false teachers. When He comes everyone will see it. Revelation 1:7 says, “Behold, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. So it is to be. Amen.” In Acts 1:11, as the disciples were watching Jesus ascend into heaven into the clouds, two angels stood beside them and said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven.” Jesus teaches this same thing in Matthew 24:30, “And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY with power and great glory.” All the tribes of the earth will see His sign in the sky and then will see Him coming. He won't be out in the wilderness or in some inner room. His coming will be obvious and will happen with great power and glory.

In verse 28 we have this curious saying that seems out of place, “Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather.” Certainly this is a true saying. We know that carrion gather where there is a dead thing. God created them to help dispose of the flesh of things that have died. They congregate over the carcasses of dead animals and of men. Jesus may be thinking of the gathering of the Roman armies over the “corpse” of Jerusalem.

Jesus explicitly says that it is “after the tribulation of those days” that there will be these great signs in the heavens involving the sun, moon and stars and the powers of the heavens. In Luke He says, “There will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth dismay among nations, in perplexity at the roaring of the sea and the waves, 26 men fainting from fear and the expectation of the things which are coming upon the world; for the powers of the heavens will be shaken” (Luke 21:25-26). Probably these words about the sun and moon being darkened and the stars falling from the sky are not meant to be taken literally, but it will appear from an earthly point of view as if this is what is happening. What has always seemed to be durable and unchangeable will be shaken and disrupted. Then all the tribes will see Jesus coming on the clouds with power and great glory, and then there will be a great trumpet sound and His angels will gather His elect “from the four winds.” God had ordered Moses to make two trumpets of silver that were to be used to summon the congregation to gather and for sounding the alarm in times of war (Numbers 10:1-10). Paul mentions this event in his great chapter about the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15:51-52, “Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, we we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will

be changed.” He says again in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 16, “For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord.” This event is known as “the rapture of the saints” when those who belong to Christ are raised from the dead, or if they are alive are taken up to meet Him in the air at His coming. When does this happen? Notice Jesus says clearly that it is after the tribulation of those days and not before. I’m not sure now the idea of the “pre-tribulation rapture” got started or by whom, or why it is so commonly accepted by so many as a settled doctrine, but the more I study scripture on the subject the more I’m convinced that it is clearly an error. This passage plainly states that the rapture, the gathering of the saints to Jesus, happens after the tribulation. I can find no passage that explicitly teaches that the rapture happens before the tribulation. Jesus is speaking to His disciples here and telling them about what they should look for and what they will experience, things they will witness. He does not say, “There will be a great tribulation, but don’t worry about it, because I will pull you out before it starts and save you from it.” It would be nice if it were true, but I’m afraid we must look for and prepare ourselves for these things.

The gathering of the elect will not be a small, local thing, confined to Jerusalem and Judea, but will encompass “the four winds” and will be “from one end of the sky to the other.” Mark’s parallel passage helps us understand what this means, “And then He will send forth the angels, and will gather together His elect from the four winds, from the farthest end of the earth to the farthest end of heaven” (Mark 13:27). Believers from all over the earth will be gathered together to Jesus at His coming. From wherever they are, they will be summoned and retrieved and gathered to Him.

We should reflect for a moment here on this expression “the elect.” Jesus has used this expression three times here, in verses 22, 24 and 31. We’ve seen that the days of the great tribulation will be shortened for the sake of the elect, that the deceivers will try to mislead even the elect, and that the elect are those who will be gathered to Jesus when He comes again. The word translated “elect” is *eklektos*, which means “picked out, chosen” (Thayer’s Greek Definitions). It is often translated “chosen.” Jesus used the word in Matthew 22:14 when He said, “For many are called, but few are chosen.” They are those for whom God will bring about justice, who cry out to Him day and night (Luke 18:7). Paul describes the process of election in Romans 8:28-30, “And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. 29 For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; 30 and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.” Then he says in Romans 8:33-34, “Who will bring a charge against God’s elect? God is the one who justifies; who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us.” The elect are those whom God foreknew, then predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, then called, justified and will glorify. God does all of this. Since they are justified by God there is no one who can condemn them.

The elect are few. Jesus said that many are called, are invited, but few are chosen. It is like trying out for a baseball team. Many are invited to come to tryouts, but few of them will be chosen to actually be on the team. In fact, the invitation to tryouts is available to everyone, but most will not even accept the invitation and come. The elect, however, will respond and will come. They are those who are known by God.

Matthew 24:32-44

"Now learn the parable from the fig tree: when its branch has already become tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near; 33 so, you too, when you see all these things, recognize that He is near, right at the door. 34 "Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. 35 "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away.

36 "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone. 37 "For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah. 38 "For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, 39 and they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away; so will the coming of the Son of Man be. 40 "Then there will be two men in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. 41 "Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one will be left. 42 "Therefore be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming. 43 "But be sure of this, that if the head of the house had known at what time of the night the thief was coming, he would have been on the alert and would not have allowed his house to be broken into. 44 "For this reason you also must be ready; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not think He will."

As we can tell from the fig tree that summer is near, so when we see these things happening that Jesus has described, we know that He is near and at the door. Those who follow Jesus must look for these signs and recognize them. He will emphasize this in the passages that follow.

In light of the fact that even today "all these things" have not yet taken place, how do we interpret verse 34? Jesus said that generation would not pass away until all these things take place. He must, in the near term, be thinking of the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. That generation would see those events. Some who heard Him speak these words would see the suffering and tribulation brought upon the Jews as a result of their rebellion against Rome. It seems to me the only other way to understand this is to say that Jesus is using the word "generation" to mean something other than the usual forty year time span, and that we are still today part of "this generation." Clearly some of the things He has mentioned have not yet occurred and that generation of His time passed away long ago.

I think we should notice too the use of the phrase "pass away" in verses 34 and 35. That generation would pass away after all the things He had mentioned take place, and even heaven and earth will pass away, but the thing that will never pass away is the words of Jesus Christ. The teaching of Christ and of God will never pass away. His words won't fail or expire. What He has predicted will come to pass and the principles He has taught will always be applicable. His command that we love one another as He has loved us will never be overturned. No one can overrule Him.

The signs of the approach of His coming can be seen and observed, but the exact day and hour is known only to the Father (verse 36). Somehow the Father knows the day and the hour, but has not disclosed this information to the Son. Why this would be the case, I don't know. Jesus could not give them a date for His return because He did not know. We want to know when He will come again, but he can't tell us. God has deliberately withheld this information from us. Jesus told the disciples that it was not for them to know this (Acts 1:7). It is futile for us to try to figure out the date that Jesus will return.

Jesus says in verses 37-39 that the time of His coming will be just like what happened in the days of Noah. The people of that time were going about their normal lives, eating, drinking, marrying, giving in marriage until that great day when Noah entered the ark and the

flood came and took them all away. Though the people near Noah could see him building the ark for many years and saw the animals coming to enter the ark, and though they heard his warnings of what was going to happen, still they did not know or perceive what was going to happen. Peter described Noah as a “preacher of righteousness” in 2 Peter 2:5. No doubt Noah, as he labored for many years building the ark, was telling people about what God had said and that a flood was coming, but no one listened to him. When the door of the ark was shut and sealed and the flood finally did come, then they understood too late the truth of what Noah had been saying. Several English translations say that the flood “swept them all away.” They were taken away or swept away by the flood to their deaths. Understanding this helps us understand verses 40 and 41. Two men will be in a field, going about their normal day of work, and one will be taken and one will be left. Two women will be doing their normal work of grinding at the mill, and one will be taken and one will be left. The context shows that it is not a good thing to be “taken.” They will be taken as the people of Noah’s day were taken by the flood, swept away to death. I think it’s a misinterpretation to think that the “taken” here are those who are “raptured” before the tribulation. It doesn’t fit the context. If you’re working in the field or grinding at the mill, you want to be the person left and not taken.

The all-important exhortation that comes out of this for a disciple of Christ is, “Therefore be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming.” This is the point of the next three parables. After the parable of the virgins in chapter 25 Jesus will repeat, “Be on the alert then, for you do not know the day nor the hour.” The words “be on the alert” translate the Greek word *grēgoreuō*, which means to be awake, to watch. It is a present tense, active voice imperative mood verb. Jesus is telling them all to continually stay awake and alert, ready for His coming at all times. Since we don’t know the day He’s coming, we must be ready and alert for it at all times.

The first illustration He gives us of being awake and alert is the head of the household parable in verses 43 and 44. If a man knew what time of night a thief was coming to break into his house, he would stay awake, arm himself and be ready to meet the thief and repel him. He would not allow his house to be broken into, but would thwart the plans of the thief. We all know this is what a man would do if he knew when the thief was coming. We are all conscious that it is possible that thieves may come and try to break into our homes and businesses and steal things. This is why we have locks on our doors and security systems and surveillance cameras and so forth. But we don’t know when or if this might actually happen. If we did somehow get wind of a planned break-in, we would take measures to stop it and arrest the thieves. For this reason, Jesus says, “you also must be ready; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not think He will.” Not only do we not know the day or hour of His coming, He also warns that He is coming when we don’t think He will come. Therefore we must be ready at all times.

Paul picks up this picture of the Lord coming like a thief in the night and gives us the same exhortation in 1 Thessalonians 5:1-6, “Now as to the times and the epochs, brethren, you have no need of anything to be written to you. 2 For you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night. 3 While they are saying, ‘Peace and safety!’ then destruction will come upon them suddenly like labor pains upon a woman with child, and they will not escape. 4 But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day would overtake you like a thief; 5 for you are all sons of light and sons of day. We are not of night nor of darkness; 6 so then let us not sleep as others do, but let us be alert and sober.” People will think that peace and safety have been achieved, but that is when destruction will come upon them. The day of the Lord will be a day of destruction for the unbelieving, and there will be no escape. Believers, though, are not in the darkness and won’t be overtaken by that day, but are to be alert and sober and ready for that day.

The second illustration Jesus gives us is the parable of the faithful and sensible slave in verses 45-51. Actually there are two depictions of this hypothetical slave. He may be faithful and sensible, or he may be evil. He is a slave who is put in charge of the task of giving the household food at the proper time. He is the household chef. He is in charge of procuring the food, preparing the food and serving the food. It is his responsibility to see that the household is well fed. If it's a large household with many servants there would probably be others under his authority who would work with him in this task. If he is faithful and sensible, he will carry out this task every day while the master is gone and when the master returns he will be found to have been faithful. The master will bless him by giving him a promotion. He had been put in charge of feeding the household, and now he will be put in charge of all that the master has. He will be like Joseph in the house of Potiphar and in the service of Pharaoh (see Genesis 39 through 41). We will see this idea of promotion and greater responsibility again in the next chapter. Not only is this slave faithful, but he is also "sensible." The Greek word is *phronimos*, from *phroneō*, meaning "to exercise the mind, to think, to have understanding." He is an intelligent man who can think things through. He has practical wisdom. He thinks correctly and has good judgment. His thinking isn't distorted.

If the slave is evil, however, he does not think correctly. He is not faithful nor sensible. The evil slave says to himself, "My master is not coming for a long time." It is this thought that sparks his disobedience and abusiveness. He thinks that because his master will not return for a long time that he can behave badly and get away with it, that he will not face any consequences for his disobedience. Perhaps he thinks that when the master is on his way home he will hear of it and will have a chance to correct his behavior and give an appearance of obedience just as the master returns. Because of this thought, the evil slave began to beat his fellow slaves and to eat and drink with drunkards. He became abusive toward those he was supposed to care for, and turned to a lifestyle of personal pleasure and intoxication. He began associating with others who shared his lifestyle. People who turn to alcohol and drugs quickly become addicted and obsessed with their alcohol and drugs. The addiction takes over their lives and becomes the central thing for them. The band Big Bad Voodoo Daddy sings a song that illustrates this titled "You and Me and the Bottle Makes 3 Tonight." The lyrics go like this:

Hey Jack, I know what you're thinking  
That now's as good as any to start drinking  
Hey Scotty, yeah, what's it gonna be?  
A gin and tonic sounds might mighty good to me

Man, I know I gotta go, it's the same thing every time  
But I don't think another drink's gonna make me lose my mind  
So, I think about my next drink  
And it's, you & me & the bottle makes 3 tonight

Well, I know this cat named Mo, he wanders to and fro  
His and my favorite waterin' hole  
I said, "Hey Mo, how you doing? Where have you been?"  
He said, "I've been fine with my whiskey, wine and gin"

Man, I know I gotta go, it's the same thing every time  
But I don't think another drink's gonna make me lose my mind  
So, I think about my next drink

And it's, you & me & the bottle makes 3 tonight

Jesus does not approve of the addictive lifestyle. He does not approve of a life centered on intoxication and getting high. People who pursue these things tend to be neglectful and abusive toward others, even those they supposedly love. They often steal to support their habit. The knowledge that the Master is going to return and hold us accountable as His servants should restrain us from this kind of behavior.

The master of the slave will return when the slave does not expect at an hour he does not know. The evil slave expected that it would be "a long time" before his master returned, and he continued to believe it. But the master did return unexpectedly. He found the evil slave beating his fellow slaves and eating and drinking with drunkards. The slave was doing these things when the master arrived. The other slaves could testify about the behavior of this slave. His wickedness, abusiveness and negligence was apparent, and there was no excuse for it. His punishment would be very severe. Jesus says that the master will "cut him in pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." The Greek word translated "cut him in pieces" is *dichotomeō* (our word "dichotomy" comes from this word), and means "to cut in two." The King James Version translates it "cut him asunder," and the Lexham English Bible has "cut him in two." I'm not sure if Jesus means this literally, but obviously it refers to a severe reaction on the part of the master. The wicked slave will be assigned a place with the hypocrites, which is where he belongs. He was not a true servant of the master, but only a pretender. Jesus has pronounced woe upon the scribes and Pharisees as hypocrites in chapter 23, and alongside of them will be those who pretend to be servants of Jesus but are false and unfaithful. They will also be assigned to the place where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

This evil slave is like the employee who works hard when the boss is around, but slacks off and goofs around when he is gone or isn't looking. Eventually his unfaithfulness will probably be revealed and he will face the consequences. In the kingdom of our Lord this day of reckoning is inevitable and unavoidable.

#### Matthew 25:1-13

"Then the kingdom of heaven will be comparable to ten virgins, who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. 2 "Five of them were foolish, and five were prudent. 3 "For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, 4 but the prudent took oil in flasks along with their lamps. 5 "Now while the bridegroom was delaying, they all got drowsy and began to sleep. 6 "But at midnight there was a shout, 'Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.' 7 "Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps. 8 "The foolish said to the prudent, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' 9 "But the prudent answered, 'No, there will not be enough for us and you too; go instead to the dealers and buy some for yourselves.' 10 "And while they were going away to make the purchase, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding feast; and the door was shut. 11 "Later the other virgins also came, saying, 'Lord, lord, open up for us.' 12 "But he answered, 'Truly I say to you, I do not know you.' 13 "Be on the alert then, for you do not know the day nor the hour.

Here's another parable about the kingdom of heaven and what it is like. Here is what it is like as we wait for the bridegroom, the King, to come. To understand this parable, we must understand the wedding customs of the time among the Jews. When a man and a woman were betrothed to one another, the man would begin to build a home for he and his future wife

on his father's property. When the home was ready, he would then gather his friends and they would together go to pick up the bride and her entourage and escort them to the wedding. As they went, the word would go ahead of them, announcing that the bridegroom was coming. The bride and her friends might have a general idea of the time that the house would be ready, but they needed to be on the alert, because they did not know for certain the day or the hour that the bridegroom would come. The bridegroom usually came in the evening to retrieve his bride and take her to the wedding feast, and then the marriage would be consummated that night. The wedding celebration would continue afterward for a week. It is probable that Jesus had this custom in mind when He said, "In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also" (John 14:2-3).

The ten virgins in this parable got word that the bridegroom was coming that evening, so they took their lamps and went out to meet him. Since it was probably already evening, they had their lamps burning. These were either torches with a wick and oil reservoir on top, or small hand-held oil lamps. Initially, all of the virgins were ready for the arrival of the bridegroom.

Five of the virgins were prudent and five were foolish. The word translated "prudent" in the New American Standard (it is "wise" in other versions) is *phronimos*, the same word we found translated "sensible" in Matthew 24:45 describing the "faithful and sensible" slave. The prudent virgins had thought things out and had taken extra oil with them in their flasks. The foolish virgins did not take any extra oil. The prudent virgins had planned for the possibility that the bridegroom might be delayed. They had said to themselves, "He may not come when I expect, so I had better take some extra oil just in case he is delayed." The foolish virgins did not think this was necessary. They assumed that he would come immediately and that there would be no need for extra oil. They did not anticipate a delay. In contrast to the evil servant in the previous parable who thought that the master would be delayed for a very long time, these foolish virgins did not think there would be a delay at all. It is a mistake to think that Jesus will be delayed for a very long time and it is a mistake to think that Jesus will come immediately so that prudent preparations are not made. When we think of Jesus coming back we need to be ready at all times but prepared as well if He delays.

The bridegroom did delay. We are not told what delayed him, but it sounds like it was something that he was doing that delayed him. It sounds like a necessary delay, something he needed to do. The delay of Jesus in coming back is a necessary delay.

We should recall 2 Peter 3:9, "The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance." Jesus is delaying because He is waiting for people to come to repentance. The delay is a gracious delay and we should be glad for it.

During the delay all the virgins got drowsy and fell asleep. I think the idea here is that they were trying to stay awake, but they nodded off and fell asleep. The word translated "drowsy" means to nod. They began to nod off and then yielded to sleep. Jesus does not fault these virgins for falling asleep. It was alright that they fell asleep, at least for those who were prudent, because the prudent virgins were still ready. For the foolish virgins, however, this was the time that they should have used to replenish their oil supply. They should have said at this point, "The bridegroom is later than I thought, and I had better go get some extra oil."

There are times when it is not good to fall asleep. For example, Jesus urged his men to pray with Him in the garden of Gethsemane just before He was arrested. They needed to pray that they would not enter into temptation at that point, but they were too sleepy to pray

(Matthew 26:38-46). At a critical time for Jesus and for them, the disciples yielded to sleep instead of giving themselves to the work of prayer.

The shout came at midnight, "Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him." He came much later than the virgins had expected, but he did come. The command to come out and meet him finally came. All the virgins woke up and arose and trimmed their lamps. It was at this point that the foolish virgins realized that their lamps were going out and that they didn't have any more oil. The five foolish virgins appealed to the prudent virgins for some of their oil. But the prudent had only brought enough for their own lamps. If they had tried to share their oil, there would not be enough for any of them. When Jesus returns many people will realize at that point that they are not prepared to meet Him. They will see that there is no light in their lives, only darkness.

The prudent virgins flatly refused the request from the foolish. They could not give them any of their oil because they only had just enough for themselves. They advised the foolish virgins to go to the dealers and buy oil for themselves. The prudent virgins would not risk their relationship with the bridegroom for the sake of the foolish virgins. Meeting the bridegroom was too important. God gives us grace only for ourselves. The grace we receive from Him does not cover anyone else. They must receive grace for themselves from the Lord. The "fuel" that provides light in our lives is for us alone. Others must have their own source of this "fuel" in their own relationship with Christ. My faith will not cover you and yours will not cover me. My children will not be saved because I have believed, but they must believe in Jesus for themselves.

The prudent virgins were ready when the bridegroom arrived, but the foolish had departed to try to buy some lamp oil at midnight. Everyone knows that generally speaking, you do not go shopping at midnight. The time was past for preparation, and the time to go with the bridegroom had come. Those who were ready went with him and those who were not were excluded.

The foolish virgins were going away on their errand when the bridegroom came. As he arrived, they were heading somewhere else in search of lamp oil. They were trying, at the last moment, to correct their deficiency, but it was too late. The virgins who were ready went with him and entered into his house for the wedding feast, and the door was shut. The foolish virgins came on their own later, called him "Lord" and asked him to open the door and let them in also, but he refused. He said, "Truly I say to you, I do not know you." He did not recognize them as those whom he knew. He denied knowledge of them. He was not acquainted with them. This recalls to mind Matthew 7:21-23, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.'" These foolish virgins are numbered among those who call Jesus "Lord," but don't do the will of the Father and who practice lawlessness. They are not known to Him nor recognized by Him.

There is only one opportunity to meet Jesus and go with Him when He returns. Once the door is shut the opportunity is past to enter into His kingdom and fellowship with Him. Just as the door of Noah's ark was shut, so the door into the wedding feast will be shut and no one else will be admitted.

Within the church there are those who are ready to meet Jesus when He returns and those who are not ready. There are those among us who appear to be ready who are not. They cannot keep their light going. They do not really know Jesus nor are they known by Jesus. They truly do not have the light of life in Christ. When He comes it will be too late for



them to obtain the grace they need. Only those who are prepared and who have their lamps burning will go in with Him into His kingdom.

The conclusion of the parable is this, "Be on the alert then, for you do not know the day nor the hour." He repeats what He said in 24:42. Since the day and the hour of His coming is not known to us, we must always be on the alert. We must always be prepared to welcome Him at His coming and to go with Him. He has delayed. It may be a long time before He comes, but then again, He may come sooner than we expect.

Matthew 25:14-30

"For it is just like a man about to go on a journey, who called his own slaves and entrusted his possessions to them. 15 "To one he gave five talents, to another, two, and to another, one, each according to his own ability; and he went on his journey. 16 "Immediately the one who had received the five talents went and traded with them, and gained five more talents. 17 "In the same manner the one who had received the two talents gained two more. 18 "But he who received the one talent went away, and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. 19 "Now after a long time the master of those slaves \*came and \*settled accounts with them. 20 "The one who had received the five talents came up and brought five more talents, saying, 'Master, you entrusted five talents to me. See, I have gained five more talents.' 21 "His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.' 22 "Also the one who had received the two talents came up and said, 'Master, you entrusted two talents to me. See, I have gained two more talents.' 23 "His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.' 24 "And the one also who had received the one talent came up and said, 'Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow and gathering where you scattered no seed. 25 'And I was afraid, and went away and hid your talent in the ground. See, you have what is yours.' 26 "But his master answered and said to him, 'You wicked, lazy slave, you knew that I reap where I did not sow and gather where I scattered no seed. 27 'Then you ought to have put my money in the bank, and on my arrival I would have received my money back with interest. 28 'Therefore take away the talent from him, and give it to the one who has the ten talents.' 29 "For to everyone who has, more shall be given, and he will have an abundance; but from the one who does not have, even what he does have shall be taken away. 30 "Throw out the worthless slave into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Here's another picture that illustrates that the Master is going away for a while and will be coming back. When he was about to leave, he called "his own slaves" and trusted them with his possessions. The word for "entrusted" is *paradidōmi*, and the word for "gave" in verse 15 is *didōmi*. *Paradidōmi* means "to hand over, to give, or to deliver over" to someone, and *didōmi*, simply "to give" (New American Standard Exhaustive Concordance). Rather than trying to take all of his money with him, he left these three slaves in charge of it. What he entrusted to them were "talents." This word comes directly from the Greek word *talanton*, which refers to a measure of weight, and not a "talent" as we think of it today. These "talents" came in the form of silver or gold, and represented quite a bit of money. When we looked at the parable of the unforgiving slave in chapter 18, we discovered that a talent of silver weighed 94 3/7 pounds. If this is correct, and the master entrusted these men with talents of silver, the man who received the five talents had over 472 pounds of silver, the man who received two talents had about 189 pounds, and the last slave had one talent. Another way to

look at it is that the talent consisted of 60 minas, and each mina was subdivided into 60 shekels. Therefore, there were 3,600 shekels in a talent. The man who was given five talents had 18,000 shekels.

It's important to note that the master distributed these funds in accordance with the ability of each slave. The word for "ability" is *dunamis*, often translated "power." The master knew the abilities and potentials of these three slaves. He knew what they were capable of doing. The first slave was the most capable, the third slave the least capable. The Lord knows our abilities, and gives us resources commensurate with those abilities. You don't have more responsibility than you are able to handle. It may at times feel like the Lord has overloaded us with more that we can take, but He knows our ability. We must rise to the challenge of whatever He gives to us.

The first two slaves went to work immediately, as soon as the master departed on his journey. There was no delay, but they got to work right away. The word translated "traded" is *ergazomai*, meaning "to work, labor" (New American Standard Exhaustive Concordance). I wonder what they did? How did they work with the money? Did they invest in real estate? Did they buy and resell goods? Did they start companies? Evidently those particulars are not important. The fact that they worked with the talents and gained a profit is what matters. They made the master's wealth grow while he was gone. They used their ability and invested for his benefit. This brings up an important point regarding what the Lord wants us to do while He is gone. He wants us to take what He has given us and decide what to do with it. He wants us to work as we are able with the resources He entrusts to us. We tend to get too focused on trying to discern God's will regarding the particulars of our lives, when the truth is that God wants us to figure out the particulars on our own within the bigger picture of working with His resources for His profit. He entrusts us with resources knowing that we have ability, expecting us to decide on the "how" of fulfilling His purpose. I think that the Lord gives us a far greater degree of freedom in terms of what we can do with the gifts He has given us than we realize. His will in terms of our vocation and work is not so narrow that if we miss a step we are permanently on the wrong path for the rest of our lives. He gives us a general command, "Go make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19) and then leaves it up to us to decide how we will carry out this command. If He has specific directions for us along the way, He is capable of letting us know, like when He directed Paul and his companions to go to Macedonia (see Acts 16:6-10). It doesn't matter so much whether we are a butcher, a baker, a candlestick maker, a carpenter, a chef, a homemaker, a doctor, a lawyer or whatever, so long as we are serving His purpose in whatever we do.

The slave who had received one talent went out and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. He did not go to work with it. He did not invest it, he did not use it in any way. The master intended that he should work with it, but he did not. So what did this slave do while the master was away? I suppose he did whatever he felt like doing. He decided not to do the will of the master, so must have hung around doing nothing. We can be sure that this is not what our Master wants us to do.

The master was gone for "a long time," but he did finally return, and then he settled accounts with his slaves. He asked them for a verbal accounting of what they had done with his money. Each of them had to make a report. The slave with five talents had gained five more talents while the master was away, so he was able to present the master with ten talents. The slave with two talents had gained two more talents and so had four. The master was pleased and said the same thing to both of them, "Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master." The responsibility of looking after the talents was a small thing that proved they were competent to handle larger things. The word translated "few things" is *oligos*, meaning

“little, small, few.” The word for “many things” is *polus*, much or many. Their faithfulness in handling his money qualified them for promotion. Notice that the reward is not retirement, but promotion to greater responsibility and honor. They will have a higher position and experience the joy of their master. They will serve him in more significant ways. He can trust them with more, knowing that they will be faithful and reliable.

It’s interesting that in this parable there are two faithful slaves who started with different amounts of money and who both proved faithful and capable and were both rewarded and commended. One had more and made more than the other, but the man with two talents heard the very same praise as the one with five talents. I’m glad that Jesus said this because it points to the fact that we don’t all have equal ability or equal responsibilities or equal expectations laid upon us. We are individuals with different abilities. Some can handle more than others, and the Lord knows this. If we are faithful with what we have and what we can do, we will be rewarded. Others will do more than we will, but that is okay. We will do more than others, and that is alright as well. Though there will be unequal distribution of resources and responsibility, there will be equitable rewards at His return for the faithful. We are not all expected to produce the same amount of profit for the Master.

The third slave came in and gave his report to his master. He had gone and retrieved his talent from the hole where he had buried it and presented it to the master. He said, “Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow and gathering where you scattered no seed. And I was afraid, and went away and hid your talent in the ground. See, you have what is yours.” There seems to be a realization on his part that he had not done what the master expected him to do with the talent. He knew that the master had not intended that he should simply preserve the talent and not lose it. He knew that he was supposed to invest it and make it grow. He had to explain his behavior. He said that the reason he buried the talent and hid it was because he was afraid. He was afraid, he explained, because of what he knew or believed about the character of his master.

First, the slave said that he knew that the master was a “hard man.” The word for “hard” is *sklēros*, hard, rough or harsh. Vincent says, “It is an epithet given to a surface which is at once dry and hard” (Vincent’s Word Studies). He saw his master as a stern and harsh man who would have punished him severely if he had lost the talent.

Second, the slave said that the master had a practice of reaping where he hadn’t sown and gathering where he hadn’t scattered. The master profited from the work of others without doing any work himself. Others did the work, and he reaped the profits. He makes the master sound like some kind of idle thief who comes along and takes for himself what others have produced! Needless to say, if he really saw his master this way, it was a very negative picture of the master! But I think this is a faulty view of the master. I think the master was benevolent and not malevolent, kind and not harsh. He was looking for faithfulness and success, yes, but he was also anticipating a gracious reward for his faithful slaves. He wanted to reward them and not punish them. He wanted to see them succeed and knew that they could.

Many people have a distorted and false view of God, like this slave had of his master. They see Him as harsh and anxious to punish and condemn. They do not see that He is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness. They don’t understand that He is quick to forgive and welcome us into His presence. (See Exodus 34:6-7.) This false view of God leads people away from Him and not toward Him. The enemy of our souls tells us these lies about the Lord.

When the master responded to this slave, the master put his finger on the real problem. The problem was not with the master, but with the slave. It wasn’t the character of the master that caused this slave to be unfaithful, but the bad character of the slave. The master calls him, “You wicked, lazy slave” in verse 26 and “the worthless slave” in verse 30. He repeated

to the slave his own words, “you knew that I reap where I did not sow and gather where I scattered no seed.” Several translations see this as a sarcastic question, “You knew that I reap where I did not sow and gather where I scattered no seed?” He is questioning the truth of the statement. If this were true, then instead of burying the talent, the slave should at least have put the money in the bank for a safe investment, and then the master would have received some interest on it. If it was really true that the slave was paralyzed by fear that he might lose the talent, then he would have behaved differently. The slave was trying to blame the master for his failure. Burying the talent indicated that the slave was too lazy to even take the money to the bankers.

The master then ordered that the talent be taken away from the wicked and lazy slave and given to the one who had the ten talents. Jesus explained, “For to everyone who has, more shall be given, and he will have an abundance; but from the one who does not have, even what he does have shall be taken away.” This is the same thing He had said when He explained why He taught in parables back in chapter 13, verse 12. More will be given to the one who has. The two faithful slaves had made their own money, but this slave had made nothing, and so what had been given to him was taken away and given to the most productive man. In the very similar parable of the minas in Luke 19, there were others standing by who questioned the master about giving the money from the worthless slave to the slave who already had ten minas (Luke 19:25). They said, “Master, he has ten minas already.” The master replied with this same saying. The master is pleased by maximum productivity and rewards it. The most fruitful will have the greatest abundance. This is not to say that the Lord wants to encourage greed and avarice, but that it is not a bad thing to be productive and fruitful. The first command to Adam and Eve was, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth” (Genesis 1:28). He wants us to succeed and to have an abundance, but it requires faithfulness and work on our part in His service. He does not reward wickedness and laziness.

The wicked, lazy and worthless slave said he was afraid he might lose the talent, and so he did. He not only lost his talent, but he was also cast into the outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. He suffers the same fate as the evil slave in the previous chapter and is counted among unbelievers. Though in name he was a slave of the master, he did not really serve the master, but served himself and followed his own desires. He set aside the will of the master to do his own will. A true disciple of Jesus will not do this.

This parable tells us that the Lord is going to be away for quite some time. He has left His servants in charge of “His possessions” on earth to use them according to their ability for His benefit while He is gone. He will eventually return and settle accounts with His servants. Those who have been good and faithful, serving Him and doing His business and looking after His concerns while He was gone, will be rewarded and promoted in the kingdom. Those who did not really serve Him, who followed their own desires and were wicked, lazy and worthless, will lose what He had entrusted to them and will be cast out. They are those who do not do the will of the Father, who practice lawlessness, and who are ultimately not known by Christ (Matthew 7:21-23). They are excluded from the kingdom and its blessings. While Jesus is gone, His will is that we take the “talents” He has given them and use them for His glory. We are to serve Him and not ourselves. We are to make use of our spiritual gifts and the message of the gospel to serve others. If you’re looking for the will of God for your life, this is it.

Matthew 25:31-46

"But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will

sit on His glorious throne. 32 "All the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats; 33 and He will put the sheep on His right, and the goats on the left. 34 "Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. 35 'For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me something to drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; 36 naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.' 37 "Then the righteous will answer Him, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give You something to drink? 38 'And when did we see You a stranger, and invite You in, or naked, and clothe You? 39 'When did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' 40 "The King will answer and say to them, 'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me.' 41 "Then He will also say to those on His left, 'Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels; 42 for I was hungry, and you gave Me nothing to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me nothing to drink; 43 I was a stranger, and you did not invite Me in; naked, and you did not clothe Me; sick, and in prison, and you did not visit Me.' 44 "Then they themselves also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not take care of You?' 45 "Then He will answer them, 'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.' 46 "These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

There will be a settling of accounts with His servants when the Master returns, and there will also be a great judgment and separation made of all humanity. When Jesus the "Son of Man" comes, He will come in glory. He came the first time in humility and lowliness, taking the form of man, but the second time He will come in glory. All the angels will come with Him, and He will sit on His glorious throne. He will take His place as King. The phrase "glorious throne" was used previously in Matthew 19:28 when Jesus said to his disciples, "Truly I say to you, that you who have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." Jesus is the King of kings and Lord of lords and all will have to answer to Him.

The nations will be gathered before Him and then He will separate them into two groups like a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia explains that, "It is not infrequent to find a flock including both goats and sheep grazing over the mountains, but they are usually folded separately." At the end of the day the sheep and goats were separated from each other. The sheep will be put at the Lord's right hand and the goats at His left. To those on His right, the sheep, He will say, "Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." To those on His left, the goats, He will say, "Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels." Again we see here in the teaching of Jesus that humanity is divided into two great groups, those who are blessed of the Father and those who are accursed, those who are sheep and those who are goats. In the parable of the wheat and the tares in Matthew 13:24-43 He called them the "sons of the kingdom" and the "sons of the evil one." Each of us will be one or the other.

We see again as well that there are two destinies for these two groups. The sheep who are blessed inherit the kingdom that has been prepared for them since the foundation of the world. The goats who are accursed are ordered to depart from Jesus into the eternal fire which had been prepared for the devil and his angels. There is a narrow road that leads to life

and a wide road that leads to destruction. The good and faithful servants are rewarded and enter into the joy of their master, but the wicked, lazy and worthless are cast out into the outer darkness. The virgins who are ready when the bridegroom arrives, who have their lamps burning, enter into the wedding feast, but those who are not ready do not enter. We need to understand that there is no one who stands outside of this in some third category. There is no one who is neither a sheep nor a goat, neither a son of the kingdom nor a son of the evil one. We are all one or the other.

God has prepared His kingdom for His people since the foundation of the world. The kingdom has been readied for them and designed for them. He also prepared another place, a place designed for the devil and his angels, a place of eternal fire. I wonder if Jesus means to say that this place was not originally intended for humans? Perhaps He's saying that God's original intent was that all humanity should enjoy fellowship with Him forever in His kingdom, but because mankind rebelled and followed Satan, they were excluded from His kingdom and they then took their place with their evil master. Those who refuse to follow the Son of God and continue to serve the evil one wind up forever in the eternal fire which was prepared for him. We will forever be with the master we have served.

In verses 35 and 36 the King explains what those on His right have done for Him. When He was hungry, they gave Him something to eat. When He was thirsty, they gave Him something to drink. When He was a stranger, they invited Him in. When He was naked, they gave Him clothing. When He was sick, they visited Him. When He was in prison, they came to Him. The sheep had actually met the needs of the Son of Man, the King. He calls them "the righteous" in verse 37. They had been righteous and had acted in a righteous way. They practiced true "social justice" in caring for Jesus. But how had they done this? They were not conscious of ever having done any of these things for Him. They asked, "When did we do these things?" They could not recall ever seeing Him in such circumstances. He answered them and said, "Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me." They had been like the "faithful and sensible slave" of Matthew 24:45-47 who fulfilled his responsibility of giving food to the masters household. They took care of their brothers and sisters in Christ, and in so doing were caring for Christ Himself. When we meet a need for even the most insignificant follower of Jesus, we meet the need for Jesus.

The great "new commandment" of Jesus is that disciples of Jesus should love one another as He has loved them (John 13:34). Jesus loved us by laying down His life for us. Jesus said in John 15:13, "Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends." And in 1 John 3:16 John says, "We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren." We love our brethren by laying down our lives for them. What does this mean in practice in daily life? John tells us as he continues in 1 John 3:17-18 "But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth." Loving our brothers and sisters means that if we have resources and see another believer in need, we do what we can to meet that need. It's that simple. That is love, and it requires no particular warm feelings to do this. We lay aside our selfishness to give to meet the need of another. So the things that Jesus mentions in Matthew 25 are the things the sheep did for one another out of love for one another. They followed His commandment to love each other, and in loving each other they were loving Him.

Note also here that Jesus calls them "these brothers of Mine." There is a marvelous passage in Hebrews 2:11-18 that points out that those who follow Jesus are not just His subjects or His servants or His students, but also are His "brothers":

For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one Father; for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren, 12 saying, "I WILL PROCLAIM YOUR NAME TO MY BRETHREN, IN THE MIDST OF THE CONGREGATION I WILL SING YOUR PRAISE." 13 And again, "I WILL PUT MY TRUST IN HIM." And again, "BEHOLD, I AND THE CHILDREN WHOM GOD HAS GIVEN ME." 14 Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, 15 and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives. 16 For assuredly He does not give help to angels, but He gives help to the descendant of Abraham. 17 Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. 18 For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted.

Those who are the "sheep" of Jesus are His brethren. We have the same Father and He identifies with us to such an extent that we are His brothers and sisters. In fact, Jesus is "the Lamb of God" (John 1:29), and in Revelation 7:17 He is depicted as both the Lamb of God and the Shepherd of His sheep, "for the Lamb in the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and will guide them to springs of the water of life; and God will wipe every tear from their eyes." His sheep share His nature; they are like Him, and He is like them.

The goats on the left hand side of Jesus had failed to do what the sheep had done. They had not given Jesus anything to eat when He was hungry. They had not given him water when He was thirsty. They had not cared for Him when He was in need. Just as the sheep didn't see how they had given to Jesus, so the goats didn't see how they had failed to care for Him. They asked, "When did we see you hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not take care of You?" His answer is, "Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me." The goats did not care for His people, so they did not care for Him. They will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous will go into eternal life. Neither of these is a temporary state. The fire is an eternal fire (verse 41) and the punishment is an eternal punishment. I'm afraid there's no getting around this truth.

Before moving on, I want to say that the sheep, the righteous, did not become sheep by doing good things for others, but they did good things for others because they were already sheep and were already righteous. Righteous deeds come from a righteous character. Jesus has taught this explicitly. He said that a tree has to be good to produce good fruit (Matthew 7:17-20). A person has to be good to do good. He said in Matthew 12:35, "The good man brings out of his good treasure what is good; and the evil man brings out of his evil treasure what is evil." By caring for others we demonstrate that we really are those who belong to Jesus and that we are His sheep and are in His kingdom.

#### Matthew 26:1-5

When Jesus had finished all these words, He said to His disciples, 2 "You know that after two days the Passover is coming, and the Son of Man is to be handed over for crucifixion." 3 Then the chief priests and the elders of the people were gathered together in the court of the high priest, named Caiaphas; 4 and they plotted together to seize Jesus by stealth and kill Him. 5 But they were saying, "Not during the festival, otherwise a riot might occur among the

people."

Jesus concluded His teaching about His second coming and then told the disciples that it would be two days and then the Passover would come, and it was then that He would be handed over to be crucified. The Passover was the feast that memorialized the last plague that came upon the Egyptians when the angel of death "passed over" the homes of the people of Israel because they had applied the blood of the Passover lamb to the doorposts and lintels of their homes that night. The Passover was commanded by God in Exodus 12. Then also for seven days the Israelites were to observe the Festival of Unleavened Bread to recall their haste in escaping Egypt. Jews from all over came to Jerusalem to observe the Passover and the Festival. This was the time when Jesus would be handed over to be crucified. The time had come.

It's clear that Matthew intends that we should see that this was not the timing chosen by the chief priests and elders of the people. They gathered and plotted against Jesus and intended to seize Him by stealth and kill Him, but they wanted to avoid causing a riot, so they decided not to do it during Passover and the Festival of Unleavened Bread. They planned to do it later. They were going to employ some sort of deceit or trickery to seize Jesus.

The Lord was fully in control of the timing of this event. He was making a very clear statement by being crucified on Passover. He was saying that He is the Passover Lamb. He is the true Lamb of God who was slain so that we might be saved from death. By taking refuge under His blood we are saved and set free. It is His death and the application of His blood to our lives that frees us from the wrath of God and lets us escape from our bondage to sin and Satan. It was no accident that Jesus died on Passover!

#### Matthew 26:6-13

Now when Jesus was in Bethany, at the home of Simon the leper, 7 a woman came to Him with an alabaster vial of very costly perfume, and she poured it on His head as He reclined at the table. 8 But the disciples were indignant when they saw this, and said, "Why this waste? 9 "For this perfume might have been sold for a high price and the money given to the poor." 10 But Jesus, aware of this, said to them, "Why do you bother the woman? For she has done a good deed to Me. 11 "For you always have the poor with you; but you do not always have Me. 12 "For when she poured this perfume on My body, she did it to prepare Me for burial. 13 "Truly I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be spoken of in memory of her."

The account of this incident is recorded also by Mark, in Mark 14:3-9, and in John 12:1-8. When Jesus was in Jerusalem by day, He evidently was staying in Bethany at night. It was only about 1 and a half miles to the east of Jerusalem. He had stayed there in the home of Martha, Mary and Lazarus, and this was after Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead (see John 11). On this occasion He was at the home of Simon the leper. No doubt Simon had been a leper but Jesus had healed him. As Jesus reclined at the table at dinner time, a woman came and poured this expensive perfume on His head. That the perfume was in an alabaster vial indicates that it was something very precious. It had cost this woman or whomever had given it to her a lot of money, and she poured it all on Jesus. John tells us that it was Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus, who did this, and that the perfume was "pure nard." Thayer's Greek Definitions says of nard that it was, "the head or spike of a fragrant East Indian plant belonging to the genus Valerianna, which yields a juice of delicious odour which the ancients used (either pure or mixed) in the preparation of a most precious ointment." John



tells us that Mary also anointed the feet of Jesus with the perfume and wiped His feet with her hair, and that the house was filled with the fragrance.

The disciples were displeased about this. They asked, "Why this waste? For this perfume might have been sold for a high price and the money given to the poor." John tells us that it was Judas Iscariot who said this, the man who was intending to betray Jesus. According to John, Judas said, "Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and given to poor people?" (John 12:5). He put a value on the perfume of 300 denarii, and Mark says "This perfume might have been sold for over three hundred denarii." It was worth almost a year's wages for a common worker! It could have been put to good use for the benefit of the poor, but instead it was wasted. The word translated "waste" is *apōleia*, meaning destruction or loss. Jesus used the word in Matthew 7:13 to describe the destination of the wide road, that it leads to destruction. Though it was Judas who said this, evidently the other disciples agreed with him and Mark says "They were scolding her" (Mark 14:5). They were very harsh with Mary. The Good News Bible renders it "they criticized her harshly," and the World English Bible has, "They grumbled against her."

Mary had been the target of complaints from her sister Martha because she was not helping Martha serve when Jesus had come to visit earlier (Luke 10:38-42), and now she is criticized by the disciples. But in both cases Jesus came to her defense. She is one who truly loved Jesus and expressed that love by both giving Him her attention and by lavishly honoring Him with a precious and valuable possession.

The criticism, at least on the part of Judas, was not sincere. John says, "Now he said this, not because he was concerned about the poor, but because he was a thief, and as he had the money box, he used to pilfer what was put into it" (John 12:6). Judas, for some reason, was entrusted with the money that had been given to Jesus and the disciples for their support. This fact is mentioned again in John 13:29 when Jesus dismissed Judas from the "last supper" in the upper room on Passover. We see that Judas was not concerned about the poor but was concerned about profit for himself. He was a thief in charge of the money box. He was an embezzler. Surely Jesus knew this, but nevertheless allowed it to continue. Jesus in fact knew all along that Judas would betray Him, but still chose him, allowed him to be among His apostles, and allowed him to pilfer from their funds. Judas had his role to play, and Jesus allowed it to happen. Sometimes our criticisms of others are not sincere. We make a show of being concerned about what is right when really we have other motives. We try to make ourselves look virtuous by making others appear in the wrong.

Jesus was aware of what the disciples were thinking and saying. He said, "Why do you bother the woman? For she has done a good deed to Me." What she had done was not a "waste," but a good deed. She had lavishly expressed her love for the Lord. The perfume was hers to use as she saw fit, and she wanted to use it to honor Jesus and express her devotion and gratefulness to Him. He accepted and honored her expression of worship.

Jesus explained further, "For you always have the poor with you; but you do not always have Me. For when she poured this perfume on My body, she did it to prepare Me for burial. Truly I say to you, wherever this gospel is reached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be spoken of in memory of her." Mark 14:7 says, "For you always have the poor with you, and whenever you wish you can do good to them; but you do not always have Me." Giving to the poor is something that we can always do at any time, but doing something like this for Jesus was a rare opportunity. As we saw in chapter 25, doing good for others in need is a means of doing good to Jesus, but when He was here in the flesh, it was a unique opportunity to do good to Him directly and in person.

I doubt that Mary was thinking as she poured the perfume on Jesus that she was preparing Him for His burial, but this is what Jesus said she was doing. Jesus was about to be

crucified and then buried, and Mary had prepared His body beforehand. Perhaps she was mindful of the things He had said about being handed over and put to death, and she wanted to do something significant for Him before this happened. Perhaps she saw this as her last chance to honor Him in a big way. Having honored Jesus this way, she also would be honored. She would be remembered for this act, and indeed it is recorded in the gospels and we are remembering her now. Her deed is preached and remembered and held up as an example.

Lavish love for Jesus is appropriate. We need to be careful about criticizing others for doing things we perceive as wasteful. Yes, we should be careful not to waste His resources, but often we can be overly critical of those who are loving the Lord lavishly. Some are lavish in their praise and expressions of worship, sometimes loud and shameless. If we are quieter and more reserved we should be careful with our criticism. They do it to honor Him, and we can learn from them.

#### Matthew 26:14-16

Then one of the twelve, named Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests 15 and said, "What are you willing to give me to betray Him to you?" And they weighed out thirty pieces of silver to him. 16 From then on he began looking for a good opportunity to betray Jesus.

We've just seen that Judas was the one who spoke up about the "waste" of the perfume, seeing money being poured out before his eyes, money he might have laid his own hands on. Judas was appalled. Judas was a lover of money, and it was a strong factor in his betrayal of Jesus. He went to the chief priests and asked them straight out, "What are you willing to give me to betray Him to you?" The word for "betray" is *paradidōmi*, to hand over, to deliver over to another. We've seen Matthew use this word often as it occurs 31 times in his gospel. Judas would turn Jesus over to them if they would pay him. They weighed out 30 pieces of silver, probably shekels, and gave them to him. According to Exodus 21:32, 30 shekels of silver was what was to be paid if a man's ox had gored a male or female slave. The life of a slave was valued at this price point.

I think another factor in the betrayal of Judas may have been Jesus' mention of how Mary was preparing was preparing Him for burial. I think Judas had not signed on to follow a Messiah who was going to die. He had signed on to follow a King and a Ruler, not a man who was going to sacrifice His life for some cause. I think Judas had become disillusioned by all this talk of suffering and dying.

Having been paid, Judas started looking for a "good opportunity" to hand Jesus over to them. He started looking for the right time. Luke says he was seeking to do this "apart from the crowd." He needed to find a time when Jesus wasn't surrounded by crowds of people, when it was just He and the disciples. AT Robertson says, "Mary and Judas extreme opposites: she freely spending in love, he willing to sell his Master for money' (Bruce). And her act of love provoked Judas to his despicable deed, this rebuke of Jesus added to all the rest" (Word Pictures in the Greek New Testament.)

#### Matthew 26:17-29

Now on the first day of Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Where do You want us to prepare for You to eat the Passover?" 18 And He said, "Go into the city to a certain man, and say to him, 'The Teacher says, "My time is near; I am to keep the Passover at your house with My disciples.'"" 19 The disciples did as Jesus had directed them; and they prepared the Passover. 20 Now when evening came, Jesus was reclining at

the table with the twelve disciples. 21 As they were eating, He said, "Truly I say to you that one of you will betray Me." 22 Being deeply grieved, they each one began to say to Him, "Surely not I, Lord?" 23 And He answered, "He who dipped his hand with Me in the bowl is the one who will betray Me. 24 "The Son of Man is to go, just as it is written of Him; but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had not been born." 25 And Judas, who was betraying Him, said, "Surely it is not I, Rabbi?" Jesus \*said to him, "You have said it yourself."

26 While they were eating, Jesus took some bread, and after a blessing, He broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is My body." 27 And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you; 28 for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins. 29 "But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom."

The 14<sup>th</sup> day of the month was to be the day for the Passover meal (Numbers 9:3), and was reckoned as starting after sunset on the 13<sup>th</sup> according to the Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges. Jesus apparently chose to observe the Passover meal with the disciples one day early, since He knew He was to be crucified on Passover.

The disciples asked Jesus where He wanted them to prepare the Passover, and He had a man and a place lined up. Plans had already been laid, at least in the mind of Jesus. There was a certain man in Jerusalem who had a house there, and that would be the place they would eat the Passover. They were to go to him and say, "The Teacher says, 'My time is near; I am to keep the Passover at your house with My disciples.'" Mark and Luke give us more detail. Mark 14:13-15 says, "And He sent two of His disciples and said to them, 'Go into the city, and a man will meet you carrying a pitcher of water; follow him; 14 and wherever he enters, say to the owner of the house, 'The Teacher says, 'Where is My guest room in which I may eat the Passover with My disciples?' 15 And he himself will show you a large upper room furnished and ready; prepare for us there.'" No doubt this was a man of means who had a nice place in Jerusalem. This sounds similar to the time when He sent the men into the city to retrieve the donkey. Things worked out just as He said they would, and they found the man and the place and prepared the Passover.

As they reclined at the table together that evening, Jesus revealed that one of the twelve would betray Him. This caused them deep grief and they all said, "Surely not I, Lord?" Jesus assured them that it would be one who had "dipped his hand with Me in the bowl." It was one of the twelve right there eating with them. Judas had to play along and say the same thing as the others. Jesus gave the grave warning, "The Son of Man is to go, just as it is written of Him; but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had not been born." Side-by-side here we see the plan of God and the responsibility of man. It had been written and it was inevitable that the Son of Man should be betrayed, suffer, be crucified and rise again, but it was still a great wickedness that Judas betrayed Him, and Judas would be severely judged as a result. Yes, the betrayal of Judas was part of the plan and purpose of God, but still Judas would pay the price for his treachery. Sometimes even the evil of men fits into the plan of God. In giving him this warning, Jesus was being gracious to Judas. He was giving him a chance to turn around, even while knowing he would not. When Judas said, "Surely it is not I, Rabbi?" Jesus replied, "You have said it yourself."

John had a unique perspective of the incident and gives us much more detail in John 13:21-30:

When Jesus had said this, He became troubled in spirit, and testified and said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, that one of you will betray Me." 22 The disciples began looking at one another, at a loss to know of which one He was speaking. 23 There was reclining on Jesus' bosom one of His disciples, whom Jesus loved. 24 So Simon Peter gestured to him, and said to him, "Tell us who it is of whom He is speaking." 25 He, leaning back thus on Jesus' bosom, said to Him, "Lord, who is it?" 26 Jesus then answered, "That is the one for whom I shall dip the morsel and give it to him." So when He had dipped the morsel, He took and gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot. 27 After the morsel, Satan then entered into him. Therefore Jesus said to him, "What you do, do quickly." 28 Now no one of those reclining at the table knew for what purpose He had said this to him. 29 For some were supposing, because Judas had the money box, that Jesus was saying to him, "Buy the things we have need of for the feast"; or else, that he should give something to the poor. 30 So after receiving the morsel he went out immediately; and it was night.

It appears that aside from Judas himself John was the only one among the apostles who was allowed to see that it was Judas who was going to betray Jesus. It's possible that Jesus was protecting Judas from the wrath of the others. This was a highly emotional moment. Jesus was troubled and the disciples were grieved. Peter wanted the man to be exposed. We can only guess what Peter and the others would have done if Jesus had said, "It is Judas!" So Jesus revealed the answer to John without the others being aware of what was going on. Satan himself entered into Judas after Jesus gave him the morsel, and then Jesus dismissed Judas to do what he was intending to do. Jesus had a lot to say to the other eleven men, but it was time to dismiss the traitor. Note that neither the opponents of Jesus nor Judas were in control of the timing of events. Jesus determined when Judas would betray Him. It was going to happen on Passover.

After Judas had left, Jesus then instituted the "Lord's Supper." He took some unleavened bread, spoke a blessing, and then broke it and gave it to the disciples, telling them to eat it and that it was His body. He then took a cup and gave thanks and gave it to them, telling them that they must all drink of it because it was His blood, the blood of the covenant, poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. The word for "thanks" in verse 27 in the Greek is *eucharisteō*, from which we get "eucharist." It comes from *eucharistos*, meaning "good favor" or "good grace." The Lord's Supper is called the "eucharist" because it celebrates the good grace of God to us in Christ His Son.

The bread and the wine represent His body and blood, His life given for us. Jesus had told them that He is the "bread of life" and if they wanted eternal life they would have to eat His flesh and drink His blood (see John 6:35-63). He said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in yourselves. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For My flesh is true food, and My blood is true drink. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats Me, he also will live because of Me. This is the bread which came down out of heaven; not as the fathers ate and died; he who eats this bread will live forever" (John 6:53-58). It's important to note especially John 6:63 when interpreting this passage, "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life." Jesus was not talking about literally eating His physical flesh, but He was speaking of spiritual reality. By faith we are to feed on Him and draw life from Him. No doubt John 6 is the basis for the doctrine of transubstantiation in the Roman Catholic church, the

idea that the bread and the wine in the eucharist, properly handled by a Roman Catholic priest, actually and mystically become the literal body and blood of Jesus. The idea, then, is that if we really want to receive and maintain eternal life and abide in Christ, we must partake of the Lord's Supper in the Roman Catholic church, or else we remain outside the grace of God. The Roman Catholic church then becomes the crucial source of a relationship with Christ and we must partake regularly of the mass in order to have eternal life. In Catholic doctrine the church hierarchy mediates the grace of God to the individual. But Jesus clearly said that it is the Spirit who gives life, and His words were spiritual words and not fleshly words. It is not the bread and the wine that give us life, but the Holy Spirit, given by the Son, who gives life. The Lord's Supper is a memorial, and the bread and the wine are symbols of His body and blood, to remind us that He gave His life for us.

When Jesus gave them the cup, He said that it was "My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins." Luke and Paul both say, "this cup is the new covenant in My blood" (Luke 22:20, 1 Corinthians 11:25). When Jesus died He inaugurated a new covenant, and His own blood was the blood of that new covenant. When He said this He was probably thinking of Jeremiah 31:31-34, "Behold, days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them," declares the LORD. But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days," declares the LORD, "I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them," declares the LORD, "for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more." This prophecy was fulfilled by the new covenant that Jesus established through His death. The author of Hebrews writes at length about this "new covenant" in Hebrews 8 and 9 and quotes from the passage in Jeremiah. He says in Hebrews 8:6 that Jesus is the "mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted on better promises," and continues on through chapter 9 to discuss why the new covenant in Christ is superior to the old covenant.

The new covenant provides true forgiveness of sins. The blood of Jesus was poured out for many for the forgiveness of their sins. To have our sins forgiven is the thing we really need. This was accomplished when Jesus died in our place on the cross and His blood, His life, was poured out for us. The book of Hebrews says that without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness (Hebrews 9:22). The Old Testament tells us in several places that the life of any creature is in the blood, and therefore God prohibited the eating of blood. Leviticus 17:10-14 says, "And any man from the house of Israel, or from the aliens who sojourn among them, who eats any blood, I will set My face against that person who eats blood and will cut him off from among his people. For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood by reason of the life that makes atonement. Therefore I said to the sons of Israel, 'No person among you may eat blood, nor may any alien who sojourns among you eat blood.' So when any man from the sons of Israel, or from the aliens who sojourn among them, in hunting catches a beast or a bird which may be eaten, he shall pour out its blood and cover it with earth. For as for the life of all flesh, its blood is identified with its life. Therefore I said to the sons of Israel, 'You are not to eat the blood of any flesh, for the life of all flesh is its blood; whoever eats it shall be cut off.'" It is the blood, the life of Jesus given for us, that truly makes atonement for our sins and truly covers our sins and truly provides us with forgiveness.

Finally, Jesus makes a commitment that He won't drink of the fruit of the vine until He drinks it new with the disciples in the Father's kingdom. He looks ahead to the future celebration all followers of Christ will enjoy with Him in the great banquet of God in the fullness of the kingdom. There will be a day when they again will enjoy the great feast in God's kingdom.

So then, what really is the significance of the Lord's Supper? If it isn't a literal eating of the Lord's body and drinking of His blood, then what is it? I think 1 Corinthians 11:23-27 is helpful at this point:

For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread; 24 and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me." 25 In the same way He took the cup also after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." 26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes. 27 Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord.

Paul says that Jesus told them, "do this in remembrance of me." The Lord's Supper is a memorial, it is meant to remind us of His death. When we take part in the Lord's Supper, we are recalling the fact that Jesus died for our sins, that His body and His blood were given for us, to atone for our sins.

Paul also says here that when we eat the bread and drink the cup, we "proclaim the Lord's death until He comes." The Lord's Supper is a proclamation of His death. The death of Jesus Christ is at the center of the gospel and is the central thing that we must proclaim. We are not saved by observing the Lord's Supper, but we remember Him and proclaim His saving work in His atoning death for our sins.

#### Matthew 26:30-35

After singing a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. 31 Then Jesus \*said to them, "You will all fall away because of Me this night, for it is written, 'I WILL STRIKE DOWN THE SHEPHERD, AND THE SHEEP OF THE FLOCK SHALL BE SCATTERED.'" 32 "But after I have been raised, I will go ahead of you to Galilee." 33 But Peter said to Him, "Even though all may fall away because of You, I will never fall away." 34 Jesus said to him, "Truly I say to you that this very night, before a rooster crows, you will deny Me three times." 35 Peter \*said to Him, "Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You." All the disciples said the same thing too.

After they had finished the Passover meal, they sang a hymn. Marvin Vincent suggests that it was "very probably the second part of the Jewish *Hallel* or *Hallelujah*, embracing Psalms 115, 116, Psalm 117:1-2, 118" ([Vincent's Word Studies](#)). Then they went out to the Mount of Olives, to the Garden of Gethsemane. There, Jesus revealed to the disciples that they would all fall away because of Him that night. We've seen this word translated "fall away" before, it is *skandalizō*, to stumble, trip, to fall. They would all fall away because it was written that they would do so in Zechariah 13:7. Jesus is the Good Shepherd, and when He was struck down, His sheep were scattered. When Jesus was arrested, the disciples scattered. In their fear they ran and abandoned Him.

Their falling away, however, would not be permanent. Jesus says, "But after I have been raised, I will go ahead of you to Galilee." They would meet Him again after He had been raised. There would be stumbling, but there would also be restoration. They would trip and fall because of their relationship to Him, but they would get up again and return. They would be parted, but they also would be reunited.

Peter, according to his nature, declared that this was not true in his case. All the others might fall away, but he never would. His loyalty and commitment could not be shaken. He would never abandon Jesus. But Jesus told him more explicitly what he would do later that night, that Peter would deny Him three times, and then a rooster would crow. Jesus had perfect foreknowledge of what was going to happen. Peter would not just fall away and abandon Jesus, but he would also deny Him three times. The word for "deny" is *aparneomai*, which Strong's Dictionary defines as "to deny utterly, to disown." Peter could not conceive that he would ever do such a thing. He said, "Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You." The others would not be outdone by Peter. They all said the same thing. They all said that they would follow Jesus to death and would not fall away. Mark tells us that Peter kept on saying this insistently (Mark 14:31). Luke records that he said, "Lord, with You I am ready to go both to prison and to death!" (Luke 22:33).

One of the things to see here is that the Lord knows us much better than we know ourselves. Our commitment and determination is an important and commendable thing, but we don't really know sometimes how we will behave when the pressures of life really come upon us. It is one thing to say that we will follow Jesus to death, but it is another thing to actually face the reality. Human determination is not enough to carry us through. We need also the presence and power and grace of God when we face the prospect of losing our lives for Jesus. Fleshly determination and pride alone will not carry us through.

Peter was sincere in his insistence that he would not fall away. He had no intention of falling away or denying Jesus, and yet he did the very thing he could not conceive of doing. This is what our sinful nature leads us into. We end up doing things we had no intention of doing. We do the opposite of what we sincerely want to do. Paul talks about this in Romans 7:14-25:

For we know that the Law is spiritual, but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin. 15 For what I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate. 16 But if I do the very thing I do not want to do, I agree with the Law, confessing that the Law is good. 17 So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. 18 For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not. 19 For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want. 20 But if I am doing the very thing I do not want, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. 21 I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good. 22 For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, 23 but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members. 24 Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? 25 Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin.

Matthew 26:36-46

Then Jesus \*came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and \*said to His disciples,

"Sit here while I go over there and pray." 37 And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be grieved and distressed. 38 Then He \*said to them, "My soul is deeply grieved, to the point of death; remain here and keep watch with Me." 39 And He went a little beyond them, and fell on His face and prayed, saying, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will." 40 And He \*came to the disciples and \*found them sleeping, and \*said to Peter, "So, you men could not keep watch with Me for one hour? 41 "Keep watching and praying that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." 42 He went away again a second time and prayed, saying, "My Father, if this cannot pass away unless I drink it, Your will be done." 43 Again He came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. 44 And He left them again, and went away and prayed a third time, saying the same thing once more. 45 Then He \*came to the disciples and \*said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? Behold, the hour is at hand and the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners. 46 "Get up, let us be going; behold, the one who betrays Me is at hand!"

Matthew and Mark tell us that the place where Jesus went with His disciples was called Gethsemane, which means "oil press." It was on the Mount of Olives, so naturally there was an olive press there for the production of olive oil. Luke tells us that it was the custom of Jesus to go to this place (Luke 22:39). John says that it was a garden (John 18:1). He went there to pray and to wait for His betrayal and arrest. He knew that this would be the place where He would be betrayed.

He told the disciples that He was going to go pray, and Luke indicates that He told them when they got there that they needed to pray. Luke 22:40 says, "When He arrived at the place, He said to them, 'Pray that you may not enter into temptation.'" He repeated the order again in verse 46, "Why are you sleeping? Get up and pray that you may not enter into temptation." They had come to a time when He needed to pray and they also needed to pray. Matthew and Mark use the phrase "keep watch," and in verse 41 in Matthew Jesus says, "Keep watching and praying that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." He wanted them to stay awake and pray. He wanted them to pray as He had instructed them in Matthew 6:13, "And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil." Jesus was at that point facing a severe temptation, the temptation to flee the suffering that lay ahead of Him, and it was crucial that He pray at this point. The disciples did not appreciate the peril that they also faced and the need they had to pray so that they might avoid temptation. Their spirit was willing to go forward with Jesus and not abandon Him, but their flesh was weak. Because of the weakness of their flesh, they needed to pray at this point. They were in danger of error and sin and they needed to pray to avoid the temptation. There may be many instances in our lives when we face temptation and fall into sin needlessly. If we had prayed, God may have protected us.

Though all the disciples were with Him in the garden except for Judas, Jesus left eight of them and took with Him Peter "and the two sons of Zebedee," James and John, further on with Him apart from the others. These are the same three He took with Him up onto the mountain where He was transfigured (Matthew 17:1-13). For some reason these three were the "inner circle" of Jesus, and were privileged to see some things and have some experiences the others didn't have.

With Peter, James and John, Jesus "began to be grieved and distressed." He told them that His soul was "deeply grieved, to the point of death." He was in deep agony and emotional pain. The disciples had never seen Jesus like this before. Luke says, "And being in agony He was praying very fervently; and His sweat became like drops of blood, falling down upon the



ground” (Luke 22:44). Jesus was subject to the same emotions anyone would feel if they knew they were going to face suffering and death at the hands of others. He was not above nor exempt from human emotions at such a time. In fact, He may have felt these emotions even more strongly than the average person because He was the Son of God who had never experienced weakness and peril and danger before He had taken on human flesh. To allow Himself to become a victim of those whom He had created must have been an agonizing thing.

Jesus told Peter, James and John, “remain here and keep watch with Me.” He wanted their presence and support at this time. In times of trouble it is a comfort to have close friends and family nearby. The word translated “keep watch” is *grēgoreō*, to be awake, to watch, to stay on the alert. Robertson says, “This late present from the perfect *egreōra* means to keep awake and not go to sleep. The hour was late and the strain had been severe, but Jesus pleaded for a bit of human sympathy as he wrestled with his Father. It did not seem too much to ask. He had put his sorrow in strong language, “even unto death” (*heōs thanatou*) that ought to have alarmed them” ([Robertson’s Word Pictures](#)).

Jesus went a little further, fell on His face and prayed. Matthew tells us that He said, “My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will.” The second time He said, “My Father, if this cannot pass away unless I drink it, Your will be done.” His request was that the “cup” might “pass from” and “pass away” from Him, that if it were possible, He might not have to drink this cup, but that there might be some alternative that would not require His suffering and death. Jesus had mentioned this “cup” previously when He asked James and John whether they were “able to drink the cup that I am about to drink” in Matthew 20:22. He explained then that He had not come to be served, but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many (Matthew 20:28). I think it is right to see this as a great temptation that Jesus was facing. He had the strong desire to avoid the suffering and death He knew He was facing. We are tempted when we are lured and enticed by our own desires (James 1:14 ESV). His strong desire was that the cup pass from Him. At this point His will was in conflict with what He knew to be the will of the Father. This is why He says, “Yet not as I will but as You will” and “Your will be done.”

Jesus asked for what was impossible and for what would not pass away. He knew and had taught the disciples explicitly that He was going to Jerusalem to die. Jesus had said that the Father had commanded Him to lay down His life for His sheep (John 10:17-18). He had rebuked Peter for saying “God forbid it Lord! This shall never happen to You.” He had told Peter, “You are not setting your mind on God’s interests, but man’s” (Matthew 16:22-23). But now in the garden, Jesus Himself asks for something that He already knows is not in accord with the will of His Father. How could He do this? Didn’t He say “I and the Father are one”? How could His will diverge from the will of His Father? Didn’t He say “I always do the things that are pleasing to Him”? (John 8:29). This is a mystery I don’t think we can fully grasp. But here Jesus shows that sometimes when we pray we may even ask for things we know God can’t or won’t do. He made a request He knew would not be granted. Why did He even ask? Because that is what He was feeling; that is what He wanted. We should be honest with God about what we want, even if we know it diverges from His will. We should ask even when we know the request won’t be granted, because prayer is communication with God, and communication sometimes requires that we honestly admit what we want and how we are feeling.

When we pray this way we will eventually get to the point where we say what Jesus said, “yet not as I will, but as You will.” James tells us that when we plan out our lives, we need to say this. James 4:13-17 says, “Come now, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit.’ Yet

you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. Instead, you ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that.' But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil. Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin." When we plan and when we pray, our plans and requests must be subject to the will of God. Jesus taught us to ask that God's will be done on earth as it is in heaven (Matthew 6:10). Our will often conflicts with His, and we need to learn to pray, as Jesus did, that the will of the Father would be carried out in our lives and in the world. Sometimes submitting to His will will lead to pain and suffering and difficulty. Contrary to the teaching of some, the will of God does not always lead to health, wealth and prosperity. Sometimes it leads to suffering and even death.

Jesus wanted Peter, James and John to keep watch with Him and pray, but "their eyes were heavy" and they fell asleep. Jesus came to them, found them sleeping, and asked, "So, you men could not keep watch with Me for one hour?" Marvin Vincent comments, "The Greek adverb is not interrogation or exclamatory *ti*, but only 'so' or 'thus.' There is a tone of sad disappointment at the discovery that they were asleep after the earnest plea that they keep awake (Matthew 26:38). 'Did you not thus have strength enough to keep awake one hour?' Every word struck home." I have had times when I intended to pray and "keep watch," but I was sleepy and fell asleep instead. This is not an uncommon thing. They had had a busy day and it was time for bed. The flesh was weak. Yet Jesus exhorted them to keep on watching and praying in order to avoid temptation. There are times we must overcome our sleepiness and keep praying.

Three times Jesus prayed, saying the same thing. It's interesting to note that Paul also prayed three times, asking that his "thorn in the flesh" might be removed, but his request was also denied (see 2 Corinthians 12:7-10). I don't know for sure if there is some special significance to the number three in scripture, some seem to think so. But both Jesus and Paul asked for something three times and their requests weren't granted, and so they moved forward knowing the Father's will in both cases. Though Jesus taught that we should avoid "meaningless repetition" when we pray (Matthew 6:7), we see here that He repeated His request three times. Clearly His repeated request was not "meaningless," but full of passion and meaning. There is no problem with a repeated request if we are honest and sincere. In the parable of the widow and the unrighteous judge in Luke 18:1-8 Jesus showed that we must keep coming back to submit the same request, that we must be persistent in seeking what we need. A similar point is made in the parable of the friend who went to his friend at midnight to ask for bread to serve a visitor. Jesus says, "I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will get up and give him as much as he needs" (Luke 11:8). We must keep praying and not give up until we know for sure that God is not going to grant our requests. Through repeated persistent prayer we either see our requests granted or we come to a settled conviction that God's will lies in a different direction.

After praying a third time, Jesus came again to the disciples and again found them sleeping. He said, "Are you still sleeping and resting? Behold, the hour is at hand and the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners. Get up, let us be going; behold, the one who betrays Me is at hand!" In John's gospel there are several references to this "hour" that was coming when it would be time for Jesus to go to the cross. John 7:30 says, "So they were seeking to seize Him; and no man laid his hand on Him, because His hour had not yet come." Jesus would not be arrested until the proper hour. Again in John 8:20 it says, "These words He spoke in the treasury, as He taught in the temple; and no one seized Him, because His hour had not yet come."

In John 12:23-33 Jesus says that the hour had come and spoke of His death and glorification:

And Jesus answered them, saying, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. 24 "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. 25 "He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it to life eternal. 26 "If anyone serves Me, he must follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also; if anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him. 27 "Now My soul has become troubled; and what shall I say, 'Father, save Me from this hour'? But for this purpose I came to this hour. 28 "Father, glorify Your name." Then a voice came out of heaven: "I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again." 29 So the crowd of people who stood by and heard it were saying that it had thundered; others were saying, "An angel has spoken to Him." 30 Jesus answered and said, "This voice has not come for My sake, but for your sakes. 31 "Now judgment is upon this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out. 32 "And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself." 33 But He was saying this to indicate the kind of death by which He was to die.

There is a foretaste of His suffering in the garden in verse 29. Knowing this "hour" had come, His soul was troubled. Should He ask to be saved from the hour? He knew that this hour was the purpose for which He came, and so He asked that the Father's name would be glorified. The hour was the hour of judgment upon this world. It was the hour when the ruler of this world would be cast out. It was the hour He would be lifted up and draw all men to Himself. It was the hour of His death. The "hour" encompassed all of these elements.

Then in John 13:1 at the last supper just before Jesus washed the feet of the disciples it says, "Now before the Feast of the Passover, Jesus knowing that His hour had come that He would depart out of this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end." The hour was the hour that "He would depart out of this world to the Father." Jesus talked with them about how He was going away to the Father. As Jesus began praying in John 17:1 He lifted His eyes to heaven and said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify Your Son, that the Son may glorify You." This hour to which they had come was the hour for His suffering and death and departure, the hour to go to the Father and to be glorified once more "with the glory which I had with You before the world was" (John 17:5). As Judas approached with the authorities to take Jesus into custody, He told the disciples that the hour had come.

#### Matthew 26:47-56

While He was still speaking, behold, Judas, one of the twelve, came up accompanied by a large crowd with swords and clubs, who came from the chief priests and elders of the people. 48 Now he who was betraying Him gave them a sign, saying, "Whomever I kiss, He is the one; seize Him." 49 Immediately Judas went to Jesus and said, "Hail, Rabbi!" and kissed Him. 50 And Jesus said to him, "Friend, do what you have come for." Then they came and laid hands on Jesus and seized Him. 51 And behold, one of those who were with Jesus reached and drew out his sword, and struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his ear. 52 Then Jesus \*said to him, "Put your sword back into its place; for all those who take up the sword shall perish by the sword. 53 "Or do you think that I cannot appeal to My Father, and He will at once put at My disposal more than twelve legions of angels? 54 "How then will the Scriptures be fulfilled, which say that it must happen this way?" 55 At that time Jesus said to

the crowds, "Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest Me as you would against a robber? Every day I used to sit in the temple teaching and you did not seize Me. 56 "But all this has taken place to fulfill the Scriptures of the prophets." Then all the disciples left Him and fled.

John tells us that Judas knew where Jesus and the disciples were because Jesus had "often met there with His disciples" (John 18:2). Judas may have lead the authorities to the place where they had been when he left and, not finding Him there, then concluded that He must have gone to Gethsemane. Even as Jesus said, "the one who betrays Me is at hand," Judas arrived with a large crowd armed with swords and clubs. This crowd had been sent by the chief priests and elders. John 18:3 says, "Judas then, having received the Roman cohort and officers from the chief priests and the Pharisees, came there with lanterns and torches and weapons." The word translated "cohort" is *speira*, and is of Latin origin and means "a mass of men," a squad or detachment (Strong's Dictionary). AT Robertson says it was a "small band secured from the tower of Antonia." So among this crowd were Roman soldiers. Clearly the chief priests, elders, and perhaps Judas himself anticipated that there might be some strong resistance to the arrest of Jesus.

Before they arrived, Judas had told the men with him that he would indicate who Jesus was by kissing Him and that He would be the one they were to take into custody. Right away Judas went to Jesus, said "Hail, Rabbi!" and kissed Him. The word for "kissed" in verse 49 is *kataphileō*, to "kiss fervently" (New American Standard Exhaustive Concordance). I don't know if he did this in a mocking manner, but it was certainly a pretense. He had no real affection for Jesus. According to Luke, Jesus said, "Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?" (Luke 22:48). Proverbs 27:6 says "Faithful are the wounds of a friend, But deceitful are the kisses of an enemy." The kiss of Judas was the kiss of one who had become the enemy of Jesus, and it was a deceitful kiss. There was no real love behind it.

Even though Judas was betraying Him, Jesus still called him "friend" in verse 50 and tells him to go ahead and do what he had come to do. So they laid hands on Jesus and seized Him. It was at this point, according to Luke, that someone asked, "Lord, shall we strike with the sword?" (Luke 22:50). John tells us that it was Peter who drew his sword and struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his right ear, and that the name of the slave was Malchus (John 18:10). Peter, impulsive as always, did not wait for Jesus to answer the question and order them to fight, but he went ahead and struck out with his sword. Matthew here has the most lengthy account of what Jesus said to him, "Put your sword back into its place; for all those who take up the sword shall perish by the sword. Or do you think that I cannot appeal to My Father, and He will at once put at My disposal more than twelve legions of angels? How then will the Scriptures be fulfilled, which say that it must happen this way?" John 18:11 tells us that Jesus said, "Put the sword into the sheath; the cup which the Father has given Me, shall I not drink it?" And Luke 22:51 says, "But Jesus answered and said, 'Stop! No more of this.' And He touched his ear and healed him." Jesus had not come to this moment to fight and defeat His enemies. If that had been His purpose He did not need Peter's help. He could have asked His Father for twelve legions of angels. A legion at that time was 6,100 soldiers and 726 horses (Robertson's Word Pictures). Each of them, Jesus and the eleven faithful apostles, could have had 6,100 angelic soldiers fighting for them, a total of 73,200! Jesus could have commanded legions of angels and easily defeated all those who opposed Him, but as we have seen, that is not why He had come to this "hour."

It looks at this point like Peter is going to be true to his word that he will not fall away from Jesus. He is determined to go down with his sword in hand, fighting for his Lord. It must have

been frustrating for him to have Jesus order him to put his sword away. We should note that Jesus did not tell Peter to get rid of his sword altogether, but simply to put it back into its place. Jesus says that all who take up the sword shall perish by the sword. The violent have a tendency to die violent deaths. It is the principle that we reap what we sow.

If Jesus had called for the twelve legions of angels and if He had destroyed His enemies, then how would the Scriptures be fulfilled that indicated that He must be handed over to suffering and death? The Father was giving Him this “cup” to drink, and it was His duty to drink it and not avoid it. After His death and resurrection, when Jesus appeared to the disciples, He pointed out this same thing. Luke 24:44-47 says, “Now He said to them, ‘These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.’ Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and He said to them, ‘Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem.’” They needed to see, and we need to see, that the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus was necessary and unavoidable. It was the will of the Father. It was foretold in Scripture. It was the purpose for which He came. If we understand the Scriptures we will understand this truth.

Jesus spoke to the crowd and asked why they had come out to arrest Him as if He were a robber. He pointed out that He had been teaching in the temple every day and they had ample opportunity to arrest Him then if He really was a criminal, but they did not do it. The police arrest criminal suspects whenever and wherever they find them. Generally speaking they do not wait until the suspect is isolated and out of the public eye. These men were acting covertly with fear and hypocrisy. Jesus then pointed out that it was all taking place to fulfill the Scriptures. Jesus was conscious that the prophecies of Scripture were being fulfilled in His arrest, and He wanted the disciples to see this clearly as well. The gospel writers want us to see this also. Jesus was saying, “Why are you doing this? You’re doing this to fulfill the Scriptures!” Behind the activity of men was the purpose of God. The arrest of Jesus was not an unfortunate and senseless accident, but was part of God’s plan for His Son. It was happening as He had planned it should happen.

Once Jesus surrendered Himself to the crowd, the disciples left Him and fled. They indeed fell away from Him. However, John tells us that Jesus had said to the crowd, “I told you that I am He; so if you seek Me, let these go their way.” John says that Jesus said this in order to “fulfill the word which He spoke, ‘Of those whom You have given Me I lost not one’” (John 18:8-9). Jesus was referring to His statement in John 6:39, “This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day,” and His prayer in John 17:12, “While I was with them, I was keeping them in Your name which You have given Me; and I guarded them and not one of them perished but the son of perdition, so that the Scripture would be fulfilled.” It was not yet time for His followers to “drink His cup” and follow Him to death. Jesus saw to it that they would escape and be protected at this point. Even their falling away was in accord with God’s plan.

#### Matthew 26:57-68

Those who had seized Jesus led Him away to Caiaphas, the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were gathered together. 58 But Peter was following Him at a distance as far as the courtyard of the high priest, and entered in, and sat down with the officers to see the outcome. 59 Now the chief priests and the whole Council kept trying to obtain false testimony against Jesus, so that they might put Him to death. 60 They did not find any, even

though many false witnesses came forward. But later on two came forward, 61 and said, "This man stated, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God and to rebuild it in three days.'" 62 The high priest stood up and said to Him, "Do You not answer? What is it that these men are testifying against You?" 63 But Jesus kept silent. And the high priest said to Him, "I adjure You by the living God, that You tell us whether You are the Christ, the Son of God." 64 Jesus \*said to him, "You have said it yourself; nevertheless I tell you, hereafter you will see THE SON OF MAN SITTING AT THE RIGHT HAND OF POWER, and COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF HEAVEN." 65 Then the high priest tore his robes and said, "He has blasphemed! What further need do we have of witnesses? Behold, you have now heard the blasphemy; 66 what do you think?" They answered, "He deserves death!" 67 Then they spat in His face and beat Him with their fists; and others slapped Him, 68 and said, "Prophecy to us, You Christ; who is the one who hit You?"

The crowd that had come for Jesus led Him away to Caiaphas, the high priest, who had gathered together the scribes and elders, the Jewish Sanhedrin. Peter kept following at a distance and even entered into the courtyard of the high priest and sat down with the officers. John tells us that there was "another disciple" with Peter, thought to be John himself, who was "known to the high priest," who brought Peter into the courtyard (John 18:15-16). Peter had said that he would never fall away, and it appears this determination was still driving him. The fact that he followed "at a distance" shows that he was fearful, but still determined to follow. Peter's purpose was "to see the outcome." The word for "outcome" is *telos*, the end. Several translations render it "to see the end." He wanted to follow Jesus to the end. It was risky for he and John to do this.

There are many who "follow Him at a distance." They don't want to follow too closely lest they be accused of being fanatical Jesus freaks or something similar. There is a level of devotion to Jesus, but fear at the same time of being accused and persecuted along with Him. Being fanatical about Jesus does indeed invite the wrath of the world. The world hates Jesus because He testifies of it, that its deeds are evil (John 7:7). Fear of being hated in the same way may tempt us to keep our distance from Jesus.

The chief priests and Council were actively trying to get false testimony against Jesus, and there were many who came forward to give false witness. Mark tells us that they were not consistent in their testimony, they did not agree (Mark 14:56). This was a corrupt trial from the beginning. It is an obvious miscarriage of justice for prosecutors and judges to solicit false witnesses in any trial. The ninth commandment is, "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor" (Exodus 20:16), yet these men were encouraging the violation of this command. Their purpose in this trial was to put Jesus to death. In order to do this they had to find at least two witnesses who would give the same testimony against Jesus. Deuteronomy 17:6 says, "On the evidence of two witnesses or three witnesses, he who is to die shall be put to death; he shall not be put to death on the evidence of one witness." They did not really care about justice or truth, they just wanted to eliminate Him.

Eventually two witnesses came forward who said, "This man stated, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God and to rebuild it in three days.'" Mark says they were not consistent in this testimony either. His version says "We heard Him say, 'I will destroy this temple made with hands, and in three days I will build another made without hands'" (Mark 14:58). Jesus did say something like this. John records it in John 2:18-22, "The Jews then said to Him, 'What sign do You show us as your authority for doing these things?' Jesus answered them, 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.' The Jews then said, 'It took forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?' But He was speaking of the

temple of His body. So when He was raised from the dead, His disciples remembered that He said this; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had spoken.” Looking back, John realized that Jesus was not talking about the temple in Jerusalem, but the “temple” of His body. Jesus was saying that if they killed Him, He would rise in three days. The “sign” He gave them of His identity and authority was His resurrection. This is still the great “sign” that proves who He is. But the Jews thought He was talking about the literal temple, and the false witnesses’ testimony reflects this misunderstanding.

The high priest was frustrated that Jesus remained silent and did not respond to the testimony against Him. Jesus didn’t try to correct or respond to the false testimony. He didn’t try to explain the true meaning of His saying. The inconsistency of the witnesses was enough to show that He was innocent of plotting to destroy the temple. Everyone knew the witnesses were false, and it was unnecessary to answer them. The high priest wanted Jesus to incriminate Himself by saying something that they could use to convict Him, so he put Jesus under oath. The word “adjure” is from the Greek *exorkizō*, to exact or force an oath. The Lexham English Bible translates it, “I put you under oath by the living God, that you tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God!” This was the thing that bothered these men, that Jesus claimed He was the Son of God. John 5:18 says, “For this reason therefore the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him, because He not only was breaking the Sabbath, but also was calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God.” To them this was an outrageous blasphemy, that this mere man would claim to be equal with God and to be the Messiah.

The demand of the high priest produced the desired result, and Jesus affirmed that He is the Messiah. Jesus said, “You have said it.” Mark 14:62 relates that He said, “I am; and you shall see THE SON OF MAN SITTING AT THE RIGHT HAND OF POWER, and COMING WITH THE CLOUDS OF HEAVEN.” In Luke 22:67-70 it says, “‘If You are the Christ, tell us.’ But He said to them, ‘If I tell you, you will not believe; and if I ask a question, you will not answer. But from now on THE SON OF MAN WILL BE SEATED AT THE RIGHT HAND OF the power OF GOD.’ And they all said, ‘Are You the Son of God, then?’ And He said to them, ‘Yes, I am.’” Again Jesus quotes from Psalm 110:1 and Daniel 7:13-14 to affirm that He is the “Son of Man” who will receive an everlasting kingdom and who will be served by all the “peoples, nations and men of every language.” These men would eventually see that He does indeed hold this position, and that He is indeed the Son of God. He not only affirmed that He was the Christ and the Son of God, but He also gave them fair warning of the implications of that truth for them. One day every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord (Philippians 2:10-11).

Outraged at this claim by Jesus, the high priest tore his robes and said to the Sanhedrin, “He has blasphemed! What further need do we have of witnesses? Behold, you have now heard the blasphemy; what do you think?” The New American Standard Exhaustive Concordance defines blasphemy as “to slander, hence to speak lightly or profanely of sacred things.” To speak of something holy as something evil is blasphemy, as when some of the Jews said that Jesus cast out demons by the authority of Satan (Matthew 12:22-32). To claim divine power and authority when you do not have it is also blasphemy. To claim that you are a true representative of God when you are not is blasphemy. Some accused Jesus of blasphemy when he told the paralyzed man that his sins were forgiven. They said, “Why does this man speak that way? He is blaspheming; who can forgive sins but God alone?” (Mark 2:7). Jesus is in fact the Christ and the Son of God. It was not blasphemy for Him to affirm this.

The members of the Sanhedrin answered the high priest by saying, “He deserves death!” This was the outcome they had planned, and now Jesus had convicted Himself in their eyes with this “blasphemy.” They found Him guilty and sentenced Him immediately. They then

expressed their anger by spitting in His face and hitting and slapping Him and demanding that He prophesy about who had hit Him. This is the beginning of His physical suffering for our sins. He has now been delivered into “the hands of sinners” who are treating Him like the worst of sinners.

#### Matthew 26:69-75

Now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard, and a servant-girl came to him and said, "You too were with Jesus the Galilean." 70 But he denied it before them all, saying, "I do not know what you are talking about." 71 When he had gone out to the gateway, another servant-girl saw him and \*said to those who were there, "This man was with Jesus of Nazareth." 72 And again he denied it with an oath, "I do not know the man." 73 A little later the bystanders came up and said to Peter, "Surely you too are one of them; for even the way you talk gives you away." 74 Then he began to curse and swear, "I do not know the man!" And immediately a rooster crowed. 75 And Peter remembered the word which Jesus had said, "Before a rooster crows, you will deny Me three times." And he went out and wept bitterly.

All four gospels tell us the story of Peter's denial of Jesus. To his credit, Peter had continued to follow Jesus this far, and was watching the proceedings. The first person to assert that Peter had been with Jesus was a servant-girl. She was a servant of the high priest (Mark 14:66) and was the doorkeeper (John 18:16-17). John says, "Simon Peter was following Jesus, and so was another disciple. Now that disciple was known to the high priest, and entered with Jesus into the court of the high priest, but Peter was standing at the door outside. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to the doorkeeper, and brought Peter in. Then the slave-girl who kept the door said to Peter, 'You are not also one of this man's disciples, are you?' He said, 'I am not'" (John 18:15-17). The servant-girl recognized John as a disciple of Jesus and allowed him in because he was known to the high priest, and she asked Peter if he was not also a disciple. Her question was asked in such a way that she anticipated a negative answer, though she probably thought he was one of the disciples. Luke says that she saw him in the firelight and looked intently at him (Luke 22:56). Peter was on the spot because there were others standing there, and no doubt he felt threatened. He said, "I do not know what you are talking about." Mark records that he replied, "I neither know nor understand what you are talking about" (Mark 14:68). He claimed complete ignorance of what she was saying.

Peter tried to move away to the gateway or porch, but another servant-girl saw him and said to others there, "This man was with Jesus of Nazareth." She was certain of the fact. Peter again denied it with an oath and said, "I do not know the man." He swore that he did not know the man. AT Robertson says, "He even refers to Jesus as 'the man' (*ton anthropon*), an expression that could convey contempt, 'the fellow.'" Peter tried to portray himself as one who was clueless about the whole matter, as if they knew more about Jesus than he did. At this point others got involved and said, "Surely you too are one of them; for even the way you talk gives you away." Mark 14:70 says, "And after a little while the bystanders were again saying to Peter, 'Surely you are one of them, for you are a Galilean too.'" Evidently as Peter stood there he was talking. Peter was a gregarious and talkative person, and on this occasion when it probably would have been wise to stay silent, still he was talking. Perhaps he was talking to John and was not whispering or using a low voice. Those around picked up on his Galilean accent. Knowing that Jesus was a Galilean and that His followers were mostly Galileans as well, it was not hard for them to conclude that Peter was surely one of His disciples. Peter had been recognized visually and audibly. John reports that one of those standing there was one



of the slaves of the high priest and a relative of the one whose ear Peter had cut off who said, "Did I not see you in the garden with Him?" (John 18:26). He had made himself conspicuous in the garden when he had drawn his sword and struck the slave of the high priest, and he also made himself conspicuous by speaking.

Peter's third denial is more vehement than the first two. He started with a simple denial, then added an oath, and the third time he added cursing and swearing. He denied Jesus in the strongest language he could muster. Immediately the rooster crowed, and Luke tells us that Jesus turned and looked at Peter (Luke 22:61). The spotlight was on Peter and he remembered what the Lord had said. Jesus had told him that he would deny Him three times before the rooster crowed, and so it happened. Peter then went out and wept bitterly. He had done what he said he would not do, what he could not conceive he would ever do.

At this point we should reflect on Luke's account of what Jesus had said to Peter when He warned him about this. In Luke 22:31-32 He said, "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat; but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers." What happened to Peter was a sifting from Satan, a process of agitating him to see if he really was wheat or chaff, whether he was genuine or false. This was a test that the Lord permitted for a larger purpose in Peter's life. Peter would go through the sifting, but Jesus had prayed for him, not that he would be exempted from the sifting, but that his faith would not fail as a result of it. The thing that Satan wanted was to destroy the faith of Peter so that he would drop out completely and go back to fishing. But Jesus asked that this might not happen to Peter, but that Peter would not abandon his faith because of his failure. Jesus knew that Peter would "turn again" back to the Lord and would then be able to strengthen his brothers. Though he had denied knowing Christ in the strongest of terms, he would turn back and affirm his faith in Him and recommit himself to Christ. His failure and falling away would not be permanent. Stumbling and falling and failing will happen. We will be tested in similar ways. Fear may prompt us to deny the Lord as well, but it doesn't have to be permanent. We can turn again and return and recommit to the Lord. Peter's faith did not fail, and if our faith is genuine it will not fail either.

#### Matthew 27:1-10

Now when morning came, all the chief priests and the elders of the people conferred together against Jesus to put Him to death; 2 and they bound Him, and led Him away and delivered Him to Pilate the governor.

3 Then when Judas, who had betrayed Him, saw that He had been condemned, he felt remorse and returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, 4 saying, "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood." But they said, "What is that to us? See to that yourself!" 5 And he threw the pieces of silver into the temple sanctuary and departed; and he went away and hanged himself. 6 The chief priests took the pieces of silver and said, "It is not lawful to put them into the temple treasury, since it is the price of blood." 7 And they conferred together and with the money bought the Potter's Field as a burial place for strangers. 8 For this reason that field has been called the Field of Blood to this day. 9 Then that which was spoken through Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled: "AND THEY TOOK THE THIRTY PIECES OF SILVER, THE PRICE OF THE ONE WHOSE PRICE HAD BEEN SET by the sons of Israel; 10 AND THEY GAVE THEM FOR THE POTTER'S FIELD, AS THE LORD DIRECTED ME."

Again we see here in verse 1 that the purpose of the chief priests and Sanhedrin was to put Jesus to death. They had plotted to seize Him and kill Him (Matthew 26:4). They had tried to obtain false testimony against Him so that they might put Him to death (Matthew 26:59). After He affirmed that He was the Christ and the Son of God they said, "He deserves death!" (Matthew 26:66). When dawn came the Sanhedrin conferred against Jesus in order to put Him to death. They bound Him again, led Him away and delivered Him to Pilate.

Judas saw that Jesus had been condemned to death by the Sanhedrin and "felt remorse." The word translated "felt remorse" is *metamelomai*, to feel concern or care afterwards. The word was used to describe the regret that the defiant son felt after he had refused his father's command to work in the vineyard in Matthew 21:29. Often we do things or say things that we later regret. On further reflection we realize we made a mistake and we should have done things differently. Judas saw that his betrayal had an unintended consequence, that Jesus was condemned to death. I don't know what he thought was going to happen because Jesus had told them all explicitly that He was going to be betrayed and crucified. Judas knew that Jesus was innocent and did not deserve death. The money he had received for handing Jesus over suddenly was not important to him any longer. He wanted to reverse the things he had done.

Judas went to the chief priests and elders and returned the thirty pieces of silver. He explained to them, "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood." The Old Testament has many strong warnings against shedding innocent blood. In Exodus 23:7 God says, "Keep far from a false charge, and do not kill the innocent or the righteous, for I will not acquit the guilty." God established sanctuary cities in Israel so that if someone accidentally killed someone they could flee to one of them and find safety. He said in Deuteronomy 19:10, "So innocent blood will not be shed in the midst of your land which the LORD your God gives you as an inheritance, and bloodguiltiness be on you." Deuteronomy 27:25 says "'Cursed is he who accepts a bribe to strike down an innocent person.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.'" In 2 Kings 21:16 it says, "Moreover, Manasseh shed very much innocent blood until he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another; besides his sin with which he made Judah sin, in doing evil in the sight of the LORD." Proverbs 6:17 says that God hates "hands that shed innocent blood." Judas realized he was guilty of this great sin and stood condemned. Jesus was the only man in history who was 100% innocent and righteous. Condemning Him to death as a criminal was the worst miscarriage of justice in human history, and Judas was at least partly responsible for it.

The chief priests and elders replied, "What is that to us? See to that yourself!" The testimony of the betrayer himself that Jesus was innocent did not matter to them. They did not care about the confession of Judas and they did not care about the innocence of the one they had condemned. They just wanted to eliminate Jesus because He was a threat to their position. Jesus had denounced them strongly and exposed their hypocrisy and wickedness. These men did not care about truth or justice or mercy.

Exasperated that his attempt to undo what he had done had fallen on deaf ears, Judas threw the thirty pieces of silver into the temple sanctuary, went out and hanged himself. Luke gives us more information about the death of Judas in Acts 1:18-19 (Luke is the author of Acts) as he narrates the story of Peter leading the church to find a replacement apostle to take the place of Judas. Luke says, "Now this man acquired a field with the price of his wickedness, and falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his intestines gushed out. And it became known to all who were living in Jerusalem; so that in their own language that field was called Hakeldama, that is, Field of Blood." Whether these two versions of the death of Judas can be harmonized or not, I'm not sure. Matthew portrays it as a suicide by hanging, but Luke makes it sound like an accident or that he used another method to kill

himself. One common attempt to harmonize the two accounts says that when Judas hanged himself the rope broke and he fell and burst open. Albert Barnes writes:

“Interpreters have suggested,” says Professor Hackett (*Illustrations of Scripture*, pp. 275, 276), “that Judas may have hung himself on a tree near a precipice over the valley of Hinnom, and that, the limb or rope breaking, he fell to the bottom, and was dashed to pieces by the fall. For myself, I felt, as I stood in this valley and looked up to the rocky terraces which hang over it, that the proposed explanation was a perfectly natural one. I was more than ever satisfied with it. I measured the precipitous, almost perpendicular walls in different places, and found the height to be, variously, 40, 36, 33, 30, and 25 feet. Trees still grow quite near the edge of these rocks, and, no doubt, in former times were still more numerous in the same place. A rocky pavement exists, also, at the bottom of the ledges, and hence on that account, too, a person who should fall from above would be liable to be crushed and mangled as well as killed. The traitor may have struck, in his fall, upon some pointed rock, which entered the body and caused ‘his bowels to gush out.’” (Albert Barnes’ Notes on the Bible.)

This explanation is certainly possible, but we can’t be certain of it. Sometimes in Biblical interpretation we have to be content with uncertainty.

The other difficulty here is whether Judas purchased the field himself or whether it was purchased by the chief priests, as Matthew asserts. In either case it was the money given to Judas that was used to purchase the field. In effect he had purchased the field. The chief priests said, “It is not lawful to put them into the temple treasury, since it is the price of blood.” Deuteronomy 23:18 says, “You shall not bring the hire of a harlot or the wages of a dog into the house of the LORD your God for any votive offering, for both of these are an abomination to the LORD your God.” The money was tainted, and so these men were concerned about keeping this aspect of the law. They would condemn the innocent, but they would not put blood money they had paid Judas into the temple treasury. Indeed these men are the worst sort of hypocrites.

Instead of putting the blood money into the temple treasury, they bought the “Field of Blood” as a burial place for strangers. Matthew says that it was called “Field of Blood” because it was purchased with blood money. Luke seems to say that they called it “Field of Blood” because it was the place where Judas met his gruesome death. Matthew says that in doing this they fulfilled “that which was spoken through Jeremiah the prophet.” The trouble is that the quote is actually from Zechariah 11:12-13, “I said to them, ‘If it is good in your sight, give me my wages; but if not, never mind!’ So they weighed out thirty shekels of silver as my wages. 13 Then the LORD said to me, ‘Throw it to the potter, that magnificent price at which I was valued by them.’ So I took the thirty shekels of silver and threw them to the potter in the house of the LORD.” I’m not sure how to resolve this. Either Matthew got it wrong or some scribe copying the text at some point erred by writing “Jeremiah” instead of “Zechariah,” or maybe as Albert Barnes and other suggest, Jeremiah was considered the first and chief book of the prophets. Albert Barnes writes:

In ancient times, according to the Jewish writers; “Jeremiah” was reckoned the first of the prophets, and was placed first in the “Book of the Prophets,” thus: Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Isaiah, and the twelve minor prophets. Some have thought that Matthew, quoting this place, quoted the Book of the Prophets under the name of that which had the “first” place in the book, that is, Jeremiah; and though the words are those of

Zechariah, yet they are quoted correctly as the words of the Book of the Prophets, the first of which was Jeremiah. (Albert Barnes' Notes on the Bible.)

Despite the mistaken attribution, we mustn't miss the point that the prophetic word was fulfilled by what the chief priests did with the blood money. They did as the text from Zechariah predicted. They had valued the life of Jesus at 30 pieces of silver, and they used it to purchase the potter's field. Again the prophetic scriptures were fulfilled in event surrounding the death of Jesus and again the plan of God was carried out by men who were not conscious they were doing so.

Peter had denied Jesus, but his faith had not failed. He turned back and was subsequently used in a great way by the Lord to spread the good news of Jesus. Judas, on the other hand, not only fell away and betrayed Jesus, but his remorse did not result in true repentance and a return to faith, but led to self-destruction.

#### Matthew 27:11-26

Now Jesus stood before the governor, and the governor questioned Him, saying, "Are You the King of the Jews?" And Jesus said to him, "It is as you say." 12 And while He was being accused by the chief priests and elders, He did not answer. 13 Then Pilate \*said to Him, "Do You not hear how many things they testify against You?" 14 And He did not answer him with regard to even a single charge, so the governor was quite amazed.

15 Now at the feast the governor was accustomed to release for the people any one prisoner whom they wanted. 16 At that time they were holding a notorious prisoner, called Barabbas. 17 So when the people gathered together, Pilate said to them, "Whom do you want me to release for you? Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?" 18 For he knew that because of envy they had handed Him over. 19 While he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent him a message, saying, "Have nothing to do with that righteous Man; for last night I suffered greatly in a dream because of Him." 20 But the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowds to ask for Barabbas and to put Jesus to death. 21 But the governor said to them, "Which of the two do you want me to release for you?" And they said, "Barabbas." 22 Pilate \*said to them, "Then what shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?" They all \*said, "Crucify Him!" 23 And he said, "Why, what evil has He done?" But they kept shouting all the more, saying, "Crucify Him!"

24 When Pilate saw that he was accomplishing nothing, but rather that a riot was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of this Man's blood; see to that yourselves." 25 And all the people said, "His blood shall be on us and on our children!" 26 Then he released Barabbas for them; but after having Jesus scourged, he handed Him over to be crucified.

When Jesus stood before Pilate the governor, Pilate asked Him the all-important question straight out, "Are You the King of the Jews?" Jesus replied by saying "You say." It was an affirmative answer, but something like, "That's the way you put it." There was a more thorough discussion of this issue between Jesus and Pilate recorded in John 18:33-38:

Therefore Pilate entered again into the Praetorium, and summoned Jesus and said to Him, "Are You the King of the Jews?" 34 Jesus answered, "Are you saying this on your own initiative, or did others tell you about Me?" 35 Pilate answered, "I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests delivered You to me; what have You done?" 36 Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world,

then My servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm." 37 Therefore Pilate said to Him, "So You are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say correctly that I am a king. For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice." 38 Pilate said to Him, "What is truth?" And when he had said this, he went out again to the Jews and said to them, "I find no guilt in Him."

Jesus was not an earthly king. He had not come to overthrow Caesar. If He had, His servants would be fighting to keep Him from being executed. But Jesus had stopped them from resisting and had not called for twelve legions of angels. The simple response "You say" from Matthew is expanded in John to "You say correctly that I am a king." He did clearly affirm to Pilate that He is a king. He would not lie about it. Jesus says that He had come into the world to "testify to the truth," and so He would tell the truth about who He was.

When Jesus was accused by the chief priests and elders, He remained silent and did not respond to their charges. Pilate was amazed. No doubt Pilate was used to those who were on trial protesting their innocence when they were accused, but Jesus did not reply at all. Luke tells us what they said, "We found this man misleading our nation and forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar, and saying that He Himself is Christ, a King" (Luke 23:2). And in Luke 23:5 they said, "He stirs up the people, teaching all over Judea, starting from Galilee even as far as this place." They had found Jesus guilty of blasphemy in claiming to be the Christ and the Son of God, but that would carry no weight with Pilate, so they accused Him of forbidding the payment of taxes to Caesar and of claiming to be a king. They depicted Him as a dangerous character, spreading his anti-Caesar teachings all over the country.

Luke tells us that, having heard that Jesus started in Galilee, Pilate asked whether Jesus was from Galilee. Galilee was the jurisdiction of Herod and Herod was in Jerusalem at that time for the Passover, so Pilate sent Jesus to Herod (Luke 23:6-12). I suppose that Pilate was trying to avoid the responsibility for rendering a judgment and wanted to pass it off to Herod. This was the same Herod who had put John the Baptist to death. Herod was happy to see Jesus because he had heard of Him. As we have seen, when he heard about Jesus and what he was doing, Herod was of the opinion that He was John the Baptist risen from the dead (Mark 6:14-16). He was hoping to see Jesus perform some sign. Mark tells us that though he had arrested John, still Herod enjoyed listening to what John had to say (Mark 6:20). Though Herod "questioned Him at some length," Jesus "answered him nothing" while the chief priests and scribes were "accusing Him vehemently." Herod dressed Him with a gorgeous robe, mocked Him and sent Him back to Pilate.

Pilate reassembled the chief priests and elders and told them that neither he nor Herod had found any guilt in Jesus and said that he would punish Him and release Him (Luke 23:13-16). He summarized the charges against Jesus by saying, "You brought this man to me as one who incites the people to rebellion, and behold, having examined Him before you, I have found no guilt in this man regarding the charges which you make against Him." The New American Standard Bible at this point has a more interpretive than literal translation in the phrase "incites the people to rebellion." The word is *apostrophō*, to turn away or to turn back. The English Standard Bible and Lexham English Bible translate it, "misleading the people." The King James says "perverteth the people." Pilate may have been thinking in terms of turning people against Caesar, but probably he means it in a broader and less specific sense.

It was a custom to release one prisoner for the Jews at the time of the Passover feast. Whether this custom pre-dated Pilate, I don't know. No doubt it was meant to curry favor with the Jews and make them more tolerant of Roman rule. The Jews decided which prisoner they wanted him to release. John records that Pilate said to the Jews, "But you have a custom that

I release someone for you at the Passover; do you wish then that I release for you the King of the Jews?" (John 18:39). It was a custom that was initiated and expected by the Jews, and it appears that there were two prisoners they could choose from, Jesus and Barabbas. Matthew calls Barabbas a "notorious prisoner." The word for "notorious" means "stamped, marked, notable, infamous." He was a well known and dangerous criminal. Mark and Luke tell us that Barabbas was in prison because he had participated in insurrection and murder (Mark 15:7 and Luke 23:19). John says that he was a robber (John 18:40). He had been justly arrested and imprisoned and deserved to be put to death. His name means "son of a father."

When the people gathered for this custom, Pilate asked them which man they wanted released, Barabbas or Jesus. Pilate was aware of the true motives of the Jewish leaders. He knew that it was because of envy that they had handed Jesus over to him. They opposed Him and wanted to eliminate Him because they envied His popularity. After He raised Lazarus from the dead, they worried that "all men will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation" (John 11:48). When they saw the crowds who met Him as He rode into Jerusalem on the donkey, they said, "You see that you are not doing any good; look the world has gone after Him" (John 12:19). They were the vine-growers in the vineyard who saw the son of the owner coming and said, "This is the heir; come, let us kill him and seize his inheritance" (Matthew 21:38). They thought that killing Jesus would solve their problems and preserve their position.

Matthew is the only gospel writer who tells us that the wife of Pilate sent him a message while he was sitting on the judgment seat. She warned him, "Have nothing to do with that righteous Man; for last night I suffered greatly in a dream because of Him." Due to her dream she had come to the conclusion that Jesus was a righteous man and that her husband would be in trouble if he had Him put to death. She was fearful and added fuel to the fear of Pilate as well. She reinforced his conviction that Jesus was not guilty and deserved to be set free.

The chief priests and elders had undertaken a campaign to convince the crowds that they should ask for Barabbas and demand death for Jesus. I don't know how they persuaded the people that Barabbas was preferable to Jesus, but it may have had something to do with the fact that Jesus had not overthrown the Romans, but was rather now in their custody, and therefore could not be the Messiah. When He rode into Jerusalem the people expected that He would take the throne and restore the kingdom to Israel, but instead now he was the prisoner of Rome. No doubt many were bitterly disappointed. So when Pilate asked them which of the two men they wanted him to release, they opted for Barabbas. When he asked what he should do with Jesus called Christ, they demanded His crucifixion. Mark and John both say that Pilate at this time again called Jesus "the king of the Jews," and in Mark 15:12 he asked, "Then what shall I do with Him whom you call the King of the Jews?" Mark and John are writing more for Gentile readers who may not have been very familiar with the title "Christ," so they used the synonymous term.

The shouts of the crowd for the crucifixion of Christ prevailed and Pilate acquiesced to their demand. John gives us quite a bit more information at this point in John 19:1-16:

Pilate then took Jesus and scourged Him. 2 And the soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on His head, and put a purple robe on Him; 3 and they began to come up to Him and say, "Hail, King of the Jews!" and to give Him slaps in the face. 4 Pilate came out again and said to them, "Behold, I am bringing Him out to you so that you may know that I find no guilt in Him." 5 Jesus then came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate \*said to them, "Behold, the Man!" 6 So when the chief priests and the officers saw Him, they cried out saying, "Crucify, crucify!" Pilate said to them, "Take Him yourselves and crucify Him, for I find no guilt in Him." 7 The

Jews answered him, "We have a law, and by that law He ought to die because He made Himself out to be the Son of God." 8 Therefore when Pilate heard this statement, he was even more afraid; 9 and he entered into the Praetorium again and said to Jesus, "Where are You from?" But Jesus gave him no answer. 10 So Pilate said to Him, "You do not speak to me? Do You not know that I have authority to release You, and I have authority to crucify You?" 11 Jesus answered, "You would have no authority over Me, unless it had been given you from above; for this reason he who delivered Me to you has the greater sin." 12 As a result of this Pilate made efforts to release Him, but the Jews cried out saying, "If you release this Man, you are no friend of Caesar; everyone who makes himself out to be a king opposes Caesar." 13 Therefore when Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus out, and sat down on the judgment seat at a place called The Pavement, but in Hebrew, Gabbatha. 14 Now it was the day of preparation for the Passover; it was about the sixth hour. And he said to the Jews, "Behold, your King!" 15 So they cried out, "Away with Him, away with Him, crucify Him!" Pilate said to them, "Shall I crucify your King?" The chief priests answered, "We have no king but Caesar." 16 So he then handed Him over to them to be crucified.

Pilate was in a very difficult position. The Jews knew that Jesus had claimed to be the Son of God, and they told Pilate so. This increased Pilate's fear and added to the warning he had received from his wife. The Jews threatened him by saying that if he released Jesus he was no friend of Caesar, because Jesus had made himself out to be a king. It appears that this was the thing that finalized Pilate's decision. The Jews had him in a position where it looked like he couldn't win. They would accuse him of rebellion against Caesar if he released Jesus. So Pilate decided to condemn a man he knew to be innocent. He concluded that to save his own skin he had to violate his conscience and give in to these people. It's clear though that he hated doing so. This is what often happens with politicians; they give in to the demands of the noisy crowd, even when they know it isn't the right thing to do.

Pilate's efforts to release Jesus and his arguments with the leaders and crowd were accomplishing nothing, and he realized it. They were not being turned from their determination to have Jesus crucified, but rather the situation was escalating toward a riot. Pilate wanted to absolve himself, and so he took water and symbolically washed his hands in front of them and proclaimed himself innocent of the blood of Jesus. He had found Jesus innocent, but nonetheless handed Him over to be crucified. The people said, "His blood shall be on us and on our children!" The Contemporary English Version says, "We and our families will take the blame for his death!" The Good News Bible has, "Let the responsibility for his death fall on us and on our children!" They had decided that He was worthy of death and they would take ownership of the responsibility. They were even gladly willing to admit responsibility. They felt about Jesus as we might feel about the 9-11 terrorists who flew the planes into the World Trade Center in New York. If we had the opportunity to prosecute them, we would put them to death without hesitation.

So Pilate released Barabbas and ordered Jesus be crucified. He still bore responsibility, though he tried to wave it off. We all bear responsibility because Jesus died for our sins. I am as responsible as anyone else for the death of Jesus. His blood is upon us all.

#### Matthew 27:27-44

Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole Roman cohort around Him. 28 They stripped Him and put a scarlet robe on Him. 29 And after twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on His head, and a reed in His right hand; and they knelt down before Him and mocked Him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" 30 They spat

on Him, and took the reed and began to beat Him on the head. 31 After they had mocked Him, they took the scarlet robe off Him and put His own garments back on Him, and led Him away to crucify Him.

32 As they were coming out, they found a man of Cyrene named Simon, whom they pressed into service to bear His cross. 33 And when they came to a place called Golgotha, which means Place of a Skull, 34 they gave Him wine to drink mixed with gall; and after tasting it, He was unwilling to drink. 35 And when they had crucified Him, they divided up His garments among themselves by casting lots. 36 And sitting down, they began to keep watch over Him there. 37 And above His head they put up the charge against Him which read, "THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS." 38 At that time two robbers \*were crucified with Him, one on the right and one on the left. 39 And those passing by were hurling abuse at Him, wagging their heads 40 and saying, "You who are going to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save Yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross." 41 In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes and elders, were mocking Him and saying, 42 "He saved others; He cannot save Himself. He is the King of Israel; let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe in Him. 43 "HE TRUSTS IN GOD; LET GOD RESCUE Him now, IF HE DELIGHTS IN HIM; for He said, 'I am the Son of God.'" 44 The robbers who had been crucified with Him were also insulting Him with the same words.

A Roman cohort was about 600 men, and was one-tenth of a legion. So as the soldiers took Jesus into the Praetorium there were as many as 600 of them who made fun of Him. They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on Him. Perhaps this was the same robe that Herod had put on Him earlier. They made a crown out of thorns and put it on his head and put a reed in His right hand. They made Him up as a sort of clown king. They mocked Him as "King of the Jews" and beat him in the head with the reed. This was after He had been scourged, which was mentioned in verse 26, which would have weakened Him considerably. After having their fun, the soldiers put His own clothing back on Him and led Him off to crucify Him.

Evidently Jesus was so weakened by the scourging and the abuse that He was unable to carry His cross to the place He would be crucified. The soldiers looked for someone they could compel to carry the cross, and they grabbed a man called Simon from Cyrene. Mark says that this man was "the father of Alexander and Rufus" (Mark 15:21). Obviously Mark was familiar with this man and the first readers of his gospel knew who these men were. Probably Simon and his family became believers in Christ. Simon did not run up and volunteer to carry the cross, but was made to do so. The same word is used here as in Matthew 5:41, "Whoever forces you to go one mile, go with him two." The soldiers forced Simon to carry the cross. This recalls also the saying of Jesus that if we want to follow Him, we must deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow Him (Matthew 16:24).

Luke tells us that on the way to His crucifixion a large crowd of people were following Him, including women who were mourning and lamenting Him. Jesus said to them, "Daughters of Jerusalem, stop weeping for Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For behold, the days are coming when they will say, 'Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bore, and the breasts that never nursed.' Then they will begin TO SAY TO THE MOUNTAINS, 'FALL ON US,' AND TO THE HILLS, 'COVER US.' For if they do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?" (Luke 23:28-31). The women were ignorant of the difficult days that were going to come upon them. At this point when the "tree" was "green" the Jews and Romans were crucifying Jesus the Christ, but things would get worse for them in the future when the "tree" became "dry." If the women knew what was



coming they would weep and lament for themselves and their children. There would be terrible consequences coming for Israel because they had rejected their Messiah.

They took Jesus to a place called Golgotha in Hebrew, which Matthew tells us means "Place of a Skull." It is often called "Calvary" because the Latin word for "skull" is *calvāria*. There seems to be a lot of debate over where exactly this place was. The traditional spot is where the Church of the Holy Sepulchre stands, but there are those who dispute this location.

There was a bit of kindness offered to Jesus just before He was crucified as they offered Him a drink of wine mixed with gall (Mark says it also contained myrrh). The word means something bitter, perhaps a bitter herb. The Contemporary English Version interprets it to mean "wine mixed with a drug to ease the pain." When Jesus tasted it and realized it was meant to drug Him and help him avoid some of the suffering, He refused to drink it. He would experience all the suffering of the cross and would not avoid it.

At the "third hour" (about 9 am – Mark 15:25) they crucified Jesus and the soldiers cast lots for His clothing. It is likely that Jesus was naked when He hung on the cross, despite depictions to the contrary. This was part of the humiliation of crucifixion. Pilate had the charge against Him written and placed over His head which said, "This is Jesus the King of the Jews." John says that the full text was "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews" and that it was written in Aramaic, Latin and Greek (John 19:19-20). The chief priests were not pleased with this and said to Pilate, "Do not write, 'The King of the Jews,' but rather, 'This man said, I am King of the Jews.'" Pilate answered, "What I have written I have written" (John 19:21-22). Pilate had written the truth, though he would not acknowledge it himself. He wrote it as a sarcastic jab at the Jews, which they clearly understood. They felt that he should have made it clear that this is what happens to someone who claims to be the King of the Jews. They did not believe that Jesus was the Christ and the Son of God, but they knew He had made the claim that He was. The chief priests wanted it known that they did not accept that Jesus was the King.

Jesus not only suffered physical abuse, He also suffered emotional abuse. People were "wagging their heads" at Him and "hurling abuse" at Him. The Greek word for "hurling abuse" is *blasphēmeō*. They were verbally abusing Him and slandering Him. They said, "You who destroy the temple, and build it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross!" (World English Bible). The leaders, the chief priests, the scribes and elders were mocking Him. Robertson says, "The word for mocking (*empaizontes*, *en*, and *paizo*, from *pais*, child) means acting like silly children who love to guy one another" (Robertson's Word Pictures). They made fun of Him and mocked Him by saying, "He saved others; He cannot save Himself. He is the King of Israel; let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe in Him. HE TRUSTS IN GOD; LET GOD RESCUE Him now, IF HE DELIGHTS IN HIM; for He said, 'I am the Son of God.'" Their words echo Psalm 22:8. The mockers pointed to the contrast between the grand claims of Jesus and the previous deeds of Jesus and His apparent inability to save Himself.

The things being said remind me of the temptations of Christ in the wilderness, when Satan challenged Jesus by saying "If you are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread," and "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down" (Matthew 4:3 and 4:6). They were tempting Jesus to prove that He was the Son of God by doing something miraculous to save Himself. Jesus had already pointed out that He could summon legions of angels to deliver Him, but that was not the purpose of the Father. He was sent to die on the cross in this manner, and Jesus would not yield to the temptation to come down from the cross and defeat His enemies. These mockers were the voice of Satan, in the same way that Peter had been earlier.

Jesus had “saved others,” and could in fact have saved Himself if He had wanted to. When the leaders said that He had saved others, they no doubt were thinking of the way that He had healed the sick and raised the dead and had claimed to forgive sins. They had heard of these things but had not believed in Him. They had even heard that Jesus had just raised Lazarus from the dead, but still they did not believe in Him and even opposed Him more as a result. They knew He had claimed to be the Son of God. They declared that if He proved He was the son of God by coming down off the cross, they would believe in Him, but surely this was a lie. They would not believe no matter what happened. It is not a lack of proof that keeps these kinds of people from believing, but a proud and stubborn unwillingness to believe. They will be the lords of their own lives and will not submit themselves to the authority of Christ. They will not be deposed from their supposed sovereignty over themselves.

Isaiah 53:12 says, “Therefore, I will allot Him a portion with the great, And He will divide the booty with the strong; Because He poured out Himself to death, And was numbered with the transgressors; Yet He Himself bore the sin of many, And interceded for the transgressors.” So we see that this prophecy was fulfilled as Jesus was crucified along with two men who were robbers. Luke tells us that as the Roman soldiers crucified Him, He said, “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.” Jesus was counted among the transgressors and prayed for the transgressors. Jesus was in fact the only one in this scene who wasn’t a transgressor. The Roman soldiers, cruel as they were, were unaware of what they were doing. They didn’t know who He was, while the Jewish leaders actually did.

Luke also tells us about the criminals in Luke 23:39-43:

One of the criminals who were hanged there was hurling abuse at Him, saying, "Are You not the Christ? Save Yourself and us!" 40 But the other answered, and rebuking him said, "Do you not even fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? 41 "And we indeed are suffering justly, for we are receiving what we deserve for our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong." 42 And he was saying, "Jesus, remember me when You come in Your kingdom!" 43 And He said to him, "Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise."

The one criminal joined with those who were “hurling abuse” (*blasphēmō*) at Jesus. He was not sincerely asking for salvation, but was mocking Jesus. The other criminal rebuked him, asking whether he feared God. These men were about to die and faced not only the condemnation of men, but also of God. A proper fear of God would lead them to repentance and turn them from their wicked ways. He pointed out that the two of them had been justly condemned and were getting what they deserved. They were guilty and were receiving the consequences of their crimes, but he said that Jesus had done nothing wrong. He recognized, as had Pilate, that Jesus was not guilty of any crime, was suffering unjustly and did not deserve to be crucified. He acknowledged that Jesus really was the Christ, the King, and asked that he might be remembered when Jesus came into His kingdom. He believed that Jesus was the Son of David who would inherit the eternal heavenly throne. Jesus promised the man that he would, that very day, be with Him in Paradise.

The Greek word for “Paradise” is *paradeisos*, and is of Persian origin. Hasting’s Dictionary of the Bible says the word is “a Persian word for ‘park’ or ‘garden,’ used in later Jewish and Christian thought to represent the abode of the blessed dead.” The word occurs two more times in the New Testament. In 2 Corinthians 12:4 Paul writes that He “was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which a man is not permitted to speak.” In verse 2 of 2 Corinthians 12 he had said that he had been “caught up to the third heaven.” It appears then, that Paradise is equated with a level of heaven. In Revelation 2:7 Jesus says,

“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God.” The tree of life had been in the original garden of Eden (Genesis 2:9 and 3:22) and is now in the “Paradise of God.” Revelation 22 says that the tree of life is in the new Jerusalem, alongside the river of the water of life which comes from the throne of God and of the Lamb of God. It seems clear to me, then, that Jesus was referring to this Paradise, the new garden of Eden that God has made for those who believe and are redeemed by Christ. This is where the robber will be with Jesus that day. In 2 Corinthians 5:8 Paul says that if we are absent from the body we are “at home with the Lord.” I find little evidence in scripture for an “intermediate state” where our disembodied spirits wait for the resurrection of our physical bodies before we are allowed into the full blessedness of heaven. When the redeemed die they are, that day, present with the Lord in His place.

#### Matthew 27:45-56

Now from the sixth hour darkness fell upon all the land until the ninth hour. 46 About the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "ELI, ELI, LAMA SABACHTHANI?" that is, "MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?" 47 And some of those who were standing there, when they heard it, began saying, "This man is calling for Elijah." 48 Immediately one of them ran, and taking a sponge, he filled it with sour wine and put it on a reed, and gave Him a drink. 49 But the rest of them said, "Let us see whether Elijah will come to save Him." 50 And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit. 51 And behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth shook and the rocks were split. 52 The tombs were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; 53 and coming out of the tombs after His resurrection they entered the holy city and appeared to many.

54 Now the centurion, and those who were with him keeping guard over Jesus, when they saw the earthquake and the things that were happening, became very frightened and said, "Truly this was the Son of God!" 55 Many women were there looking on from a distance, who had followed Jesus from Galilee while ministering to Him. 56 Among them was Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee.

Jesus was crucified at the “third hour,” about 9 am (Mark 15:25), and then the darkness fell over the whole area from the sixth hour (noon) until the ninth hour (3 pm). Luke says this was “because the sun was obscured” (Luke 23:45). The word translated “obscured” means to omit, to cease, to fail. The CEV says, “the sun stopped shining,” and the ESV says, “the sun’s light failed.” The gospel writers don’t tell us what caused this, but there doesn’t seem to be an indication that people reacted as if it was doomsday. It was unusual, evidently, but people didn’t freak out. When heavy clouds and storms come through it can get rather dark even at midday. Even though it may not have seemed to be supernatural to those who experienced it, still the writers are apparently saying that this darkness was a sign that something momentous was happening. It wasn’t simply coincidental. It was a dark time in history when the Son of God was crucified by men.

At the ninth hour Jesus cried, “Eli, Eli, Lama Sabachthani?” and Matthew tells us it means, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?” The words are in capitals in the New American Standard to indicate that He was quoting scripture. They are the first words from Psalm 22, which depicts very clearly the exact events of the suffering of Christ on the cross. Psalms 22:6-18 says:

But I am a worm and not a man, A reproach of men and despised by the people. 7 All who see me sneer at me; They separate with the lip, they wag the head, saying, 8 "Commit yourself to the LORD; let Him deliver him; Let Him rescue him, because He delights in him." 9 Yet You are He who brought me forth from the womb; You made me trust when upon my mother's breasts. 10 Upon You I was cast from birth; You have been my God from my mother's womb. 11 Be not far from me, for trouble is near; For there is none to help. 12 Many bulls have surrounded me; Strong bulls of Bashan have encircled me. 13 They open wide their mouth at me, As a ravening and a roaring lion. 14 I am poured out like water, And all my bones are out of joint; My heart is like wax; It is melted within me. 15 My strength is dried up like a potsherd, And my tongue cleaves to my jaws; And You lay me in the dust of death. 16 For dogs have surrounded me; A band of evildoers has encompassed me; They pierced my hands and my feet. 17 I can count all my bones. They look, they stare at me; 18 They divide my garments among them, And for my clothing they cast lots.

In quoting from this Psalm, Jesus was not just crying out to the Father, but was also communicating the truth of what was taking place to those who were there. He was pointing out that the prophecy of the Psalm was taking place before their eyes.

Matthew had to translate this saying for his readers because, again, it was spoken in Aramaic, and some of those who heard Him misunderstood what He was saying. They thought He was calling for Elijah. They didn't understand that He was quoting from Psalm 22.

The question in the quote from Psalm 22 is, "Why have you forsaken Me?" The word for "forsaken" means "to leave behind, to desert, to abandon." In some sense Jesus was forsaken by the Father when He was on the cross. On the cross He was bearing the sins of all mankind. He was being punished in our place. Isaiah 53:4-6 tells us, "Surely our griefs He Himself bore, And our sorrows He carried; Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, Smitten of God, and afflicted. But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, And by His scourging we are healed. All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all To fall on Him." 2 Corinthians 5:21 says, "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." Peter writes in 1 Peter 2:24, "He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed." On the cross Jesus was stricken, smitten, afflicted and crushed for our sins. He was suffering in a way He did not deserve. The righteous and holy One was being punished for us as our substitute. Jesus had always enjoyed perfect fellowship with the Father, but had never before experienced His wrath as He now was. I remember how difficult it was to come to grips with the fact that our old cat, Bud, was at the end of his life and had to be put down. I couldn't bear to take him to the vet and have it done, and my wife and son had to take care of it. How infinitely harder must it have been for Father, Son and Spirit to go through the agony of the cross and the suffering for our sin!

Those there who thought he was calling for Elijah were interested to keep watching to see if Elijah would come. They had the faulty idea that He was calling for His own rescue, as if He actually did want to come down from the cross and thought He needed Elijah's help. One person ran and filled a sponge with sour wine and gave it to Jesus to drink. John says that Jesus, "to fulfill the Scripture, said, 'I am thirsty,'" and then the sour wine was given to Him (John 19:28-29). The Scripture John was thinking of was probably Psalms 69:21, "They also gave me gall for my food And for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink."

It was after drinking the sour wine that Jesus cried out with a loud voice and yielded up His spirit. Luke says, "And Jesus, crying out with a loud voice, said, 'Father, INTO YOUR HANDS I COMMIT MY SPIRIT.' Having said this, He breathed His last" (Luke 23:46). John tells us He said, "It is finished!" The text does not say simply that Jesus died, but that He "yielded up His Spirit." The word for "yielded up" means "to send away." Jesus deliberately gave up His life. Marvin Vincent writes, "Lit., *dismissed his spirit*. Rev., *yielded up his spirit*. The fact that the evangelists, in describing our Lord's death, do not use the neuter verb, ἔθανεν, *he died*, but *he breathed out his life* (ἐξέπνευσε, Mark 15:37), *he gave us his spirit* (παρέδωκε τὸ πνεῦμα, John 19:30), seems to imply a *voluntary* yielding up of his life. Compare John 10:18. Augustine says, 'He gave up his life *because* he willed it, *when* he willed it, and as he willed it'" (Vincent's Word Studies). The life of Jesus was not taken from Him by men against His will, but was yielded up willingly in obedience to the Father's command. Jesus "became obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" (Philippians 2:8). Paul writes a number of times that Jesus "gave Himself up" for us:

- Galatians 1:4 ...who gave Himself for our sins so that He might rescue us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father.
- Galatians 2:20 I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.
- Ephesians 5:2 ...and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.
- Ephesians 5:25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her.
- 1Timothy 2:6 ...who gave Himself as a ransom for all, the testimony *given* at the proper time.
- Titus 2:14 ...who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds.

It's clear from these passages that Jesus gave Himself for us, to rescue us, to atone for our sins, to ransom us, to redeem us and purify us. It was for our benefit that He yielded up His Spirit. I'm reminded of Fanny Crosby's great old hymn, "To God Be The Glory:"

### **Stanza 1**

To God be the glory, great things He hath done;  
So loved He the world that He gave us His Son,  
Who yielded His life an atonement for sin,  
And opened the life gate that all may go in.

### **Refrain**

*Praise the Lord, praise the Lord,  
Let the earth hear His voice!  
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord,  
Let the people rejoice!  
O come to the Father, through Jesus the Son,  
And give Him the glory, great things He hath done.*

### **Stanza 2**

O perfect redemption, the purchase of blood,

To every believer the promise of God;  
The vilest offender who truly believes,  
That moment from Jesus a pardon receives.

(Refrain)

### **Stanza 3**

Great things He hath taught us, great things He hath done,  
And great our rejoicing through Jesus the Son;  
But purer, and higher, and greater will be  
Our wonder, our rapture, when Jesus we see.

(Refrain)

In verses 50-53 Matthew says that some miraculous and monumental things happened when Jesus died. The veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom, the earth shook and the rocks were split, tombs were opened and the bodies of dead saints were raised and appeared to many after His resurrection. Mark also mentions that the veil of the temple was torn in two, but otherwise the other gospels do not mention these things. The veil of the temple was a thick curtain that separated the most holy place in the temple from the outer part of the temple. When Jesus died and this veil was torn in two, God was signifying that the way to the most holy place and the presence of God was now opened because of the death of Christ. The barrier has been removed, and now we may come to the Father through Him. The author of Hebrews says, "Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water" (Hebrews 10:19-22). The true veil is the body, the flesh, of Jesus, and by His blood we now can confidently enter the holy place into the true presence of God.

The account of tombs being opened and dead saints being raised has always seemed a very strange part of the story to me and doesn't really seem to fit. Twice in the New Testament Jesus is called the "firstborn of the dead" (Colossians 1:18 and Revelation 1:5). In 1 Corinthians 15:20-24 Paul says, "But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep. For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming, then comes the end, when He hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power." There is an order to the resurrection of the dead, and Christ comes first. He is the first to be raised permanently from the dead. People like Lazarus were raised from the dead, but unfortunately for them they had to die again later. Jesus was the firstborn, the first to rise from the dead for eternity, and others follow Him. So it just seems very strange that some dead saints should rise from the dead when Jesus died and then appear to people in Jerusalem after His resurrection. If this really happened, these people are a special case who were raised to give special testimony to Christ.

The centurion and his soldiers who guarded Jesus and the two robbers were very frightened by the things that happened. They saw the earthquake and they could tell this was no ordinary man dying on the cross, but this was an extraordinary event. They exclaimed, "Truly this was the Son of God!" It's not clear when they said this that they meant it in the same way the Jews meant it. No doubt the soldiers had heard people taunting Jesus for calling Himself the "Son of God," and so were aware that this was an issue that surrounded this man, but in the Greek text there is no definite article. AT Robertson says, "There is no

article with God or Son in the Greek so that it means ‘God’s Son,’ either ‘the Son of God’ or ‘a Son of God.’ There is no way to tell” ([Robertson’s Word Pictures](#)). Whatever they meant by it, it is obvious that they were impressed that Jesus was not an ordinary man, but there was something special about Him and they recognized Him as a divine being. Luke gives us a different perspective in Luke 23:47, “Now when the centurion saw what had happened, he began praising God, saying, ‘Certainly this man was innocent.’” The centurion may not have understood exactly what was meant by the phrase “Son of God,” but in saying what he said he was praising God. His words gave glory to God.

Some women had followed Jesus from Galilee. Most of the apostles had fled the scene, but the faithful women were there. They had been following Him and had ministered to Him. Luke says, “Soon afterwards, He began going around from one city and village to another, proclaiming and preaching the kingdom of God. The twelve were with Him, and also some women who had been healed of evil spirits and sicknesses: Mary who was called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna the wife of Chuza, Herod’s steward, and Susanna, and many others who were contributing to their support out of their private means” (Luke 8:1-3). Matthew also lists Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of James and John. These women were watching from a distance. We know also that the apostle John was there looking on along with Mary, the mother of Jesus, because John tells us that while Jesus was on the cross had transferred the responsibility for caring for His mother to John (John 19:26-27). Sometimes the women are there when the men have fled.

#### Matthew 27:57-61

When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who himself had also become a disciple of Jesus. 58 This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate ordered it to be given to him. 59 And Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, 60 and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock; and he rolled a large stone against the entrance of the tomb and went away. 61 And Mary Magdalene was there, and the other Mary, sitting opposite the grave.

It was Friday, “preparation day” for the Jews, the day before the Sabbath. Sabbath officially started at sundown Friday, so they had to prepare food for the Sabbath before sundown on Friday, and all work had to be concluded before then as well, so the Jews were anxious that the business of disposing of the crucified bodies be done before the Sabbath commenced. John tells us more about what happened in John 19:31-37:

Then the Jews, because it was the day of preparation, so that the bodies would not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), asked Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away. 32 So the soldiers came, and broke the legs of the first man and of the other who was crucified with Him; 33 but coming to Jesus, when they saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs. 34 But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out. 35 And he who has seen has testified, and his testimony is true; and he knows that he is telling the truth, so that you also may believe. 36 For these things came to pass to fulfill the Scripture, "NOT A BONE OF HIM SHALL BE BROKEN." 37 And again another Scripture says, "THEY SHALL LOOK ON HIM WHOM THEY PIERCED."

They broke the legs of the criminals crucified with Christ so that they would suffocate and die more quickly. Without the use of their legs they could not breathe while hanging on the cross. Seeing that Jesus was already dead, they didn't break His legs, but pierced His side with a spear. As a result two explicit prophecies about His death were fulfilled. Jesus had yielded up His spirit at just the right time.

Joseph from Arimathea went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Matthew tells us that he was rich and was a disciple of Jesus. The other gospels tell us more about him. Mark says he was "a prominent member of the Council, who himself was waiting for the kingdom of God" (Mark 15:43). Luke says that he was a member of the Council, "a good and righteous man (he had not consented to their plan and action), a man from Arimathea, a city of the Jews, who was waiting for the kingdom of God" (Luke 23:50-51). John says that he was "a disciple of Jesus, but a secret one, for fear of the Jews" (John 19:38). John also tells us that Nicodemus, whom Jesus had spoken with about being "born again" in John 3, also helped to bury Jesus. John says in John 12:42-43, "Nevertheless many even of the rulers believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they were not confessing Him, for fear that they would be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the approval of men rather than the approval of God." Joseph overcame his fear of others and gathered up the courage to go to Pilate and ask for the body of Jesus. He finally came out of the shadows and acted on his faith. Most of the apostles had fled, and those disciples like John who were there did not have the resources to care for the body of Jesus, so this wealthy man who had his own tomb nearby stepped forward to do what was needed. Isaiah 53:9 was fulfilled, "His grave was assigned with wicked men, Yet He was with a rich man in His death, Because He had done no violence, Nor was there any deceit in His mouth."

Joseph put the body of Jesus into his own new tomb, which he had hewn out of the rock for himself, and rolled a large stone against the entrance. Two of the women watched the process, Mary Magdalene and the "other Mary," the mother of James and Joseph. Luke writes, "Now the women who had come with Him out of Galilee followed, and saw the tomb and how His body was laid. 56 Then they returned and prepared spices and perfumes. And on the Sabbath they rested according to the commandment" (Luke 23:55-56). They intended to return after the Sabbath to finish the task of applying these spices and perfumes to His body.

#### Matthew 27:62-66

Now on the next day, the day after the preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered together with Pilate, 63 and said, "Sir, we remember that when He was still alive that deceiver said, 'After three days I am to rise again.' 64 "Therefore, give orders for the grave to be made secure until the third day, otherwise His disciples may come and steal Him away and say to the people, 'He has risen from the dead,' and the last deception will be worse than the first." 65 Pilate said to them, "You have a guard; go, make it as secure as you know how." 66 And they went and made the grave secure, and along with the guard they set a seal on the stone.

The Sabbath officially started after sundown on Friday, so it is possible that the chief priests and Pharisees went to Pilate on Friday night, when the Jews considered it the "next day." Since they were concerned about this, they probably would have wanted this guard posted as soon as possible.

The chief priests and Pharisees remembered what the disciples had forgotten, that Jesus had said He would rise from the dead after three days. They of course did not believe that it



would actually happen, but they were concerned that His disciples might fake His resurrection by stealing the body from the tomb. They called Jesus “that deceiver.” The word is *planos*, meaning “wandering, roving, misleading, leading into error” (Thayer’s Greek Definitions). Some versions translate it “impostor.” One of the common opinions about Jesus among the Jews was that “He leads the people astray” (John 7:12). People then did not try to do what people today sometimes do, that is, say that Jesus is a great man and a great teacher, but not really the Son of God. They understood what He had claimed about Himself and either believed in Him or completely rejected Him as an impostor and deceiver. Its very odd today that people will acknowledge Jesus as a “great moral teacher,” but then completely ignore His teachings.

The chief priests and Pharisees asked Pilate to order that the grave be made secure until the third day. They wanted to prevent the disciples from stealing His body and perpetuating the deception about Jesus. They wanted to put a halt to this idea that Jesus was the Messiah and the Son of God. Pilate granted their request and gave them a guard and told them to secure the tomb, so they secured the grave and set a seal on the stone. Marvin Vincent says, “The sealing was performed by stretching a cord across the stone and fastening it to the rock at either end by means of sealing clay. Or, if the stone at the door happened to be fastened with a cross beam, this latter was sealed to the rock.” Even if the disciples had been planning to fake the resurrection by stealing the body, they surely would have been deterred by these measures. But nothing could deter the actual resurrection of Jesus!

#### Matthew 28:1-10

Now after the Sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to look at the grave. 2 And behold, a severe earthquake had occurred, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled away the stone and sat upon it. 3 And his appearance was like lightning, and his clothing as white as snow. 4 The guards shook for fear of him and became like dead men. 5 The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid; for I know that you are looking for Jesus who has been crucified. 6 "He is not here, for He has risen, just as He said. Come, see the place where He was lying. 7 "Go quickly and tell His disciples that He has risen from the dead; and behold, He is going ahead of you into Galilee, there you will see Him; behold, I have told you." 8 And they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy and ran to report it to His disciples. 9 And behold, Jesus met them and greeted them. And they came up and took hold of His feet and worshiped Him. 10 Then Jesus \*said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and take word to My brethren to leave for Galilee, and there they will see Me."

Early on the day after the Sabbath (Sunday morning) the women came to the tomb of Jesus. Matthew says that they came to “look at the grave,” but we know from Mark and Luke that they had come with spices they had prepared to finish anointing the body of Jesus properly (Mark 16:1 and Luke 24:1). They came expecting to find the dead body of Jesus still in the tomb. The women were Mary Magdalene and “the other Mary,” and Mark tells us Salome was there. Luke lists Mary Magdalene, Joanna and Mary the mother of James, and “also the other women” in Luke 24:10. John only mentions Mary Magdalene. It appears that Mary Magdalene was the leader of this group.

On the way to the tomb the women were wondering who would roll the stone away from the tomb for them so they could go in (Mark 16:3). As it turned out, they need not have worried about this, because when they arrived, they found the stone already rolled away and the tomb open. An angel had come down from heaven and had rolled away the stone, and a

great earthquake had occurred as well. After rolling the stone away, the angel sat on it. I don't think the stone was rolled away from the tomb to allow Jesus out, but to allow the women and others in, and to show conclusively that He had risen. The stone would not prevent Jesus from exiting the tomb.

Regarding the angel or angels the gospels again differ as to how many there were and where they were. Matthew mentions the one angel who rolled away the stone from the tomb and sat on it who looked like lightning and whose clothing was as white as snow. Mark says that when the women entered the tomb, they "saw a young man sitting at the right, wearing a white robe; and they were amazed" (Mark 16:5). Luke says that when they entered the tomb they didn't find the body of Jesus, and as they were wondering about it, "two men suddenly stood near them in dazzling clothing" (Luke 24:4). John's account is very different, as he says that Mary Magdalene first went to the tomb and found it empty, went and told Peter and John about it and they went to the tomb and observed it empty except for the linen wrappings that had been around Jesus' body. After Peter and John left, Mary stayed at the tomb weeping and when she looked into the tomb, "she saw two angels in white sitting, one at the head and one at the feet where the body of Jesus had been lying" (John 20:12). The gospels do agree that angels were there and were involved when Jesus rose from the dead, and that they spoke to the women. The resurrection of Christ was arguably the greatest and most important supernatural event in history, so it's no surprise that angels were involved, as they were at His birth.

The angel was so glorious that the Roman soldiers guarding the tomb "shook for fear of him and became like dead men." I presume Matthew means that these guards lost consciousness because of their fear of the angel. The attempt to secure the tomb was an utter failure, as all human attempts to stop the activity of God must be. The might of the Roman empire was nothing in the face of one angel of God.

Though the Roman soldiers shook with fear of this angel, the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid." He brought fear to the guards, but reassurance to the women. For them there was no reason to be afraid, but good news from the angel of the resurrection of Jesus. The angel knew why they had come to the tomb, that they were looking for Jesus who had been crucified. He knew they were expecting to find the crucified and still dead body of Jesus. But they had come to the wrong place. They would not find Jesus there. The angel said, "He is not here, for He has risen, just as He said." Luke 24:5-7 says, "and as the women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, 'Why do you seek the living One among the dead? He is not here, but He has risen. Remember how He spoke to you while He was still in Galilee, saying that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again.'" The one they were seeking was "the living One," and He would not be found among the dead. He had told them that He would rise from the dead on the third day, and the angels reminded the women that He had told them explicitly what was going to happen. Still they were surprised by the resurrection.

The angel or angels invited the women to see the place where He had been lying, and then told them to go and tell the disciples that He had risen. They saw the open tomb and the linen wrappings that had been around His body. The wrappings were there, but He was not. I believe that John's description of the linen wrappings indicates that the body of Jesus had passed through or vanished from within the wrappings. I don't think they were unraveled and strewn about the tomb as if Jesus had unwrapped Himself or had been unwrapped by an angel. John says "the face-cloth, which had been on His head" was "not lying with the linen wrappings, but rolled up in a place by itself" (John 20:7). I think John means that the face-cloth simply collapsed in place as the body of Jesus passed out of the wrappings. This is more significant to me than the current myth that Jesus carefully "folded the napkin" after His

resurrection. John says that when he saw this, he believed (John 20:8). I think he means he believed Jesus had risen from the dead because of the grave clothes. When Lazarus emerged from the tomb at the command of Christ we are told that he was “bound hand and foot with wrappings, and his face was wrapped around with a cloth” (John 11:44). This shows that it was customary to use a face-cloth that was separate from the rest of the wrappings.

When the angel told them to “go quickly and tell His disciples that He has risen from the dead,” Mark records that he said, “But go, tell His disciples and Peter” (Mark 16:7). Peter was not kicked out. He especially was to hear the message from the women, and he and John were the first to go to the tomb. Peter’s faith had not failed, and in this special message the grace of the Lord toward Peter is made plain. The message from the women to the disciples was that Jesus had risen from the dead and that He was going ahead of them to Galilee and that they would see Him there. The message was not that the tomb was empty and He wasn’t there, but that He had risen. His word had come to pass and He had risen just as He had said.

They left quickly “with fear and great joy and ran to report it to His disciples.” It’s an interesting mix of emotions. They felt both fear and great joy. They had seen that a monumental miracle had taken place and they had heard from a glorious angel. These things don’t happen to people, but they were privileged to be the witnesses to them, and the first to hear the news. When the supernatural breaks in to our humdrum natural lives, it is both scary and thrilling.

As the women were going to report what they had learned to the disciples, Jesus Himself met them and greeted them, and they fell at His feet and worshiped Him. They were the ones who sought Him, even though they thought He was still dead, and they were the ones who were first privileged to see Him after the resurrection. He again told them not to be afraid and to “take word to My brethren to leave for Galilee, and there they will see Me.” The disciples were the brethren of Jesus, His brothers. Followers of Jesus do not merely have a Master to student relationship, but also we are His brothers and sisters and are heirs with Him of His kingdom.

His instructions to the disciples was that they were to go to Galilee and they would meet Him there. Matthew does not mention the fact that Jesus appeared to them that evening there in Jerusalem, but Luke and John make it plain that He did. He appeared to the two disciples that afternoon who were walking to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35). When those two returned to Jerusalem they met with the eleven and others with them who told them, “The Lord has really risen and has appeared to Simon” (Luke 24:34). So at some point on that day Jesus had appeared to Simon Peter before appearing to the others. Paul mentions this in 1 Corinthians 15:5, “and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.” Apparently it was a priority for Jesus to meet with Peter before the others. Peter needed the reassurance from Jesus that he was forgiven and was still numbered among the apostles.

That evening the disciples were gathered together in one place, perhaps the same room where they had observed the Passover with Jesus a few days before. Thomas was not there with them. Jesus appeared among them and assured them that it really was Him. He showed them His wounds and ate some broiled fish (Luke 24:36-43). He was not a disembodied spirit, but was still a flesh and blood man. The same body that had been crucified had been raised and still retained its wounds. Eight days later they were still in Jerusalem and Jesus appeared to them for the sake of Thomas, who had refused to believe unless he personally saw Jesus and examined His wounds (John 20:25-29). It was after this that they returned to Galilee and met with Jesus again there.

Matthew 28:11-15

Now while they were on their way, some of the guard came into the city and reported to the chief priests all that had happened. 12 And when they had assembled with the elders and consulted together, they gave a large sum of money to the soldiers, 13 and said, "You are to say, 'His disciples came by night and stole Him away while we were asleep.' 14 "And if this should come to the governor's ears, we will win him over and keep you out of trouble." 15 And they took the money and did as they had been instructed; and this story was widely spread among the Jews, and is to this day.

While the women were on their way to tell the disciples about the resurrection of Jesus, some of the guard came and reported what had happened to the chief priests. They probably told them a true account of the angel who came from heaven, rolled the stone from the mouth of the tomb and sat on it. They told of their helplessness and fear. They told them that Jesus had risen from the dead and they were powerless to stop it from happening. The Sanhedrin had asked Pilate for this guard because they remembered that Jesus had said He would rise from the dead, and because they thought the disciples would try to fake the resurrection by stealing His body (Matthew 27:62-66). It was at their request that this guard had been posted. Now they have a problem. Jesus had really risen from the dead. The guards themselves were witnesses! What are they going to do? Are they going to believe in Jesus and become His disciples? Are they going to tell Pilate and everyone else the truth? No, they are going to try to suppress the truth and falsify the story.

The chief priests gathered with the elders and "consulted together." They had to decide how to deal with this news. I wonder if any member of the Sanhedrin advocated for telling the truth? I wonder if anyone said, "It's time that we acknowledge that this Man is the Messiah and believe in Him"? Joseph of Arimathea, who had buried Jesus in his own tomb, who was a member of the Sanhedrin and had not "consented to their plan and action" to crucify Jesus, may have said something like this (see Luke 23:50-51). But the majority of the Sanhedrin decided to pay the soldiers a large sum of money and instructed them to say that the disciples had come by night as they slept and stole the body of Jesus. The word for "stole Him away" is *kleptō*, to steal. If they had been asked how they knew what had happened if they were asleep, they would have no answer. The trouble was that sleeping while on guard duty was a fatal mistake for a Roman soldier. That's why the council said, "And if this should come to the governor's ears, we will win him over and keep you out of trouble." The World English Bible is probably more literal, "If this comes to the governor's ears, we will persuade him and make you free of worry." There may be here the implication that they would bribe Pilate to overlook the offense. So the story they gave the soldiers was unlikely for two reasons. First, it is unlikely that the soldiers would have slept while on duty, and second, if they had been sleeping they would not have known what had happened.

The soldiers took the money and did as they had been told, and the story spread among the Jews. It's interesting to note that later this story was not advanced to contradict the preaching of the apostles. When Peter and John and others testified about seeing the risen Christ, no one accused them of having stolen His body. Nobody said that they were liars and frauds. As they continued to preach Christ and the resurrection none of them ever denied the truth of it. Even when they were persecuted and killed they did not deny the resurrection.

Matthew 28:16-20

But the eleven disciples proceeded to Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had designated. 17 When they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some were doubtful. 18 And

Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 19 "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

Matthew omits quite a bit regarding the appearances of Jesus to the disciples after His resurrection. He does not mention His appearances to them while they were still at Jerusalem. In Acts 1:3 Luke says that Jesus "presented Himself alive after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God." John 21 makes it clear that after appearing to them in Jerusalem He also appeared to them in Galilee and had an important discussion with Peter. Matthew's summary is very brief and to the point.

Jesus had designated a mountain in Galilee where He would meet them, and so the eleven disciples went there and met Him there. They saw Him and worshiped Him, and Matthew says "some were doubtful," perhaps his way of alluding to Thomas. When the women had reported to the disciples in Jerusalem that Jesus had risen from the dead, Luke says, "But these words appeared to them as nonsense, and they would not believe them" (Luke 24:11). All the apostles were skeptics at first, and some still had doubts. It is not unusual that we should doubt this idea that Jesus rose bodily from the dead. We should be able to see why many consider this to be a wish-fulfillment myth. But even the disciples were skeptics. They didn't believe it until they saw Him and He proved to them "by many convincing proofs" that He really had risen from the dead. They were not willing to believe and had to be convinced.

Matthew finishes up his gospel with this passage in verses 18-20 we call the "Great Commission." Having accomplished His work of dying on the cross and rising from the dead, what message does Jesus have for His followers? What orders does He have for them? What are they to do going forward? Here it is in a nutshell.

He first talks about His authority. All authority in heaven and earth had been given to Him. This is quite a claim! The word again is *exousia*, which we have examined previously. Jesus is authorized to do whatever He wishes throughout heaven and earth. He is free to do whatever He wants, and no one has a higher authority than He. He's been given "the name which is above every name" (Philippians 2:9), and everyone will be accountable to Him. No one is exempt from His authority. As the Roman Centurion saw, Jesus has the authority to issue orders and they are carried out (Matthew 8:5-13).

On the basis of His authority, He then orders them to go and make disciples of all the nations. The word "go" is a participle and could be translated, "as you are going." Jesus assumes they will go. The verb here, the command, is "make disciples." Wherever they go, whatever they do, their main task is to make disciples. As we noted earlier as we examined chapter 5, the Greek word translated "disciples" is *mathētēs*, meaning one who is a pupil, a student, a learner. Here the verb "make disciples" is *mathēteuō*, to become a disciple or to make a disciple. The word occurs three other times in the New Testament, two other times in Matthew, and once in Acts. In Matthew 13:52 Jesus said, "Therefore every scribe who has become a disciple (*mathēteuō*) of the kingdom of heaven is like a head of a household, who brings out of his treasure things new and old." In Matthew 27:57 it says that Joseph of Arimathea had "become a disciple" (*mathēteuō*) of Jesus. The last occurrence, in Acts 14:21, actually tells us how disciples are made, and is therefore crucial for us in our understanding of the actual process. Speaking of the ministry of Paul and Barnabas in the city of Derbe, it says, "After they had preached the gospel to that city and made many disciples, they returned to

Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch.” They made disciples by preaching the gospel. They presented the good news about Jesus to the people of the city, and those who received the message and believed were disciples. They had become students of Jesus.

I think it’s important for us to see that there is no concept in the New Testament that one might be a mere “believer” or “Christian” without being a disciple. There is no indication that becoming a disciple is something subsequent to believing in Christ and being saved, and yet most of our current ideas and teachings about this thing we call “discipleship” seem to assume that one can indeed be a believer without being a full card-carrying disciple. We seem to have the idea that a disciple is a Christian who has achieved a higher or deeper or more committed walk with Christ than the mere believer. Much of our teaching on this seems to say that there is some undefined point at which a mere believer crosses over and becomes a full-fledged disciple. I think this is faulty thinking. It’s like saying that the purpose of a university is to “make students.” Well, there are people in the admissions department of a university who are concerned with recruiting and admitting students, but once a student has been enrolled, the purpose of the university is then to teach that student, and the responsibility of the student is to show up and learn. We have over-complicated this business of making disciples. We make them by sharing the gospel message. When they believe and commit themselves to Christ, they have been admitted as students into His university.

Making a disciple is like having a baby. Once the baby is made and is born any parent in their right mind knows that the task is not completed, but it has just begun. That baby has a lot of growing to do and a lot that he or she must learn. We don’t put our newborn on the lawn outside the hospital and say, “There you go! You’ve been born and you’re here! Have a good life!” Similarly a new Christian is a disciple, but they have a lot of learning and growing to do, and they must not be abandoned. So then we must not see evangelism and salvation as an end, but as a beginning. Once someone has heard the gospel and believed it starts a lifelong process of learning and growing spiritually. The aim for a disciple of Christ is to become like His teacher. In Matthew 10:25 Jesus said, “It is enough for the disciple that he become like his teacher, and the slave like his master.” And in Luke 6:40 He says, “A pupil is not above his teacher; but everyone, after he has been fully trained, will be like his teacher.” It will be a lifelong process for all of us as we pursue this goal of becoming fully like Jesus.

Jesus orders that disciples be made “of all the nations.” The Greek term for “nations” is *ethnos*, and denotes a race, a nation or a tribe. Probably the Gentile nations distinct from Israel are meant. The book of Revelation says that with His blood the Lord purchased people “from every tribe, tongue, people and nation” (Revelation 5:9). In His kingdom every tribe will be represented, every language will be represented, every people group and every nation will be represented. Jesus has authority over all of them (Revelation 13:7), and the gospel is to be preached to all of them (Revelation 14:6). Just before He ascended into heaven, Jesus said to His disciples, “you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth” (Acts 1:8). The scope of the mission is the entire world and every group of people in the world.

Once a disciple has been made, they are to be baptized in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Baptism is, I think, a means of publicly confessing our faith in Christ. It is an identification with Him in His death and resurrection. Paul uses this picture in Romans 6:3-4, “Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.” This is why baptism by immersion is a more accurate depiction of the meaning of baptism than baptism by sprinkling. Paul uses the picture again in

Colossians 2:12, "having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead." Baptism also is indicative of having one's sins washed away, as Paul mentioned when he told his story in Acts 22:16. He recalled that after Jesus had appeared to him, Ananias in Damascus had said to him, "Now why do you delay? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name." When we are baptized we are saying, "I now believe in and identify with Christ, having been cleansed by His death and raised to newness of life by His resurrection."

New disciples are to be baptized "in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit." This passage stands out as a very rare trinitarian formula in the New Testament. In Matthew 11:27 Jesus had said, "All things have been handed over to Me by My Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him." So Jesus has used this same kind of language before, and of course we often find Jesus speaking of the Son and the Father in the gospel of John. It is clear in the New Testament that the one God exists in the three persons of the Trinity, Father, Son and Spirit. It is a great mystery that we can't fully grasp or adequately illustrate through any simile or metaphor. When we believe in Jesus we also believe in the Father and the Spirit. No true Christian says, "I just believe in Jesus, but not in the Father or Spirit."

After a disciple, a student, has been baptized, then they must be taught. They have been enrolled in the university of Jesus as His student, and now they must be taught "to observe all that I commanded you." The word for "observe" is *tēreō*, and it means "to attend to carefully, take care of, to guard" ([Thayer's Greek Definitions](#)). I think "observe" is a good translation of the word. A disciple to be taught, not just the truths and principles of God's word, but primarily the commandments of Christ. The aim of the teaching is that the disciple should not just know, but also learn to keep the commands of Christ. When God gave the ten commandments He said that He shows His lovingkindness to those who "love Me and keep my commandments" (Exodus 20:6 and Deuteronomy 5:10). Love for God is demonstrated by keeping His commandments. Similarly, Jesus said, "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments" (John 14:15, and see also John 14:23-24 and John 15:10). A disciple of Jesus who is committed to Him and loves Him will concern himself with doing what Jesus commands. The true "Christian life" is a life that is concerned with obeying the commands of the Lord.

Its important to say at this point that obedience to the commands of Christ does not lead to our salvation, but results from our salvation. It is disciples who are taught to obey, not the obedient who become disciples. The saved are taught to keep His commandments. You might say, "But doesn't Paul tell us that we are not under Law, but under grace?" Yes, that's true. He says this in Romans 6:14-18:

For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace. What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? May it never be! Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness? But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed, and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.

Being "under grace" does not mean that we are free to sin and need not pay attention to God's commands. Being under grace means that we are now free from sin and don't have to be mastered by it any longer. It means that we are now able to be obedient and are able to

become slaves of righteousness. By grace we've been freed from sin and by grace we are enabled to walk in obedience and righteousness. Someone who says they are a disciple of Jesus but has no interest in obeying His commands is not really a disciple and has not really received His grace.

If we have become disciples of Jesus, we must devote ourselves to learning the word of God so that we can obey it and put it into practice. We must commit ourselves to keeping the commands of Christ. We want to become like our great Teacher, and so we must devote ourselves to learning His word and following His ways.

Finally, Jesus assures them, "and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." The word "lo" is *idou*, to look, to behold, and is imperative. He commands them to observe this fact, that He will be with them as they are going to make and teach disciples. He will not leave them alone, but will be with them in the task. I think the idea is elaborated in John 14 through 17 where Jesus talked about going away, but sending the Holy Spirit, the "Helper" who would be with them and in them. In John 14:15-20 He says, "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments. 16 I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; 17 that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you. 18 I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. 19 After a little while the world will no longer see Me, but you will see Me; because I live, you will live also. 20 In that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you." Jesus would be with them in the person of the Holy Spirit who would dwell in them. They will have success because He will be with them. This is always the key to the success of those who follow the Lord. Joseph in Genesis succeeded because the Lord was with Him. The same was true of Moses, of Joshua, of Samuel and David and many others. We don't succeed in the Lord's endeavors apart from His presence and power.

Jesus assured them He would be with them "even to the end of the age." They lived in an "age" that would come to an end, and we live in that same age. An "age" is a span of time that has boundaries, that has a beginning and an end. We may speak of the "prehistoric age," meaning the time before written language when history was not recorded. We have heard Jesus speak of the end of the age previously. When He explained the Parable of the Wheat and the Tares, He said, "...and the enemy who sowed them is the devil, and the harvest is the end of the age; and the reapers are angels. So just as the tares are gathered up and burned with fire, so shall it be at the end of the age" (Matthew 13:39-40). The judgment of all humanity will come at the end of the age. He warned of the same thing in the Parable of the Dragnet in Matthew 13:49-50, "So it will be at the end of the age; the angels will come forth and take out the wicked from among the righteous, and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." The disciples understood that there would be an end of the age. They asked Jesus, "Tell us, when will these things happen, and what will be the sign of Your coming and of the end of the age?" (Matthew 24:3). In Mark 10:29-30 Jesus spoke of "the present age" and "the age to come" when those who follow Him will enjoy eternal life. In Galatians 1:4 Paul writes that Jesus "gave Himself for our sins so that He might rescue us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father." The present age is an evil age and is going to pass away. We must not think that things are going to continue as they are forever. There will be an end to this evil age. God will put a halt to all evil, suffering and wickedness. The wicked will be removed from the righteous. Before this happens, Jesus told us that the gospel will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come (Matthew 24:14). Our concern, then, and the concern of all who follow Christ, must be the preaching of the gospel to all the nations. We play a part in helping determine when the end of the age will come. When the followers of



Christ finish the task of making disciples of all tribes, tongues, peoples and nations, then the end of the age will come. Jesus promises to be with us in this work.