

Faith-builders Bible Studies

The Gospel of Matthew

by Mathew Bartlett &
Derek Williams

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First Published 2013.

Faith-builders Bible Studies: The Gospel of Matthew by Mathew Bartlett & Derek Williams

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ISBN: 1481851535

EAN-13: 978-1481851534

www.biblestudiesonline.org.uk

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Dedicated to all those who are hungry for God's Word.

Faith-builders Bible Studies

The 'Faith-builders Bible study series' has been developed a useful resource for today's students of God's Word and their busy lifestyles. Pastors, home or study group leaders and indeed for anyone wishing to study the Bible for themselves will benefit from using Faith-builders studies.

Each volume is the result of many years of group Bible study, and has been revised again and again to be relevant, challenging and faith building whilst remaining clear and easy to understand. What is more, we aim to keep our costs to an absolute minimum, helping more people to discover the blessings of God's Word.

Mathew Bartlett and Derek Williams are both experienced pastors in the Pentecostal movement in Great Britain, and have over 65 years of ministry experience between them.

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Matthew Chapter 1

The Genealogy of Christ

1:1 This is the record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

Matthew's purpose in writing his gospel is clear from the very beginning: he intends to reveal to his own nation of Israel, and to all God fearing persons, that Jesus is the Christ, the long awaited anointed One promised by God, and to demonstrate this fact by showing how all the promises of Scripture relating to the coming of Christ are fulfilled in Him. The titles "son of David" and "son of Abraham" describe Christ in this way, for it was both to Abraham and to David that God revealed His promise that one of their descendants would be the Christ.

To David, God said "I will set one of your seed upon your throne" (1 Chron. 17:11 and Psa. 132:11).

To Abraham, God said "Through your seed shall all nations of the earth be blessed" (Gen 22:18). The apostle Paul explains the meaning of this promise in Galatians, that "seed" is singular, referring to One of Abraham's offspring, not all of them (Gal. 3:16). Matthew's aim throughout his gospel is to reveal Jesus as that One.

The word genealogy means the line of natural descent. Although Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God, who pre-existed his manifestation in the flesh, yet he became flesh as part of Abraham's family by his incarnation and was born a Jew (2 Tim, 2:8).

Christ's genealogy reveals how Christ truly became one of us by entering the human family and the

Jewish family in particular. Of this family's history much could be said, which would be superfluous to our understanding of this gospel. But since the inspired writer particularly highlights several features of this genealogy, so we shall consider them in greater detail.

1:2 Abraham was the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob, Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers.

Christ's descent from Abraham through Isaac and Jacob makes him a Jew. This was a vital qualification for the Christ, since Moses said "The Lord your God prophet like me from among your own people" (Deut. 18:15). God had made it clear that it would not be through Ishmael (Abraham's child born in natural way, albeit to a slave) but through Isaac (Abraham's child born by the power of the Spirit in fulfillment of God's promise) that the lineage of Christ would come. This illustrates for us that it is not by the works of the flesh but by God's miracle working power that He brought Christ into the world, and through that same power he brings salvation to our hearts by faith.

Furthermore, God later revealed that the Christ would be descended from Judah (Gen. 49:10).

1:3 Judah the father of Perez and Zerah (by Tamar), Perez the father of Hezron, Hezron the father of Ram.

The devil had many times tried to frustrate God's purpose bringing Christ into the world. One such occasion was in the days of Judah. Judah's oldest son married a girl named Tamar, but died without leaving children. Judah's younger son, Onan, according to custom, was to take her to wife and raise up children to inherit his brother's estate. But Onan knew that the child would not be his heir, so whenever he had sex with Tamar, he pulled out in order to

deliberately spill their semen outside her, to prevent her getting pregnant (Gen. 38:6-10).

This scripture does not teach that contraception is wrong, but that it was wicked since behind it was an attempt to end the family line of Judah. Judah had still one son, Shelah, whom he promised to give to Tamar when he was old enough, but when Judah did not keep his promise, Tamar made her own plans. She dressed up with a veil and waited near Judah's place of work posing as a prostitute. Judah's wife had already died and he paid Tamar to let him have sex with her, and made her pregnant, but he did not know that she was his daughter in law. Since he had no money with him at the time, Judah left his personal seal as a pledge that he would return with payment. But when he sent a friend to pay the girl and get his seal back, the girl had disappeared. (Read the whole story in Genesis 38).

Later it was told Judah that his daughter in law, although a widow, was pregnant. He was about to order her execution when the girl announced that she was pregnant by the owner of a seal she showed. It was Judah's. So he did not execute her, but said she is more righteous than I. Tamar had twins, and through one of them Jesus Christ is descended from Judah according to the flesh.

This whole sordid lesson reveals that neither the devil nor the wickedness of men could prevent God bringing his only begotten son into the world.

1:4-5 Ram the father of Amminadab, Amminadab the father of Nahshon, Nahshon the father of Salmon, Salmon the father of Boaz (by Rahab), Boaz the father of Obed (by Ruth), Obed the father of Jesse.

Matthew notes that Boaz's mother was Rahab, who by the faith which she showed when she hid the spies that Rahab was accounted righteous before God (Heb. 11:31) and became not only numbered among the people of Israel, but included in the family tree of the Lord Jesus Christ. We too are accounted as righteous by God through faith in Jesus Christ, a faith which expresses itself in good works (Rom 5:1).

Boaz married Ruth, the Moabitess, even though the law had said that a Moabite could not enter the congregation of the LORD until ten generations (Deut. 23:3). Matthew highlights that Jesus Christ is the One who breaks down the middle wall of partition and makes it possible for both Jews and Gentiles to enter into God's kingdom (Eph. 2:14).

1:6 And Jesse the father of David the king. David was the father of Solomon (by the wife of Uriah).

If Jesus is truly the Christ then he must be a descendent of David, and Matthew is at pains to stress that this is the case. When David committed adultery with Bathsheba, the child born from that unholy union died. But later, Uriah being dead and God having forgiven David's sin, David and Bathsheba were married, and Solomon, the result of their legal union, was loved by God, and it is through him that the future Kings of Israel came, even up to the time of Christ, for when God forgives, he forgives fully.

This inclusion of Bathsheba in Jesus' family tree reveals God's ultimate purpose in sending His Son, for Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners (1 Tim. 1:15).

It is at this point that the genealogy in Matthew begins to differ from the one given by Luke. Scholars have debated much about this. Some suppose that Luke's genealogy is actually that of Mary. What is clear is that Matthew wants to show us how Christ fits into the royal line, and that Joseph was in line for the throne. When it comes to Jesus, of course, he is not in line for the throne, for the throne is his.

All the names given in the following verses were kings of Judah, and their life histories are found in the books of 1 & 2 Kings and 1 & 2 Chronicles.

1:7-11 Solomon the father of Rehoboam, Rehoboam the father of Abijah, Abijah the father of Asa, Asa the father of Jehoshaphat, Jehoshaphat the father of Joram, Joram the father of Uzziah, Uzziah the father of Jotham, Jotham the father of Ahaz, Ahaz the father of Hezekiah, Hezekiah the father of Manasseh, Manasseh the father of Amon, Amon the father of Josiah, and Josiah the father of Jeconiah and his brothers, at the time of the deportation to Babylon.

These verses span the 400 years from the civil war in Israel to the carrying of Judah to Babylon, for during this time the purposes of God concerning his people were not forgotten, nor was that greatest purpose of all - to bring Christ into the world, Throughout the history of Israel, God was working out his purpose for the salvation of mankind.

It is of note that such was the effect of the deportation to Babylon on the corporate mind-set of the nation that the Jews dated their history as being either the time before or after the deportation and return.

1:12-16 After the deportation to Babylon, Jeconiah became the father of Shealtiel, Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel, Zerubbabel the father of Abiud, Abiud the father of Eliakim, Eliakim the father of Azor, Azor the father of Zadok, Zadok the father of Achim, Achim the father of Eliud, Eliud the father of Eleazar, Eleazar the father of Matthan, Matthan the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, by whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ.

God had promised that after 70 years in exile, Judah would return again and rebuild Jerusalem, which they did. Matthew points out that God who kept this promise to Israel has also kept his greater promise for a greater restoration in Christ Jesus.

1:17 So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations, and from David to the deportation to Babylon, fourteen generations, and from the deportation to Babylon to Christ, fourteen generations.

God's plan to bring Christ into the world was not last minute, for the way of salvation in Christ was foreordained before the foundation of the world. God had it planned to the smallest detail before he ever made the world. Notice the symmetry of the generations, which reveal that God is in charge of the flow of human history. Everything happens according to his time scale. God predicted the exact day and date of Christ's crucifixion, resurrection and ascension to glory (through the foreshadowing of the Passover and also through Dan. 9:25-26: As it was written of the exodus from Egypt on the exact day (Gen. 15:13 and Exod. 12:41), so all the details of our spiritual exodus through Christ came exactly on time.

The Birth of Christ

In order to further show that Jesus is the Christ in fulfilment of the Scriptures, Matthew shows the manner of his birth fulfilled the scriptures.

1:18 Now the birth of Jesus Christ happened this way. While his mother Mary was engaged to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit.

What is significant about the birth of Jesus is that it is God breaking into time; the Word became flesh to dwell among us, and in order to fulfil all the promises of God. This is why Matthew devotes this section to Christ's birth. Whilst Mary was engaged to be married to Joseph, Matthew emphasizes that they had not had sexual intercourse with Joseph, or any other man, but was found with child through the Holy Spirit who formed within her womb this fusion of God and man - Jesus Christ.

1:19 Because Joseph, her husband to be, was a righteous man, and because he did not want to disgrace her, he intended to divorce her privately.

Joseph at this time knew nothing about the purpose of God being carried out in Mary's life. Supposing she had been unfaithful, he considered his position. The selflessness of Joseph is here revealed. It was not he, but Mary whom he wished to spare the shame of being found pregnant outside of marriage. So he decided to go ahead with the marriage to keep up appearances, but later to divorce Mary away from the public eye, for he did not wish to be united with (as he may have then thought) an immoral woman.

1:20-21 When he had contemplated this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, because the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son and you will name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

God begins to reveal his purpose to Joseph. God wanted him to marry Mary without fear, for the child within Mary was conceived of the Holy Spirit. The son she would bear would be born in fulfilment of long awaited prophecy. He would be the Saviour who would save His people from their sins - Jesus.

1:22-23 This all happened so that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet would be fulfilled: "Look! The virgin will conceive and bear a son, and they will call him Emmanuel," which means "God with us."

Matthew again emphasizes that Christ's birth was in fulfilment of the scripture, that a virgin would conceive and bear a son who although fully man is no less than fully God. Jesus would have a unique birth, a unique name, and a unique mission.

1:24-25 When Joseph awoke from sleep he did what the angel of the Lord told him. He took his wife, but did not have marital relations with her until she gave birth to a son, whom he named Jesus.

Although nothing like this had ever been heard of before - a virgin pregnant! Joseph believes and acts obediently upon the Word of God. What is more, out of reverence for the holy child she carried, even after they were married, Joseph had no intercourse with Mary till after Jesus was born.

Matthew Chapter 2

The Time and Place of Jesus' Birth

2:1-2 After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, in the time of King Herod, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem saying, "Where is the one who is born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him."

Matthew, (like Luke in Luke 1:5), dates the time of Jesus' birth as being in the days of Herod the Great, King of Judea, which leads scholars to believe that Christ was born in approx. 4BC. Traditionally, the year Anno Domini was taken to be the date of Christ's birth, but these early estimates are inaccurate to the tune of 3-4 years.

It is of vital importance that Matthew records the place of Jesus' birth as Bethlehem, since it was long since prophesied and understood by the Jews to be the birth place of the coming Messiah (see John 7:42 and Micah 5:2).

Little is told us of the scholars which came from the East to Jerusalem, except that they had seen a sign which indicated to them that the Messiah King of the Jews had been born. The words "wise men" denote scientists, or learned men. They were clearly in possession of the prophetic Scriptures, and had observed a sign in the heavens as being the omen of the fulfilment of a prophecy concerning Christ's coming.

Balaam son of Beor prophesied that Num. 24:17 'A star will march forth out of Jacob, and a sceptre will rise out of Israel.'

Isaiah wrote (Isa. 60:3): 'And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising.'

To indulge in speculation as to the nature of this star is actually pointless. It served merely as a sign to these wise men, and afterward had no purpose. It is possible that the sign was supernaturally produced, or even that it was literally a new star, showing forth the glory of a creator.

Having read of his coming, these devout men travelled long distances in order to worship and pay him homage.

The Rejection of Christ

2:3 When King Herod heard this he was alarmed, and all Jerusalem with him.

The word "alarmed" is too weak. We are often told in Christmas nativities that Herod did not wish to lose his throne. That is not the meaning of this verse. He was not afraid of a new King taking his place, but he was averse to God's King coming to reign in his heart and life, and would not submit to him. On hearing of the coming of Christ, both Herod and all Jerusalem are stirred and agitated in opposition to the coming One, thus revealing the enmity in the heart of sinful man against God. To think that such antipathy was provoked by the mere mention of the coming King. Many today share this irrational enmity against God which is the result of sin.

2:4 After assembling all the chief priests and experts in the law, he asked them where the Christ was to be born.

Herod himself was not entirely in the dark concerning the prophecy of a divine King who would reign

over all the earth and demand perfect submission from every man. He knew enough to know that the place of his birth was predicted in the scriptures, as the scribes remind the King.

2:5-6 "In Bethlehem of Judea," they said, "for it is written this way by the prophet: 'And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are in no way least among the rulers of Judah, for out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.' "

All the Kings from David onwards might have been said in one sense to arise out of Bethlehem, for that was their ancestor David's family home. Yet prophecy was sure that the Christ, the greatest of all Kings, would himself be born in Bethlehem to shepherd and rule over God's people Israel. Matthew concentrates here on the fulfilment of the prophecy, and so does not elaborate on the rest of Micah's prophecy which states "whose goings forth have been from everlasting."

2:7 Then Herod privately summoned the wise men and determined from them when the star had appeared.

In keeping with every evil work, Herod wanted his plans for the killing of the Christ child to be as secret as possible. No one does wrong openly, but secretly, behind closed doors. Pretending to show greater interest for some other reason, Herod found out by closely examining the wise men when the star had appeared, information which would enable him to roughly age the child.

2:8 He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and look carefully for the child. When you find him, inform me so that I can go and worship him as well."

Originally it had only been Herod's intention to eliminate the Christ, so he asks the wise men to definitely locate the child and report back to him, so that he might find and destroy him.

Seeking, Finding and Worshiping

2:9-10 After listening to the king they left, and once again the star they saw when it rose led them until it stopped above the place where the child was. When they saw the star they shouted joyfully.

Since the hearts of the wise men were open to the guidance of God, they found that as they journeyed toward Bethlehem, the star "went before them" confirming that their direction of travel was correct, and they gave a shout of joy to think that they were now so near to completing their journey and finding their goal. Are we so enthusiastic about coming together to worship Jesus?

2:11 As they came into the house and saw the child with Mary his mother, they bowed down and worshiped him. They opened their treasure boxes and gave him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

The worship of the wise men consisted both of hearts of faith and homage. They sought him and bowed down to him. It consisted also of devotion, for they opened their treasures - it may well have been all they had to live on, it was certainly not cheap to them, this gold frankincense and myrrh: gold the gift for a king, frankincense for the worship of God, and myrrh for the burial and the priestly office.

Since by this time, Matthew refers to Jesus as a "young child" different word to "babe", we may assume that the arrival of the wise men came a while after Christ's

birth and that Mary and Joseph had spent some time in Bethlehem. From what follows in this passage we assume that time to be approx. Two years, and Jesus age was anything up to two years at this point.

2:12 After being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they went back by another route to their own country.

Whether or not the wise men had been taken in by Herod's duplicity or not is unclear. Yet if they did harbour any suspicions, they were to be confirmed, for an angel of the Lord appeared to them in a dream, warning them about Herod's true purpose. They went back to their own country by a different route in order to escape and frustrate him.

Herod Tries to Kill Jesus

2:13-15 After they had gone, 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 stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to look for the child to kill him." Then he got up, took the child and his mother during the night, and went to Egypt. He stayed there until Herod died. In this way what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet was fulfilled: "I called my Son out of Egypt."

God sent his angel also to warn Joseph of what is about to happen "Herod is going to look for the child to kill him". God instructs Joseph to flee Bethlehem and remain in Egypt where he would be safe, until he once more received word from God. Joseph immediately obeyed, and through all this circumstances was fulfilled another prophecy "out of Egypt have I called my son" (Hosea 11:1).

2:16 When Herod saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, he became enraged. He sent men to kill all the children in Bethlehem and throughout the surrounding region from the age of two and under, according to the time he had learned from the wise men.

The opponent of Christ was angered when his plans were frustrated by the wise men, and sought to accomplish his evil plan in another way. It may be seen as God giving Herod chance to turn from his evil purpose, but he did not. Instead, he ordered his soldiers to slaughter all children in Bethlehem and the surrounding districts who were of the age of approx. two and under. It is worth remembering that the soldiers would not have asked to see evidence of age. They would have killed every child who looked two or under, and they would not have stopped to check the child's sex either, so all the girls died too in Herod's efforts to rid the earth of the Christ child.

2:17-18 Then what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled: "A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and loud wailing, Rachel weeping for her children, and she did not want to be comforted, because they were gone."

This mindless slaughter, carried out in deliberate defiance of God, was predicted through the prophet Jeremiah. Barnes notes that Rama was a small town about 6 miles northwest of Jerusalem, and Rachel was buried near to Bethlehem, Gen. 35:16-19 which is about 10 miles from Rama.

The prophecy clearly indicates the extent of the "surrounding area" where the children were killed. One might easily understand why the parents refused to be comforted.

2:19-20 After Herod had died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt saying, "Get up, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who were seeking the child's life are dead."

The one comfort we can take from this passage is that Herod died, as all tyrants will. It was time then for God to call his Son back into Israel; which is what the angel instructed Joseph to do.

2:21-23 So he got up and took the child and his mother and returned to the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. After being warned in a dream, he went to the regions of Galilee. He came to a town called Nazareth and lived there. Then what had been spoken by the prophets was fulfilled, that Jesus would be called a Nazarene.

Joseph immediately obeyed. But as he journeyed, he came to learn that Archelaus was reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod. Knowing the son to be as evil as his father, and perhaps worried that the story of the Christ child might endanger Jesus there, and with Divine confirmation of this being given, Joseph decided to return to Nazareth, which was a different Jurisdiction, where he had Mary had become engaged, and where no one was looking for Jesus. This once again caused the fulfilment of Scripture, where the coming Messiah was foreshadowed by the oath of the Nazarite, the one from Nazareth. Thus the Messiah would be a Nazarene. Nazareth was a despised city, and so it was fitting that he who was despised and rejected by men should live there.

Matthew Chapter 3

John's Call to Repentance

3:1 In those days John the Baptist came into the wilderness of Judea proclaiming,

Matthew does not record for us the details of John's birth; in fact it is only in Luke's gospel that this is given. When Matthew says "in those days" he is not referring to the time of the previous chapter as John was only six months older than Jesus. Barnes says that perhaps Matthew was referring to the time when Jesus still lived in Nazareth. John took as his pulpit the desert area of Judea to proclaim his message.

3:2 "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near."

His message consisted of two headings, repent and the kingdom of heaven is near. The call to repentance is fundamental to the message of salvation. At the time of John's ministry salvation had not been provided because Christ had not yet died for the sins of the world nevertheless the people needed to repent. This word repent simply means to "think differently" to "reconsider"(Strong's Dictionary) to have a change of heart or direction, to be sorry for our sins against God (2 Corinthians 7:10), indeed it is only against God that we sin (Psalm 51:4), it is the actions of sin that causes others to suffer. But it is not only a turning away from but a looking to God the only one who can save (Isaiah 45:22, Hebrews 7:25). The kingdom of heaven does not refer to the kingdom of glory that is in the heavenly places but to the coming of the Messiah, the Christ into the world. It was near, or at hand, because Jesus Christ was about to

commence His ministry on earth that would culminate in His death on the cross for the atonement of sin thus opening the door of the kingdom of heaven for all that believe and receive Him as their Saviour.

3:3 For he is the one about whom Isaiah the prophet had spoken: "The voice of one shouting in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make his paths straight.'"

The coming of John and the message that proclaimed was prophesied in the Old Testament through Isaiah 40:3. He was the forerunner, the herald, the one who went before the Christ to announce that He was on His way. Therefore people had to get themselves ready for His coming.

3:4 Now John wore clothing made from camel's hair with a leather belt around his waist, and his diet consisted of locusts and wild honey.

John was unmistakable he was distinct from everybody else of his day. The clothes that he wore were woven of course camel hair tied with a leather belt around the waist. His diet consisted of locusts for meat and the honey of free bees, which are those that were not housed in bee hives.

3:5 Then people from Jerusalem, as well as all Judea and all the region around the Jordan, were going out to him,

He had no problem with getting the people to come out to hear his message; they came from the city of Jerusalem and from all over Judea to the bank of the river Jordan.

3:6 and he was baptizing them in the Jordan River as they confessed their sins.

They not only came and heard the word but responded to it and repented and were baptized confessing their sins.

3:7 But when he saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, "You offspring of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?"

However, there were the sceptics who came also, the Pharisees and the Sadducees. John knew that they did not come to hear or repent and be baptized but to criticize. He told them straight what they were a bunch of snakes. Jesus later said the same of them (Matthew 12:34) and that they were of their father the devil (John 8:44). John was fully aware that these people were hypocrites, self-righteous that they considered themselves to be the elect of God and without sin and therefore rejected his message. So he asks them who had warned them to escape from the wrath of God that is coming.

3:8 Therefore produce fruit that proves your repentance,

He calls upon them to prove that they had repented from their sins and yielding their lives to God by living a godly life (Matthew 7:20).

3:9 and don't think you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you that God can raise up children for Abraham from these stones!

The biggest boast of the Scribes, Pharisees and Sadducees was that they were descended from Abraham and that guaranteed them acceptance with God and entrance into heaven. He tells them that it meant nothing to God for He is able to raise up children from the very stones around them.

3:10 Even now the axe is laid at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.

Already the hand of God is outstretched in judgment against those who He had entrusted with His Word and whom He had separated unto Himself, the people of Israel. Everyone who does not produce fruits of righteousness will be destroyed.

The Greater One

3:11 "I baptize you with water, for repentance, but the one coming after me is more powerful than I am – I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

John's commission from God was to baptize with water those who repent and turn to God. The One who will come after Him is mightier, has a greater ability the power to do anything. In comparison to Him, John says that he is not even worthy to be His slave to carry His sandals. This coming one, the Messiah, the Christ will baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire (Acts 1:5).

3:12 His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clean out his threshing floor and will gather his wheat into the storehouse, but the chaff he will burn up with inextinguishable fire."

To separate the chaff from the wheat a winnowing fork or spade was used. Jesus Christ is pictured here as having a winnowing fan in His hand with which He will sort out the real from the false. The wheat, that is those who are truly His He will gather to Himself but those that are not will be cast into the never ending fire (Revelation 20:15).

The Baptism of Jesus

3:13 Then Jesus came from Galilee to John to be baptized by him in the Jordan River.

While John was still by the banks of the Jordan Jesus also came to be baptized by him.

3:14 But John tried to prevent him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and yet you come to me?"

John had the witness within him that Jesus was the Christ. In John 1: 29 it says "the next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" John, knowing who Jesus was, strenuously objected to baptizing Him for he saw his own need of being baptized by Jesus.

3:15 So Jesus replied to him, "Let it happen now, for it is right for us to fulfil all righteousness." Then John yielded to him.

Although Jesus had no need to repent or be baptized in water (1 Peter 2:22) He told John that he must do so now for it is the right way for them both to show that they are carrying out what God requires of them. So John baptized Jesus in the river Jordan.

3:16 After Jesus was baptized, just as he was coming up out of the water, the heavens opened and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming on him.

After He was baptized Jesus came up out of the water. It is quite clear from this that John's baptism was by full immersion and not a sprinkling of water. As He was coming up out of the water the heavens opened and the Holy Spirit descended in the form of a dove settled upon

Him. This was the sign of confirmation that God had given to John (John 1: 33).

3:17 And a voice from heaven said, "This is my one dear Son; in him I take great delight."

At the same time the voice of God spoke from heaven declaring that Jesus to be His beloved Son in whom He delights (Psalm 2:7).

Matthew Chapter 4

Jesus Tempted by Satan

4:1 Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

Having been baptised with the Holy Spirit of God, Jesus was immediately led by the Spirit into the wilderness of Judea to "be tempted of the devil". God's purpose was for His Son to take on Satan head on. Satan knew who Christ was, the seed of the woman who would come to destroy him, and so in various ways attempted to cause Jesus to fail in his mission.

We may find it difficult to understand how Christ was tempted, for whereas we are sinful and prone to fall into temptation, Christ was without sin. But it is because our Lord Jesus Christ overcame all sin and went to the cross spotless for us that we can be forgiven. His word says "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." That means to make us right with himself again, just as he did when we first received Christ as Saviour and Lord. Christ also has the power to enable us to overcome temptations which once we were helpless to resist - but only when we learn that it is not we who can win against temptation, but He who has won on our behalf.

4:2 After he fasted forty days and forty nights he was famished.

Christ was not only led into the wilderness, but also was led to fast and pray for forty days and nights. The similar fasts of Moses and Elijah merely point forward to

this event. Concentrating on that which was spiritual, Jesus deliberately starved the natural life. This is the principle of fasting, to allow the spiritual to overcome the natural, but it must be pointed out that it is only when led by the Spirit of God to fast that it should be attempted. Ill-advised fasting will lead to health problems, rather than spiritual blessing.

4:3 The tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become bread."

Another name is used for the devil is employed in this verse, describing his nature, as being the tempter. He is the one who opposes and resists all that is of God or is godly. Satan's tempting of Christ was more than a temptation to the weak human nature which Jesus shared in. Satan first tempts Christ's divinity. "If" you are the Son of God, he says. The devil knew very well that Jesus was the son of God, and yet rebelliously resists and mockingly opposes him. The devil is a liar from the beginning, and it appears that since he is confident of his own power, he must be lying to himself also. To ask God for a demonstration of his power to prove that he is, is to test him in a sinful way. To allure a hungry man with food is to appeal to human weakness. Yet on both points, Jesus is victorious. The sin of Adam and Eve was to obey Satan rather than God. Jesus did not fail to remain faithful and obedient to his Father.

4:4 But he answered, "It is written, 'Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

Jesus turns the word of God to effect against the devil. The same word which Satan asks Jesus to use to prove his divinity, he uses to justify his obedience, and

resist the temptation of the devil. The feeding of the human soul is accomplished by something more than the bread, which only feeds the body. The body cannot live without the soul, but the soul lives eternally even without the body. It is the word of God which feeds the soul, and gives life. It is his word that brought us life, keeps us in life, and preserves us to eternal life. Jesus successfully resists the temptation.

4:5 Then the devil took him to the holy city, had him stand on the highest point of the temple.

The power of the devil may here be seen. By his power he bodily took Jesus, without the need of time or transport, to the highest point of the Temple in Jerusalem. It is perhaps strange that Jesus allowed this to be done to him, but he wished to face Satan fully in all his evil power for our sakes. Christ's was no half-hearted battle or mock war. The Word of God does not diminish the power of our enemy, but it assures us that the infinitely greater power of God is within us (1 John 4:4).

4:6 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 'with their hands they will lift you up, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.' "

Again Satan tempts Christ's divinity. "If" you are the son of God, prove your indestructability and godhead. Throw yourself down, and experience the fulfilment of scripture. God will not allow you to be hurt. But Christ had voluntarily humbled himself to become a servant and was committed to doing God's will, not forcing God's hand with impetuous actions of his own. Once again the lies of Satan fall on deaf ears. Someone has said that Christ was such

a stranger to evil, and the ways of the devil, that he could pass sin by on the street without so much as a familiar look of recognition. He was without sin.

4:7 Jesus said to him, "Once again it is written: 'You are not to put the Lord your God to the test.' "

Jesus knew that the devil was asking him to do exactly what he had been doing, test God. He refuses to do so, in obedience to the word of God, which once again he uses like a sword to defeat the purposes of Satan. The Bible says that as believers we too have access to the sword of the spirit which is the word of God (Eph. 6:17) to overcome all the works of the devil. It is because Christ has overcome that we can (Rev. 12:11).

4:8-9. Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their grandeur. And he said to him, "I will give you all these things if you throw yourself to the ground and worship me."

In a similar way to verse 5, the devil transported Jesus to a very high mountain and in a single instant showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. This may at first sight be regarded as a temptation to the pride of the human heart, but since Christ was absolutely without pride, such a temptation would have proved useless. Rather, the tempting again of Christ's divinity was that all which is of man, human supposed glory, when God should be man's glory, and offering the creator his own world, on condition of his abdicating his throne and bowing down to Satan, was a temptation of his divinity, and a repeat of the earlier sin which Satan has committed in heaven, when he sought to take God's place upon his throne.

4:10 Then Jesus said to him, "Go away, Satan! For it is written: 'You are to worship the Lord your God and serve only him.' "

On this occasion, Jesus orders Satan away, and upholds the very first commandment, to worship God and have no other gods before Him.

4:11 Then the devil left him, and angels came and began ministering to his needs.

The hollowness of the devils conceit becomes apparent, in that whilst he offers Christ all the world's glory, and puts himself forward as his superior and God, he has no choice but to obey the command of Jesus to leave him. Christ's victory over Satan is overwhelming, but it is by no means complete. Jesus could no doubt carry on defeating the devil in this way forevermore, even as one day he shall order him to be cast into the lake of fire. But it was in order to save us that he took Satan on, and only by conquering him who had the power of death through death could Christ release all those who were held captive of the devil. SO Christ continues his victorious march to the cross (Heb. 2:14).

Following the rigours of fasting alone in the desert, and of expending spiritual power in resisting Satan, Christ receives the ministry of angels to strengthen and renew his body and mind. It is thought by some that the angels brought food and water, as they did in the case of Elijah, but perhaps they also brought a more spiritual ministry, resulting in the supernatural quickening of Christ's mind and body.

4:12 Now when Jesus heard that John had been imprisoned, he went into Galilee.

From scripture we discern that both John and Jesus realised that the diminishing of the one would lead to the public ministry of the other, and were content in this. Knowing that now is the time to begin his earthly ministry, Jesus returns from Judea to Galilee.

4:13 While in Galilee, he moved from Nazareth to make his home in Capernaum by the sea, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali.

He left his home town of Nazareth to take a house in Capernaum near the sea of Galilee.

4:14-16 So that what was spoken by Isaiah the prophet would be fulfilled: "Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the way by the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles — the people who sit in darkness have seen a great light: and on those who sit in the region and shadow of death a light has dawned."

By this action, Matthew is keen to point out that the Scripture was again fulfilled. Galilee of the NT was the inheritance of the tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali, and Isaiah predicted the day in which the people living there, in the darkness of sin and death, might come face to face with him who brings us out of spiritual darkness and death to eternal light and life (Col. 1:13 and Acts 26:18).

4:17 From that time Jesus began to preach this message: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near."

The beginning of the ministry of him who came to seek and to save the lost was to call men to repent that is return to God.. But they were not to repent in vain, for God was at this time offering full amnesty, pardon and forgiveness to guilty sinners, reconciliation of his enemies

to himself, and the making them his children who were once children of wrath. All this and more is implied by the words "the kingdom of heaven". The kingdom was near in as much as the King who brought it was standing among them.

4:18-19 As he was walking by the Sea of Galilee he saw two brothers, Simon (called Peter) and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea (for they were fishermen). He said to them, "Follow me, and I will turn you into fishers of people."

The call of Peter Andrew James and John is referred to in various ways in all four gospels. Christ knew his men before he met them, and called them first to follow him. The Christian life is a personal walk and relationship with Jesus Christ. God has a will for every individual life, and our responsibility is to seek to do his will. It is to be remembered that the will of God for the individual coincides with his will for the whole church, so that God's will is for us to be active as his servants through the medium of his church, not out on our own.

This meeting with Peter and Andrew was certainly not the first. But this is the point at which, possibly just after the miraculous catch of fish, that they forsook all to follow him. Christ's purpose for their life call was made clear from the start - they would be fishers of men, leading others to Jesus Christ.

4:20-22 They left their nets immediately and followed him. Going on from there he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, in a boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets. Then he called them. They immediately left the boat and their father and followed him.

Having been prepared by earlier encounters with Christ, and having received such a meaningful purposeful and personal call, Peter, John, James and Andrew did not hesitate to give up their jobs, and all things, to follow him.

4:23 Jesus went throughout all of Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all kinds of disease and sickness among the people.

This was the beginning of Jesus ministry. His disciples accompanying him, he set out on an itinerant ministry across the region of Galilee, preaching the gospel in both synagogues and in the open, and healing not only every kind of sickness and malady, but also everyone that was brought to him. Matthew later refers to this healing ministry of Christ as being in fulfilment of Scripture (Matt. 8:17).

4:24 So a report about him spread throughout Syria. People brought to him all who suffered with various illnesses and afflictions, those who had seizures, paralytics, and those possessed by demons, and he healed them.

Such a message accompanied by such demonstration of authority over sickness, spread Christ's fame all over the region of Syria, so that throughout that province all the sick and suffering were brought to Jesus and all were healed.

4:25 And large crowds followed him from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and beyond the Jordan River.

This first year of Jesus' ministry is often referred to by commentators as the year of popularity. For huge crowds followed Christ, perhaps more because of his ability to heal them, than his message which would challenge and save their souls. Wesley remarks that this region mentioned includes the whole of Palestine except Samaria.

Matthew Chapter 5

The main characteristics of the way of life set out in the Beatitudes can be summarised under four headings:-

a) Inwardness - rightness of heart and spirit. If we are not right with God we cannot be right within ourselves or with anyone else.

b) Enthusiasm, earnestness, perseverance. The work done within the heart should not exclude action but should be the source of it concerning God and the good works he has called us to do (Eph. 2: 10).

c) Disregard for the world's prizes and honours in preference of seeking those things from above (Col. 3:1) and for the supreme and heavenly prize to which God in Christ is calling us to (Phil. 3:14).

d) Love, not self-regard. That is, a love for God and for others that will seek the wellbeing of others and not oneself. The Old Testament parallel of the Beatitudes can be found in Deuteronomy chapters 28 and 33.

The Beatitudes

5:1-2 When he saw the crowds, he went up the mountain. After he sat down his disciples came to him. Then he began to teach them by saying:

It was not to the multitudes that Jesus spoke the Sermon on the Mount but to His own disciples. In fact he makes certain that only his disciples were there (not necessarily only the twelve). "When he was set" - he prepared himself before commencing to teach them.

5:3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to them.

"The poor in spirit"; although it was those who were considered common and had not much of this world's goods that heard Jesus gladly and responded to him the most this does not refer to physical poverty. Nor does it mean poor-spirited, that is, a dejected, self-pitying, without any backbone person. It is the person who knows that he has nothing to offer God except his sin stained soul, that without God he has nothing and is unprofitable. The poor in spirit are the opposite of the proud they are humble rating themselves as insignificant. Goodspeed's translation is 'Blessed are those who feel their spiritual need.' This realisation of being poor in spirit is not just a condition before being saved but should remain with us throughout our Christian life. We have a picture in Revelation 3:17-18 of the Laodicean church who had become proud and arrogant. To the poor in spirit is given the "kingdom of heaven". They live in the realm where God rules, where his name is holy. They are citizens of the kingdom and can therefore enjoy all the benefits that heaven offers here and now and much more when they go to dwell there. (Rom. 14:17).

5:4 "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

"Are they that mourn"; this is a sorrow for our sins against God and the grief they cause Him. Also the sorrow we have at the loss of someone close to us or because of the testing and trials of life that we have. Isaiah 53:3 says that Jesus was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief and that He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows. There is a blessing in sorrow if we turn to the love of God and let him do the works of grace

that he wants to do in our hearts. "They shall be comforted." As we receive comfort, support and encouragement from Him so we like Jesus can comfort others (2 Cor. 1:3-5). Hugh Martin says that the deeper meaning of this Beatitude is a blessing upon those who mourn for the needs of others, whose hearts are full of sympathy for their fellow beings. Mourning is indeed but another and deeper side of loving" (G.M. Trevelyan). This is what Jesus Christ has and still does for us (Heb. 4:15)

5:5 "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

"Are the meek"; this word is generally misunderstood to mean weakness but it is nothing of the sort. Jesus called himself 'meek and lowly' (Matt. 11:29) a yet he spoke as one with authority and there were times when he used his authority with power. The Lord was meek because he had the infinite resources of God at his command (Vine). It is gentleness and kindness of spirit. The meek person denies self, does not make selfish demands, whose concern is not for his own interests or reputation but has a care and concern for others that will go all the way. The story of the 'Good Samaritan' is a picture of a meek man. "He shall inherit the earth". In the Old Testament this phrase was used concerning the Israelites literally possessing the land of promise (Psalm 37:11). In the New Testament the inheritance of the Christian is usually spoken of as eternal life, salvation, the promises. It is difficult to fully understand what Jesus meant here. Was he saying that it is not the strong and mighty, the grab all's that own the earth but those who are meek even as He was. The earth does not belong to man anyway: "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof" (Ps. 24:1). As Christians are "joint heirs with Christ" (Rom. 8:17) it can be said that we inherit the earth through him.

5:6 "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied.

"Hunger and thirst after righteousness"; that is, who have a ravenous hunger and a burning thirst, not for meat and drink but a longing to do and fulfil the will of God in their lives, to do good and who long to grow more like Christ. "They shall be filled". They will be satisfied for God will feed their souls (Isaiah 55:1-2). They shall be filled with the fullness of God (Eph. 3:19), with the Holy Ghost and power, with the fruits of righteousness (Phil. 1:11) and with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding (Col. 1:9). Before God can feed the soul however there must be a hunger and thirst.

5:7 "Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

"The Merciful"; the meaning of the word as used here is "the outward manifestation of pity; it assumes need on the part of him who receives it, and resources adequate to meet the need on the part of him who shows it" (Vine). It is one of the attributes of God who is declared to be rich in mercy (Eph. 2:4) and to be the Father of Mercies (2 Cor. 1:3). In the Old Testament particularly the word love is very often translated mercy. Without love it is impossible to be merciful, they work hand in hand. Another meaning to this word is compassionate or having compassion on, which is a feeling of distress and pity for the suffering or misfortune of another and a desire to relieve it. The prime example is of God's mercy to us in that while we were still sinners and deserving the penalty for it of death and hell, Jesus Christ came and paid that penalty (Rom. 5:8). The apostle Paul exhorts us to clothe ourselves with tender mercies (Col. 3:12) for it is only as

we show mercy to others that we shall obtain mercy from God.

5:8 "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

"The Pure in heart"; that is the clean and sincere in heart. Note that the region of this purity is the heart that represents the desires and affections. Again purity or holiness is the very nature of God and we know that of ourselves we are not pure. The inspired writer in Prov. 20: 9 asks "Who can say, I have made my heart clean, I am pure from sin?" and Jeremiah the prophet declares "the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" (Jer. 17:9). Who, or how can we be pure or clean? By being washed in the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ (Heb. 9:13-14, 1 Cor. 6:11) and being made clean through the word of God (John 15: 3). Having been thus made pure in heart through Christ we are exhorted to keep ourselves pure (1Tim. 5: 22), to think upon those things which are pure (Phil. 4:8). To help us in this we are told in 1 John 3:2-4 if we have the hope within us of the return of the Lord Jesus Christ that when we see him we shall be like him, then this hope purifies us, even as he is pure. "They shall see God"; the only other place in scripture that I can find where it is said that God will be seen is in Job 19:26-27. We know that God is a spirit and that Jesus said "no man hath seen God at any time" (John 1:18). He also said that whoever had seen and knew Him (that is Jesus Christ) has both seen and know the Father. Yet here is the promise to the pure in heart that they will see God. (When Jesus said "no man has seen God at any time" was He saying that up to that time no one had, but that through the way that he was going to make those who are cleansed by him would see God?). In fact the Lord Jesus Christ is God manifest in the Flesh (1 Tim. 3:16). So those who saw Him while He was on earth saw God

although few believed it. It is certain as we have seen in 1 John 3:2 that all believers will see Jesus Christ who was God manifest in the flesh.

5:9 "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called the children of God.

"The Peacemakers"; again this is a characteristic of God and thus of Jesus for he was the one who came and made peace between the sinner and God and reconciled us to God. This does not mean keeping the peace at any price, certainly not at the expense of the truth of the word of God, or of patching things up. If we put the word the other way round we have makers (of) peace. This we can only do through Christ who is the 'Prince of Peace'. Hugh Martin says ""Peace making ought to mean dealing with causes, not only with symptoms. It is often thought of as intervening in a quarrel; it ought to mean preventing a quarrel from arising at all". To those who are peacemakers "they shall be called the children of God".

5:10 "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to them.

"Persecuted for righteousness sake"; doing the work of God as a peacemaker and of reconciliation will bring persecution because the world is at enmity with God. Note that it is persecution that is brought on as a result of doing that which is good and upright - doing God's will and does not refer to that which we bring on ourselves (1 Pet. 2:19-20, 3:17). Unfortunately, there are some Christians who have suffered what they have called persecution because they have done things which in no way could be called the work of a peacemaker or of God. As in the first

Beatitude they have the promise of the "kingdom of heaven".

5:11 "Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you and say all kinds of evil things about you falsely on account of me.

"Insult, persecute, falsely accuse - for Christ's sake". Three forms of suffering. 1. Insult or revile - abusive and scornful language. 2. Persecute - oppress, harass, maltreat. 3. Falsely accuse - malicious slander, saying something about someone which has no basis in truth. This time, the persecution is not for righteousness but on account of Christ. Jesus himself suffered all these three forms of treatment and Isaiah tells us that "he was oppressed, afflicted, led as lamb to be slaughtered but he spoke not a word against his tormentors (Isa. 53: 7 and 1 Pet.2: 21-23).

5:12 Rejoice and be glad because your reward is great in heaven, for they persecuted the prophets before you in the same way

In all that we suffer for Christ we are to be glad and rejoice. The "great reward in heaven" is not compensation for the sufferings nor are they ours to make a claim for. They are a statement of fact that by the sovereign act and grace of God they will be given to those who suffer for righteousness and Christ's sake (Rom. 8:18). Jesus having spelled out the characteristics of a believer in the Beatitudes now goes on to say that the work of grace accomplished in the soul should bring forth fruit for the benefit of all the earth. In fact in Matthew 7:17-20 he says that it is by their fruits we will know whether a person is Christian or not.

What Believers are in the World

5:13 "You are the salt of the earth. But if salt loses its flavour, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled on by people.

"Salt of the earth"; in eastern countries salt is a symbol of loyalty and friendship. To eat of a person's salt and so to share his hospitality is still regarded among the Arabs. In the scriptures it is a symbol of the covenant between God and His people (Num. 18:19). In the Lord's teaching it is a symbol of the spiritual health and activity essential to Christian morality and its counter effect in a corrupt world. All the offerings made to God by the children of Israel had to contain salt (Lev. 2:13). W.E. Vine says that "this was symbolic of the holiness of Christ and suggests the reconciliation provided for man by God on the ground of the Death of Christ".

1. Food is seasoned with salt to bring out the full flavour of it.
2. It is a preservative - it keeps things from decaying.
3. It has antiseptic qualities, therefore it heals.
4. It cleanses or purifies.
5. In small quantities it is also used to fertilize soil.

This then is the properties and potential that every believer has through Jesus Christ.

1. Believers are the seasoning that is sprinkled throughout a sinful world that makes it a more pleasant and beautiful place to live in.

2. Our presence in the world keeps it from falling into decay and ruin and from completely being ruled by wicked men until the day of grace ends and we are taken to be with the Lord.

3. As Jesus healed the broken hearted and the sick so we too are called to do this work by the preaching of the Gospel, the Ministry gifts of Christ and the Gifts of the Holy Spirit (Math. 24:19-20, Mark 16:17-18).

4. While it is only the blood of Christ that cleanses from all sin the believer can have the effect of being a cleansing agent because he has been made clean and pure in Christ. By being among people we can silence the foul and blasphemous mouth and can hinder evil deeds and practices from being carried out.

5. We are also able to prepare the hearts of the people to receive the word of God by praying for it to fall on good soil so that they may be saved. (Before planting seeds the gardener prepares the soil so that it will be fertile enough to help the seeds grow). In Colossians 4: 6 we are told that everything that we say as Christians should be with grace and seasoned with salt, that we may know how we ought to answer everyman. Jesus concludes this verse by stating that if salt loses its properties, or if a Christian loses his Christ given life and character, how can he regain it, it is an impossibility, it becomes worthless (see Heb. 6:1-6).

5:14 You are the light of the world. A city located on a hill cannot be hidden.

The "Light of the World" in the truest sense is the Lord Jesus Christ (John 8:12). Because Christ indwells every believer they are the "Light" and He radiates from them so that all men should know they are His disciples and that they are walking in that "Light". Light is as essential in the world as salt, it cannot be dispensed with. Natural light is needed for production and growth. It is needed to give sight and it gives us colour. As a Light in the world the children of God are:

1. To so shine as to produce fruit in bringing many to receive Christ as Saviour and to instruct them in the ways of the Lord that they will grow in His grace.

2. To reveal the truth that men are in darkness, dead in trespasses and sins but that Jesus Christ has come to deliver and save to bring out of darkness into light and to give eternal life. "A city set on a hill". Christ has lifted His church to a place of prominence in Him and has given it gifts to enable it to be effectual and that all may see that He is in the midst of her; because of this she cannot hide herself away.

5:15 People do not light a lamp and put it under a basket but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house.

Believers are not made partakers of the "Light" to go and hide themselves in a monastery or cut themselves off from the world; this would be as idiotic as lighting a candle and sticking it under a basket where it would be of no benefit to anyone.

5:16 In the same way, let your light shine before people, so that they can see your good deeds and give honor to your Father in heaven.

We are to let the Light that is in us to blaze forth in the good works that we are called to do (1Tim. 6:18, Tit. 2:7 and Matt. 25:35-36). In so doing we shall bring glory and honour to God our Father for they will be a reflection of Him.

Christ the Fulfilment

5:17 "Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have not come to abolish these things but to fulfil them.

Many of the people who had heard the teachings of Jesus were by now wondering if He had come to replace the Law given by God and recorded in the first five books of the Old Testament and also that which had been revealed by the prophets because His sayings seemed to be so different to them. Jesus therefore corrects them and says He has not come to destroy but in fact He has come to teach them the "spirit" of the Law, for up to now they had become bound by the letter of it. In other words they had endeavoured to live by the do's and don'ts of the Law but He came to show them that it was a new spirit and the Law written in their hearts that were needed (Ezek.36:26-27; Heb. 8:10; Rom. 7:6). He came to accomplish and to fulfil all the righteous requirements of the Law and because He was without sin, the spotless Lamb of God He was the only one who could do so

5:18 I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth pass away not the smallest letter or stroke of a letter will pass from the law until everything takes place.

He has not come to do away with the Law for not the least of them would be nullified until heaven and earth has passed away (2 Pet. 3:10) and all has been

accomplished according to the plans and purposes of God.

Notes:

a) Jot or the Greek letter iota is the smallest letter in the alphabet and tittle the smallest stroke of a letter.

b) It is by the Law of God that we have a knowledge of sin (Rom. 3: 20) and it is a schoolteacher to bring us to Christ (Gal. 3:24)

5:19 So anyone who breaks one of the least of these commands and teaches others to do so will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever obeys them and teaches others to do so will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

Whoever therefore breaks or tries to do away with the least important of these laws and teaches others to do the same, they will be of least importance in the Kingdom of Heaven. Those who practice them and teach others to do so will be great in the Kingdom of Heaven.

5:20 For I tell you, unless your righteousness goes beyond that of the experts in the law and the Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

The righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees were after their own standards and many rules and regulations that they had added to the Law of God were sometimes considered more important than the Law. The only righteousness that can exceed theirs and thus gain entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven is the righteousness of Christ (Phil. 3:9).

Spiritual Standards in Society

5:21 "You have heard that it was said to an older generation, 'Do not murder,' and 'whoever murders will be subjected to judgment.'

In the Law of Moses, murder was considered to be the (Ex. 20:13) unlawful premeditated killing of someone for which the person responsible was brought before the local judges (Deut. 16:18) and if found guilty was to be put to death (Ex. 21:12) usually by the sword. The interpreters of the Law at that time applied this only to the actually physical act of murder.

5:22 But I say to you that anyone who is angry with a brother will be subjected to judgment. And whoever insults a brother will be brought before the council, and whoever says 'Fool' will be sent to fiery hell.

But Jesus declared that the action of murder begins in the heart of man, since anger that is allowed to build up and become uncontrolled can lead to violence. Col. 3:8 tells us to completely rid ourselves of anger. Note that it is anger against a Christian brother. Jesus defines murder as being angry or harbouring malice without any real reason for it. Those who do so will be brought to judgement and pay the penalty of a murderer. The word Raca, means empty-head, or idiot, and those who called a brother an idiot was to be brought before the ruling Council, the high court of those days, who had the power to impose death by stoning. But if a man calls his brother "a fool" which means a godless moral reprobate, such a person would be judged by God to be worthy of the punishment of hell.

5:23-24 So then, if you bring your gift to the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you,

leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother and then come and present your gift.

Consequently, because of what Jesus has just said, if anyone remembers that he has any grievance against a brother when he comes before God to offer his gift he should leave the gift there as a token of his sincerity and determination to put the matter right. Having done so he will be able to offer his gift, for it will be acceptable to God. The equivalent of the altar today would be the communion (1 Cor. 11:26-28).

5:25-26 Reach agreement quickly with your accuser while on the way to court, or he may hand you over to the judge, and the judge hand you over to the warden, and you will be thrown into prison. I tell you the truth; you will never get out of there until you have paid the last penny!

The adversary referred to here is the legal term for an opponent in a lawsuit. If you are being taken to court by someone you owe a debt then you should come to a friendly agreement with them while you have the chance. Otherwise you might end up in prison. If God were your adversary, for you had turned against him with anger in your heart, then judgment may go worse for you, too. So be right with God, and to be right with God, you must be right with your brother. (1 John 3:15-16).

5:27 "You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.'

Adultery was forbidden by the law of God (Ex. 20:14 and Lev.20:10). Lawyers of Jesus' time interpreted this to mean only the physical act of adultery, but Jesus applied this law to the heart of man.

5:28 But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to desire her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

It is not the passing glance or the momentary impulse of desire but the continued or regular looking at another woman with sexual intentions that arouses the evil desires which ultimately express themselves in bodily activity. The sin starts in the heart, before it is committed in body.

5:29-30 If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away! It is better to lose one of your members than to have your whole body thrown into hell. If your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away! It is better to lose one of your members than to have your whole body go into hell.

The word 'offend' means to cause another to stumble or fall into a trap. The words used by Jesus "pluck it out - cut it off" were not meant to be literally applied, for even if these parts were destroyed it would not remove the inward sin of corruption. It is as Paul says in Col. 3:5 to "mortify" that is to account as dead and "to put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof" (Rom. 13:14). Jesus means us to deal with sin in a serious way, for it can lead us away from him and back into the world. In Corinth, when a man was living with his stepmother, Paul had to intervene to impose strict discipline, but it worked, and the man's soul was saved. This is the idea behind the "cutting off your hand".

5:31 "It was said, 'whoever divorces his wife must give her a legal document.'

The law on divorce was given in Deut. 24:1-4. The interpreters of this Law said that a man could be divorced from his wife for any reason simply by issuing a certificate to her. But in Matthew 19:3-9 Jesus said that God ordained that when a man and woman married they became as one flesh, which means inseparable. But that because of the hardness of men's hearts Moses permitted them to divorce their wives.

5:32 But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except for immorality, makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

Jesus states that the only grounds on which God will permit a man and wife to separate or divorce is "fornication", meaning sexual intercourse outside of marriage. Note that this really does mean the full physical act, not the thought of the heart. A man who marries a divorced woman (and by implication a divorced man remarrying) is committing adultery.

Making Oaths

5:33 "Again, you have heard that it was said to an older generation, 'Do not break an oath, but fulfil your vows to the Lord.'

The word 'forswear' used in the A.V. Actually means to swear falsely, to tell lies under an oath. Although oaths were not commanded by the Law of God, it had become practice to use oaths in common speech without really thinking, and it is this practise which Jesus condemns. Anyone who needs take an oath to prove that he is telling the truth is bringing their own honesty into question. To invoke the Lord's name in an oath is to use His Name in vain and this was forbidden in the Law (Ex.20:7 and Lev. 19:12).

5:34-35 But I say to you, do not take oaths at all — not by heaven, because it is the throne of God, not by earth, because it is his footstool, and not by Jerusalem, because it is the city of the great King.

Jesus tells us not to bind ourselves to oaths at all. To use heaven or earth as a surety is to appeal to God and implies a reference to the Eternal whose throne is heaven itself and who uses the earth as His footstool, Jerusalem being the city of the King of King's (Isaiah 66:1). None of these are ours to swear by anyway, so we have no right to use them.

5:36 Do not take an oath by your head, because you are not able to make one hair white or black.

Nor are we to swear by our own heads because we have no power to alter the colour of a single hair with our words.

5:37 Let your word be 'Yes, yes' or 'No, no.' More than this is from the evil one.

If we are living in the light of Christ then we should be confident that we are living a life of truth and honesty, and so our yes or no should be sufficient in dealings with others (James 5:12). Anything more than a yes or a no comes from the devil. The Annotated Paragraph Bible commentary says in fact that 'the first recorded appeal to God was made by Satan in his support of the lie by which he tempted Eve' (Gen. 3:5). There are however examples of sacred vows that were made before and to God in the Bible, e.g. Acts 18:18 by Paul, and Acts 21:23 by four believers. According to the word of God these are to be kept (Num. 30:2, Deut. 23:21). In Hebrews 6:17 we read that God in order to show beyond any shadow of a doubt

to those who were heir to His promises that He was the unchangeable God concerning His plans and purposes confirmed it with an oath. So it could be said that the only one that we make our vows to is God and that they should be made concerning our commitment and service to Him.

Revenge

5:38 "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.'

This law was given in Ex. 21:24 "as a check on the wild justice of revenge" (Ellicott). The purpose of the Law was not that the injured party should do the same to the person who had injured him but that the judges should make the punishment fit the crime.

5:39 But I say to you, do not resist the evildoer. But whoever strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other to him as well.

In contrast Jesus teaches us that we are not even to put up a fight against anyone who physically assaults us but to show a spirit of meekness and forgiveness.

5:40 And if someone wants to sue you and to take your tunic, give him your coat also.

If anyone should take us to court to obtain a payment from us we are not to make a counterclaim but give him more than he asks for. (Note: the coat (tunic) was the undergarment worn next to the body and would have been of less value than the cloak which was the heavier and dearer top garment).

5:41 And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two.

Jesus uses this illustration to show that we should not put a limit on our willingness to suffer wrongfully or to forgive. When wrong is done to us, we are not to retaliate (Rom. 12:17) but to leave the way open for God's wrath, for He declares that the right of vengeance belongs to Him alone (Rom. 12:19).

5:42 Give to the one who asks you, and do not reject the one who wants to borrow from you.

The Amplified New Testament says "Give to him who keeps on begging from you". This translation rightly suggests that if someone who is in need comes asking something from you then give according as you are able (Deut. 16:17; 2 Cor. 9:7). Or if someone comes to borrow from you, do not turn them away (Deut. 15:8). In Luke 6:35 Jesus says to "lend hoping for nothing again, and your reward shall be great." However, we need the wisdom of God in handling these matters for we are stewards of all that He has given to us and are accountable to Him to use it wisely. For example, it would not be wise for a man to give money so another child can have food, when that money should have been used to buy his own child food.

Christian Love

5:43 "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbour' and 'hate your enemy.'

Only the first part of this verse is correct (Lev. 19:18) but the second part of "hate your enemies" is what the scribes added.

5:44 But I say to you, love your enemy and pray for those who persecute you.

Jesus not only gives the correct spiritual interpretation of the Law but reverses the order and tells us to do what is impossible in and of ourselves - love our enemies. W.E. Vine says "Christian love has God for its primary (first) object, and expresses itself generally, is not an impulse (fancy) from feelings, it does not always run with the natural inclinations (tendencies), nor does it spend itself only upon those for whom some relation is discovered - Love seeks the welfare of all'. We are able to love our enemies only with the Love of God that is poured into our hearts by the Holy Ghost (Rom. 5:5). God loved us when we were His enemies and saved our souls, so we ought to love likewise. We must bless and not curse - we saw in verse 39 how we should react to those who physically abuse us, here we are told how we should treat those who verbally abuse us. The literal meaning of bless is to speak well of. Pray for those despitefully using you - those who make false accusations and persecute you.

5:45 So that you may be like your Father in heaven, since he causes the sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

In loving, blessing and praying for them it shows that God is our Father, that the Lord Jesus Christ dwells in our hearts, and that we are truly His children, for God is impartial. He providentially provides for the good and evil.

5:46-47 For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Even the tax collectors do the same, don't they? And if you only greet your brothers, what more do you do? Even the Gentiles do the same, don't they?

The love of the heathen, or tax collectors, is confined to those who give to them whereas ours should be that universal love that God has "For God so loved the

world, that He gave His only begotten Son" John 3:16 (see 1 Pet. 2:20-21).

5:48 So then, be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

The fulfilment of the standard set down in these verses can again only be accomplished as we allow the nature Christ to be perfected in our hearts and lives. The word perfect signifies complete and mature. We know that God is perfect. When this word is applied to the believer it means that we are mature in our spiritual growth. It is in this way that Paul exhorts us to go on to perfection (Heb. 6:1) for he said concerning himself that he was not already perfect but that he was going on to perfection (Phil. 3:12). By the grace of God let us therefore go on to perfection.

Matthew Chapter 6

Giving

6:1 "Be careful not to display your righteousness merely to be seen by people. Otherwise you have no reward with your Father in heaven.

The Greek meaning of the word alms as given in the A.V. is mercy; therefore it is acts of mercy. However the best manuscripts have the word "righteousness", so "righteous acts", the New King James Version reads "your charitable deeds". Whereas the word "alms" suggests monetary giving only, the "charitable deeds, righteous acts, and acts of mercy" embraces all kinds of giving. Jesus accepts without question that the disciples were fulfilling their duty as regards giving to the needy as prescribed in Lev. 25:35 and which He further says in Luke 11:41 "give alms of such things as you have". What He is more concerned about here is the way that they give. They were not to do so in order that they may be seen to be benevolent or more correctly, that they seemed to be benevolent. For if they did it this way then they would not receive the reward from their Father in Heaven who knows the heart of all men, thus the motive behind the giving.

6:2-4 Thus whenever you do charitable giving, do not blow a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in synagogues and on streets so that people will praise them. I tell you the truth, they have their reward. But when you do your giving, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your gift may be in secret. And your Father, who sees in secret, will reward you.

The correct way to give is out of a sincere heart with the pure motive of giving help to the one in distress without any thought of a return (1 Cor. 13:3), without any fuss or bother. Do so in as secretive a way as possible. Do not take too long in deciding or considering the cost of giving (v3. Rom. 12:8). With regularity (1 Cor. 16:2) and with a cheerful heart (2 Cor. 9:7). He says "do not do as the hypocrites". This word was originally used for actors. In other words do not play the part of a giving person so that you may be known as such, honoured and receive the praise of men, for that is all you will get. Whereas our Father who sees what is done will bless you in such a way that it will be seen by others.

Praying

6:5 "Whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, because they love to pray while standing in synagogues and on street corners so that people can see them. Truly I say to you, they have their reward."

Jesus is not knocking at public prayer here but is saying that private prayer should not be conducted in the open air or in the church as there is a right place and time for it. Those hypocrites he refers to here prayed publicly in order to give the impression that they were very spiritual and had a good standing with God (Luke 18:11-12). Again they have already received their reward from men, for what it is worth. How should we pray then? Jesus gives the answer.

6:6 But whenever you pray, go into your room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret. And your Father, who sees in secret, will reward you."

We are to find ourselves a place where no one can disturb us, where we can shut ourselves in with God

and him alone. Personal prayer should be strictly personal and private (Ellicott). Jesus went up on the mountain to pray and Peter up to the roof. As we do so in this fashion so our Father who hears the cry of our hearts will bless us openly.

6:7 When you pray, do not babble repetitiously like the Gentiles, because they think that by their many words they will be heard.

We are not to repeat over and over again the same phrases and words as if by doing so we will get God to hear us, (this does not refer to persevering or intercessory prayer) or to pray long for the sake of doing so in order to get an answer (1 Kings 18:26).

6:8 Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

We have no need to be like the heathen for our God hears and answers prayer, He knows what we have need of but requires us to come and make our requests known to Him with thanksgiving (Phil. 4:6).

What do we pray for? The Lord gave His disciples this pattern of praying to help them.

6:9 So pray this way: Our Father in heaven, may your name be honoured,

First of all we are to realise in full the relationship that we have with God in our Lord Jesus Christ, which is that of a Father and His children (Rom. 8:15). That He dwells in the heavenly places where we sit with Christ (Eph. 2:6). Therefore we do not have to reach up to bring Him down for He is present with us. Although we have this relationship He is still the Almighty God the everlasting

Father and we have to approach Him with reverence and in awesome fear because of His very being (that is, His name).

6:10 may your kingdom come, may your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

We are to pray for His kingdom to be established upon the earth. Although in one sense the Kingdom has come into the hearts of those who have received Jesus Christ as their Saviour. That God's plans and purposes will be fulfilled on the earth, especially in us as His people, as it always is in heaven by the angels.

6:11 Give us today our daily bread,

Our physical needs to be met for the day.

6:12 and forgive us our debts, as we ourselves have forgiven our debtors.

It is said that debts are sins of omission, that is the things that we do not do and therefore we are in debt to God for them. Trespasses are the sins we commit so, as we forgive or cancel out anything that someone else may owe or done to us we can ask God to do so for us.

6:13 And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.

God does not tempt any man (James 1:13) the Amp. N.T. has "bring" not lead and would therefore suggest that we ask God to keep us from the paths that would be a temptation to us and cause us to fall for the next prayer is deliver us from the hand of the evil one. The prayer finishes with a hymn of praise in acknowledgement that God is sovereign, He reigns over

all. All power belongs to Him and He is exalted above all. Amen - So it is.

6:14-15 "For if you forgive others their sins, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, your Father will not forgive you your sins.

In these verses Jesus enlarges on verse 12 by further saying that our sins will only be forgiven by God as we forgive those who have wronged us.

Fasting

As in giving, Jesus accepts that the disciples fasted. Although while He was with them they did not do so, this was no grounds for an accusation against them (Matt. 9:14-15). Under the Law there was only one great fast for the Day of Atonement (Lev. 23:27). Other than that they were only held in times either of distress or penitence (Joel 1:14, 2:15). By the time of the Lord it had become common practice to fast religiously twice a week (Luke 18:12) as a way to obtain self-control but it had become a mechanical ritual. The Lord here however recognises fasting, and on one occasion referred to a demon possessed person only being able to be delivered by prayer and fasting (Math. 17: 21). In 1 Cor. 7: 5 Paul talks about "giving yourselves to fasting" in 2 Cor. 6:5 "proving ourselves in fasting" and 2 Cor. 11:27 "fasting often".

6:16 "When you fast, do not look sullen like the hypocrites, for they make their faces unattractive so that people will see them fasting. I tell you the truth, they have their reward.

Jesus does not give much instruction concerning fasting only to say that when we do it should not be apparent to anyone that we are. The Amplified N.T. has

do not look gloomy, sour and dreary. In other words do not make up your face to play the part so that everybody can see that you are suffering a fast.

6:17 When you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face,

But that we should refresh ourselves by washing our faces and perfume (anoint) our head, dressing and appearing as usual.

6:18 so that it will not be obvious to others when you are fasting, but only to your Father who is in secret. And your Father, who sees in secret, will reward you.

Our fasting should be before and between our Father and us, it should be seen only by Him. And again Jesus says that as God sees in secret so He will bless us before all men.

Seek those things which are from above (heaven)

6:19 Do not accumulate for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal.

The things which we may gather to ourselves on earth are of little value compared to heavenly and eternal things, which Jesus called true riches (Luke 16:11). Why lay-up that which does not keep its value, when we can lay up that which is of everlasting worth? Why lay up what may be stolen from us when we can have what will never be taken away? If we want to receive the things of God in full measure then we must seek them and not those things that belong to this world. We are not to set our affection

upon them (Col. 3:1-2), or put our trust in them, and we should consider them of little value in the light of eternity.

6:20 But accumulate for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and thieves do not break in and steal.

The eternal things of God are not subject to decay, and are the source of real happiness and joy. The God who provides us with them also keeps them for us. He guarantees that they shall never be taken from us (Col. 1:5).

6:21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

If what is most important to us (our treasure) is in heaven then our whole heart will be taken up with it and our focus will be heavenward - it is where our love, affection, hope, and trust will be. The greatest treasure that we can possess is the Lord Jesus Christ and we have this treasure in our frail human bodies (2 Cor. 4:7).

6:22-23 The eye is the lamp of the body. If then your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is diseased, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!

Jesus uses this illustration to show that we must have single vision, our eyes must be focused on Him and our desires on the things of heaven. By the help of our natural eyesight, we can properly identify and understand things. If there is any defect in the eye then we are not able to receive sufficient light to give clear vision. The spiritual eye is the spirit within man (Prov. 20:27) for it is

there that God has commanded the Light of His glorious gospel to shine (2 Cor. 4:6), giving us an understanding of who He is and of heavenly things. If there is anything in our lives that detracts us from God then our spiritual eyesight will be defective. If we hinder the Light of God from entering our spirit then we will not be able to receive that full knowledge of the Glory of God as it is revealed in Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 4:6).

6:24 No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.

We cannot have one foot in the world and one in Christ. We cannot we divide ourselves between serving God and serving mammon, that is whatever this world has to offer. It must be one or the other. Serving God half - heartedly will result in us going away from God altogether. A double minded man is unstable in all his ways (James 1:6-8).

Do not worry

As we serve God fully, so He will take full care of us. So, we have no cause for worrying. (Phil. 4:6 and 1 Pet. 5:7).

6:25 Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Isn't there more to life than food and more to the body than clothing?

We are not to charge ourselves with care about obtaining enough food and drink to live, or clothes to wear. God will take this charge of caring for His children on Himself. They are not things we should concern ourselves

about, for the Kingdom of God "is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost" (Rom. 14:17). That is what we should concern ourselves with. God had already declared that man shall not live by bread only, but by every word that goes forth from Him (Deut. 8:3).

6:26 Look at the birds in the sky: They do not sow, or reap, or gather into barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Aren't you more valuable than they are?

The birds of the air do not concern themselves with the work of growing and harvesting their own food, for although they are not as valuable to God as we are, yet He feeds them. They do not make provision for themselves, but leave it for God to take care of them.

6:27 And which of you by worrying can add even one hour to his life?

In this deliberately ridiculous question Jesus shows how senseless it is for us to worry, for by doing so we do not alter our own circumstances one bit. How ridiculous to worry!

6:28-29 Why do you worry about clothing? Think about how the flowers of the field grow; they do not work or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his glory was clothed like one of these!

The flowers of the field do neither work, nor make their own clothes and yet in comparison with them, the richest King who ever lived, Solomon, was not as splendidly clothed as they were.

6:30 And if this is how God clothes the wild grass, which is here today and tomorrow is tossed into the fire to heat the

oven, won't he clothe you even more, you people of little faith?

Here we are challenged by Christ to see that if God takes care of meadow flowers which are here today and gone tomorrow, how much more will He care for us, His own dear children who shall live with him eternally? Christ chides our anxiety in that it reveals just how little trust we trust God. He not only provides us clothing for today, but with wonderful garments suitable for heaven (Isa. 61:10).

6:31-32 So then, don't worry saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear?' For the unconverted pursue these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them.

Since we have witnessed in nature God's provision for the birds and flowers, and the much greater love and concern which He has for His own, then we are not to concern ourselves with such things, as if God were not our father (as the unsaved do, the Gentiles). Their lives are completely taken up with the things of the world, for they do not know the blessings of the next world. God our Father is fully aware of what we want and will "supply all our needs according to His riches in glory by Jesus Christ (Phil. 4:19).

6:33 But above all pursue his kingdom and righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

First and foremost, above everything else, we are to seek for the things that belong to the Kingdom of God and do what is right in God's sight. As we do we will have no cause to worry for God has promised to give to us everything that He knows we need.

6:34 So then, do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Today has enough trouble of its own.

Or we could say, do not borrow tomorrow's worries and cares for tomorrow might never come. Take one day at a time. Remember that Jesus was speaking to His disciples who had given up their means of living to follow Him and we know that Peter, if not more of them, was married and could very well have had children. So when he tells us not to worry, Jesus is fully aware of all our circumstances.

What does worry rob us of? It robs us of faith, confidence, peace, joy, sleep and our fruitfulness (Matt. 13:22).

Matthew Chapter 7

Judging

7:1-2 "Do not judge so that you will not be judged. For by the standard you judge you will be judged, and the measure you use will be the measure you receive."

The Lord is exhorting His disciples not to be as the self-righteous Pharisees who put themselves above everyone else and in the position of a judge. Man judges according to the outward appearance (1 Sam. 16:7) and as the facts present themselves before him. He can never hope to be able to judge in absolute righteousness for this is reserved for God who knows the heart of all (Jer. 17:10). His Word is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart (Heb. 4:12). The word judge as used here means judgement, so it suggests not only judging but also condemning and passing sentence. It can also mean to criticise. Jesus gives reasons why we are not to judge others: that we should not be judged in our turn by others but more importantly by God on how we deal with other people, and because we will be judged according to the same process that we arrived at our conclusion. In dealing with us God will use the same measuring stick that we have used in our condemnation of others. Matthew Henry comments "What would become of us, if God should be as exact and severe in judging us, as we are in judging our brethren; if He should weigh us in the same balance."

Reproving

To reprove is to rebuke, convict and expose. Although we are not to judge anyone it does not mean that we are not to reprove for James 5:19-20 Amp. N.T. says

'My brethren, if anyone among you strays from the Truth and falls into error, and another person brings him back to God, let the (latter) one be sure that whoever turns a sinner from his evil course will save that one's soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins (that is, procure the pardon of the many sins committed by the convert.

7:3-4 Why do you see the speck in your brother's eye, but fail to see the beam of wood in your own? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me remove the speck from your eye,' while there is a beam in your own?

We must however, make certain that we are not guilty of the same faults before we seek to correct anyone else. How is it that we make a big thing about the small faults (mote, splinter, speck) that we see in other people, are quick to point them out and yet fail to see the larger faults (beam, plank) in our own lives? Jesus uses the word consider which would seem to suggest that we are aware of our own faults but that we push them into the background or we fail to see them because we are too busy looking at others.

7:5 You hypocrite! First, remove the beam from your own eye, and then you can see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.

To reprove a brother of his fault we have to go about it the right way. First of all we have to consider our own faults and failings and seek to right them. Although this should not stop us offering a friendly reproof but ought to keep us from being magisterial (tending to dictate) or condemning anyone.

7:6 Do not give what is holy to dogs or throw your pearls before pigs; otherwise they will trample them under their feet and turn around and tear you to pieces.

This verse would seem to be out of place here but Matthew Henry ties it in by saying "Our zeal against sin must be guided by discretion (know how to avoid embarrassment or distress), and we must not go about to give instructions, counsels, and rebukes, much less comforts, to hardened scorners".

Give not - the holy things: To the Jew the holy things were those that were separated for service to God, the sacrifices and the word of God. These were not to be given as meat for the dogs. We are the temple of God, and the Spirit of God dwells in us (1 Cor. 3:16 and 1 Cor. 6:19) therefore we are not to give ourselves over to anything that would defile (1 Cor. 3:17) but to present our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy acceptable unto God (Rom. 12:1). The Bible is The Holy Bible and we are to handle and use it correctly. To give it to those who will despise and treat it as though it was nothing but dust would be just like giving pearls to pigs for food.

What is Prayer

We have heard previously How to pray and what to pray for now Jesus tells us what prayer is.

7:7 "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened for you.

It is asking that we might receive. When we know the will of God concerning a matter, we can ask in complete confidence for it and receive it (1 John 5:14). Seeking to find - if we do not know the mind of God concerning any matter we are to seek Him until we know

what His will is and then having found out to pray that His will be done (Proverbs 8:17, Hebrews 11:6). Knocking and opening - when we know the will of God and we find a closed door then we are to persist in prayer until God opens the way).

7:8 For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened (Luke 11:5-8).

The promise to receive, find, and the door to be opened is to everyone who asks, seeks and knocks.

7:9-11 Is there anyone among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you then, although you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!

If a child comes to his/her parents and asks for something good to eat would they give him/her something that was bad. If we being sinful know how to give good things, how much more will our Father in Heaven who is perfect and good give to us of His riches in glory if we keep on asking Him (James 1:17).

7:12 In everything, treat others as you would want them to treat you, for this fulfils the law and the prophets.

Therefore, in consideration of all that we have heard in these verses, we should make it our principle in life that whatever we desire that others would do to and for us we should first of all do it for them, for in so doing we fulfil the righteousness of God, the Beatitudes.

Two Ways

7:13-14 "Enter through the narrow gate, because the gate is wide and the way is spacious that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. But the gate is narrow and the way is difficult that leads to life, and there are few who find it.

Jesus declared Himself to be "The Way" to the Father in John 14:6 and He made it quite clear that there is no other way to enter into heaven except by the way that He has made by His atoning death on the cross. He said "I am the door if any man enters in by me, he shall be saved" John 10:9. Peter in Acts 4:12 said "there is salvation in and through no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we shall be saved. So no matter what anyone else says whether they are professing Christians or belong to other religions there is only one way. This "gate" is no wider than the width of a man for it is Jesus therefore only one can enter at a time.

A husband cannot take his wife through, a mother/father their children, a brother his sister. Every individual has to enter by his/her own choice. Because the "gate" is narrow, because it is the way of the cross (1 Cor. 1:1 and 1 Cor. 1:23) there is only a few that will be saved in comparison to the world population. In saying this Jesus makes it quite clear that not everyone will be saved. Because the gate is narrow it follows that the "way" also is narrow. As we travel along it we will find that we are restricted and disciplined by the Holy Spirit and the work of regeneration and grace being done in our lives. There is no provision made for turning back although on the way there will be many tempting side roads to take (see Pilgrims Progress). There is only room for two side by

side, "Jesus and Me." If we were under the impression that once we are saved and started on the road to heaven then all our problems would be solved and we would have no more troubles, then Jesus puts us right here, for the word "narrow" in its fuller sense means "difficult". The difference is that we have Jesus with us and on our side to lead, guide, guard and keep us and the Holy Spirit as our comforter and helper. On the other hand the alternative way has a wide gate. It is so wide that it does not even have to be searched for and people not only enter by themselves but they take many more with them. Because the gate is wide the way behind it is broad. There are no restrictions at all anything and everything goes. There is only one place this road can lead to and that is hell (Rev. 21:8).

False Prophets

7:15 "Watch out for false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are voracious wolves.

We are given a warning to be on our guard against the false prophets that we will meet on our journey. They will be very difficult to recognise for they will be cleverly disguised and to all outward appearance will seem like fellow pilgrims. They will say and do the right things. They will participate in the fellowship, praise and worship, but inwardly their purpose is to destroy and tear apart the Church of Christ and to cause division. They seek to undermine the truth and replace it by their own doctrines. How are we to recognise them then?

7:16 You will recognize them by their fruit. Grapes are not gathered from thorns or figs from thistles, are they?

"By their fruits" Jesus uses an illustration from nature. We do not expect to find grapes on thorn trees or

figs from a thistle, it is impossibility. Therefore no matter how well disguised in appearance these false prophets may be, what is in their hearts will show (Prov. 23:7, Mark 7:21-22). Their fruits are well describe by Paul in (Gal. 5:20).

7:17-18 In the same way, every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree is not able to bear bad fruit, nor a bad tree to bear good fruit.

A good tree is a cultivated one that has been planted by the Lord Jesus Christ (Isaiah 61:3, Jer.17:8). New fruit trees purchased from a garden centre have usually been grafted on to an approved root stock so that it will bear good fruit. So it is with us for we have been grafted into the new Israel of God, into the Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. 11:17). Therefore as we abide in Him we can only bring forth good fruit, the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23). The false prophets on the other hand are the bad or wild trees. It is impossible for them to bring forth good fruit for they are not the planting of the Lord but tares (Matt. 13:24-29).

7:19 Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

Their end will be to be cut down and burnt (Rev. 21:8).

7:20 So then, you will recognize them by their fruit.

We will recognise false prophets by their speech and behaviour. For a little while they may be able to pretend to be what they are not but it is impossible to keep this what is in their hearts will eventually manifest itself.

True Believers

These few verses are not easy to understand but I believe they show us that the true believers are not those who call themselves Christians but those who live the life of a Christian.

7:21 "Not everyone who calls me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter into the kingdom of heaven – only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven.

The key words here are 'calls' and 'does'. It is not the ones who pay lip service to the Lord but they that are obedient and seek to carry out the Father's will that shall enter the kingdom of heaven.

7:22 On that day, many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, didn't we prophesy in your name, and in your name cast out demons and do many powerful deeds?'

Many who will stand before the Lord when He comes to separate the goats from the sheep (Matt. 25:31-41) will try to escape by making claims that they prophesied, cast out devils and had done many mighty works in the name of Jesus.

7:23 Then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you. Go away from me, you lawbreakers!'

And He will declare before everyone that He never knew them and banish them from His presence. These are the "mock believers", the "false prophets".

Spiritual Foundation

Here Jesus uses the illustration of house building to show that those who truly belong to Him are firmly

established in Him (2 Chron. 20:20; 2 Thess. 2:17, Col. 2:7)

7:24-25 (Therefore) "Everyone who hears these words of mine and does them is like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the flood came, and the winds beat against that house, but it did not collapse because it had been founded on rock.

We have the final, therefore, which refers to all that He has said in the Sermon on the Mount. It is a blessed thing to hear the word of God but it is more blessed to allow the Lord to do the work of grace in our lives so that we can carry out His words. Jesus Christ is the "Rock" (1 Cor. 10:4) on which the foundation of our faith is laid (1 Cor. 3:11) and we are being built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone (Eph. 2:20). Therefore when temptations and trials and persecution beat upon us like a mighty hurricane we shall not be moved (Ps. 46:5) but remain firm and steadfast.

7:26-27 Everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain fell, the flood came, and the winds beat against that house, and it collapsed; it was utterly destroyed!"

On the other hand those who hear but do not carry out the words of the Lord are those who build upon the uncertain, unstable and shifting things of the world which are here today and gone tomorrow. When the storms of life assail them they will collapse like a pack of cards and there is nothing left of their foolish labours.

7:28-29 When Jesus finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed by his teaching, because he taught them like one who had authority, not like their experts in the law.

The things that Jesus had spoken to the people in the Sermon on the Mount completely astounded them for although they had heard many things from the Scribes and the Pharisees never did a man speak like this man for the words He spoke were living and power packed words for not only did He speak with authority but He is authority.

Matthew Chapter 8

Christ the Divine Healer

Cleansing the Leper

8:1 After he came down from the mountain, large crowds followed him.

After the Lord had finished his teaching in the "the sermon on the mount", he came down from the mountain, large crowds followed him. It may have been that his teaching had awakened a sense of their need and they sought more from him. Once we have experienced Christ we will want to experience him more, for we have "tasted and seen that the Lord is good."

8:2 And a leper approached, and bowed low before him, saying, "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean."

News of Christ's healing power, as much as his amazing teaching, drew many to him. This sufferer of leprosy had heard the report about Jesus and believed (Isa. 53:1). He accepts the Lord's power to heal, but humbly inquires as to his willingness. This leper gives us an example of how to approach the Lord - in faith, and in humility, bowing low, the man was open and ready to receive anything from Jesus.

8:3 He stretched out his hand and touched him saying, "I am willing. Be clean!" Immediately his leprosy was cleansed.

In reply to the man's question Jesus declares "I am willing!" From the lips of the son of God, this statement is as powerful as the earlier professions of God "I am the

Lord that heals you" and "I am the Lord, I change not." Since Jesus Christ does not change the Lord who was willing to heal this leper is still willing to heal. IT is an eternal I am saying. I AM WILLING.

Because of the leper's faith and petition, Jesus commands the healing. He does not pray over him "Be clean!" Is the command of the creator, and so he was clean. (Gen. 1:2-3)

8:4 Then Jesus said to him, "See that you do not speak to anyone, but go, show yourself to a priest, and bring the offering that Moses commanded, as a testimony to them."

Christ did not want cheap advertising for his gospel campaign. He never looked for the fantastic in order to provide publicity. It was enough to Jesus that he had met the need of this man. He did however, want the man to show the priest a testimony of his divine healing power, and to obey the command of Moses by presenting a thank offering. In this quiet way, Christ sought to win the hearts of the religious leaders, and not without success (Acts 6:7).

Healing the Centurion's Servant

8:5-7 When he entered Capernaum, a centurion came to him asking for help: "Lord, my servant is lying at home paralyzed, in terrible anguish." Jesus said to him, "I will come and heal him."

When a Roman centurion approaches the Lord with a need, Jesus is ready to drop everything and go to his home to heal the servant who was in terrible pain and paralyzed, possibly as the result of a recent accident.

8:8-9 But the centurion replied, "Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof. Instead, just say the word and my servant will be healed. For I too am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. 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."

Like the leper, the centurion too was a man of humility and faith. Having heard of the works of Christ, he addressed him as Lord, and did not consider himself worthy for Jesus to come under his roof. He knew that his soldiers obeyed him because of the authority entrusted to him by the emperor. If he commanded them to do anything, it was done at once without demurring. How much more could Christ, who held authority as the representative of God, command that sickness depart. How could sickness refuse him?

8:10 When Jesus heard this he was amazed and said to those who followed him, "I tell you the truth, I have not found such faith in anyone in Israel!"

Christ marvelled at the great faith shown by this Roman, a faith far greater than any he had encountered among the Jews. It gave Christ an opportunity for Christ to speak of the day, following his death and resurrection, when the gospel would be preached to the whole world, and God's kingdom open wide to all men and the blessings promised to Abraham Isaac and Jacob, which are fulfilled in Christ, given to all who would believe in Him and accept him as Lord and Saviour.

8:11-12 I tell you, many will come from the east and west to share the banquet with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, but the sons of the kingdom will

be thrown out into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

Whoever rejects Christ will not be part of the kingdom of God, even though they be the natural descendants of those to whom the promises were given (the sons of the kingdom - Israelites).. Unbelievers of all races, including Israel, shall be cast out into the everlasting darkness of hell, where there will be unending pain and anguish and sorrow, signified by the weeping and gnashing of teeth. Christ is the only one who can save us from our sin and the consequences of it which is eternal Judgment. Those who refuse Christ's salvation must face their own punishment for sin.

8:13 Then Jesus said to the centurion, "Go; just as you believed, it will be done for you." And the servant was healed at that hour.

The word of the Lord is given, that what was asked and believed for in faith has been granted. This is the way to receive from the Lord Jesus Christ - by asking in faith (Mark 11:24). As soon as the centurion received the word of the Lord with faith, the servant was instantly healed.

The Healing of Peter's Mother in Law

8:14-15 Now when Jesus entered Peter's house, he saw his mother-in-law lying down, sick with a fever. He touched her hand, and the fever left her. Then she got up and began to serve them.

When Jesus came to Simon Peter's house in Capernaum, they informed him that Peter's wife's mother was in bed, sick with a fever. He took her hand and rebuked the fever (Luke 4:38-39) and immediately she got

up completely well and waited on the Lord Jesus Christ and his disciples, cooking and serving them food and drink.

Jesus Heals Many

8:16 When it was evening, many demon-possessed people were brought to him. He drove out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were sick.

The Lord Jesus Christ was and is the only one who can heal the sick. At evening, they brought those possessed by devils to him and he set them free. Notice that he did not lay hands or pray but rebuked and cast out the devils with a word of command Mark 1:21-26 gives us an example of his doing this, as does Mark 9:25-26: Paul learned this, as we see in Acts 16:16-18: Jesus also healed the sick so that there were no sick people left in Capernaum after Christ's visit (Mark 1:33-34) Yet evangelists take note - they did not repent (Matt. 11:23-24).

8:17 In this way what was spoken by Isaiah the prophet was fulfilled: "He took our weaknesses and carried our diseases."

Christ's healing ministry revealed him to be the Son of God and the promised Messiah, as he fulfilled the words of the prophet - He himself took up (carried) our weaknesses for us who were too weak to bear them, and carried (bore away) our sicknesses. Only the Divine Christ could do this, and thank God he still can. It is of note that this is a reference to Christ's healing ministry and not to his work on the cross.

8:18 Now when Jesus saw a large crowd around him, he gave orders to go to the other side of the lake.

Christ often had compassion on large crowds of people, but this verse reminds us that it was not crowds themselves that Jesus sought from His ministry, but to do the will of God. As the crowds increased, Jesus gave instructions to his disciples in preparation to withdraw to the other side of Galilee. There he would meet an individual, but that individual would reach another densely populated area with the good news.

8:19 Then an expert in the law came to him and said, "Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go."

As he was getting ready to leave, a doctor of the Mosaic law approached Christ with a show of devotion. His words are almost without fault, but where is his heart. Notice that he addressed Jesus as "teacher" and not as "Lord".

8:20 Jesus said to him, "Foxes have dens, and the birds in the sky have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head."

Jesus knows all men (John 2:24-25). He knew that in reality, this lawyer was not prepared to forsake all he had and follow Christ into at least temporary homelessness and hardship. His disciples had done so. Our words do not count with God if they are nothing more than words or sentiment. God requires our devotion and obedience (1 John 5:3).

8:21-22 Another of the disciples said to him, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father." But Jesus said to him, "Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead."

The response of Jesus at first seems harsh. We are not sure whether the man's father was already dead

awaiting burial, or what is more likely, that the man's father still lived and that this disciples wanted permission to stay and care for his father, whilst the Lord was clearly calling him elsewhere. Jesus was teaching that nothing and no one must come before him, or before the call of God on our lives. We must put Jesus first (Matt. 10:37-38). Let the unsaved, the spiritually dead in sin, walk according to their carnal attachments, but let the child of God walk according to the spirit. Even if a believer dies, he is not dead, so child of God, tarry not long to grieve, but press ever onwards to glory.

8:23-24 As he got into the boat, his disciples followed him. And a great storm developed on the sea so that the waves began to swamp the boat. But he was asleep

After this exchange, the boat was ready and Jesus entered it. No doubt being exhausted from dealing with the crowds (for he was the son of man John 4:6). He soon fell asleep in the stern. As he slept, a great storm arose, producing great waves which threatened to overwhelm and sink the boat.

8:25 So they came and woke him up saying, "Lord, save us! We are about to die!"

The disciples were terrified, despite the presence of Jesus with them. They had clearly not yet understood who it was who sailed with them. They considered that all was lost, and at least have the sense to cry out for the Lord to save them, which he does.

8:26 But he said to them, "Why are you cowardly, you people of little faith?" Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the sea, and it was dead calm.

But before he does so, he rebukes their lack of faith. Awake or asleep, they were in God's hands, and should have trusted that all would be well. Then he arose and rebuked the winds and the sea. Suddenly the sea and sky became placid and tranquil.

8:27 And the men were amazed and said, "What sort of person is this? Even the winds and the sea obey him!"

Still the disciples had failed to recognize Christ as the creator of the universe, for they are amazed, not at his miracle working power, but at the authority he carries which extends even to the elements of nature. Later, after another experience on the lake, they understood (Matt. 14:33).

8:28 When he came to the other side, to the region of the Gadarenes, two demon-possessed men coming from the tombs met him. They were extremely violent, so that no one was able to pass by that way.

In other gospels only one of the two men is described, yet Matthew insists that there were two. They lived in the tombs - unclean place for Jews - naked, cutting themselves with stones and crying out continually in the blackness of despair and torment that such possession brings. They were so dangerous and violent that no one dared to pass that way. It is quite possible that they had been guilty of the most hideous murders on more than one occasion.

8:29 They cried out, "Son of God, leave us alone! Have you come here to torment us before the time?"

Notice that it is the demons, not the men which cry out, for even their speech organs were not under the

control of the men but the demons which possessed them. The clean, holy presence and unlimited, uncreated power of the son of God tormented these unclean spirits greatly, and they cried out to be left alone. They understood Christ's purpose was to bring about their final undoing, and that their inevitable final end would be in hell. They do not, for they could not, oppose this fact, but only ask if he were come to cast them into hell before the time which they had known was appointed by God.

8:30-31 A large herd of pigs was feeding some distance from them. Then the demons begged him, "If you drive us out, send us into the herd of pigs."

But Christ had come on this occasion to free men from the dominion of Satan. It is at a later time that he will return to destroy Satan and cast him and his demons into the lake of fire. What happened to the demons was not of particular interest to him at this point - -only what happened to the men. So they are given permission to enter the pigs, something which they found preferable to going straight into hell. Notice that they did not for they could not resist the word of Jesus to leave the man. Demons never can oppose the word or purpose of God with success. They recognize that they have no choice but to obey the higher authority.

The Bible says "greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world." We need not fear when called upon to handle demonic personalities (Luke 10:17-20).

8:32 And he said, "Go!" So they came out and went into the pigs, and the herd rushed down the steep slope into the lake and drowned in the water.

With the voice of command, Jesus orders the unclean spirits to go, and they enter the herd of pigs, tormenting those beasts so that they found drowning preferable to living. It appears that the demons gained nothing from this encounter but a bare escape from immediate incarceration in hell, which was not for that time, and which will be inevitable for them.

8:33 The herdsmen ran off, went into the town, and told everything that had happened to the demon-possessed men.

When those who kept the pigs saw what had happened, they ran into town to tell the news. Not only had they lost their jobs and their herds, they were astonished, as the crowds were to see the dangerous and violent madmen, sitting quietly at the feet of Jesus with their sanity restored.

8:34 Then the entire town came out to meet Jesus. And when they saw him, they begged him to leave their region.

The towns' people were so afraid of the supernatural authority of Jesus, enabling him to perform what they knew to be impossible, that they begged him to leave, which he did. In other gospels we are told that one of the men wanted to go with him, but Jesus sent him to the neighbouring towns to share the testimony of his life. Although Christ was at this point turned away, through the faithful witness of this man, later Christ was accepted by many. We should never give up witnessing and testifying for the Lord simply because people are not responding, for that may change in time.

Matthew Chapter 9

Jesus has Authority to Forgive Sin

9:1 After getting into a boat he crossed to the other side and came to his own town.

After casting out the demons from the man of Gadara Jesus did what the people of the town asked Him to do. He got back into the boat and went to Capernaum where He seems to have been residing with Peter (Matthew 4:13, Matthew 8:14).

9:2 Just then some people brought to him a paralytic lying on a stretcher. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Have courage, son! Your sins are forgiven."

As He arrived some people brought to him a man on a stretcher who was paralysed. When Jesus saw how much faith that they had also of the paralytic man He said the most unexpected thing. He addresses the man as "son" (teknon) the word used for "child or a young son" for such are we all to God. (The usually word for son is "uihos") First of all He encouraged the man and then says that his sins have been forgiven him. Jesus knew the greater need of this man in having his sins forgiven and that is the greatest need of everyone.

9:3 Then some of the experts in the law² said to themselves, "This man is blaspheming!"

But some of the teachers of the religious law had an immediate response within their hearts for they knew that only God could forgive sin and they did not acknowledge Jesus as being anything else but an ordinary man, therefore, He was blasphemer.

9:4 When Jesus saw their reaction he said, "Why do you respond with evil in your hearts?"

Jesus knew what they were thinking (Hebrews 4:12) so addressing them He asks why they had such evil thoughts in their hearts.

9:5 Which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven' or to say, 'Stand up and walk'?

Neither of these two things are easy to do as far as man is concerned. Not one of them good heal the man and none can forgive sin. In His atoning death on the cross there is forgiveness of sin and healing. However, there was no other way but through the death of the Son of God that sin could be forgiven, it was not easy for Jesus Christ to take our sin upon Himself and become sin, He alone paid the price (1 Peter 1: 18 - 19, 1 Corinthians 7:23).

9:6-7 But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins" – then he said to the paralytic – "Stand up, take your stretcher, and go home." And he stood up and went home.

In order that they may know that He, the Son of Man has the authority on earth to forgive sins he demonstrates it by turning to the man and tells him to get up and pick up his bed and go home. And that is what he did.

9:8 When the crowd saw this, they were afraid and honoured God who had given such authority to men.

When the people saw what Jesus had done they were filled with awe and gave praise to God that he should have given such authority to a man. Although they

attributed this miracle to God they still considered Jesus to be just another man and not the Son of God, God manifest in the flesh.

Jesus Came to Call Sinners to Repentance

9:9 As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax booth. "Follow me," he said to him. And he got up and followed him.

Our text says as Jesus was walking He saw Matthew the tax collector. This was no accidental encounter. Jesus purposed to go that way so that He could call Matthew to come and follow Him. Jesus knew all about Matthew and what the people thought of him but He wanted him to be His disciple. Without hesitation Matthew left his job and went with Jesus and never looked back.

9:10 As Jesus was having a meal in Matthew's house, many tax collectors and sinners came and ate with Jesus and his disciples.

Sometime later Matthew invited Jesus to have dinner with him at his home. He had also invited many tax collectors and others who were branded as sinners to come and see the man who had given up all to follow.

9:11 When the Pharisees saw this they said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?"

As far as the Pharisees and scribes were concerned Jesus couldn't do anything right. Here they made a complaint against Him to His disciples about

accepting an invitation from a tax collector to dine with him and all his sinful friends. Were they being extra cautious in not complaining to Jesus direct because they knew He would defeat them again?

9:12-13 When Jesus heard this he said, "Those who are healthy don't need a physician, but those who are sick do. Go and learn what this saying means: 'I want mercy and not sacrifice.' For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

They were right of course. In hearing what they were saying about Him Jesus told them straight that a healthy person has no need of a doctor only those who are ill.

It is sinners who need a remedy for their sins and not those who consider themselves to be righteous and that He was able to set them free from their sins (1 Timothy 1:15, Luke 19:10). God puts mercy before sacrifice for first and foremost He is a God of Mercy

Jesus does not give them an understanding of this scripture (Hosea 6:6) but tells them to go and learn the truth of it for themselves (Ephesians 2:4).

A Time for Fasting

9:14 Then John's disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but your disciples don't fast?"

The disciples of John the Baptist came to Jesus to ask Him why it was that they and the Pharisees often fasting but His disciple did not. The Pharisees religiously fasting twice a week (Luke 18:11-12).

9:15 Jesus said to them, "The wedding guests cannot mourn while the bridegroom is with them, can they? But the days are coming when the bridegroom will be taken from them, and then they will fast."

In this simile (a figure of speech that expresses a resemblance between things of different kinds) Jesus is the bridegroom (Revelation 21:2) who is still with His disciples therefore it is not a time to fast but of rejoicing. But He forewarns that the day will come when He will be taken away from them and then they will fast. He refers to his death upon the cross and then after His resurrection to His Ascension into heaven.

9:16-17 No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, because the patch will pull away from the garment and the tear will be worse. And no one pours new wine into old wineskins; otherwise the skins burst and the wine is spilled out and the skins are destroyed. Instead they put new wine into new wineskins and both are preserved."

If you sew a new piece of cloth to patch up an old garment the new piece would shrink and rip away from the old and the result would be a bigger hole. If you put new wine into old wine skins they would burst. New wine is put into new skins and they are preserved. Jesus uses these illustrations to show that the New Covenant that He will bring in will not be a patch up of the Old Covenant it will be completely new and different as these scriptures show (Jeremiah 31:31, Matthew 26:28, Hebrews 8:13, Hebrews 9:15, 2 Corinthians 3:6). You cannot mix the Old Covenant that is made known in the Old Testament with that of the New Covenant which is revealed in the New Testament. It is only those who are "born again" can

enter in and receive the eternal blessings of the New Covenant (John 3:3, 2 Corinthians 5: 17).

Jairus' Daughter Raised from the Dead and the Woman with the issue of blood

9:18 As he was saying these things, a ruler came, bowed low before him, and said, "My daughter has just died, but come and lay your hand on her and she will live."

The ruler is not named here as he is in other gospels. It is Jairus the ruler of the synagogue in Capernaum. When he originally comes to Jesus it is because his only child, a girl of twelve, was lying at the point of death (Luke 8:41-42). Jairus initially had faith that Christ could heal his daughter while she lived. (Mark 5:22-23). It was while he sought the help of Jesus that news reached him via his servants that his little girl had actually died. Jesus then challenges Jairus to keep on believing and she will be alive and well again (Mark 5:35-36). Matthew condenses this whole situation into one sentence.

9:19-21 Jesus and his disciples got up and followed him. But a woman who had been suffering from a haemorrhage for twelve years came up behind him and touched the edge of his cloak; for she kept saying to herself, "If only I touch his cloak, I will be healed."

As Jesus and his disciples went on their way with Jairus to his house, a woman came up behind him, no doubt pushing her way through the crowd. She had suffered with a gynaecological problem which meant that the bleeding from her womb was continuous, and had been so for twelve years. Such was her faith in Christ's power to heal, that she said "I have only to touch the hem

of his cloak to be healed, and indeed she was. She was also naturally modest about her situation and did not wish her condition or her healing to be made public.

9:22 But when Jesus turned and saw her he said, "Have courage, daughter! Your faith has made you well." And the woman was healed from that hour.

The woman had hoped to be healed without being noticed, but one can never go unnoticed as far as Jesus is concerned. He encouraged her to tell her story, as a testimony to God's goodness (Mark 5:33), and reassured her that because of her faith, she was fully and truly healed.

9:23-24 When Jesus entered the ruler's house and saw the flute players and the disorderly crowd, he said, "Go away, for the girl is not dead but asleep." And they began making fun of him.

A crowd of relatives, friends and neighbours had gathered to mourn the dead girl. In hot eastern countries, funerals must take place quickly, because of decay. They mourned in the traditional way, with doleful music. Can you imagine anyone entering a funeral and telling the relatives not to worry, for their dead loved one is not dead at all but only asleep? The words "Laughed at him" or "made fun of him" are really too weak. The word derided is more correct. The reaction of the crowd was hostile.

9:25 But when the crowd had been put outside, he went in and gently took her by the hand, and the girl got up.

The crowd were persuaded to leave for the time being, possibly by Jairus, (though Christ's authority would have been sufficient to compel them to leave, had he

wished to exercise it). In this way the Lord was given his place to do his work.

Notice that Christ did not call on God or even pray for the girl. He himself is the resurrection (John 11:25) with power over life and death (Rom. 14:9). He took her by the hand and summoned her spirit back from the world of the dead, with the words recorded by Mark in Aramaic "Talitha Kumi" Little girl, I say to you, get up." (Mark 5:41)

9:26 And the news of this spread throughout that region.

Mark tells us that he allowed only Peter, John and James with him into the child's bedroom, together with her father and mother. Yet no one can keep the secret of a dead girl brought back to life. Such an occurrence shook the entire region.

The Healing of Two Blind Men

9:27 As Jesus went on from there, two blind men followed him, shouting, "Have mercy on us, Son of David!"

Christ had healed many blind people, and as often happened, two more came to him and shouted out for mercy, calling him the Messiah or Christ, the promised son of David.

9:28-31 When he went into the house, the blind men came to him. Jesus said to them, "Do you believe that I am able to do this?" They said to him, "Yes, Lord." Then he touched their eyes saying, "Let it be done for you according to your faith." And their eyes were opened. Then Jesus sternly warned them, "See that no one knows about this." But they went out and spread the news about him throughout that entire region.

It was not at the roadside, as in the case of Bartimaeus, but later in the house that the two men were brought to Jesus. Jesus questions them concerning their faith, to challenge them. Notice how after this challenge they call him no longer son of David but Lord. He touched their eyes, and by faith they received the healing from Jesus.

Yet on this occasion, the Lord did not want their healing advertised. He sternly warned them not to give their testimony. Yet they did not heed this warning, and mark tells us that as a result, so many crowds sought Christ for healing that he could no longer enter the cities, but carried on his ministry, like the Christ for all Nations crusades of today, in the deserts. Christ did not want his ministry to be seen as a healing campaign. He longed for the crowds to gather to hear the teaching of his word, to receive eternal life, for more important than healing was the mission he came to fulfil - the son of man has come to seek and to save the lost.

Deliverance of a Demon Possessed Man

9:32-33 As they were going away, a man who could not talk and was demon-possessed was brought to him. After the demon was cast out, the man who had been mute spoke. The crowds were amazed and said, "Never has anything like this been seen in Israel!"

This man who was brought to Jesus had been robbed of the power of speech by a demon which possessed him. It was when the demon was cast out that his power of speech returned - there had been nothing physically wrong with the speech organs. Indeed, the ministry of Christ was the first time that men had ever seen demons cast out, and it was a characteristic of

Christ's ministry everywhere he went, fulfilling the scripture which says "release the captives."

9:34 But the Pharisees said, "By the ruler of demons he casts out demons."

In a mere fit of jealousy, the religious leaders accuse Jesus with this ludicrous statement (Matt. 12:24-30) tells us how Christ answered them, That it was nonsense to suppose that an army would attack and destroy itself in battle, so it was ludicrous to suggest that Satan could drive out Satan. He also warns them that to oppose the spirit of God in this way is to be in danger of committing an eternal sin (Matt. 12:31-32).

Few Workers

9:35 Then Jesus went throughout all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and sickness.

Christ's purpose was to reach the whole population of Israel with the gospel, and so he would not be confined to one geographic location. He travelled as an itinerant preacher, preaching the gospel and teaching the word of God in every synagogue throughout the entire region. As he went he healed every kind of sickness and disease as part of his ministry.

9:36 When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them because they were bewildered and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

As huge crowds turned out to meet him and to be healed of their sicknesses, Christ the good shepherd had compassion on them, for without him they were without a

shepherd, leader, guide, one to tend and bless and care for them. One of our motivations in ministry and evangelism is not just the reality of people going to hell, but the reality of our wonderful blessed Saviour whom they do not know. How we want them to know him! So did Christ want this, which is why he says in the following verses.

9:37 Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into his harvest."

God has a great work to do. His harvest is the gathering of men unto himself from every tribe and nation. People coming to know and worship God through his son Jesus Christ. This work cannot be done by a small group of individuals. There is a world to be reached. Pray that the Lord of the harvest, which is God, will send or thrust out labourers into his harvest work. Sometimes God needs to thrust us out, or we would never go. The work of preaching and teaching the gospel of Christ is a labour, the word means toil, it is hard and often discouraging work. If a man turns up unprepared for a Sunday school class, and doesn't know what he will teach the children, or what activity they will do, then he ought not to be surprised if there is not a result. Paul says do the work of an evangelist (2 Tim. 4:5). God requires hard work. The word is "toil". Of Pastors teaching the word he employs the phrase "the hard working ox should not be muzzled as it treads out the corn" (1 Tim. 5:17-18). Work is involved. Praise God, let's not be afraid of such work for the master, nor accuse hard working ministers of relying on their own efforts. The harder a man works, the greater his revelation of Christ (See Paul's claim to work 'harder than they all' in 1 Cor. 15:10). There is no room for the lazy in the kingdom of God.

Matthew Chapter 10

Empowered to Preach, Teach and Heal

10:1. Jesus called his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits so they could cast them out and heal every kind of disease and sickness.

The time had now come for Jesus to send out Disciples on their own so He calls them together. He imparts to them power over evil spirits so that they can cast them out from those who have been possessed by them, and to heal every kind of disease and sickness.

10:2-4 Now these are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon² (called Peter), and Andrew his brother; James son of Zebedee and John his brother; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.

In these verses Matthew lists the names of the twelve disciples who Jesus gave power to. Note that he emphasizes that Judas Iscariot who betrayed Jesus was also given the same as the others and was sent forth by Him. As far as we know Judas did the same miracles as the other disciples.

10:5-6 Jesus sent out these twelve, instructing them as follows: "Do not go to Gentile regions and do not enter any Samaritan town. Go instead to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

The disciples were not to go anywhere that they choose to for Jesus specifically tells to go only to the

Jews, the lost sheep of God. They were not to enter Samaria or any Gentile regions.

10:7 As you go, preach this message: 'The kingdom of heaven is near!'

He gives them the message that they are to preach. The good news that the kingdom of heaven is near the way of salvation is coming. The message is the same today for every believer proclaim that Jesus Christ is the Saviour of the World.

10:8 Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons. Freely you received, freely give.

As they gave the message signs and wonders would follow. They were to heal the sick, raise the dead to life, lepers are singled out for healing and to drive out demons from those who they possess. As the disciples had received freely from the Lord Jesus Christ this power to do this things so they must freely give to others. The Contemporary English Version says "You received without paying, now give without being paid".

10:9-10 Do not take gold, silver, or copper in your belts, no bag for the journey, or an extra tunic, or sandals or staff, for the worker deserves his provisions.

Jesus did not tell them to go and pack their suitcases and make certain they had enough money to provide for food and lodgings as you would expect to do if you were going away for a while. No, it was exactly the opposite they were to go straight away and with what they stood up in. He does add however that workers deserve their food (1 Corinthians 9: 7 - 11).

10:11 Whenever you enter a town or village, find out who is worthy there and stay with them until you leave.

When they enter a town they are seek out someone who is worthy enough to have them as their guests and stay with them until they are ready to move on.

10:12 As you enter the house, give it greetings.

As they are entering a home they must give their blessing upon it. (" Peace to this house" in Luke 10:5)

10:13 And if the house is worthy, let your peace come on it, but if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you.

If that house is indeed worthy then the blessing will remain upon it. If it is not then the disciples are to take back the blessing of peace.

10:14 And if anyone will not welcome you or listen to your message, shake the dust off your feet as you leave that house or that town.

If anyone will not receive them or their message they are to leave that home or town and shake the dust off their feet at them. To the Jews the dust of heathen countries was unclean. Paul and Barnabas did this to Antioch in Pisidia (Acts 13:51).

10:15 I tell you the truth, it will be more bearable for the region of Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town!

Jesus declares that in the Day of Judgment it will be more endurable for the wicked cities of Sodom and

Gomorrah that for the town who had been given the opportunity to hear the Word of God and receive it.

Opposition and Persecution

10:16 "I am sending you out like sheep surrounded by wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.

Jesus warns them that He is not sending them into pleasant places for they will be like sheep surrounded by people who are as hard hearted and merciless as wolves. So they are to be as shrewd as serpents and as innocent, harmless as doves.

10:17 Beware of people, because they will hand you over to councils and flog you in their synagogues.

They are to beware of people who will take them to court and have them publicly beaten.

10:18 And you will be brought before governors and kings because of me, as a witness to them and the Gentiles.

They will be dragged before governors and kings for Christ sake in order for them to witness before the Gentiles that Jesus Christ is Lord and King and Saviour. So Paul was brought before Gallio, Felix, Festus and Agrippa (Acts 26: 1, 28).

10:19 Whenever they hand you over for trial, do not worry about how to speak or what to say, for what you should say will be given to you at that time.

When they are brought to trial they are not to worry about thinking what they should say or how they should say it. In that very hour they will be given the right words to say.

10:20 For it is not you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.

It will not be them speaking but the Holy Spirit that will be speaking through them.

10:21 "Brother will hand over brother to death, and a father his child. Children will rise against parents and have them put to death.

Brothers and sisters will betray one another parents will betray their own children and children their parents and have put to death.

10:22 And you will be hated by everyone because of my name. But the one who endures to the end will be saved.

Do not expect to be liked or loved by anyone for Christ's disciples will be hated by everyone because they are His. Those who will endure and remain faithful in the face of persecution to the end will be saved.

10:23 Whenever they persecute you in one place, flee to another. I tell you the truth, you will not finish going through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes.

When disciples are persecuted in one town for their faith they are flee to another. Taken in the context of the verse the disciples of Jesus Christ who are persecute will never have time to flee for refuge to every town in Israel before Jesus Christ comes. It is debatable what Jesus meant by this. Some commentators say that He meant before His death and resurrection others that He meant before the destruction of Jerusalem or until He comes again. It cannot mean from the time He said these words until He comes again for His church for this period

has been far too long and the country far too small for this to be so. It is more likely to refer to the time of the destruction of Jerusalem when believers fled from Israel.

10:24-25 "A disciple is not greater than his teacher, nor a slave greater than his master. It is enough for the disciple to become like his teacher, and the slave like his master. If they have called the head of the house 'Beelzebub,' how much more will they defame the members of his household!

A disciple is not better than his teacher and a slave is not above his master so Christ's disciples cannot be better than He is or higher than Him. As His disciples we should become like Him - He came to serve so His followers should serve others (John 13:13-16). If they called Jesus Beelzebub they are going to call His disciples even more so (Matthew 12:24).

Do not Fear

10:26 "Do not be afraid of them, for nothing is hidden that will not be revealed, and nothing is secret that will not be made known.

Do not be afraid of those who oppose, persecute and threaten you for nothing is hidden from God; in due time their evil deeds against you will be made known (Jeremiah 1:8, 1 Peter 3:14).

10:27 What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light, and what is whispered in your ear, proclaim from the housetops.

The Lord Jesus Christ encourages His disciples to spread abroad the things that He has taught them in

secret. They are to proclaim it in the daytime and shout it from the housetops.

10:28 Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Instead, fear the one who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

Do not be afraid of people for they can only kill the body they cannot kill the soul. Fear only God for He alone is able to destroy both body and soul in hell.

10:29. Aren't two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father's will.

The Lord gives the blessed assurance that God the Father not only cares for the sparrow that is sold two a penny but He knows and sees them when they die.

10:30-31 Even all the hairs on your head are numbered. So do not be afraid; you are more valuable than many sparrows.

You do not know how many hairs you have on your head unless you have none at all but God the Father numbers them! So why be afraid for you are of more value than a flock of sparrows.

10:32 "Whoever, then, acknowledges me before people, I will acknowledge before my Father in heaven.

If you want to avoid persecution then deny the Lord Jesus Christ. However, if you confess before the people that Jesus Christ is your Lord and Saviour then He will acknowledge you as His own before His Father in heaven.

10:33 But whoever denies me before people, I will deny him also before my Father in heaven.

Whoever denies, disowns Jesus Christ before people then He will deny and disown them before His Father in heaven.

Not Peace but Conflict

10:34 "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace but a sword.

He warns His disciples that He has not come into the world to bring an end to all wars and contentions whether it is between individual people or nations. The "peace on earth" proclaimed by the angel at the birth of Jesus Christ refers to the peace of God through reconciliation to Him by the death of the Lord Jesus Christ on the Cross (Colossians 1:21-22). There will be those who will continually oppose the teaching and the person of the Lord Jesus Christ therefore there will be no peace but conflict as the Word of God which is the sword of the spirit is proclaimed (Ephesians 6:17, Hebrews 4:12).

10:35-36 For I have come to set a man against his father, 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 gospel message will bring division among families, a son will turn against his father a daughter against her mother and the opposite will be true. The enemies of believers will be from within their own families.

10:37 "Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.

If a Christians have a greater love for their parents or for their own children, if they put these relations before Christ then they do not deserve to have Him (Mark 3:32-34, Mark 10:28-30).

10:38 And whoever does not take up his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.

Whoever does not deny himself (die to self-will) and embraces the will of God whatever it may cost is not deserving to belong to Christ.

10:39 Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life because of me will find it.

Whoever holds on to his own life will lose out by it but whoever lets go of his own life completely surrendering it to Jesus Christ will have that abundant life (John 10:10, Galatians 2:20)

Rewards

10:40 "Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me.

If anyone welcomes you it is the same as welcoming the Lord Jesus Christ and whoever welcomes Jesus welcomes God the Father who sent Him.

10:41 Whoever receives a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet's reward. Whoever receives a righteous person in the name of a righteous person will receive a righteous person's reward.

The person who receives a prophet of the Lord as such will receive the same reward as a prophet. Anyone who receives a righteous person because of their

righteousness will have the same reward as a righteous person.

10:42 And whoever gives only a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple, I tell you the truth, he will never lose his reward."

Whoever gives a cup of cold water to the least of the disciples of Jesus Christ because he is a disciple of His has the promise of the Lord that he will never lose his reward.

Matthew Chapter 11

John the Baptist's Question

11:1 When Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples, he went on from there to teach and preach in their towns.

Although Christ had sent his apostles out to preach, he did not refrain from going to preach himself. In the local church situation, there would be little point in the Lord sending new workers to us if the result were that existing workers ceased their work!

11:2 Now when John heard in prison about the deeds Christ had done, he sent his disciples to ask a question:

John the Baptist had been arrested quite near to the commencement of Jesus' ministry, and so perhaps had seen and heard only little of his work before his imprisonment. John's disciples often visited him in prison, and brought him news of what Christ was doing. In the darkness of his cell, facing a violent death, John did not so much waver in his faith (see verse 7), as in his courage, but the effects can be similar.

11:3 "Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another?"

John needed reassurance concerning his own life and ministry. He had been sent to prepare the way of the Lord (John 1:23) and had publicly testified that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God (John 1:34). Now the glorious times when multitudes gathered for his baptism had gone, replaced by troubles and suffering.

All involved in Christian ministry for any length of time will experience a dark night of the soul similar to that which John did here. Doubts and questions arise concerning our life and ministry; we may feel that nothing has been accomplished, and that our life has lacked any real significance.

The answer of Jesus to John's disciples is sufficient to inspire us with renewed faith and courage to persevere (1 Cor. 16:13).

11:4-6 Jesus answered them, "Go tell John what you hear and see: The blind see, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news proclaimed to them. Blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me."

At first reading it may not appear that Christ gave John any specific word relevant to his life and ministry. But in fact Christ reveals to John that his ministry had been fulfilled. The object of his service had been realised. His life and ministry were actually, from God's viewpoint, a complete success. John had been sent to prepare the way for the ministry of Jesus, and that ministry had now commenced, which fact the disciples of John are told to report to him. John had declared Christ to be the son of God, and through His mighty works, God himself was now giving witness to that same fact. The poor flocked to hear the gospel. John's life and ministry were not for nothing, but rather they were nothing by themselves. John needed to see his ministry as being part of the wider and greater work of Christ on earth.

This is the meaning behind Jesus words: "blessed is he who is not offended in me." John would be blessed if he considered the work of Christ to be of supreme

importance; more important than his own personal success. Only when our lives are completely taken up with Christ and lived for him will they find their true meaning (Matt. 10:39).

The apostle Paul suffered a similar dark nights of the soul, but was reassured concerning the significance of his service for Christ, and said: (Act 20:24) 'but none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God.'

11:7 While they were going away, Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind?"

It was not to John or his disciples but to the general public that Jesus gave his testimony approving John's life and ministry. He affirms that he was a man not easily shaken in his faith or dedication to God by opposition or the threat of death which hung over him.

11:8 What did you go out to see? A man dressed in fancy clothes? Look, those who wear fancy clothes are in the homes of kings!

John's clothes were of camel's hair, and he lived in the wilderness, living on locusts and wild honey in a manner similar to Elijah. He was no stranger to hardship and difficulty for the sake of Christ all his life. He was no fop at the Kings court, but a seasoned warrior of Jesus Christ.

11:9-10 What did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom

it is written: 'Look, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.'

Jesus affirms John's calling to be more than a prophet as a messenger of the Lord who prepares the way for the people to receive God's only begotten son. No prophet before him had received such an honour.

11:11 "I tell you the truth, among those born of women, no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he is.

Because of the honour placed on him, John should be considered as the most exalted of mortal men. Indeed, even being allowed to carry Jesus'; sandals would have made him highly honoured, even though he considered himself unworthy to do so (Matt. 3:11). Yet every born again believer has an even greater privilege, for we are not merely preparing the way for the Lord, we have him dwelling within us, and are his representatives witnessing for him in the world, and ministering to the church which is his body.

11:12 From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and forceful people lay hold of it.

From the time John came to announce the coming of Christ, to the moment of Christ spoke these words, the kingdom of heaven had been proclaimed so that men and women might press their way into it. It "suffers violence", in that one does not need a further personal invitation to enter. Since the invitation is to all, it is left for those who truly wish to enter to press in with all their might, seeking

the blessings of forgiveness and salvation, as being the most important blessing they can have - which they are.

11:13-15 For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John appeared. And if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah, who is to come. The one who has ears had better listen!

Christ announces that the end of the Old Covenant was with Malachi. John's appearance heralded the bringing in of a New Covenant by Christ; and as had been predicted by Malachi, a prophet would come in the spirit and power of Elijah to herald the appearance of the Lord. Those with hearts willing to listen and to be instructed by Christ would understand that this prophecy had been fulfilled by the ministry of John the Baptist.

11:16-17 "To what should I compare this generation? They are like children sitting in the marketplaces who call out to one another, 'We played the flute for you, yet you did not dance; we wailed in mourning, yet you did not weep.'

There was simply no pleasing these people! They had hardened their hearts and refused to listen. Jesus compares them to a group of sulky and awkward children who did not want to play what the others were playing.

11:18-19 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, 'Look at him, a glutton and a drunk, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' But wisdom is vindicated by her deeds."

In the manner of Old Testament prophets (by which they should have recognised him as being from God), John came like one under the vow of a Nazarite,

separated to God, and yet was accused of being mad or demon possessed. When Jesus came in an entirely different manner they rejected him also, accusing him of being over indulgent, and of associating with sinners. They would not listen to God's word no matter how it was presented to them. In our modern day there is a temptation to think that because men and women have not responded to the gospel when it has been presented to them in a certain way, that they might accept it when presented it in a different way. Some are actually shying away from preaching, for they think that the gospel will be found more palatable if it is rapped or presented in some other "more accessible" format. Whilst there is nothing wrong with presenting the gospel in a host of new ways, the sad fact remains that if the gospel is not responded to, it will make no difference how we present it. Nothing will alter this by our living differently, dressing differently, or outreaching differently. It is the gospel people are rejecting, not the manner of the preacher or the method of presentation. Choose whatever method of presentation you like, the eternal result will be the same.

Woe to the Unrepentant Towns

11:20 Then Jesus began to criticize openly the cities in which he had done many of his miracles, because they did not repent.

The rejection of the gospel would bring certain fearful consequences (Heb. 2:3). Even though Christ had preached and confirmed his word with miraculous signs in many local cities, they had not repented. They had failed to respond and receive the gospel of Christ. The word "criticize" used in the NET Bible (above) is slightly misleading. Jesus is pronouncing judgment on these towns, as can be seen from the following verses.

11:21 "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! If the miracles done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.

The un-repentance of the Jewish towns of Chorazin and Bethsaida was inexcusable in view of the fact that so many miracles had been done there. If they had been done in the foreign cities of Tyre and Sidon, Jesus says that they would have repented immediately and deeply. These Jews had been privileged to know the law, of God and even more privileged to see and hear Christ in person, but still they did not respond. Judgment will be according to their privilege. Those who receive more light, yet reject it, will be held to account to a greater extent than those who had less light.

11:22 But I tell you, it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you!

Although judgment would still fall on the unrepentant in those foreign cities, their guilt would not be as great, and so their punishment would be more bearable. NB This is one of only a few verses which seem to advance the view that there will be a variance in the degrees of punishment meted out upon unbelievers.

11:23-24 And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? No, you will be thrown down to Hades! For if the miracles done among you had been done in Sodom, it would have continued to this day. But I tell you, it will be more bearable for the region of Sodom on the Day of Judgment than for you!"

In a similar manner, Capernaum had been exalted to heaven by the measure of the revelation they had been

given by Christ concerning himself through his teachings and miracles among them. The whole city had come to Jesus, and he had healed ALL the sick in that town (Matt. 8:16). Yet even this was insufficient to bring the hardened hearts of the people to repentance. In God's sight, this sin was more serious than that of Sodom and Gomorrah, who, if they had received such revelation, would have repented and been spared of the fire which consumed them. Whatever else these verses teach us, they teach us that the most serious sin of all is the rejection of Jesus Christ, for it is the rejection of Christ that results in unbelievers going to hell (John 3:36).

11:25-26 At that time Jesus said, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this was your gracious will.

According to Luke (Luke 10:17-21), Jesus made this statement sometime after the sending out and return of both his 12 apostles and his 70 evangelists, who reported to him concerning their preaching and the miracles they had seen. They had gone forth in simple faith, trusting Jesus as a child trusts his mother or father.

It is not to through human wisdom or intelligence that God reveals himself to man, but through the revelation of faith 1 Cor. 1:26-27. It is the will of God our Father that it should be so, for he would leave none out of his gracious plan. Men who refuse to accept God's wisdom in favour of their own are excluding themselves from receiving God's grace.

11:27 All things have been handed over to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no

one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son decides to reveal him.

All the authority of God, especially with regard to responsibility for the salvation of mankind, had been handed over to Jesus Christ. In his eternal generation, all things that are God and are of God are His and the Father and son are mutually dependent. It takes a divine being to know a divine being fully, hence Christ announces that only the son knows the father and only the father knows the son. Yet, following on from the revelation spoken of in verse 25, we see that God the father is at this time pleased to reveal his son to men, and that Jesus Christ we may know God here and in fuller measure hereafter. Again the words of Christ make clear that it is only by divine revelation that one can know God.

11:28 Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.

Although some may have rejected God's purpose for themselves, the way remains wide open for them. With this invitation, Jesus reveals the way to come to God. It is through him. "Come to me" is his invitation to "all", for all are weary of life and burdened with sin and the troubles it brings. The rest Christ offers is the rest of the family home. The man at war with God has no rest, but when reconciled he enjoys peace and acceptance as one of the family (Rom. 5:1). The guilty man has no rest for his conscience; he is living under a heavy burden of sin. When we come to Christ we find that he has lifted our heavy load from us as we find forgiveness, cleansing and the peace which a cleansed conscience brings (Heb. 9:14). The man without God has no rest when it comes to facing death, but by coming to Christ we receive an eternal hope of everlasting life and a home in heaven.

11:29-30 Take my yoke on you and learn from me, because I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy to bear, and my load is not hard to carry."

In addition to the rest given when we initially come to Christ, there is a daily rest of following Christ. I might refer to this as the deepening peace which spiritual maturity brings. The yoke was placed over two oxen so that they could share the load and pull the plough together in the same direction. Usually a younger ox would be yoked to an older, well behaved ox, from which he would learn to copy. This is the picture Christ gives here, as we learn from him and walk in his ways, we shall find the path of peace and blessing. Some young oxen smart at the yoke, and it is difficult for them to submit to it. But when they do, they are quiet and obedient. The animals are tame and quiet for they have been broken in.

Our meek and gentle Jesus has such great patience with us as we learn to carry the cross-yoke. Dying to our own self will and living for God's will may be a crucifying experience, but when we are supported in our struggles by our Saviour, and we find his strength sufficient, making the cross easy to bear - with He who has born our grief and carried our sorrows carrying the heavier end for us.

Matthew Chapter 12

Lord of the Sabbath

12:1 At that time Jesus went through the grain fields on a Sabbath. His disciples were hungry, and they began to pick heads of wheat and eat them.

The disciples of Jesus were hungry so as they were going through a grain field they naturally began to pick the heads of grain and eat them. The Law of God gave them the right to do this (Deuteronomy 23:25).

12:2 But when the Pharisees saw this they said to him, "Look, your disciples are doing what is against the law to do on the Sabbath."

The Pharisees who were ever waiting for any opportunity to catch Jesus out even through His disciples behaviour were quick to point out to Him that they were breaking the Law (Exodus 20:10).

12:3-4 He said to them, "Haven't you read what David did when he and his companions were hungry – how he entered the house of God and they ate the sacred bread, which was against the law for him or his companions to eat, but only for the priests?"

Jesus is never caught off guard and He had a ready answer for them through an action of King David. When he and his companions were hungry because there was nothing else to eat the priest gave them the holy bread that he had taken from the place of worship after putting out fresh bread (1 Samuel 21:6). According to the Law only the Levites were allowed to eat this bread (Leviticus 24:7-9).

12:5 Or have you not read in the law that the priests in the temple desecrate the Sabbath and yet are not guilty?

In order to carry out their God given tasks on the Sabbath the priests were allowed by the Law to work (Numbers 28:8-9).

12:6 I tell you that something greater than the temple is here.

It was God who had given the ordinances and Laws concerning the worship in the temple and keeping the Sabbath day holy. Jesus tells the Pharisees that there was someone greater and more important than the temple amongst them (2 Chronicles 6:18). In fact God manifest in the flesh was standing there before them (John 1:14 and 1 Timothy 3:16).

12:7 If you had known what this means: 'I want mercy and not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the innocent.

The Pharisees had got it all wrong they were so taken up with the rituals of worship that they had forgotten the nature and character of God. Instead of offering sacrifices to Him God wanted them to have mercy and compassion. If they had this then they would not be condemning those who were innocent (Hosea 6:6).

12:8 For the Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath."

Jesus Christ who is God is therefore Lord of the Sabbath (Philippians 2:6 and Titus 2:13).

Doing Good on the Sabbath

12:9 Then Jesus left that place and entered their synagogue.

Leaving the corn field Jesus went to their synagogue.

12:10 A man was there who had a withered hand. And they asked Jesus, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?" so that they could accuse him.

In the synagogue was a man whose hand had wasted away, no muscle or sinew left, Luke says that it was his right hand. Again the Scribes and Pharisees were seeking to make an accusation against Jesus so they ask if the Law allows someone to heal on the Sabbath day.

12:11 He said to them, "Would not any one of you, if he had one sheep that fell into a pit on the Sabbath, take hold of it and lift it out?"

He throws the ball right back in their court by asking if there was anybody among them who would not rescue their sheep who had fallen into a pit on the Sabbath day. Would they leave it there to suffer until the next day or pull it out on the Sabbath? Under the Law a Jew had to go to the aid of any of his neighbours animals that were in trouble, Sabbath day or not (Deut. 22:4).

12:12 How much more valuable is a person than a sheep! So it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath."

People are worth more than any animal therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.

12:13 Then he said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out and it was restored, as healthy as the other.

Turning to the man He tells him to do that which is impossible to for him to do, stretch out his hand. The man

believed Jesus and did what He told him and his hand was restored just like the other one.

12:14 But the Pharisees went out and plotted against him, as to how they could assassinate him.

The Pharisees proved how right Jesus's words were about them in verse seven. They could not care less about the man being healed there began to make plans how they could kill Jesus.

12:15 Now when Jesus learned of this, he went away from there. Great crowds followed him, and he healed them all.

When Jesus heard of this he left that place and the crowds followed after Him. It was still the Sabbath day and Jesus continued to heal the people every one of them and they were only too willing to let Him even if it was the Sabbath Day!

The Servant of God

12:16-17 But he sternly warned them not to make him known. This fulfilled what was spoken by Isaiah the prophet:

Jesus warns those whom He has healed not to go back to His enemies and tell them what He had done for them. This was in fulfilment of the words spoken of Him by Isaiah the prophet.

12:18 "Here is my servant whom I have chosen, the one I love, in whom I take great delight. I will put my Spirit on him, and he will proclaim justice to the nations

Jesus Christ although the Son of God is the Servant of God, He is the Chosen One, the Beloved Son in whom He "is well pleased" (Matthew 3:17). God sent the

Holy Spirit upon Him as He was baptised by John in the river Jordan (Mark 1:10). He shall make known to the nations the truth concerning sin and judgement and the way of salvation.

12:19 He will not quarrel or cry out, nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets.

He will not contend, or argue, with those who oppose Him or yell or call out in the streets.

12:20 He will not break a bruised reed or extinguish a smouldering wick, until he brings justice to victory.

Those who are battered and bruised from the troubles and difficulties of life He will not add to their miseries by crushing them (as the Pharisees did with their heaven burden of laws and regulations). Those who have come to the end of their strength and cannot go on any further, He will not snuff them out like a candle. He will bring to them justice, peace and deliverance through His victorious death on the cross and by His resurrection from the dead (1 Corinthians 15:57 and 1 John 5:4).

12:21 And in his name the Gentiles will hope."

In His Name shall be the Hope of all peoples (Romans 10:13).

A Divided House cannot Stand

12:22 Then they brought to him a demon-possessed man who was blind and mute. Jesus healed him so that he could speak and see.

They brought to Jesus a man who was possessed by a demon who had made blind and dumb. Jesus set him free and completely healed him.

12:23 All the crowds were amazed and said, "Could this one be the Son of David?"

The crowds who absolutely amazed by this and asked one another "is this the Son of David, the Messiah" (Matthew 1:1)?

12:24 But when the Pharisees heard this they said, "He does not cast out demons except by the power of Beelzebub, the ruler of demons!"

When the Pharisees heard what He had done they made this most ridiculous and blasphemous statement! They accused Jesus of casting out the demon by the power of the devil - this was blasphemy. It was ludicrous to think that Satan would cast out one of his own demons from anybody.

Note: Beelzebub means lord of the house. It was the title of a heathen deity, to whom the Jews ascribed the sovereignty of the evil spirits; Satan, the prince of the devils (Smith's Bible Dictionary).

12:25 Now when Jesus realized what they were thinking, he said to them, "Every kingdom divided against itself is destroyed, and no town or house divided against itself will stand.

Jesus knowing what they were thinking makes a logical statement. If a country is divided by civil war it will end up in ruin. If townspeople or a family fight among themselves then will fall about.

12:26 So if Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand?

So if Satan is fighting against himself then he will bring about his own destruction.

12:27 And if I cast out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your sons cast them out? For this reason they will be your judges.

If Jesus uses the power of Satan to cast out demons then by whose power do their followers cast them out? Their own followers will be the ones that will condemn them.

12:28 But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has already overtaken you.

If Jesus is driving out a demon by the power of God's Spirit then this serves to prove that the kingdom of God has already come (Acts 10:38).

12:29 How else can someone enter a strong man's house and steal his property, unless he first ties up the strong man? Then he can thoroughly plunder the house.

Here is another argument that Jesus gives to prove that He could not be casting out demons by Satan's power. No one can enter a strong man's house unless he first overpowers him and ties him up, and then he can take whatever he wants. It is only by a greater power than Satan can Jesus Christ overcome the devil and his works and that is the power of God (Colossians 2:15, Hebrews 2:14 and Revelation 20:10).

12:30 Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.

Anyone who is not on Christ's side is opposed to Him and anyone who is not working with Him to gather in

a harvest of souls is sending them to hell. Satan continually opposes Jesus Christ and ever works to takes souls into the lake of fire with him.

Outside the Reach of Forgiveness

12:31 For this reason I tell you, people will be forgiven for every sin and blasphemy, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven.

Here is one of the most difficult teachings in all of scripture. The Pharisees had deliberately and maliciously ascribed the work of Christ to the evil one. Jesus warns them that this is indicative of their unrepentant and obdurate hearts. The works Christ performed were not his own, but were wrought by the Holy Spirit. To compare the Holy Spirit to the devil, or to call the Holy Spirit the devil is such a blasphemy that will never be forgiven. This may well be because the state to which a man must come before he does this is such, that his heart is hardened beyond all remedy. In this sense, many commentators refer to the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit as the rejection of Christ.

It is my opinion that the scribes and Pharisees knew what they were doing. They were ascribing the works of the Holy Spirit to the evil one in order to put people off following Christ. To oppose the Spirit of God in this way is to put oneself outside of the reach of God's salvation and forgiveness, for it is the Holy Spirit who brings us under conviction and to repentance and faith in Christ (John 16:8).

12:32 Whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven. But whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.

Jesus clearly explains his own teaching concerning the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. He defines it as speaking against the Holy Spirit. Only the hardened in heart would do this.

The Bible exhorts Christians to "test the spirits" especially when it comes to supernatural manifestations (1 John 4:1). We must test prophecy, which is a supernatural utterance, because even when a person is genuinely filled with the Spirit, and inspired by the Spirit, their gift is only a partial revelation and so will not be perfect (1 Cor. 13:9) and so must be judged in the light of God's word (1 Cor. 14:29). So, if we were to make an error in our judgment; if we said this is of God or not, but we were mistaken; that is not what Jesus means by blaspheming the Holy Spirit; for although blasphemy involves the mouth, it also involves the whole personality being opposed to God as Jesus goes on to show. We may sadly deduce from Jesus words that there are some people that will never be saved, for even in the face of the influence and gracious power of the Holy Spirit, they continue to harden and reject him and even speak evil of him.

As a pastor I have sometimes met believers who are worried about whether or not they have blasphemed the Holy Spirit. My reply is simply this: if you are concerned about it, then you certainly have not done so. For a person who is as hardened as these Pharisees would not care about being forgiven, but would curse God all the way down to hell.

The Tree and its Fruit

12:33 "Make a tree good and its fruit will be good, or make a tree bad and its fruit will be bad, for a tree is known by its fruit.

If a tree is healthy, it will produce good fruit,. But if it is diseased, the fruit will also be diseased. The nature of the tree is discerned by the fruit it produces. The Pharisees, though outwardly religious, had revealed the true state of their hearts by their words of opposition to Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit.

There are today many professing believers who reject the doctrine of the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and the teaching about spiritual gifts of the Holy Spirit being for believers today. They speak and teach against it. Whilst they may profess salvation, Jesus teaching applies to them. Their words of opposition to the Holy Spirit reveal that their hearts are not right with God, and that they are in danger of committing an eternal sin. I am not referring to those believers who are untaught or ignorant of the things of the Spirit, but of those who deliberately oppose and malign them.

12:34 Offspring of vipers! How are you able to say anything good, since you are evil? For the mouth speaks from what fills the heart.

It is because of the corruption in the human heart, which the Scripture declares to be absolute, (e.g. Rom. 7:18) that the Pharisees were unable to speak of what was good. Jesus describes them as a brood of snakes, in other words children of the devil, those whose nature was perverse and sinful. We are by nature alienated from God, and children of wrath (Eph. 2:3), and our mouths are simply organs through which we express the sinfulness of our souls. A man may claim to speak and teach for God, but unless his heart has first been cleansed by the new birth - unless he has received a new nature -he cannot speak correctly about God, for he cannot speak the truth which he does not know (John 3:3).

12:35 The good person brings good things out of his good treasury, and the evil person brings evil things out of his evil treasury.

Since only God is good (Mark 10:18), only those who share the nature of God (the Divine nature 1 Peter 1:3) may be called good people. They are born again of his Spirit and God resides in them. It is out of this good treasury that they are able to speak the pure words of truth. If a man is not born of the Spirit, he does not have the new nature of Christ within him, but remains in the nature of sin. He is so utterly corrupt that he can neither do nor say anything that is pleasing to God (Rom. 8:7-8).

12:36 I tell you that on the Day of Judgment, people will give an account for every worthless word they speak.

All of us are accountable to God for all we say and do, even for all we think. God has kept a record of every word we utter, even casual comments, and will hold us to account for them on the Day of Judgment (Rev. 20:12). The only hope any sinner has of escape from this judgment is through the Lord Jesus Christ.

12:37 For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned."

The Pharisees sealed their own condemnation by their words which were hostile to, and rejecting of, Christ.

The means of God's justification is also through speech. For if we believe in our hearts that God has raised Jesus from the dead, and confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, we will be saved (Rom. 10:9). Jesus said, "If any man confess me before men, I will confess him before the angels of God" (Luke 12:8); for "it is with the

mouth that confession is made unto salvation" (Rom. 10:10).

A Generation without Excuse

12:38 Then some of the experts in the law along with some Pharisees answered him, "Teacher, we want to see a sign from you."

The petulant Pharisees demand a sign, rejecting his authority to say these words to them, as if to say 'no we won't listen to you unless you do a sign'. That is why he describes them as evil and unfaithful to God (adulterous). After all the miracles he had just performed, which they had openly criticised and rejected.

12:39 But he answered them, "An evil and adulterous generation asks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah."

The only sign that will be offered to the Pharisees is the same sign that will be offered to everyone in the world, the resurrection of Christ, which Jesus expounds from the life of Jonah.

12:40 For just as Jonah was in the belly of the huge fish for three days and three nights, so the Son of Man will be in the heart of the earth for three days and three nights.

Just as Jonah spent three days and three nights in the whale's belly, so the Lord Jesus would be "in the heart of the earth" for three days and three nights. His body of course, would be in the grave for three days and nights, but his soul was in the "heart of the earth", or paradise (Luke 23:43), where he descended to announce his victory to those faithful who were waiting for his coming there (Eph. 4:9).

12:41 The people of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented when Jonah preached to them -- and now, something greater than Jonah is here!

Jesus uses the ministry of Jonah to reveal to the Pharisees their condemnation. For the people of Nineveh repented when they heard Jonah's preaching, but the Pharisees did not repent even when they heard the preaching of One far greater than Jonah. At the Day of Judgment, the repentance of the one will condemn the other, for it shows that all men were given the same opportunity to repent; some accept and some reject. It is our rejection of Christ which condemns us (John 3:36).

12:42 The queen of the South will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon -- and now, something greater than Solomon is here!

Similarly, the Queen of Sheba will arise from the dead at the day of judgement, and her response to Solomon's wisdom will condemn those who failed to respond to the wisdom of Christ. The Queen came a long distance to hear the wisdom of Solomon, but even his wisdom could not compare with the wisdom of Christ, who is wisdom personified (1 Cor. 1:24).

12:43 "When an unclean spirit goes out of a person, it passes through waterless places looking for rest but does not find it."

It was Jesus' casting out devils which began this confrontation with the Pharisees (12:22-24). Jesus teaches them that when a devil is cast out, he is in limbo. He wants rest, a place to inhabit, but is unable to find one.

To him, being without a body is like being in a desert (dry places).

12:44-45 Then it says, 'I will return to the home I left.' When it returns, it finds the house empty, swept clean, and put in order. Then it goes and brings with it seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they go in and live there, so the last state of that person is worse than the first. It will be that way for this evil generation as well!"

Because the demon wants to inhabit a body, he will seek someone who is open and vulnerable to possession. But not finding any, he returns to the person from whom he had been cast out. Finding him clean and put right, yet EMPTY (that is the key word), he re-enters the person.

Jesus cast out many evil spirits by his word, but unless the delivered person later accepted him as Lord and allowed Him to take up residence within their souls and bodies, they remained empty and vulnerable to renewed possession. They would revert to what they were before. In fact, it would be worse, for the evil spirit takes seven other spirits with him to possess such a man, so that in the end the person is in a worse state than he was originally.

This is what would happen to the people who had been so blessed by Christ ministry but who rejected him as Saviour and Lord. It can also be observed in the life of the backslider. To harden your heart to Jesus Christ and turn away from him is to open the door to all kinds of evil and oppression of the devil.

Jesus Mother and Brothers

12:46-50 While Jesus was still speaking to the crowds, his mother and brothers came and stood outside, asking to speak to him. Someone told him, "Look, your mother and your brothers are standing outside wanting to speak to you." To the one who had said this, Jesus replied, "Who is my mother and who are my brothers?" And pointing toward his disciples he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother."

Christ recognised that he had a spiritual relationship with his followers, and indicated that it was far greater than the natural ties which binds us as families (2 Cor. 5:16). Family ties are important, and the Christian is commanded to love and honour his or her parents; parents are to provide for their children and so on.

But Jesus Christ is the son of God, and eternal and spiritual being, who brings us into an eternal and spiritual relationship with Himself through the new birth. We become sons of God through faith in Jesus Christ (Gal. 3:26). There is no gender in the kingdom (Gal. 3:28), which is why at one and the same time we can be his brother and sister and mother. We are all these things, in other words we have a family relationship with Jesus greater than any that has previously been known on earth. This relationship has been brought about by new birth, and is revealed through the love and obedience shown by his followers; those who do "the will of [his] father in heaven" (John 14:15).

It is worthy of mention that here Jesus gives no special position to Mary as his mother, but rather gives all

believers an equal status to Mary in this heavenly kingdom.

Matthew Chapter 13

Sowing the Word of God

13:1-2 On that day after Jesus went out of the house, he sat by the lake. And such a large crowd gathered around him that he got into a boat to sit while the whole crowd stood on the shore.

On the same day that Jesus had been preaching and working miracles he left the house and went and sat by the lake of Galilee. A great multitude of people gathered together so He got into Simon Peter's boat (Luke 5:3) while the crowd stood on the shore.

The Parable of the Sower

13:3 He told them many things in parables, saying: "Listen! A sower went out to sow.

He began to tell them many truths concerning the Kingdom of Heaven by using parables. The simple explanation of a parable is, that it is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. It would be more correct however to say that it is taking an everyday activity or common item and using it to explain a spiritual truth. He begins with the parable of the sower. Jesus makes it clear that He wants the full attention of His listeners as he uses the imperative "Listen". Before anything can be accomplished the sower has to put his hand to plough and then go out to the field to sow the seed.

13:4 And as he sowed, some seeds fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured them.

The method of sowing was to scatter the seed by hand over the ground. Using this method it was inevitable that some seed would fall where it would not find sufficient soil to grow. The good thing about it was that every inch would be covered with seed. Some of the seed fell on the hard path and became food for the birds.

13:5-6 Other seeds fell on rocky ground where they did not have much soil. They sprang up quickly because the soil was not deep. But when the sun came up, they were scorched, and because they did not have sufficient root, they withered.

Other seeds fell on rocky ground where there was hardly any soil. These did begin to sprout but because the soil was very thin when the sun came up they were scorched and died.

13:7 Other seeds fell among the thorns, and they grew up and choked them.

Other seed fell among thorns and grew up with them but these weeds were too strong for them and suffocated them.

13:8 But other seeds fell on good soil and produced grain, some a hundred times as much, some sixty, and some thirty.

As the sower was planted his seed in a field that he would prepared then it must follow that most of the seed fell on fertile soil. The result was that some plants produced an abundant crop some as much as a hundred times as much.

13:9 The one who has ears had better listen!"

Anyone who hears this parable had better pay attention.

An Explanation why Jesus speaks in Parables.

13:10 Then the disciples came to him and said, "Why do you speak to them in parables?"

As soon as they had an opportunity the disciples came to Him and asked why He speaks in parables.

13:11 He replied, "You have been given the opportunity to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but they have not.

He tells them that He has chosen them so that He can make known to them those things concerning the kingdom of heaven that is hid from other people.

13:12 For whoever has will be given more, and will have an abundance. But whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him.

To those who listen and receive spiritual truths more will be given to them and they will have an abundant knowledge of these things. To those who will not listen and therefore cannot have this knowledge of spiritual truth the little that they do have will be taken away from them.

13:13 For this reason I speak to them in parables: Although they see they do not see, and although they hear they do not hear nor do they understand.

The reason why Jesus speaks to these people in parables is because although they see Him, who is the way, the truth and the life and hear Him speak the things of the kingdom of God and witness the miracles that He

does they do not see or hear him in faith and believe that He is the Son of God. So they cannot understand.

13:14 And concerning them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled that says: You will listen carefully yet will never understand, you will look closely yet will never comprehend.

This is in fulfilment of the prophecy of Isaiah when he said that although they will listen carefully to what the Christ says and see the mighty things that He will do they will not understand or perceive or recognise the meaning of it.

13:15 For the heart of this people has become dull; they are hard of hearing, and they have shut their eyes, so that they would not see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.'

This is because their hearts have become hardened to God and therefore cannot hear His word. They have shut their eyes to the truth and put their hands over their ears so that they cannot hear. They do not want to understand and believe in their hearts and turn to the Lord if they did He would forgive their sins (Mark 4:12).

13:16 "But your eyes are blessed because they see, and your ears because they hear.

Blest are His disciples whose eyes and ears have been opened to hear and see the spiritual truths and believe in them.

13:17 For I tell you the truth, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it.

There were many prophets and righteous people who longed to see and hear what the disciples had but they did not see or hear although they had prophesied concerning these things (1 Peter 1:10-12, Hebrews 11:39-40).

The Meaning of the Parable.

13:18 "So listen to the parable of the sower:

Jesus now explains to His disciples the meaning of the parable of the sower.

13:19 When anyone hears the word about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches what was sown in his heart; this is the seed sown along the path.

The seed is the Word of God and the Sower is first of all the Lord Jesus Christ and then all His followers who He has commissioned (Mark 16:15). The seed that falls on the hard path are those who hear the Word but have no understanding it goes no further than their ears. Like the bird that comes and snatches the seed away so the devil comes and takes the Word away from their hearts.

13:20 The seed sown on rocky ground is the person who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy.

The seed that falls on rocky ground is the emotional hearers. They receive the word straight away with great joy and they seem to flourish for a while.

13:21 But he has no root in himself and does not endure; when trouble or persecution comes because of the word, immediately he falls away.

But because they have not taken the word deep into their hearts when trouble comes and they are persecuted for Christ's sake they fall away and are seen no more.

13:22 The seed sown among thorns is the person who hears the word, but worldly cares and the seductiveness of wealth choke the word, so it produces nothing.

The seed that falls among thorns is the worldly hearers. They receive the word of God but are so tied up with the world that they never become separated from it. They continue to walk in the ways of the world and desire to fill themselves with it until the word is crowded out and there is no room for spiritual fruit to grow in them (1 John 2:15, Rom. 12:2).

13:23 But as for the seed sown on good soil, this is the person who hears the word and understands. He bears fruit, yielding a hundred, sixty, or thirty times what was sown."

The seed that falls on the good ground is the prepared and receptive heart. This is the person who receives the word in the very depths of their soul where it abides and matures. The person grows in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord and the fruit of the spirit abounds in them. This parable is generally applied to the sowing of the gospel message and is applied to the unsaved but it is equally applicable to believers and how they respond to the word of God. Jesus required the attention of His hearers, in verse three He said "listen" having heard the Word of God we are now responsible for how receive and respond it.

The True and False Growing Together

13:24 He presented them with another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a person who sowed good seed in his field.

Jesus then continues to tell them another parable concerning the kingdom of heaven which has a similar setting. A man goes out to sow good seed in his field. Again the seed is the Word of God and the sower is the Lord Jesus Christ.

13:25 But while everyone was sleeping, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away.

During the night when everyone was asleep his enemy came and sowed weeds among his wheat and stole away. The enemy is the Devil whose greatest delight is to sow his seeds of evil, false prophets and discord among God's people. Notice this is done in the dark, the night, when no one on guard. This is how the devil always works (Galatians 2:4, 2 Timothy 4:3-5, 2 Peter 2:1).

13:26 When the plants sprouted and bore grain, then the weeds also appeared.

These weed seeds grew up and amongst the good seed.

13:27 So the slaves of the owner came and said to him, 'Sir, didn't you sow good seed in your field? Then where did the weeds come from?'

When the servants of the owner saw the weeds growing among the wheat they asked him if he had sown good seed in his field. If he had then where did all the

weeds come from. Jesus Christ is the owner of the field and of course He can only sow good seed (James 1:17)

13:28 He said, 'An enemy has done this.' So the slaves replied, 'Do you want us to go and gather them?'

The owner knew who had done this work and informs his servants that it was an enemy. They ask him if he wanted them to pull them up and burn them. Jesus Christ is not deceived by anything or anyone He knows who are His and the work He has done.

13:29 But he said, 'No, since in gathering the weeds you may uproot the wheat with them.'

The owner tells his servants to leave the weeds where they are in case they disturb and pull up the wheat with them. Jesus Christ's greatest concern is for the care of His own, those whom He has redeemed and will not suffer anything to be done that will cause them harm in their faith.

13:30 Let both grow together until the harvest. At harvest time I will tell the reapers, "First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned, but then gather the wheat into my barn."

The true and false are to grow up together until the harvest is ready to be gathered in. Then the weeds are to be collected tied in bundles and thrown in the fire to be burned. After this the wheat can be safely gathered in (Revelation 14:15-16). The "harvest" is the end of the age, the Day of Judgement when the Devil and all his demons and those who worship him shall be cast into the lake of fire (Revelation 19: 20, 2 Peter 2:9, 2 Peter 3:7).

13:31-32 He gave them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field. It is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest garden plant and becomes a tree, so that the wild birds come and nest in its branches."

The growth of the mustard seed is an amazing phenomenon of nature. The smallest of all the garden seeds, it is barely visible, yet it grows into a tree, so that the birds may rest in its branches. In the same way, the kingdom of heaven is small, in as much as it is invisible to the eye, yet as it grows and develops in each individual life into the likeness of Christ, so that His dwelling life can be clearly seen. In fact, for "kingdom of heaven", we could substitute "Christ", and realize that his presence, though invisible to the eye, is made increasingly visible by its effects on the life of anyone in whom, the life of Christ is allowed to grow within.

13:33 He told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed with three measures of flour until all the dough had risen."

Just as a woman would add yeast to a dough, so that it permeates the whole bread, so the life of Christ can fill and saturate the whole life, so that the likeness of Christ is formed within the soul. This truth, applied to the individual, may also be applied to the church as a whole.

Is Christ Lord of your whole life? He will continue to graciously move upon us until we yield our whole lives to him, just like the yeast fills the whole bread.

13:34 Jesus spoke all these things in parables to the crowds; he did not speak to them without a parable.

Perhaps it was because of the profundity of his teaching concerning spiritual matters that Christ was compelled to use parables to teach the people. Without the parables, the people could not understand.

13:35 This fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet: "I will open my mouth in parables, I will announce what has been hidden from the foundation of the world."

This practice of Jesus confirmed him again to be the chosen One, the Messiah, because it was in fulfillment of the scripture. Truths which had been hidden since the foundation of the world were now made known in Him (Eph. 3:8-9). Christ is the fulfillment of all God's plans and purposes for man.

13:36 Then he left the crowds and went into the house. And his disciples came to him saying, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field."

The source of all wisdom and knowledge is Christ (Col. 2:3). If we would know the meaning of his word, we would do no better than to ask him directly, as his disciples did. They specifically on this occasion wanted to know the meaning of the parable of the weeds. It is always good to inquire and seek concerning the word of God. You will notice from Jesus' reply the simplicity of meaning which he attaches to his own parable. This should warn us never to look for elaborate hidden meanings in the parables of Christ - meanings which Christ never meant them to convey.

13:37-38 He answered, "The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. The weeds are the people of the evil one,

Christ is the only one who produces "good seed" for these are those who are saved by his grace and made children of God. The field is the world and the good seed are the people of the kingdom. . Believers are chosen out of the world to become part of God's spiritual and eternal kingdom. Those who refuse to accept and believe the gospel are those who are blinded by the devil, and refuse to accept Christ as their Saviour. These, who reject Christ, are described as the children of the devil, for they listen to him and, albeit unwittingly, do his will (John 8:44).

13:39 and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels.

At the end of the world, those who have constituted themselves to be the devil's children and enemies of God by rejecting Jesus Christ will be seized, at His command, by the angels and cast into the fiery furnace of everlasting punishment, "Where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." That is, their punishment will never cease, they will not be annihilated, but consciously tormented forever in hell.

13:40-43 As the weeds are collected and burned with fire, so it will be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather from his kingdom everything that causes sin as well as all lawbreakers. They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. The one who has ears had better listen!

After this event, the final Judgment, comes a new heaven and a new earth, wherein only righteousness dwells, sin having been removed, and those who practiced lawlessness having been removed also.

13:44-46 "The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure, hidden in a field, that a person found and hid. Then because of joy he went and sold all that he had and bought that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant searching for fine pearls. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant searching for fine pearls. When he found a pearl of great value, he went out and sold everything he had and bought it.

These two famous parables have two possible meanings. Both convey the truth, but from different aspects. Firstly, the merchant and the person finding treasure can be likened to Christ, who came into this world, not to find pearls, but souls of men. He considered the church to be such a prize worth gaining that he emptied himself of all his privileges, and humbles himself to the death of the cross, giving all he had to purchase the church. It is of note, that if the field here is the world, then Christ has "potentially" paid the price to redeem all men, but only when they accept that it was paid for them is what is "potential" made "actual" in their experience. Because of joy. It was for the joy set before him that Christ endured the cross, despising the shame, and sat down at the right hand of God (Heb. 12:2). Despising the shame means he thought nothing of it, for the joy of gaining souls - bringing many sons to glory. On the other hand, one might think of the merchant as any man or woman who realizes the great worth of the treasures contained in the gospel - forgiveness, redemption, salvation and so on, and is willing to part with all things and follow Christ in order to gain such blessings. It is better to lose all, and to gain Christ, (Phil. 3:8) than to gain all, and without Christ, lose one's own soul (Matt. 16:26).

13:47-50 Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was cast into the sea that caught all kinds of fish. When it

was full, they pulled it ashore, sat down, and put the good fish into containers and threw the bad away. It will be this way at the end of the age. Angels will come and separate the evil from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

This parable is almost a repeat of the parable of the weeds in the field. The gospel is proclaimed to all men. Yet only those who believe and receive Christ will obtain eternal life. These are the "good fish" those who reject Christ as Saviour are the "bad fish" that are thrown into the lake of fire. The fact that it is the angels who do the separation is significant only because it shows that the Judgment takes place outside of the sphere of this world. It will be at the end of time, when earth and heaven have passed away, that this judgment will take place. One might imagine the angels as heavens police officers, ensuring the inevitable, that none will get away or escape (Heb. 2:3).

13:51-52 Have you understood all these things?" They replied, "Yes." Then he said to them, "Therefore every expert in the law who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his treasure what is new and old."

The disciples, simple though they were, as a result of Jesus' teaching and explanation, understood these parables perfectly.

Because of this, Jesus declares that if men understand the word of God, the Old Testament, and the New, then he can bring teaching of God's truth from each. The lessons of the Old Testament still stand: the lessons

of the new have not replaced them, but revealed them much more fully.

13:53-58 Now when Jesus finished these parables, he moved on from there. Then he came to his hometown and began to teach the people in their synagogue. They were astonished and said, "Where did this man get such wisdom and miraculous powers? Isn't this the carpenter's son? Isn't his mother named Mary? And aren't his brothers James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas? And aren't all his sisters here with us? Where did he get all this?" And so they took offense at him. But Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and in his own house." And he did not do many miracles there because of their unbelief.

The crowds on the other hand, although deeply challenged (astonished) by his words, refused to submit to that authority, choosing instead to focus on the lowly origins from which Jesus came. Jesus recognised this, and was unable to perform many great works among them as a consequence of their unbelief.

Matthew Chapter 14

Recap of John the Baptist's Death

14:1-2 At that time Herod the tetrarch heard reports about Jesus, and he said to his servants, "This is John the Baptist. He has been raised from the dead! And because of this, miraculous powers are at work in him."

This Herod Antipas the son of Herod the Great who was king at the time of the Birth of Jesus. When he heard about all the miracles that Jesus was doing his reasoning could only bring him to the conclusion that John the Baptist whom he had beheaded was risen from the dead.

14:3 For Herod had arrested John, bound him, and put him in prison on account of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife,

Herod had divorced his first wife and married his brother Phillip's wife, Herodias who was a daughter of Aristobulus a son of Herod the Great and was therefore a niece of them both.

14:4 because John had repeatedly told him, "It is not lawful for you to have her."

John the Baptist had repeatedly told Herod that it was against the Law of God for him to marry her (Leviticus 18:16) and for this reason he imprisoned him.

14:5 Although Herod wanted to kill John, he feared the crowd because they accepted John as a prophet.

Heroes would not have hesitated to kill John but he had a great fear of the people because they believed John to be a prophet of God.

14:6-7 But on Herod's birthday, the daughter of Herodias danced before them and pleased Herod, so much that he promised with an oath to give her whatever she asked.

However, the daughter of Herodias danced before Herod at his birthday party and this greatly pleased him. This was to such an intoxicating extent that he promised on oath to give her whatever she asked of him.

14:8 Instructed by her mother, she said, "Give me the head of John the Baptist here on a platter."

Mark tells us that she immediately went to her mother to ask her what she should ask for. This would suggest that the whole thing was planned by Herodias before the party began. Herodias hated John and was determined that he should die so told her

14:9 Although it grieved the king, because of his oath and the dinner guests he commanded it to be given.

Although he had wanted John killed in the first place he now regretted his promise but because he had made it before all his guests and did not want to lose face he commanded it to be done.

14:10-11 So he sent and had John beheaded in the prison. His head was brought on a platter and given to the girl, and she brought it to her mother.

This was immediately done in the prison and John's head was brought and given to the girl who gave it to her mother.

14:12 Then John's disciples came and took the body and buried it and went and told Jesus.

John's disciples would have sought permission from Herod to come and take his body away and bury it.

14:13 Now when Jesus heard this he went away from there privately in a boat to an isolated place. But when the crowd heard about it, they followed him on foot from the towns.

In hearing about the death of His cousin John Jesus went by boat across the Sea of Galilee to a remote area, not through fear, but to be have time to himself. But the crowd heard where he had gone and followed him by foot around the shore of the sea.

Feeding more than 5000

14:14 As he got out he saw the large crowd, and he had compassion on them and healed their sick.

As he got out of the boat he met with the large crowd and moved with compassion towards them He healed those who were sick among them.

14:15 When evening arrived, his disciples came to him saying, "This is an isolated place and the hour is already late. Send the crowds away so that they can go into the villages and buy food for themselves."

When evening arrived His disciples came to Him pointing that that they were in an isolated place and it was already late. As they had come without food they ask Jesus to send away so that they could go to the nearby villages to food for themselves.

14:16-17 But he replied, "They don't need to go. You give them something to eat." They said to him, "We have here only five loaves and two fish."

Jesus astounded His disciples by telling them there was no need for the people to go away for they could give them something to eat. This was all the more amazing when they tell Him that they only have five loaves and two fish between them.

14:18-19 "Bring them here to me," he replied. Then he instructed the crowds to sit down on the grass. He took the five loaves and two fish, and looking up to heaven he gave thanks and broke the loaves. He gave them to the disciples, who in turn gave them to the crowds.

He asks them to give Him the loaves and fish and tells the people to sit down on the grass. Jesus takes them in His hands and looking up to heaven he gave thanks and blessed the food. He then gave them back to His disciples who began to distribute it to the people.

14:20 They all ate and were satisfied, and they picked up the broken pieces left over, twelve baskets full.

They all ate as much as they wanted to and the disciples gathered the fragments left over and fill twelve baskets full with the.

14:21 Not counting women and children, there were about five thousand men who ate.

Without counting the women and children about five thousand men had been fed from five loaves and two fish and there was plenty left over for the disciples.

Peter's Faith Tested

14:22 Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go ahead of him to the other side, while he dispersed the crowds.

As soon as the fragments were gathered up Jesus made His disciples get into the boat and go before Him to the other side while He sent the crowds away.

14:23 And after he sent the crowds away, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone.

You remember that in verse 13 Jesus had intended to go to a quiet place by himself but the crowds followed Him. Having now sent them away and His disciples He goes up to the mountain to pray by himself. While He was there darkness had fallen.

14:24 Meanwhile the boat, already far from land, was taking a beating from the waves because the wind was against it.

While Jesus was up on the mountain the disciples in the boat had gone a long way from land and were in difficulties because the wind had become very strong and the waves were very high.

14:25 As the night was ending, Jesus came to them walking on the sea.

Somewhere between the hours of three and six in the morning, the fourth watch as it was called; Jesus came to the disciples walking on the water. Remember that this was not a calm sea.

14:26 When the disciples saw him walking on the water they were terrified and said, "It's a ghost!" and cried out with fear.

When the disciples saw Him coming towards them walking on the water they were terrified. They believed it to be a ghost and so cried out with fear.

14:27 But immediately Jesus spoke to them: "Have courage! It is I. Do not be afraid."

When Jesus heard their cry He called out to them not to be afraid but to be of good courage for it was Him.

14:28 Peter said to him, "Lord, if it is you, order me to come to you on the water."

Peter, always the impetuous one (acting without thinking with boldness and haste) calls out to Jesus "Lord if it is really you command me to come to you walking on the water".

14:29 So he said, "Come." Peter got out of the boat, walked on the water, and came toward Jesus.

Jesus bids Peter to come to Him. So he gets out of the boat and walks on the water just as Jesus Christ was doing and begins to walk towards Jesus.

14:30 But when he saw the strong wind he became afraid. And starting to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!"

The wind was still blowing strong and the waves were still high and Peter taking his eyes off his goal, Jesus Christ, and looking upon his surroundings begin to sink with his faith. He immediately calls upon the Lord to save him (Hebrews 12:2 and Titus 2:13).

14:31 Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?"

At the same time Jesus reached out His hand and caught hold of Peter telling him that he had so little faith and asking why did he doubt (James 1:6).

14:32 When they went up into the boat, the wind ceased.

The moment that Jesus and Peter got into the boat the wind ceased.

14:33 Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

When the disciples saw that the wind immediately ceased the moment Jesus entered the boat they worshiped Him acknowledging that He was in truth the Son of God.

A Touch from Jesus

14:34 After they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret.

Having crossed the Sea of Galilee safely thanks to the Lord Jesus Christ they came to the region of Gennesaret.

14:35-36 When the people there recognized him, they sent word into all the surrounding area, and they brought all their sick to him. They begged him if they could only touch the edge of his cloak, and all who touched it were healed.

When the people there recognized that it was Jesus they sent word of His arrival right throughout the

area and all the people brought their sick to him, and all who touched him were healed.

Matthew Chapter 15

What Defiles a Man

15:1-2 Then Pharisees and experts in the law came from Jerusalem to Jesus and said, "Why do your disciples disobey the tradition of the elders? For they don't wash their hands when they eat."

It was not out of concern for their own spiritual condition, or for that of the people, but in order to oppose Jesus that the Pharisees came all the way from Jerusalem to Galilee. Their question was designed to discredit Jesus and to stir the people against him, as they accuse him of failing to instruct his disciples to obey the various religious regulations which they themselves had laid down.

15:3 He answered them, "And why do you disobey the commandment of God because of your tradition?"

Firstly, Jesus confronts the question of man-made rules, and later deals with the matter of ceremonial washing. Any tradition which has at its heart obeying the commandments of God is good, but the Pharisees had substituted religious tradition for the commandments of God, a fact which revealed how far from God the Pharisees were in their hearts..

15:4 For God said, 'Honor your father and mother' and 'Whoever insults his father or mother must be put to death.'

Jesus reminds them of the commandment of God to honor and respect parents. The word honor, as Jesus teaching goes on to clarify, involves the idea of financial help and support in other ways.

15:5-6 But you say, 'If someone tells his father or mother, "Whatever help you would have received from me is given to God," he does not need to honor his father.' You have nullified the word of God on account of your tradition.

The Pharisees had made a practice of teaching people to devote to God, by gifts and offerings, money which was supposed to be used to help elderly parents. The act of giving to God may have seemed very commendable, but not when it involved the breaking of his laws.

God did not want the money which was given on this basis, or this time, if indeed time to help could have been given, but was instead devoted to the Lord.

15:7-9 Hypocrites! Isaiah prophesied correctly about you when he said, 'This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me, and they worship me in vain, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.' "

This substitution of the doctrines of men for the word of God revealed just how far the Pharisees hearts had become from God. They praised God with their mouths, but they failed to obey his commandments, revealing that their hearts were far from him. They were hypocrites, play actors, showing men that they were righteous, when in fact they were not willing to humble themselves before God and obey Him.

15:10-11 Then he called the crowd to him and said, "Listen and understand. What defiles a person is not what goes into the mouth; it is what comes out of the mouth that defiles a person."

Jesus now returns to the question of ceremonial washing, and his answer in fact deals with every external religious practice. Later, he explains his comment fully to his disciples. Nothing that enters the mouth of man can cause him to be unclean in the presence of God. What we eat does not bring us to God, what we do not eat does not bring us to God. Whether we wash our hands before we eat, it may well be good for the prevention of germs, but it has no effect whatever on our relationship to God. It is what comes from within man, and is revealed through his mouth, that effects our relationship to God.

False Teachers

15:12-14 Then the disciples came to him and said, "Do you know that when the Pharisees heard this saying they were offended?" And he replied, "Every plant that my heavenly Father did not plant will be uprooted. Leave them! They are blind guides. If someone who is blind leads another who is blind, both will fall into a pit."

Firstly, though, before explaining this fully to his disciples, Jesus deals with the matter of upsetting the Pharisees. His disciples saw that the Pharisees were offended by Jesus hit at their artificial religion. But Jesus is neither sorry nor apologetic. He does not need to curry the favour of men. Every plant which my heavenly father has not planted will be plucked up by the roots. If the Pharisees would repent and turn to God in faith, then they would be born again, and become plants of his planting. But since they are not, they are like the weeds Jesus spoke of in his earlier parable, which are to be burned (Matt. 13:40-42).

In saying this Jesus completely rejects all forms of false religion as having absolutely nothing whatever to do

with God. Such men, who are wilfully blind, we will be unable to persuade, which is why Jesus says "Leave them" If his words offend them, what shall ours accomplish? They are blind guides, for they teach others the way of God, but are ignorant of that way themselves, can only teach it in error. The result of not following Christ will be to fall into the pit of everlasting destruction which awaits all unbelievers (John 3:36).

15:15 But Peter said to him, "Explain this parable to us."

The fact that Peter requires an explanation of Christ's teaching is disappointing to Jesus. Didn't they understand by now? Peter even thought that this straight forward teaching was a parable.

15:16 Jesus said, "Even after all this, are you still so foolish?"

The word foolish can be translated dull, unable to perceive and take in spiritual truth, when he should have done so.

15:17 Don't you understand that whatever goes into the mouth enters the stomach and then passes out into the sewer?

Whatever food we eat is digested in the body, the nutrients used and the waste expelled from the body. The food we eat has absolutely no impact on our spiritual lives.

15:18 But the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these things defile a person.

But what is revealed by a man's words to be in his heart are those sinful things, deeds of the sinful nature,

which defile the man, and make him unclean, a sinner in the sight of God.

15:19 For out of the heart come evil ideas, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander.

These are the evil imagination of the heart, the hatred which leads to murder, the lust which leads to sexual immorality and adultery, the greed which leads to theft, the crookedness which leads to telling lies and the envy and spite which leads to slander.

15:20 These are the things that defile a person; it is not eating with unwashed hands that defiles a person."

These are the things which defile the life, not whether or not we have washed our hands, or taken part in any other religious observance, including those ordinances enjoined by the Lord himself. For if our hearts are not right, the outward sign of baptism or receiving communion will be of no benefit to us.

An Object Lesson in Faith

15:21-22 After going out from there, Jesus went to the region of Tyre and Sidon. A Canaanite woman from that area came and cried out, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David! My daughter is horribly demon-possessed!"

In foreign parts, a foreign woman came to ask Jesus to perform a miracle and cast a demon out of her daughter. She recognizes his power and his ability to do such miracles, and that he has been invested with this authority by God himself, for she calls him Lord, and son of David (Christ).

15:23 But he did not answer her a word. Then his disciples came and begged him, "Send her away, because she keeps on crying out after us."

In order to teach an object lesson on faith, Jesus initially does not reply. Notice how the woman is not at all deterred, but continues to call out after him for the same purpose. The disciples become uncomfortable. If you're ignoring her Lord, best send her away really. Tell her to stop.

15:24 So he answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

But Jesus had no intention of deterring the woman's faith. Yet now he explains to her that his present mission was for Jews, which she is not.

15:25 But she came and bowed down before him and said, "Lord, help me!"

This did not deter the woman, being confident of Jesus ability and willingness, she persists with her request.

15:26 "It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs," he said.

One might have thought this final rebuff sufficient to stop any less a seeker from persisting. If what was given to the children of Israel was for them alone, it should not be given to foreigners, who were like dogs.

15:27 "Yes, Lord," she replied, "but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table."

The woman wins the victory, for her faith will not be deterred by such arguments. What if she were not a Jew, but a dog, even dogs take a share in what is being given to the family. There is bound to be something here for me, she decides.

15:28 Then Jesus answered her, "Woman, your faith is great! Let what you want be done for you." And her daughter was healed from that hour.

Jesus has got the object lesson of faith which he desires. Her faith would not be deterred. She shows us to this day a lesson in how to get something from Jesus. Jesus gladly grants her request, and the demon immediately leaves her daughter for good. Later, Christ's mission was extended as he sent his disciples to the entire world, every creature. If this woman got what she wanted when the time was not right, how much easier it should be now to get what we need. Yet to receive we must follow the same example of faith.

An Object Lesson in Unbelief (the Disciples)

15:29-31 When he left there, Jesus went along the Sea of Galilee. Then he went up a mountain, where he sat down. Then large crowds came to him bringing with them the lame, blind, crippled, mute, and many others. They laid them at his feet, and he healed them. As a result, the crowd was amazed when they saw the mute speaking, the crippled healthy, the lame walking, and the blind seeing, and they praised the God of Israel.

Jesus, as his custom was, went up the mountain in order to sit and teach the crowds of people the Word of God. Yet they thronged to him for healing, and he did not disappoint any of them, for they are all healed of so many

various diseases. The crowd were astonished to see the results of miraculous healing, and gave glory to God.

15:32 Then Jesus called the disciples and said, "I have compassion on the crowd, because they have already been here with me three days and they have nothing to eat. I don't want to send them away hungry since they may faint on the way."

It was not long since the feeding of the five thousand. Jesus had miraculously healed everyone there. Yet notice how he here tests his disciples' faith. Jesus, once again, wants to feed the multitudes, since they have remained to hear his word, they had not food left. Christ was concerned lest they faint by the way. We should always keep in mind that Christ is concerned for our physical condition, and adopts a very common sense approach to keeping our bodies healthy. The people needed to eat.

15:33-39 The disciples said to him, "Where can we get enough bread in this desolate place to satisfy so great a crowd?" Jesus said to them, "How many loaves do you have?" They replied, "Seven — and a few small fish." After instructing the crowd to sit down on the ground, he took the seven loaves and the fish, and after giving thanks, he broke them and began giving them to the disciples, who then gave them to the crowds. They all ate and were satisfied, and they picked up the broken pieces left over, seven baskets full. Not counting children and women, there were four thousand men who ate. After sending away the crowd, he got into the boat and went to the region of Magadan.

But the disciples still had not got the point. They had already witnessed the feeding of the 5,000 yet fail to

trust in Jesus for the present need, they begin looking to their own resources, and conclude that it is impossible. Their unbelief, of course, did not hinder the Lord Jesus Christ from doing what he had determined to do – a repeat of that same miracle, this time with seven baskets left over. And as before, Jesus dismissed the crowd before leaving by boat for Magdala.

Matthew Chapter 16

Sign Seeking

16:1 Now when the Pharisees and Sadducees came to test Jesus, they asked him to show them a sign from heaven.

The Pharisees and Sadducees are so opposed to the Lord Jesus Christ that they continually bait him with things that they are not really interested in. There are those today who will seek to waste our time in the same way. Not content with all the miracles that He had done and which they obviously did not think came from heaven they now have the audacity to ask Him for a sign!

16:2-3 He said, "When evening comes you say, 'It will be fair weather, because the sky is red,' and in the morning, 'It will be stormy today, because the sky is red and darkening.' You know how to judge correctly the appearance of the sky, but you cannot evaluate the signs of the times.

We are all familiar with the answer that Jesus gave them and have most probably used it ourselves. They know how to read the signs in the sky concerning the weather outlook "red sky at night shepherds delight, red sky in the morning shepherds warning" we would say. But they have so blinded themselves with their unbelief that they cannot see the fulfilment of the signs given them in the Old Testament that is happening before their very eyes.

16:4 A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah." Then he left them and went away.

He tells them that it is only those that have evil designs and are unfaithful to God and unbelieving that ask for signs. Jesus tells them straight that the only sign they will receive is that shown through Jonah (Matthew 12:40, Jonah 3:4-5); that Jesus would die and rise again.

A Lack of Understanding

16:5 When the disciples went to the other side, they forgot to take bread.

As they went on their way in the boat over to Magdala the disciples suddenly realised that they had forgotten to bring any food with them.

16:6 "Watch out," Jesus said to them, "beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees."

While they were talking about this Jesus warns them to beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees i.e. their teachings.

16:7 So they began to discuss this among themselves, saying, "It is because we brought no bread."

Because their minds were so full of feeding their stomachs they misunderstood Him and thought that He said this because they had forgotten to bring any food.

16:8 When Jesus learned of this, he said, "You who have such little faith! Why are you arguing among yourselves about having no bread?"

Jesus knowing what they were discussing among themselves rebukes them for their incredible small faith and that they should be arguing about having no bread! Most probably blaming they were each other for forgetting it.

16:9-10 Do you still not understand? Don't you remember the five loaves for the five thousand, and how many baskets you took up? Or the seven loaves for the four thousand and how many baskets you took up?

What was so incredible was that they had witnessed the miracle of Him feeding above five thousand and four thousand and yet they could not believe that if necessary they could be fed again in the same way. Had they not collected twelve and seven baskets of leftovers?

16:11 How could you not understand that I was not speaking to you about bread? But beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees!"

How could they fail to understand that He was not talking about bread to eat but warning them about the corrupt teachings of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

16:12 Then they understood that he had not told them to be on guard against the yeast in bread, but against the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

At last the penny dropped, the truth dawned about them that He was warning them against the deceptive teaching of these religious people.

Who do you say Jesus is?

16:13 When Jesus came to the area of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?"

As they were coming into the region of Caesarea Philippi Jesus asks His disciples who the people say He is.

16:14 They answered, "Some say John the Baptist, others Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets."

They told Him that some believed that He was John the Baptist, others that He was the prophet Elijah or Jeremiah, still others that He must be one of the other prophets of the past.

16:15 He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?"

Jesus did not ask them this for His own benefit for He knew who He was but that He may bring them to answer this leading question. They had been with Him some time now and had heard His teachings and seen the mighty things He had done so "who do you say I am"

16:16 Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

It was Simon Peter who was the first to speak up and confessed That Jesus was the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of the Living God.

16:17 And Jesus answered him, "You are blessed, Simon son of Jonah, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but my Father in heaven!"

He did not receive this revelation by his own means or from any man but directly from God the Father.

16:18 And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.

This verse is often misunderstood and in some Christian circles purposely so. A careful study of the words that Jesus said in the original shows clearly that He did not say that His church would be built upon Peter. The name that Jesus gave to Simon, that is Peter is "Petros" meaning a small rock and indeed Peter proved to be a steadfast rock in the early church. The word that Jesus used that He said He would His church on was "Petra" a large rock. Jesus Christ is the Rock (1 Corinthians 10:4). Peter called Jesus the "living stone" and the "chief corner stone" (1 Peter 2:4-6). Paul speaks of Jesus Christ as the foundation that the church is built on (1 Corinthians 3:11 and Romans 9:33). It is because Christ builds His Church that the gates of Hell shall not overpower it.

16:19 I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth will have been bound in heaven, and whatever you release on earth will have been released in heaven."

The keys of the kingdom of heaven were to be employed by preaching of the Gospel in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ with the authority and power that the Name means. In His Name not only Peter and the other disciples but all who are Christ's can bind things on earth and it shall happen because they have been bound in heaven and whatever is loosed on earth will be done because it has been loosed in heaven.

16:20 Then he instructed his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Christ.

Having said this Jesus instructs His disciples not to tell anyone that He was the Christ.

God's Thoughts are not Our Thoughts

16:21 From that time on Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests, and experts in the law, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.

From this time on Jesus began clearly to show His disciples that His destiny is to go up to Jerusalem and there suffer many terrible things at the hands of the religious leaders and would be killed and that on the third day He would be raised from the dead.

16:22 So Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him: "God forbid, Lord! This must not happen to you!"

This was beyond Peter's comprehension this thing could never happen, God forbid, it must not be allowed to happen! God Forbid? poor Peter he did not know that it was God's plan and purpose that His only begotten Son should die for the sins of the whole world and for this reason He came into the world (John 12:27).

16:23 But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me, because you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but on man's."

Jesus knew that it was the Devil using Peter to get in the way in order to hinder God's plan to be fulfilled. So he rebukes Satan and tells Peter that He is seeing things only from an human point of view and not God's.

The Cost of Discipleship

16:24 Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone wants to become my follower, he must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.

Then He said to all His disciples that if anyone wants to become His disciple, to follow Him, he must not do the things that please himself but must deny himself and every day take up his cross, submit to God's will and be prepared to sacrifice following in the footsteps of Jesus.

16:25 For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

Whoever wants to save his own life, live for self only, will find that he will lose his life. But whoever is prepared to give his life for the sake of Jesus Christ will save it (1 Corinthians 15:30-31 and Romans 8:36-37).

16:26 For what does it benefit a person if he gains the whole world but forfeits his life? Or what can a person give in exchange for his life?

What benefit is it if a person should have all this world's goods and its approval but lose his own soul and is destroyed.

16:27-28 For the Son of Man will come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done. I tell you the truth, there are some standing here who will not experience death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."

Jesus Christ is going to come again with His angels in all His splendour and the glory of His Father and

will accordingly reward all those who have done His will. Moreover, the kingdom of God itself, with the good news of salvation being proclaimed to all people was to be made known before that event, and those listening to Jesus would live to see it and take part in it.

Matthew Chapter 17

The Transfiguration of Jesus

17:1 Six days later Jesus took with him Peter, James, and John the brother of James, and led them privately up a high mountain.

Six days after Peter had taken Jesus aside and remonstrated with Him for saying that He would suffer and die at Jerusalem and Jesus had rebuke Satan that He takes Peter, James and John up a high mountain to be alone.

17:2 And he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light.

While they were there Jesus was transfigured before their eyes. The word used in the original is "metamorphoo" this is where the English word metamorphosis comes from meaning to change into another form. His body remained the same shape and substance; that is it was still flesh He was still man but His Divinity as "God in the flesh" was manifest in its glorious form. This was reflected in His face like the noonday sun and on the clothes that He wore.

17:3 Then Moses and Elijah also appeared before them, talking with him.

As the disciples stood there in awesome wonder Moses and Elijah came and talked with Jesus. The Bible clearly tells us that Moses died and God buried him. Let us not be surprised that Moses now appeared in a body that was recognizable to the disciples for the dead in Christ are not a vapour or ghostly spectre but have a form.

Remember that the rich man who was in Hades recognized Abraham and Lazarus in Paradise (Luke 16:23). Elijah was taken up into heaven in a chariot of fire (2 Kings 2:11). There has been much surmising as to what Moses and Elijah were talking to Jesus about the most common being that it was concerning His forthcoming death on the cross. However, it is clearly not recording in the gospel what was said. None of the three disciples who were there say anything about hearing what was said they only saw. Whatever they were talking about was not for the disciples or us to know.

17:4 So Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you want, I will make three shelters – one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah."

Completely awestricken by what they saw Peter realizing they were very privileged to be there wanted to make three booths, shelters, for each of them. This type of shelter would only be made as a temporary measure usually made of the branches of trees. Obviously Peter was not expecting Moses and Elijah to remain long.

17:5 While he was still speaking, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my one dear Son, in whom I take great delight. Listen to him!"

Even while he was speaking a bright cloud of light enveloped them and the voice of God spoke from it declaring that Jesus was His "dearly beloved Son" in whom He takes great delight in.

17:6 When the disciples heard this, they were overwhelmed with fear and threw themselves down with their faces to the ground.

On hearing this voice the disciples were overwhelmed with fear and threw themselves down with their faces to the ground.

17:7-8 But Jesus came and touched them. "Get up," he said. "Do not be afraid." When they looked up, all they saw was Jesus alone.

Jesus came over and touched them to dispel their fears and told them to get up. When they lifted up their heads it was only Jesus that they saw Moses and Elijah had gone.

17:9 As they were coming down from the mountain, Jesus commanded them, "Do not tell anyone about the vision until the Son of Man is raised from the dead."

As they were coming down the mountain Jesus told them that they were not to tell anyone about the vision they had seen not even to the other nine disciples until after His resurrection. John refers to it at the beginning of his gospel (John 1:14).

17:10 The disciples asked him, "Why then do the experts in the law say that Elijah must come first?"

In the light of what they saw the disciples could not understand why the experts in the scriptures said that Elijah had to come before the Messiah.

17:11 He answered, "Elijah does indeed come first and will restore all things.

Jesus affirms that they were quite correct in what they said Elijah does come before the Messiah prepares the way.

17:12 And I tell you that Elijah has already come. Yet they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they wanted. In the same way, the Son of Man will suffer at their hands."

He goes on to say that Elijah has already come but he was not recognized and that they did not treat him right. In the same way they will treat the Son of Man who will suffer much at their hands.

17:13 Then the disciples understood that he was speaking to them about John the Baptist.

The disciples realized that Jesus was speaking to them about John the Baptist.

Faith, Prayer and Fasting brings deliverance

17:14-15 When they came to the crowd, a man came to him, knelt before him, and said, "Lord, have mercy on my son, because he has seizures and suffers terribly, for he often falls into the fire and into the water.

When they came down from the mountain they were confronted by a man who came and knelt before Jesus. He cries upon the Lord to have pity on him and have mercy on his son who suffers terribly from epilepsy and often fell into the fire and water.

17:16 I brought him to your disciples, but they were not able to heal him."

This man had brought his son to the disciples who remained at the foot of the mountain but they could not heal him.

17:17 Jesus answered, "You unbelieving and perverse generation! How much longer must I be with you? How much longer must I endure you? Bring him here to me."

It was not to his disciples that Jesus addressed His remarks but to the unbelieving Jews who had twisted the word of God to suit themselves. Barnes says that the word perverse means "that which is twisted or turned from the proper direction; and is often used of the eyes, when one or both are turned from their natural position." He asks how long must He put up with their faithlessness then asks the father to bring his son to him.

17:18 Then Jesus rebuked the demon and it came out of him, and the boy was healed from that moment.

In the case of this boy the epilepsy was caused by a demon and Jesus commands it to come out of the boy, and it immediately did and the boy was healed. We must make it clear that not all epilepsy is caused by demon possession.

17:19 Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, "Why couldn't we cast it out?"

Afterwards the disciples came to Jesus and asked Him why it was that they could not cast out the demon. Jesus had previously sent His disciples out on the own and given them power over unclean spirits (Matthew 10:1).

17:20 He told them, "It was because of your little faith. I tell you the truth, 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; nothing will be impossible for you."

On this occasion He tells them that they did not have enough faith. In fact it must have been smaller than a mustard seed for He says if they had faith that was no greater than the size of a mustard seed they could move mountains and nothing would be impossible for them.

17:21 However, this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting."

However the kind of demon that had possessed this boy could not be cast out by faith alone but needed pray and fasting.

Jesus foretells His betrayal, death and resurrection

17:22 When they gathered together in Galilee, Jesus told them, "The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men.

When they came together in Galilee Jesus told them that he would be betrayed and delivered into the hands of His enemies.

17:23 They will kill him, and on the third day he will be raised." And they became greatly distressed.

These would kill Him but on the third day He will be raised from the dead. On hearing this the disciples became deeply grieved.

Paying Taxes

17:24 After they arrived in Capernaum, the collectors of the temple tax came to Peter and said, "Your teacher pays the double drachma tax, doesn't he?"

On arriving in Capernaum those who collected the temple tax came and asked Peter if Jesus paid the half shekel tax (Exodus 30:13-14).

17:25 He said, "Yes." When Peter came into the house, Jesus spoke to him first, "What do you think, Simon? From whom do earthly kings collect tolls or taxes – from their sons or from foreigners?"

Peter answered yes and that went into his house. Before he could say anything Jesus asked him who did he think the kings of the earth collected taxes from - their own sons or from strangers?

17:26-27 After he said, "From foreigners," Jesus said to him, "Then the sons are free. But so that we don't offend them, go to the lake and throw out a hook. Take the first fish that comes up, and when you open its mouth, you will find a four drachma coin. Take that and give it to them for me and you

Peter answered that they collected it from foreigners. Jesus said that if this was so then the sons are free. Yet so as not to cause an offense which might hinder the officials from hearing and responding to the gospel, Jesus miraculously provides for and pays this tax.

Matthew Chapter 18

The Least shall be Greatest

18:1 At that time the disciples came to Jesus saying, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"

At the same time that Jesus had been telling His disciples that He would be betrayed and be killed the disciples came to ask Him a question. Mark tell us that the disciples had been arguing about who would be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven (Mark 9:33). They came to Jesus to ask Him who would be.

18:2 He called a child, had him stand among them,

To their amazement He calls a little child to come to Him and stands him/her in the midst of them.

18:3 and said, "I tell you the truth, unless you turn around and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven!"

He tells them of a truth that unless they are prepared to acknowledge that they need to change and become like a young child (infant). That is to have the simplicity and humbleness of a child, to think of themselves as being of no more importance than anyone else; they will never enter the kingdom of heaven (Romans 12:3,16, Galatians 6:3).

18:4 Whoever then humbles himself like this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

It is those who humble themselves like a child who will be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

18:5 And whoever welcomes a child like this in my name welcomes me.

Whoever accepts and receives a child in the Lord's Name and for His sake, it is reckoned as having received Jesus Christ. But not only Him, but also His Father who sent Him into the world to save sinners (John 13:20).

18:6 "But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a huge millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the open sea.

Having made it clear to the disciples that it is those who are considered to be the least are the greater He gives a warning against anyone who should cause the least of His disciples to fall into sin. These people would be better off if they were thrown into the deepest sea with a huge millstone tied around their neck.

Causing Offence

18:7 Woe to the world because of stumbling blocks! It is necessary that stumbling blocks come, but woe to the person through whom they come.

Great sorry is in the world because of the offences of sin and the temptation to sin. Temptations are inevitable but pity the person who does the tempting!

18:8 If your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life crippled or lame than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into eternal fire.

We must point out here that Jesus is not advocating that a hand or foot should be cut off or an eye plucked out literally. The disciples must have clearly understood that it was not meant literally for they neither practised nor preached it.

What did Jesus mean? In the three examples of the anatomy given there are five things that are repeated in them all.

"Offend" in the KJV, sin in the NKJV this does not mean to upset or annoy but to be a stumbling block and to cause to sin.

"Cut it off" this means to mortify or to account as being unable to perform a function because the part is considered dead. In Rom. 6: 6 Paul puts it this way "our old self was nailed to the cross with Him (Christ) in order that our body which is the instrument of sin, might be made ineffective, and inactive for evil, that we may no longer be the slaves of sin" (Amp. N.T.). How are we able to do this when there are so many temptations that we find very hard to resist? Paul gives us the answer to this "Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfil the lusts of the flesh" (Gal. 5:16). So we do not cut off parts of our body but when we are tempted to use them to sin we are to consider them as unable to do such things because they crucified with Christ.

"Life" Although it may appear that to take this action we lose out in life in fact we gain for we are able to live the life that Christ has given us the abundant, full, rich life in Him: "for me to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Phil. 1:21).

"Hell" (Gehenna), death. There is only one alternative to eternal life and that is the second death where those who have not received Jesus Christ as their Saviour shall go by their own choice by choosing to live a life of sin rather than life in Christ.

"Eternal torment" The first death nor the second death will mean annihilation but that the penalty for sin will go on forever (Rev. 14:11).

"If your hand". With the hand we take, we hold onto, we do things. If we are tempted to steal, hold on to things we should not, or do things that we should not. "If your foot". With our feet we go places. If we are tempted to go to places that we should not (Psalm 1:1) then we must take action to stop doing these things or going to these places.

18:9 And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter into life with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into fiery hell.

"If your eye". Jesus said "the light of the body is the eye" (Matt. 6:22) with the eye we see and obtain understanding. What we see enters our minds and our hearts more readily than by any other means. If we are tempted to read or look at things that are unwholesome then we must turn away from them (1 John 2:16). It is better to go throughout life without these things that tempt us than be thrown into hell.

18:10 "See that you do not disdain one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven.

Referring again to those "little ones" that is babes in Christ those who have a simple faith He says that they are not be looked down upon with disdain to esteem them of no worth. In heaven their angels always have access into the presence of God (Hebrews 1:14).

Lost and Found

18:11 For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost.

The sole purpose in Jesus Christ coming from heaven to earth and taking upon himself a body of flesh was to come and save those who are lost in sin.

18:12 What do you think? If someone owns a hundred sheep and one of them goes astray, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go look for the one that went astray?

A farmer owns a hundred sheep but one of them wanders off, what will he do? Will he turn his back upon it and leave it to pay the penalty for its folly? No, he leaves the ninety nine on the hills and goes looking for the one that is lost.

18:13 And if he finds it, I tell you the truth, he will rejoice more over it than over the ninety-nine that did not go astray.

His efforts are rewarded for he finds his lost sheep and he brings it back home rejoicing more over it than the others who had not gone astray.

18:14 In the same way, your Father in heaven is not willing that one of these little ones be lost.

Just as the farmer with his sheep so God love is for all who have gone astray (Isaiah 53:6). He is not willing that any should perish but that all should repent and be saved (2 Peter 3:9). He has a love and concerned for every individually person and does everything that is possible to bring the sinner to Himself (John 3:16).

Putting Things Right

18:15 "Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother.

If a brother or sister in the Lord wrongs you or offends you then do not neglect to do anything about it in case it causes a bitterness to grow in your heart. To not spread it abroad but go to him or her on your own and seek to put the matter right. If he or she puts it right with you then you have won that person back.

18:16 But if he does not listen, take one or two others with you, so that at the testimony of two or three witnesses every matter may be established.

If however he or she refuses to listen to you then take one or two brothers in Christ with and try again. This is in accordance with the Word of God for by the testimony of two witnesses shall a matter be proved (Deuteronomy 19:15).

18:17 If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. If he refuses to listen to the church, treat him like a Gentile or a tax collector.

If he or she still refuses to listen to them then the matter must be brought before the church. If he or she will

not take heed to the church then he or she are to be treated like a pagan, and unbeliever a sinner.

Unity

18:18 "I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will have been bound in heaven, and whatever you release on earth will have been released in heaven.

Jesus here repeats what He had said in Matthew 16:19 that all who are Christ's can bind things on earth and it shall happen because they have been bound in heaven and whatever is loosed on earth will be done because it has been loosed in heaven.

18:19 Again, I tell you the truth, if two of you on earth agree about whatever you ask, my Father in heaven will do it for you.

He further adds to this that if two of His followers agree to come together as one to ask something of the Father in Heaven then it will be done.

18:20 For where two or three are assembled in my name, I am there among them."

Jesus gave this certain promise that wherever two or three come together in His Name that He would be there with them.

Always Forgive

18:21 Then Peter came to him and said, "Lord, how many times must I forgive my brother who sins against me? As many as seven times?"

Peter having listened to all the Lord had said about offending and doing wrong against brother or sister

asks the Lord how many times then should be prepared to forgive someone who has sinned against him. Is there a limit to this say seven times?

18:22 Jesus said to him, "Not seven times, I tell you, but seventy-seven times!"

I wonder if Peter was surprised by the answer that Jesus gave him. Perhaps he thought to himself "well I could forgive seven times but that's as far as I'm prepared to go". In fact Jesus tells him and us that there is no limit to the number of times that we should forgive, although He says 490 times. Let us not be like the little boy who was determined to write down in a notebook every time his older brother did something that was not nice to him. He would forgive him the 490 times but then he could look out after that.

18:23 "For this reason, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his slaves."

Jesus then proceeds to liken the kingdom of heaven to a king who wanted to bring his accounts up to date to know who owed money.

18:24 As he began settling his accounts, a man who owed ten thousand talents was brought to him.

At the commencing of doing this a man was brought before him who owed an exceeding large amount of money.

18:25 Because he was not able to repay it, the lord ordered him to be sold, along with his wife, children, and whatever he possessed, and repayment to be made.

We are not told what he had done with all this money but the point is that he owed it and could not pay it back. In order to regain his losses the king ordered him, his wife and children to be sold and all of his possessions.

18:26 Then the slave threw himself to the ground before him, saying, 'Be patient with me, and I will repay you everything.'

This man threw himself on the ground and begged the king to be patient with him and he would repay everything he owed.

18:27 The lord had compassion on that slave and released him, and forgave him the debt.

His master had compassion on his servant and gave him back his freedom and cancelled the debt that he owed. All have sinned and come short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23) and the soul that sins shall die (Ezekiel 18:4) therefore we owe a debt to God that we cannot repay but Jesus Christ paid that debt for us upon the cross (1 Peter 1:18). Jesus Christ has set us free (John 8:36)

18:28 After he went out, that same slave found one of his fellow slaves who owed him one hundred silver coins. So he grabbed him by the throat and started to choke him, saying, 'Pay back what you owe me!'

However this man did not go out and do as his master had done for him. He went to a fellow servant who owed him a comparatively small amount and demanded by force that he should repay straight away.

18:29-30 Then his fellow slave threw himself down and begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will repay you.' But

he refused. Instead, he went out and threw him in prison until he repaid the debt.

In the same way that this man had thrown himself on the mercy of the king so his fellow servant did before him begging for time to repay but he refused to do so and threw him into prison.

18:31 When his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were very upset and went and told their lord everything that had taken place.

When some of the other servants saw this they were very grieved and went to the king and told him about it.

18:32 Then his lord called the first slave and said to him, 'Evil slave! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me!'

The king summoned the man to be brought before him and justly called him a wicked servant for he had been set free and his debt cancelled when he had beseech the king to spare him.

18:33 Should you not have shown mercy to your fellow slave, just as I showed it to you?'

He should have therefore followed the example and in turn shown mercy upon his fellow servant who was in exactly the same position as he had been (Matthew 10:8,).

18:34 And in anger his lord turned him over to the prison guards to torture him until he repaid all he owed.

The king was so angry that he handed the man over to the jailers to tortured him until he had repaid all that he owed.

18:35 So also my heavenly Father will do to you, if each of you does not forgive your brother from your heart."

In the same way, those who refuse to forgive others are closing their hearts to God's forgiveness, without which an eternal punishment awaits.

Matthew Chapter 19

Marriage and Divorce

19:1 Now when Jesus finished these sayings, he left Galilee and went to the region of Judea beyond the Jordan River.

After he had taught his disciples about forgiveness, Jesus again left Galilee and crossed the River Jordan into Judea.

19:2 Large crowds followed him, and he healed them there.

News of Jesus ministry, and particularly of his healing ministry, had spread rapidly until almost everywhere he went large crowds gathered to him. They had come for healing and he healed them all.

19:3 Then some Pharisees came to him in order to test him. They asked, "Is it lawful to divorce a wife for any cause?"

Some of the religious rulers who belonged to the strict sect of Pharisees also came to Jesus, but they sought neither healing nor blessing. They wanted to catch him in his words that they might discredit his ministry among the people. Their question is about a point of Jewish law, given by Moses. Does the Law of Moses permit divorce, and if so under what circumstances?"

19:4-6 He answered, "Have you not read that from the beginning the Creator made them male and female, and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and will be united with his wife, and the two will

become one flesh'? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate."

Jesus replied with reference to the original Creation. Marriage was ordained of God from the beginning, for God saw that it was not good for man to be alone. So he made for man a helper comparable to him, and she was his wife. In this way marriage was ordained for mutual fellowship. Male and female he created them. It was ordained by the wisdom of God that when a man reached the age when he wished to leave father and mother, that he should marry a wife, and be united sexually with her. In this way marriage was ordained for the procreation of children, and as a pure way of fulfilling the natural sexual desires which come as the result of the Creator, "Making them male and female". Having been joined together, they would no more be two but one flesh. Since it is God who has joined man and woman together as one, no man has the authority (for it would necessarily be greater than God's) to separate them. Man cannot undo a union formed by His creator.

19:7 They said to him, "Why then did Moses command us to give a certificate of dismissal and to divorce her?"

Still wishing to test Jesus, the Pharisees demanded to know why, if God opposed divorce, Moses gave instructions relating to legal divorce and permit the issuing of divorce certificates.

19:8 Jesus said to them, "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because of your hard hearts, but from the beginning it was not this way.

Jesus explains that Moses realised some marital situations as untenable, particularly since the hearts of men were hardened to any other solution, and so permitted separation as the lesser of two evils. Such a law might at least provide a measure of restraint against the tide of fornication and adultery. But this action was permitted rather than desired and Jesus makes clear that it was certainly not God's will for man from the beginning, but rather was because of the results of sin that a law was introduced to minimise sin.

19:9 Now I say to you that whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another commits adultery."

Here is a greater authority than Moses. What Christ says applies to all throughout the Christian dispensation. Whoever divorces his wife and re marries commits adultery in the sight of God, no matter what neither the law of the land nor the policy of the church may be. Divorce is only permitted when one partner has been unfaithful (i.e. has committed adultery), and separation is only permitted when an unbelieving partner leaves because of the gospel. Jesus also makes clear in Matt. 5:32 that the divorced woman is not to remarry, since this is adultery. For a minister of the gospel to conduct the marriage service of a divorcee is for him to condone adultery, undermine the sacredness of marriage and of the family unit, and to be a partaker in other men's sins. Note: If the Lord of Glory (who knows every situation that can possibly arise) had meant there to be exceptions to this rule, he would have said so.

19:10 The disciples said to him, "If this is the case of a husband with a wife, it is better not to marry!"

The disciples, many of whom were married men, thought that if the situation between a husband and a wife was so bad that they were actively seeking a divorce, then it would have been better for them never to have married in the first place! Divorce is as bad as it gets, God refers to it as an act of violence, tearing apart rather than healing and reconciling (Mal. 2:16).

19:11 He said to them, "Not everyone can accept this statement, except those to whom it has been given."

Jesus realized that men and women marry because of the real needs which they have as part of God's creation. Specifically, most men and women need to find the satisfaction of their need for a sexual relationship, and that relationship has been provided for by God in the marriage state (Heb. 13:4). However, Jesus (who knows all) knew also that some people are able to live perfectly happily without a sexual partner.

19:12 For there are some eunuchs who were that way from birth, and some who were made eunuchs by others, and some who became eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. The one who is able to accept this should accept it."

Some of these are born that way, (eunuchs from birth), they simply are happy to remain single all their lives. Jesus is saying that this is the right course, if it is the natural course for them. Something in their make-up makes it less necessary for them to have a sexual partner. Others, says Jesus, were made eunuchs by men, that is (understand that Jesus said this in the days of slaves) they have been castrated, and so no longer have any sexual desires at all. Likewise, some have heard the call of God in such a way that they are completely abandoned to him,

and have made up their minds not to get married, for the sake of giving their time fully to the work of God. They are gifted with enough self-control to channel their energies into the work of God. Paul expands on this theme in 1 Cor. 7, where he makes plain that the man or woman who is able to refrain from marriage is gifted by God in this respect, and should use this gift well, for it is better to remain unmarried. But for those who feel a sexual desire, it is better to marry than to burn with lust, resulting in immorality. As a result of the fall, marriage will never be perfect, but it is still an estate ordained by God, and is regarded as a means of avoiding immorality.

Little Children

19:13 Then little children were brought to him for him to lay his hands on them and pray. But the disciples scolded those who brought them.

The result of the marriage union will be children. Every caring parent wants the best for their child, and what could be better than to seek the Lord of glory that he might bless our children? Mothers and fathers brought their children to Jesus for this reason. But the over wrought disciples rebuked them, for they thought their master too busy for children, implying that children were not as important as adults.

19:14-15 But Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me and do not try to stop them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these. And he placed his hands on them and went on his way.

Here is one of the few places in the New Testament where Jesus is angered. To him, each child was a precious human being with a living soul, loved by God every bit as much as his father or mother. What is

more, every child is capable of receiving spiritual blessing, and many were already old enough to receive spiritual instruction, in particular, the kind of instruction which comes by participation. If they could not learn much from Jesus' preaching, yet they could learn much from his love and his welcome. By refusing to welcome them, the disciples were in danger of misrepresenting God to the children. The kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these – each one could be saved and receive God's eternal blessings.

Modern surveys suggest that most people who become Christians do so before their 16th birthday. Children's ministry is not a second rate ministry, it is on the cutting edge. A church without an active children's ministry is a lopsided church, and is out of touch with the heart of God for children. Jesus heart always reached out to children; may we do the same.

What must I do to Gain Eternal Life?

19:16 Now someone came up to him and said, "Teacher, what good thing must I do to gain eternal life?"

The scripture offers two ways in which we might obtain eternal life. The first was by the keeping of the law and commandments of God, and the other is by faith in Jesus Christ who fulfilled the law for us. Because of sin, every single man and woman has already failed to be right with God through keeping the law. All have sinned and come short of the glory of God. That is why "By the deeds of the law, no flesh shall be justified" (Rom 3:20). Jesus wanted to help the young man realise that he was a sinner. Notice how Jesus says that there is only one good, which is God, implying that "there is no man good, no not one" (Rom. 3:12). The commandments which the young

man had kept in letter he had broken in spirit, even as to be angry with one's brother without cause is to commit murder. If he had kept many of the commandments, yet to break one law is to be a rebel against the law-giver (James 2:10).

19:17-20 He said to him, "Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only one who is good. But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments. Which ones?" he asked. Jesus replied, "Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, honor your father and mother, and love your neighbour as yourself. The young man said to him, "I have wholeheartedly obeyed all these laws. What do I still lack?"

Jesus firstly mentions only those commands which relate to the young man's relationship with other people, and the man insists that with regard to his duty to man he has been upright and wholehearted in his law keeping. Yet there was something lacking, he had "fallen short" of the glory of God.

19:21-22 Jesus said to him, "If you wish to be perfect, go sell your possessions and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." But when the young man heard this he went away sorrowful, for he was very rich.

Jesus now turns his attention to the man's relationship with God. And in this test, he fails utterly. The law demands that a man love God with all his heart, mind, soul, and strength (Deut. 6:5). Jesus himself had said that it is impossible to serve God and money (Luke 16:13). Yet when the young man is challenged to put his relationship with God first, before his money, he fails to do so,

revealing that he does not love the Lord his God with all his heart at all.

19:23-24 Then Jesus said to his disciples, "I tell you the truth, it will be hard for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven! Again I say, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter into the kingdom of God."

With sorrow in his heart, Jesus tells his disciples that a rich man is not easily parted from his love of money. It is not that it is wrong to have money or worldly possessions, but when holding on to those possessions is what keeps a man from the kingdom of heaven, then they are deadly possessions indeed, for they will damn a man's soul. No wonder James writes: "Your gold and silver have rusted and their rust will be a witness against you. It will consume your flesh like fire. It is in the last days that you have hoarded treasure!" (James 5:3) The only way for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God is for him to forego, or denounce his riches. Jesus asks us to part with all for his name sake, and sometimes this will literally mean the loss of all worldly possessions. It may not literally come to that in each case, but in each case a man must be prepared and willing for it to come to that. A man must realise that we have more enduring treasures in heaven (Heb. 10:34).

19:25-26 The disciples were greatly astonished when they heard this and said, "Then who can be saved?" Jesus looked at them and replied, "This is impossible for mere humans, but for God all things are possible."

Of course, it is impossible for a camel to enter the eye of a needle. It is also impossible for a man to enter the kingdom of God, without a miracle. But it is God who

provides the miracle, and in the hearts of those who are willing to hear and obey the gospel, whether they are rich or poor, he will perform this miracle of salvation. For all things are possible with God.

19:27 Then Peter said to him, "Look, we have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?"

Peter realised that his commitment to follow the Lord Jesus Christ had meant him forsaking all. If the rich who failed to follow Christ were not blessed, what of the poor who did follow Christ? "What's in it for me?" is a paraphrase of Peter's question.

19:28-30 Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth: In the age when all things are renewed, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And whoever has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last first."

Christ promises eternal blessings to all who forsake all to follow him. We are never the losers with God. Whether we are great (first) or small (least), We possess greater things than this world could ever provide. In this case, Jesus tells Peter that he and the other apostles will obtain a position of rank and authority, the honour of being seen as his esteemed servants. This will be when "the Son of Man sits on His glorious throne", which is after the resurrection of the saints. Then shall honour be given to all those who truly follow Christ. Yet even in this life, by entering in and partaking of the kingdom of God, we receive great riches through our relationships with others who are also in the kingdom.

They will be to us brothers and sisters, fathers and mothers in Israel, and their homes and hospitality shall be at our disposal. Peter later found that the needs of the missionary were met by the people whom he laboured among, or those who financially supported his work (1 Cor. 9:4-7).

Matthew Chapter 20

God Deals Justly

20:1 "For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard.

This parable follows on from Peter's statement in the previous chapter when he said to the Lord "See, we have left all and followed You. Therefore what shall we have?" He uses the illustration of a landowner who goes out early in the morning to find workers to work in his vineyard.

20:2 And after agreeing with the workers for the standard wage, he sent them into his vineyard.

He agreed with those he had hired to pay the standard wage for those days which was a Roman penny worth about seven and half pence.

20:3-4 When it was about nine o'clock in the morning, he went out again and saw others standing around in the marketplace without work. He said to them, 'You go into the vineyard too, and I will give you whatever is right.'

At about nine o'clock he went to the marketplace and saw other men standing about doing nothing. He engaged them to go and work in his vineyard also and told them he would pay them a fair wage at the end of the day.

20:5 So they went. When he went out again about noon and three o'clock that afternoon, he did the same thing.

So they went to the work. The landowner went out again to the marketplace at twelve o'clock and three o'clock and employed those who were hanging around and agreed to pay the same wage to these.

20:6 And about five o'clock that afternoon he went out and found others standing around, and said to them, 'Why are you standing here all day without work?'

At five o'clock in the afternoon he found other men standing around and asked them why they were not working.

20:7 They said to him, 'Because no one hired us.' He said to them, 'You go and work in the vineyard too.'

They replied that no one had hired them so he also told them to go and work in his vineyard. The point being made at this part of the illustration is the different times of day that these men were employed.

20:8 When it was evening the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, 'Call the workers and give the pay starting with the last hired until the first.'

At the end of the day the owner of the vineyard told his manager to call the workers to him that he might pay them starting with the last men who were hired.

20:9-10 When those hired about five o'clock came, each received a full day's pay. And when those hired first came, they thought they would receive more. But each one also received the standard wage.

He paid those who had worked the least hours a full day's pay. The workers who had worked all day from early morning thought that they would be paid more. But each one received the standard wage.

20:11-12 When they received it, they began to complain against the landowner, saying, 'These last fellows worked one hour, and you have made them equal to us who bore the hardship and burning heat of the day.'

When they saw that they had received the same amount as those who had only worked for an hour they complained to the owner. It was not fair that those who had only worked a very short time should receive equal pay with those who had worked hard all through the burning hot sun all day.

20:13 And the landowner replied to one of them, 'Friend, I am not treating you unfairly. Didn't you agree with me to work for the standard wage?'

This might seem unjust to us also but the owner told them that he was not treating them unjustly they had agreed to work for the standard wage and that is what he paid them.

20:14 Take what is yours and go. I want to give to this last man the same as I gave to you.

Without further to do he told them to take their money and go. As the owner of the vineyard if he chose to pay the last man the same as them what was that to do with them.

20:15 Am I not permitted to do what I want with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?'

It was no business of theirs if he chose to do with his money what he wanted to. If he wanted to be generous why should they be jealous?

20:16 So the last will be first, and the first last." For many are called, but few chosen."

The whole purpose of Jesus telling His disciples this parable is this concluding verse. The first to be called into the kingdom of heaven will have no advantage over those who enter in later. All are equal in the sight of God (Deuteronomy 10:17, Ephesians 6:9). There are many who hear the call of the gospel message but there are few in proportion that obey and are saved. It is Jesus Christ who will give out the rewards at his coming and no one can complain at what they may receive for God is a just God (Revelation 22: 12).

Jesus Foretells His Death for the Third Time

20:17-18 As Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he took the twelve aside privately and said to them on the way, "Look, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and the experts in the law. They will condemn him to death,

On their way to Jerusalem Jesus took the twelve disciples aside and told them again the reason why they were going up to Jerusalem at this time. Those who were conspiring against Him would hand Him over to the chief priests and scribes and they will condemn Him to death.

20:19 and will turn him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged severely and crucified. Yet on the third day, he will be raised."

They in their turn will hand Him over to the Romans to be made fun of and to be flogged and then crucified. But on the third day He would be triumphantly raised to life from the dead!

To Minister and not be Ministered To

20:20 Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came to him with her sons, and kneeling down she asked him for a favour.

The mother of James and John sons of Zebedee came to Jesus with them and kneeling in worship before Him asked a favour.

20:21 He said to her, "What do you want?" She replied, "Permit these two sons of mine to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your kingdom."

In response to Jesus asking her what the request was she asked him to allow her sons to sit one on His right hand and the other on the left. In chapter 19 verse 28 Jesus had promised His twelve disciples that they would sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. Perhaps it was in response to this that James and John sought to obtain a greater position than the other disciples.

20:22 But Jesus answered and said, "You do not know what you ask. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" They said to Him, "We are able." (NKJV™)

Jesus tells them that they have no idea what they asking for and challenges them. Are they able to drink the cup that He is about to drink? (Matthew 26:39). The cup that He partook was our sins, the sins of the whole world! (2 Corinthians 5:21). They replied without realizing

what He meant that they were. Were they able to be baptized with the baptism that He is baptized with? This baptism refers to His sufferings and death upon the cross. 'Yes they were' was their bold reply!

20:23 He told them, "You will drink my cup, but to sit at my right and at my left is not mine to give. Rather, it is for those for whom it has been prepared by my Father."

Jesus foretells that they would indeed drink of His cup but to sit on His right hand and at His left was not His to give but will be given to whosoever the God the Father has chosen.

20:24 Now when the other ten heard this, they were angry with the two brothers.

When the other disciples heard what James and John had been up to they were not very happy.

20:25 But Jesus called them and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those in high positions use their authority over them.

Jesus called the twelve disciples to Him and reminds them of a fact that they saw every day concerning the Romans that ruled over them. The rulers in Gentile nations rule with a rod of iron and dominate their people and those who are given positions of authority do the same thing.

20:26-27 It must not be this way among you! Instead whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you must be your slave –

This must not been so among His followers; it has to be the complete opposite. Whoever is given authority within Christ's church, His body, (Colossians 1:18) must serve Christ's people. Whoever wants to have first place must be a servant.

20:28 just as the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Jesus Christ was the prime example of this all He had all authority and power as the Son of God yet He did not come to be waited upon but ministered, work and cared, for others and to give His life as a ransom to redeem many souls.

Two Blind Men

20:29 As they were leaving Jericho, a large crowd followed them.

As they were leaving Jericho to continue their journey to Jerusalem a large crowd followed them.

20:30 Two blind men were sitting by the road. When they heard that Jesus was passing by, they shouted, "Have mercy on us, Lord, Son of David!"

As they were leaving Jericho two men who sitting by the side of the roadside begging heard that Jesus was coming that way so began shouting out to Him to have mercy upon them. They acknowledged that He was Lord, which had supreme authority; the promised Son of David the promise Messiah (Psalm 132:11-12).

20:31 The crowd scolded them to get them to be quiet. But they shouted even more loudly, "Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!"

The crowds yelled at them to be quiet but they shouted all the louder.

20:32 Jesus stopped, called them, and said, "What do you want me to do for you?"

Jesus on hearing them stopped and called out and asked what it was they wanted from Him.

20:33 They said to him, "Lord, let our eyes be opened."

They had no doubt that Jesus was able to give them their sight. They in simple faith asked Him to.

20:34 Moved with compassion, Jesus touched their eyes. Immediately they received their sight and followed him.

Matthew Chapter 21

Entry to Jerusalem

21:1 Now when they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethpage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples,

Jesus was about to enter Jerusalem for the last time, drawing near the city he arrived at a village called Bethpage on the slopes of the Mount of Olives.

21:2 Telling them, "Go to the village ahead of you. Right away you will find a donkey tied there, and a colt with her. Untie them and bring them to me.

He sent two of his disciples, we are not told which two, into the village to obtain transport. God had been foreordained that the Christ should enter Jerusalem sitting on a donkey and her colt. No one else was party to the arrangements. The colt and donkey were in their appointed place. The disciples, under the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, were to untie them and bring them to Jesus.

21:3 If anyone says anything to you, you are to say, 'The Lord needs them,' and he will send them at once."

No one could actually resist this authority of the Lord, but if any one challenged the disciples, they were to reply with the words Jesus had given them. If the Creator chose to commandeer his creation for his own purposes who was to stop him? Later, at his arrest, his enemies would find that even they were in his hands (John 18:6), but here at Bethpage; we see Christ in his absolute sovereignty, yet gentle and humble.

21:4-5 This took place to fulfil what was spoken by the prophet: Tell the people of Zion, 'Look, your king is coming to you, unassuming and seated on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.' "

This event had all been predicted by the prophet Zechariah, that the Christ would show both his authority and yet his gentleness and humility as he rode into Zion (Jerusalem) on a donkey's foal. Warriors rode into battle on mighty horses, but thank God that our King is King of peace, not king of war.

21:6 So the disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them.

Obedience to Jesus Christ always requires faith, the disciples carried out their instructions without doubting.

21:7 They brought the donkey and the colt and placed their cloaks on them, and he sat on them.

As a mark of respect for Christ, the disciples first put their own outer coats on the donkey before Christ rode on it, acting as both a cushion and saddle.

21:8 A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road. Others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road.

The same respect due to a king was shown by the great crowd of followers who had accompanied Christ from Galilee and the surrounding area. They lay their cloaks on the road, or if they had no cloaks they strewed the road with palm branches to make a carpet for the king to ride on. In modern terms we would say they "rolled out the red carpet" for the king.

21:9 The crowds that went ahead of him and those following kept shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!"

Inspired by the Spirit of God, the disciples began shouting their praises to the Lord as he entered Jerusalem. They recognised him as Christ, the King, the Son of David. They knew him to be the One sent by God, who would bring God's salvation (hosanna means, Lord save us, or salvation). They knew him to be king of the highest glory.

21:10-11 As he entered Jerusalem the whole city was thrown into an uproar, saying, "Who is this?" And the crowds were saying, "This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth in Galilee."

These verses shed light on the age old problem concerning this passage. Many preachers have said that the same crowds who shouted hosanna on Palm Sunday shouted Crucify him less than a week later. Nothing could be further from the truth. The crowds which accompanied him from Galilee shouted Hosanna as he entered Jerusalem. The crowds already in Jerusalem met him with hostility "Who is this?" was their discourteous question. It was this Jerusalem crowd that later shouted for his blood early one morning, as the followers from Galilee were mostly camped without the city.

Cleansing the Temple

21:12 Then Jesus entered the temple area and drove out all those who were selling and buying in the temple courts, and turned over the tables of the money changers and the chairs of those selling doves.

The New Testament records that Jesus had visited the temple several times before this (e.g. Luke 2:41-42) It is likely that in accordance with the law, he had visited it every year since he came of age. It was not that the buying and selling had only just started that year. This was no sudden act of anger or passion. Christ had long planned this show of authority. The time had come. He had come to rid false religion from the land and bring in the true. Disrespect for God is hateful to Christ in every age and generation. Some modern churches ought to remember this.

21:13 And he said to them, "It is written, 'My house will be called a house of prayer,' but you are turning it into a den of robbers!"

Contrary to what some commentators have implied, Christ was not angry that the poor were being cheated. Note his words, as they disclose the reason for his anger. The holy place where God was to be worshipped, the house of God and the house of prayer, was being treated with irreverence. The matter of cheating the people (den of robbers) was a serious one, but entirely secondary to the honour and glory of his father.

What is your attitude when you come to the house of God for worship? DO you come to meet with God in worship? Do you treat his presence with the awe it deserves? OR do you treat being in God's presence in God's house as no different to being in your sitting room chatting to your friends?

21:14 The blind and lame came to him in the temple courts, and he healed them.

It is always the will of God that men and women should find healing in his house and in his presence. No special occasion was needed, just the presence of Jesus. In our churches, he is present, for "where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there in the midst of them" (Matt. 18:20).

21:15 But when the chief priests and the experts in the law saw the wonderful things he did and heard the children crying out in the temple courts, "Hosanna to the Son of David," they became indignant

The indignation of the chief priests came from their unbelief. Had they known and accepted who Christ was, they would not have been put out by his healing ministry or by the fact that he received praise as God in God's temple. For a man to be angry with God reveals the true nature of their hearts, that they are enemies of God through wicked works.

21:16 and said to him, "Do you hear what they are saying?" Jesus said to them, "Yes. Have you never read, 'Out of the mouths of children and nursing infants you have prepared praise for yourself?'"

The Pharisees were so opposed to Christ that they begrudged him the praises of the children. Unbelief results in envy and jealousy. Yet Christ saw their praised the fulfilment of scripture. The witness of the children was the greatest of the day, for who had taught them to say such things? Not their parents. It was unplanned, but spontaneous by divine inspiration. It is as if Jesus tells the Pharisees, "listen to the children, for they will tell you the truth about me."

21:17 And leaving them, he went out of the city to Bethany and spent the night there.

It is significant that although Christ had ridden triumphantly into the city that day, he was so unwelcome there that he was given no place to stay. He resorted to a little house almost two miles away where he was welcome, quite probably the home of Lazarus, Martha and Mary. Even Christ found the home of love to be the preferred place of lodging, rather than the places of the mighty (Prov. 15:17).

The Fig Tree

21:18 Now early in the morning, as he returned to the city, he was hungry.

Early next morning, Jesus returned on foot to the city of Jerusalem. We have no reason to doubt that he had not been offered breakfast by his hosts at Bethany, but nevertheless he was hungry.

21:19 After noticing a fig tree by the road he went to it, but found nothing on it except leaves. He said to it, "Never again will there be fruit from you!" And the fig tree withered at once.

God had provided fruit trees for mankind's food (Gen. 2:9) We are not sure whether ,before mankind fell into sin, the trees bear fruit every month, as they do (typically) in heaven. Yet the fig tree was not in season, and was not fulfilling the purpose God had for it. The Creator himself was unable to find food on it. By inference, the people of Jerusalem were not fulfilling God's will either, and whereas the master should have found the fruit of love and obedience, he found the bitterness of rejection.

What happened to the fig tree would be a picture of what would happen to Jerusalem as a result of their rejection.

21:20 When the disciples saw it they were amazed, saying, "How did the fig tree wither so quickly?"

The withering of the fig tree was noticed immediately, and its complete death was referred to by Peter later that day. They had seen Christ heal immediately, perhaps their amazement stemmed from the fact that they had never seen Christ's word acting in judgment before.

21:21 Jesus answered them, "I tell you the truth, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only will you do what was done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, 'Be lifted up and thrown into the sea,' it will happen.

Here, Jesus uses the withering fig tree as an object lesson of faith for his disciples. What he has done, they will do, if they have faith in God. Indeed, by faith in God nothing is impossible. God does not wish us to tell mountains to fall into the sea, but should he call upon us to do so, we can.

21:22 And whatever you ask in prayer, if you believe, you will receive."

When we pray, we must bear in mind the mighty power of God, and believe that we will receive, else what is the point of prayer? If we believe that God hears and has answered us, we shall receive from Him the answer.

By Whose Authority?

21:23 Now after Jesus entered the temple courts, the chief priests and elders of the people came up to him as he was

teaching and said, “By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?”

Jesus returns to Jerusalem after staying the night in Bethany and again enters the Temple and begins teaching the people about the Kingdom of God. The chief priests and scribes who are joined by the elders, these would be the heads of the tribes and clans of the Jewish nation confront Him. They want to know by whose authority He had the previous day driven out the buyers and sellers from the Temple. But more than this they questioned His authority to teach the people about the things of God. After all He was not a qualified man He did not have letters after His name! Who had given Him this authority? In asking this they were in fact acknowledging that He spoke as one having authority (Luke 4:36, Matthew 28:18).

21:24 Jesus answered them, “I will also ask you one question. If you answer me then I will also tell you by what authority I do these things.

Jesus replied that if they would give Him an answer to a question He has for them then He would tell them by whose authority He was doing these things.

21:25 Where did John’s baptism come from? From heaven or from people?” They discussed this among themselves, saying, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ he will say, ‘Then why did you not believe him?’

Did John’s authority to baptise come from heaven or did it come from men? They put their heads together and discussed this question amongst themselves. They knew that if they said that John’s authority was from

heaven then Jesus would ask them why they did not repent and believe his teaching.

21:26 But if we say, 'From people,' we fear the crowd, for they all consider John to be a prophet."

They were too afraid of what the people would do to them if they said that John's authority was of men because the people believed John to be a prophet.

21:27 So they answered Jesus, "We don't know." Then he said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.

So they played safe and answered Jesus that they did not know from whom John had received his authority. They did not meet the condition of the Lord's question to them so He did not tell them who had given Him His authority.

Surrendering to Divine Authority

21:28 "What do you think? A man had two sons. He went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work in the vineyard today.'

Jesus did not leave it there but went on to tell them a parable about a man who had two sons. He went to the elder son and asked him to go and work in the vineyard today.

21:29 The boy answered, 'I will not.' But later he had a change of heart and went.

Without hesitation this son said that he would not go but later on repented and went.

21:30 The father went to the other son and said the same thing. This boy answered, 'I will, sir,' but did not go.

The father not put off by his elder son refusal went and asked his younger son who politely said that he would go but he did not.

21:31 Which of the two did his father's will?" They said, "The first." Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, tax collectors and prostitutes will go ahead of you into the kingdom of God!

Jesus asked these people which of the two sons did the will of their father. That was an easy question it was obviously the elder son. The parable was given to bring home to these religious leaders that they were like the second son who said he would go and work in the vineyard but did not. They were making pretence of serving God but were not surrendering to His Divine will but doing their own thing. Jesus told them that the dregs of society will enter the kingdom of heaven before they did.

21:32 For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him. But the tax collectors and prostitutes did believe. Although you saw this, you did not later change your minds and believe him.

John the Baptist came preaching repentance and the right way to live but they would not believe him. It was the people who they considered in their self-righteousness were sinners that gladly heard and believe. Although they saw the response from these "sinners" and the change in their lives they still did not believe John's message.

Rejecting the Son Jesus Christ

21:33 "Listen to another parable: There was a landowner who planted a vineyard. He put a fence around it, dug a pit for its winepress, and built a watchtower. Then he leased it to tenant farmers and went on a journey.

The first parable was to show the religious leaders of Israel their rejection of John the Baptist preaching. This second one will show them their rejection of the Son of God, Jesus Christ. A man who owned land planted a vineyard and enclosed it with a fence. Then he dug a pit to put its winepress in and built a watchtower to guard it. He rented his vineyard out to tenant farmers and went away.

21:34 When the harvest time was near, he sent his slaves to the tenants to collect his portion of the crop.

When the time came to harvest the grapes he sent his servants to the tenants to collect a portion of the crop.

21:35 But the tenants seized his slaves, beat one, killed another, and stoned another.

However the tenants took hold of his servants beat one and killed another and stoned another one.

21:36 Again he sent other slaves, more than the first, and they treated them the same way.

He was not put off by the brutal treatment of the his servants so he sent another lot greater in number than the first but they did the same to these.

21:37 Finally he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.'

Eventually he sent his own only son believing that they would show respect for him.

21:38 But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, 'This is the heir. Come, let's kill him and get his inheritance!'

But when the tenants saw the son they said among themselves this is the heir if we kill him then the inheritance will be ours.

21:39 So they seized him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him.

So they laid hands upon him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.

21:40 Now when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?"

Jesus asked the religious leaders what the owner of the vineyard would do to those tenants when he came back.

21:41 They said to him, "He will utterly destroy those evil men! Then he will lease the vineyard to other tenants who will give him his portion at the harvest."

They rightly answered that he would completely destroy these evil men and will rent out his vineyard to other tenants who would give him the portion of the harvest that he asked for.

21:42 Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the scriptures: The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. This is from the Lord, and it is marvellous in our eyes"?

To bring out the truth of the parable Jesus asks them if they knew the scriptures and quotes to them from Psalm 118: 22 (see also Isaiah 8:14 and Isaiah 28:16). The people of Israel were God's chosen people, his vineyard, (Isaiah 5:7) to whom he entrusted His Word and appointed their religious leaders to take care of His people and teach them His Word. They had failed in their duty. God had sent many prophets to speak to them and call them to repentance but they had brutally treated and killed them. Finally God sent His only begotten Son to them, the Lord Jesus Christ, the cornerstone, and they rejected Him.

21:43 For this reason I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit.

It is because of the rejection of Jesus Christ their Messiah that the kingdom of God will be taken from them and given to the peoples of the world who will believe and many will be saved.

21:44 The one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces, and the one on whom it falls will be crushed.”

The stone is the Lord Jesus Christ whoever hears the gospel message of salvation through Him and will not except it will suffer severe consequences. Those on whom judgment will fall will perish.

21:45 When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they realized that he was speaking about them.

The chief priests and Pharisees knew that Jesus was speaking about them in these parables.

21:46 They wanted to arrest him, but they were afraid of the crowds, because the crowds regarded him as a prophet.

Because of this they wanted to kill him but were afraid of the people because they thought Jesus was a prophet.

Matthew Chapter 22

The Parable of the Wedding Banquet

22:1 Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying:

Following on directly from chapter 21, Jesus is still speaking in parables and teaching the people in the temple courts in the hearing of the Pharisees and scribes.

22:2 "The kingdom of heaven can be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son.

In this parable the king represents God and Jesus is His Son. The wedding banquet prepared by God stands for the eternal blessings made available to men by God through Christ, the blessings which are received through salvation (Eph. 1:3).

22:3 He sent his slaves to summon those who had been invited to the banquet, but they would not come.

The servants of God were sent to invite those whom he wished to welcome as guests at this banquet. The gospel of salvation is for all men, and God is not willing that any should perish (2 Pet. 3:9). In this parable Jesus makes clear that it was to the Jewish nation and to the keepers of the law that the message of salvation was first sent. Indeed, the words of this verse "summon those who have been invited" imply that the invitation had already been given through the writings of the prophets, and that the apostles of the New Testament were merely announcing that the time had come for these prophetic writings to be fulfilled. (Mark 1:15). Unfortunately, by and large those who heard the heralds refused to respond to the invitation. We must bear in mind that this gospel was

first spoken by the Lord Jesus Christ (Heb. 2:3). It was the invitation of the son himself that the Pharisees refused, though later they also rejected that of the apostles. (1 Thess. 2:15). The sin here is of obduracy, hardness of heart, and disobedience as they refused to listen, obey and come.

22:4-5 Again he sent other slaves, saying, 'Tell those who have been invited, "Look! The feast I have prepared for you is ready. My oxen and fattened cattle have been slaughtered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet." 'But they were indifferent and went away, one to his farm, another to his business.

More messengers were sent. Again and again God appeals to lost souls to receive his son Jesus Christ, and is longsuffering. But those portrayed in this verse are those who are indifferent to the things of God. They thought nothing of the fact that God has prepared everything for them. The king in the parable had slaughtered his oxen and fattened cattle and prepared everything, they did not even need to pay for admission; they only had to bring themselves. God has done everything required for our eternal blessing and salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ, who has died and who is raised again, so that whoever responds to his call and comes to him in faith just as they are will be saved. So little did these men esteem the invitation of the king that they considered manual labour to be more important. In point of fact there is nothing more important than the salvation of our souls and we should give more earnest heed to the things that are spoken and ensure we obey to the saving of our souls (Heb. 2:1-3).

22:6 The rest seized his slaves, insolently mistreated them, and killed them.

Just as seriously some of those who rejected the invitation abused and murdered the messengers of the king (see Luke 11:49). If the rejection of Jesus Christ were not serious enough, the murder of his servants will not go unpunished either.

22:7 The king was furious! He sent his soldiers, and they put those murderers to death and set their city on fire.

God's wrath was aroused by the people's rejection of his son and his servants, and determined to repay them for their sin. Significantly, Jesus said that he burned their city with fire –which is exactly what happened to Jerusalem when it was raised to the ground by the Romans in AD 70.

22:8-9 Then he said to his slaves, 'The wedding is ready, but the ones who had been invited were not worthy. So go into the main streets and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet.'

The wedding was so important, and the desire of the king so great for his son's honour, that the original rejection of the people did not deter the king from continuing to invite others, indeed all people were invited. When Jesus says those who were invited were not worthy he means that they made themselves unworthy (Acts 13:46). Notice that those who rejected the message received the same genuine invitation as those who accepted it. It was not God who rejected them. God's concern is that his servants should go everywhere and invite everyone (Mark 16:15 and John 3:16).

22:10-12 And those slaves went out into the streets and gathered all they found, both bad and good, and the wedding hall was filled with guests. But when the king

came in to see the wedding guests, he saw a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. And he said to him, 'Friend, how did you get in here without wedding clothes?' But he had nothing to say.

The evangelists went out to plead with all men and great crowds gathered in the wedding hall, the place where the wedding was to take place. Yet, as the wedding was about to begin, the king spoke personally to one man who was not wearing wedding clothes. These special clothes were a gift provided by the king for all of his guests. It was a serious affront to a king not to wear his gifts. The significance of these verses lies in the fact that our salvation in Christ is provided for us as a gift of God (Rom. 6:23). Just as the king provided the wedding clothes, so it is God himself who clothes us with the garments of salvation and arrays us with the robe of righteousness (Isa. 61:10). When we receive Jesus Christ as our saviour he removes our filthy garments of sin, which he nailed to the cross, and gives us in their place the robe of his own righteousness (Jer. 23:6). We cannot hope to enter heaven any other way than the one which he has provided. Jesus is saying that if we want to enter his wedding banquet then we must first accept his gift. Being in the wedding hall, or among the congregation of God's people, by joining a church, is not what saves us; receiving the God's gift of eternal life does. You can spend your entire life among Christians, you may have been born to Christian parents, but one day you will have to personally meet with and be examined by God. Are you sure that you have received his gift of righteousness through faith in Christ?

22:13 Then the king said to his attendants, 'Tie him up hand and foot and throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth!'

The end for all those who do not accept the free gift of salvation through faith in Christ will be eternal punishment, in outer darkness where there is endless regret and pain.

22:14 For many are called, but few are chosen."

We should understand this concluding verse of the parable in the context of the whole parable. Many had been called, the invitation went out to all equally, but only those who responded in the affirmative received the wedding garments and so were chosen. God has sovereignly prepared the salvation banquet; he was not forced any man to attend. God has sovereignly announced the means of salvation, yet man can of his own free will choose to accept or reject that which God offers. The false teaching that grace cannot be resisted is contradicted by this parable.

Paying Taxes to Caesar

22:15 Then the Pharisees went out and planned together to entrap him with his own words.

The Pharisees knew in their hearts that they were among those who rejected the king's messengers and were plotting the death of his son, were cut to the heart by Christ's words. They hated him for exposing the truth. Those who are enemies of God will always hate those who are truly his servants. They plotted to trap Jesus in something he might say for the sole purpose of handing him over to the power of the Roman Governor (Luke 20:20) that he might be put to death. This was the motive behind the following question.

22:16-17 They sent to him their disciples along with the Herodians, saying, "Teacher, we know that you are

truthful, and teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You do not court anyone's favour because you show no partiality. Tell us then, what do you think? Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?"

The Pharisees united with their enemies by sending their disciples with those who were loyal to King Herod to trap Christ in his words. They begin, as those who hate us often will, with lying and flattery, before asking Christ to answer a controversial question. Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not? The Herodians were puppets of Rome and would have supported the tax, whilst the Pharisees were known to be opposed to it, hypocritically describing the money as idolatrous (whilst at the same time they loved money).

22:18 But Jesus realized their evil intentions and said, "Hypocrites! Why are you testing me?"

The Lord of Glory knows all things and is never taken in by the deception of men. He denounces them as pretenders and confronts them with the truth: that they were trying to trap him.

22:19 Show me the coin used for the tax." So they brought him a denarius.

Jesus nevertheless answers their duplicitous question. He demands to be shown the coin used for the tax, not because he had never seen one, but in order to make his point.

22:20-21 Jesus said to them, "Whose image is this, and whose inscription?" They replied, "Caesar's." He said to them, "Then give to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."

Again, Christ knew whose image and inscription was on the coin, he wanted to hear it from the mouths of his questioners. If the money was minted by Caser as a means of exchange and taxation, then they should not refuse to give to him what is his own. Christians are commanded to pay their dues both in terms of taxation and service to the civil authorities (Rom. 13:1-7). Nor should they, like the men in the parable, refuse to give God what is rightly his - the complete obedience of their hearts and lives (Rom. 12:1).

22:22 Now when they heard this they were stunned, and they left him and went away.

The men were stunned, for they had never imagined that Christ could answer their question without incriminating himself, let alone silence them with his wisdom and absolute authority. They decide it is best to beat a hasty retreat.

Marriage and the Resurrection

22:23 The same day Sadducees (who say there is no resurrection) came to him and asked him,

The Sadducees were like the Pharisees, an influential religious group in Jerusalem, but unlike the Pharisees they did not believe in the resurrection or even in angels. Christ had often referred to resurrection, and had raised a number of people from the dead, most recently Lazarus (see John 11). The Sadducees oppose and wish to discredit Christ's teaching by means of an absurd question.

22:24 "Teacher, Moses said, 'If a man dies without having children, his brother must marry the widow and father children for his brother.'

They begin by quoting the Law of Moses. It was in order to keep the family land in the family that this law was written. One can imagine the difficulties involved when a landed man died if his wife remarried and the new husband acquired rights to his land. This might be catastrophic for other dependents, such as elderly parents. Of course, if the dead man had children, they would inherit the land and so the problem would not arise.

22:25 Now there were seven brothers among us. The first one married and died, and since he had no children he left his wife to his brother.

The Sadducees are not concerned about the validity of this point of law, but simply use it to discredit Christ's teaching about the resurrection. They claim that one woman was married to seven brothers in the same family, a story which is unlikely to be true. When the woman eventually died, whose wife she will be in the resurrection, since all seven had her? To their minds, this question reveals the absurdity of the idea of a resurrection, how could she live again with all of her seven husbands? So we must bear in mind this was not a genuine enquiry but an argument against the truth.

22:26-29 The second did the same, and the third, down to the seventh. Last of all, the woman died. In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife of the seven will she be? For they all had married her." Jesus answered them, "You are deceived, because you don't know the scriptures or the power of God.

Jesus immediately answers that the reason they are blinded by such error is their ignorance of the scripture and their lack of any experimental knowledge of God's power. Had they experienced the power which raises a

soul from death to life, they would have little trouble believing in the power that will raise dead bodies to life (John 5:25-29).

22:30 For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven.

In one short sentence, Christ states what Paul spends several verses explaining in 1 Cor. 15. When the dead are raised they are raised with immortal, incorruptible bodies, and are no longer subject to the laws we are familiar with on earth, such as the laws of gender and marriage.

22:31-32 Now as for the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is not the God of the dead but of the living!"

Christ illustrates from scripture that God is the God of resurrection, as he referred to Abraham Isaac and Jacob as LIVING when they had been dead for hundreds of years. God is the eternal God and to Him all live.

22:33 When the crowds heard this, they were amazed at his teaching.

Although the crowds were amazed by this teaching, you will observe that Matthew does not allude to any Sadducees changing their hardened view as a result of it, although Christ had confounded and silenced them.

The Greatest Commandment

22:34 Now when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they assembled together.

The Pharisees try again. One of their highly educated experts of the law tested Christ with a question. Which was the greatest law?

22:35-40 And one of them, an expert in religious law, asked him a question to test him: "Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?" Jesus said to him, " 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. The second is like it: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' All the law and the prophets depend on these two commandments."

Jesus is never stumped by a question. He knows all things. He is the wisdom of God. That which comes from his mouth is perfect knowledge and wisdom. Even as a child of 12 he had astounded these same men with his comprehension of the reality of God. In two short sentences Jesus expresses the whole law; in the first he speaks of man's relationship to God, and in the second his relationship with his fellow men. Behaving in a way that agrees with the love of God will result in the fulfilment of all these laws (Rom. 13:10). The Pharisees were unable to trap him in this answer.

Whose Son is the Christ?

22:41-46 While the Pharisees were assembled, Jesus asked them a question: "What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?" They said, "The son of David." He said to them, "How then does David by the Spirit call him 'Lord, 'saying, 'The Lord said to my lord, "Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet" '? If David then calls him 'Lord,' how can he be his son?" No one was able to answer him a word, and from that day on no one dared to question him any longer.

Now it was Christ's turn ask a question of his opponents. He knew that they considered the Christ to be the son of David, and that they were opposed to his claim to be the Christ, the son of God. So he asks: how it can be that in the prophetic writings of the psalms, David refers to the Christ as Lord? Lord is one greater, one in authority, and David, King of Israel knew only one Lord, and that was the Lord God. David was sat on the throne of Israel but not at the position of honour and power in heaven at the right hand of God. David's Lord would be given all power and authority with every enemy placed under his feet by God. Who could such a lord be? Certainly not a lesser than David, who never ascended to the throne of god, and who never once enjoyed the whole world bowing down to him. It is Jesus Christ who has been highly exalted, given the name above every name, and who is ascended to heaven to sit at God's right hand until the time that he takes up his authority and returns to earth to reign. God has made him Lord of all men, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow (Phil. 2:9-11). Such revelation had not yet been given and was certainly unknown to Christ's enemies, although he spoke to them again about it at his trial (Matt. 26:63-64).

Matthew Chapter 23

Doers of the Word not Just Teachers

23:1-2 Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples, "The experts in the law and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat.

Jesus addresses these next ten verses to the crowds about Him and His disciples. He wants them to show respect to the scribes and Pharisees because they are the teachers of the Law of God they are the experts in the Law of Moses.

23:3 Therefore pay attention to what they tell you and do it. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they teach.

They are to obey everything they are taught by them from the Word of God but not to follow their example because they do not practice what the teach (Romans 7:12, Galatians 3:24).

23:4 They tie up heavy loads, hard to carry, and put them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing even to lift a finger to move them.

They impose their own rules and regulations that are heavy burdens and too oppressive to be borne. They will not lift a finger to help anyone.

23:5 They do all their deeds to be seen by people, for they make their phylacteries wide and their tassels long.

They are nothing but show-offs. Everything they do publicly is only to attract attention to themselves. They

wear extra-large phylacteries (prayer boxes containing scripture verses) on their arms and foreheads (Deuteronomy 6:6-8). All their good deeds are done so that everybody can see and know about them. They attach long fringes on the edges of their robes (Numbers 15:38-39).

23:6 They love the place of honour at banquets and the best seats in the synagogues.

They love to have the seats of honour at banquets and to sit in the best seats in the meeting places.

23:7 And elaborate greetings in the marketplaces, and to have people call them 'Rabbi.'

When they are going about the marketplaces they delight to hear the people giving them respectful greetings and acknowledge them as Rabbi's.

23:8 But you are not to be called 'Rabbi,' for you have one Teacher and you are all brothers.

Jesus tells His followers that they should not seek or have anyone call them Rabbi for there is only One Teacher and that is Jesus Christ. They are brothers in Christ.

23:9 And call no one your 'father' on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven.

In a religious or priestly sense do not call any man father on earth for there is only One Father of the soul who is God in heaven.

23:10 Nor are you to be called 'teacher,' for you have one teacher, the Christ.

Again Jesus tells His followers not to let anyone call them teacher for He alone is their teacher.

23:11 The greatest among you will be your servant.

The person who is an elder or leader among them is to serve the others.

23:12 And whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.

Those who put themselves above others with haughtiness and false pride shall be brought down. Whoever humbles himself in spirit and manner shall be raised to honour.

Religious Hypocrites

23:13 "But woe to you, experts in the law and you Pharisees, hypocrites! You keep locking people out of the kingdom of heaven! For you neither enter nor permit those trying to enter to go in.

Jesus now addresses His remarks to the scribes and Pharisees who are not ignorant of the law and teach the people its ordinances. Because of their knowledge they will suffer much sorrow because by their hypocrisies (their insincerity by pretending to have qualities or beliefs that they do not really have) they keep shutting the door into the kingdom of heaven in the peoples face. They will not go in themselves and will not allow others to enter in.

23:14 (NKJVTM) Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayers. Therefore you will receive greater condemnation.

Great sorrow awaits these teachers of the law for they cheat widows out of their homes and then pretend to be very holy and religious by offering long prayers to God. Because of this they will receive the greater condemnation.

23:15 "Woe to you, experts in the law and you Pharisees, hypocrites! You cross land and sea to make one convert, and when you get one, you make him twice as much a child of hell as yourselves!"

Again great sorrow awaits these people because they go to great lengths to convert one person to their kind of religion and when they ensnare one they make him/her twice as bad as themselves. In fact Jesus says they make him/her a child of hell like they are!

23:16 "Woe to you, blind guides, who say, 'Whoever swears by the temple is bound by nothing. But whoever swears by the gold of the temple is bound by the oath.'"

For the fourth time He tells them that great sorrow awaits them for they are spiritually blind trying to lead the people into spiritual truths they cannot see or understand, or rather do not want to see or understand themselves. They tell the people that if they make an oath by the temple it is meaningless. But if they make one by the gold of the temple then it is binding.

23:17 "Blind fools! Which is greater, the gold or the temple that makes the gold sacred?"

As far as spiritual things are concerned they are "blind fools" if they think that the gold of the temple is greater than what the temple represents. It is the God of the temple who sanctifies the gold that adorns it.

23:18 And, 'Whoever swears by the altar is bound by nothing. But if anyone swears by the gift on it he is bound by the oath. '

If anyone should make an oath by the altar it doesn't signify anything. But if anyone makes an oath by the sacrificial gift offered on the altar to God they are bound by it.

23:19 You are blind! For which is greater, the gift or the altar that makes the gift sacred?

Are these hypocrites so blind that they cannot see which is the greater the altar or the sacrificial gift?

23:20-21 So whoever swears by the altar swears by it and by everything on it. And whoever swears by the temple swears by it and the one who dwells in it.

Whoever makes an oath by the altar and everything that is on it is bound by it. Likewise whoever makes an oath by the temple and by whose dwelling place it is i.e. God's.

23:22 And whoever swears by heaven swears by the throne of God and the one who sits on it.

Again whoever makes an oath in the name of heaven or by the throne of God and He who sits on it is bound by it. Note: Jesus is addressing the hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees when He speaks about making oaths. He is not advocating that Christians should make an oath by anything (James 5:12).

23:23 "Woe to you, experts in the law and you Pharisees, hypocrites! You give a tenth of mint, dill, and cumin, yet

you neglect what is more important in the law – justice, mercy, and faithfulness! You should have done these things without neglecting the others.

These hypocrites make a big show of tithing on every little thing down to the herbs they grow. Yet they neglect to do the most important parts of the law, which are to do justice to love mercy and faithfulness. These ought to be particularly done without neglecting any other point of the law.

23:24 Blind guides! You strain out a gnat yet swallow a camel!

Jesus does not spare them at all again He says they are spiritually blind guides. The illustration He uses is that if they have a gnat or fly in their water or soup they will strain it out but will swallow a camel! What He means is that they will take great care in keeping the minor parts of the law but the most important parts they neglect. This is in reference to the preceding verse.

23:25 “Woe to you, experts in the law and you Pharisees, hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and the dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence.

And so it goes on. They are most particular about washing cups and dishes hands and feet and clothes, all the outward adorning. But inside they are still unclean and full of greed and selfishness and sin (Isaiah 64:6, Romans 3:10).

23:26 Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup, so that the outside may become clean too!

Particularly addressing the Pharisees who were full of self-righteousness He tells them that it is the heart

they need to get clean first and then the outward life would become clean too (Jeremiah 4:14, Ezekiel 18:31, Hebrews 1:3, 10:12).

23:27 "Woe to you, experts in the law and you Pharisees, hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs that look beautiful on the outside but inside are full of the bones of the dead and of everything unclean.

These scribes and Pharisees are like tombs that have been whitewashed and look beautiful on the outside but inside lie dead corrupting bodies.

23:28 In the same way, on the outside you look righteous to people, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

They are like these tombs on the outside they look very clean and righteous but in their hearts they are full of hypocrisy and sin (Ephesians 2:1).

23:29-30 "Woe to you, experts in the law and you Pharisees, hypocrites! You build tombs for the prophets and decorate the graves of the righteous. And you say, 'If we had lived in the days of our ancestors, we would not have participated with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.'

These hypocrites build elaborately decorated tombs for the prophets and adorn the graves of the righteous. They make the boast that if they had lived in the days of these prophets whom their forefathers had murdered they would not have participated with them.

23:31-32 By saying this you testify against yourselves that you are descendants of those who murdered the prophets. Fill up then the measure of your ancestors!

By this false declaration they were condemning themselves and showing that they were the descendants of those who had killed the prophets. Jesus knew that they were plotting to kill Him and that they had rejected the message of John the Baptist (Matthew 26:4). So He tells them to go ahead and finish what their ancestors had started.

23:33 You snakes, you offspring of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell?

Jesus' final caustic words of truth to them were to tell them what they were. Snakes and the sons of vipers (The snakes poison is in its tongue). How will they be able to escape the eternal punishment of suffering in hell!

Jesus foretells the Destruction of Jerusalem

23:34 "For this reason I am sending you prophets and wise men and experts in the law, some of whom you will kill and crucify, and some you will flog in your synagogues and pursue from town to town,

Because of the eternal danger they were in Jesus will be sending to them prophets and wise people and those that will be experts in the law of God. Some of these they will kill and crucify, and others they will flog and throw them out of the synagogues and chase them from town to town (Acts 5:40, 7:57 -58, 9: 1-2, 12:2).

23:35 so that on you will come all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Barachiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar.

As a result of their treatment of the prophets this present generation of Jews will be held responsible for the

murder of all godly people: from righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Barachiah who they slew between the temple and the altar.

23:36 I tell you the truth, this generation will be held responsible for all these things!

It will certainly come to pass that on the people who were living then, in Jesus Christ time, this punishment will fall for they will be held responsible, since it was they who finally rejected the Son of God who had come to save them.

23:37 "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those who are sent to you! How often I have longed to gather your children together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you would have none of it!"

It is evident from this beseeching cry of the Lord Jesus Christ that He earnestly desired the salvation of the Jews. Those who had killed and stoned the prophets that had been sent to them and would hand Him over to be crucified. In His love He reached out to them continuously and yearned for them to come into His outstretched arms that He might protect and comfort them as a mother does for her chicks. But they would have none of it.

23:38-39 Look, your house is left to you desolate! For I tell you, you will not see me from now until you say, 'Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!'

Here in this verse He foretells the destruction of Jerusalem and the complete destruction of the Temple in A.D. 70 by the Romans. Yet it also seems to foretell a day (possibly near the end of time) in which the Jewish nation,

which at this time rejected Christ, would one day repent as a people to receive and welcome him.

Matthew Chapter 24

24:1 Now as Jesus was going out of the temple courts and walking away, his disciples came to show him the temple buildings.

The disciples of Jesus were taken up with what related to the material world. They could see the beautiful and expensive buildings which made up the Temple, and wanted to share their wonder and admiration with their Lord.

24:2 And he said to them, "Do you see all these things? I tell you the truth, not one stone will be left on another. All will be torn down!"

But Jesus' mind was at all times, and especially at this time, fixed on eternal things. The world held no appeal for Him, indeed nothing in the world would remain one day, and that is why we must live for eternity. The Temple and the sacrificial system which it represented would be abolished by the bringing in of a new covenant (Heb. 10:9), and so the significance of the Temple would cease (John 4:21-24). From that time on, the Temple of God would be within and among his people (2 Cor. 6:16). The temple itself would be literally demolished, with every stone torn out individually, entirely flattened. This came to pass when the Romans took Jerusalem in AD 70 under Titus.

24:3 As he was sitting on the Mount of Olives, his disciples came to him privately and said, "Tell us, when will these things happen? And what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?"

As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, some of his disciples came to him eager to know more detail about these terrible and seemingly apocalyptic events. They linked the destruction of the temple with the end of the world, and they were to some extent right. The destruction of the temple marked the beginning of the end with Israel scattered all over the world. But that beginning of the end was almost 2,000 years ago, and Jesus wanted to put everything in context for his disciples.

24:4-6 Jesus answered them, "Watch out that no one misleads you. For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and they will mislead many. You will hear of wars and rumours of wars. Make sure that you are not alarmed, for this must happen, but the end is still to come.

Christ begins by urging his disciples not to listen to any false Christ or their messengers (false apostles and prophets). Many were to come (and have since come) claiming to be the chosen one of God. Later, John warns of these false messengers (1 John 2:18) but assures us that we have been given the anointing of the Holy Spirit to guard us from their erroneous doctrine (1 John 2:20 and 1 John 2:27). Paul also warned that the Holy Spirit witnessed that a great falling away from truth would occur as the end of time approached (1 Tim. 4:1).

Clearly, the world would not end with the destruction of the temple, there would be far more dreadful and significant events on earth before that. These events are sometimes referred to as the signs of the times, or the signs of Jesus' coming. With the increase of these things on earth, we become aware that the coming of Christ is drawing nearer. Jesus predicted wars affecting whole nations, world wars. Also there would be rumours of wars,

implying sedition and espionage, as well as civil unrest and acts of terrorism.

24:7 For nation will rise up in arms against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines and earthquakes in various places.

In addition there would be famines and earthquakes of increasing magnitude in an increasing number of places. As their severity and frequency rise, we can be sure that our Lord's coming draws nearer.

24:8 All these things are the beginning of birth pains.

Yet Jesus regards these events, not as the end in themselves that is they will not usher in the end of the world, but will happen through the church age. Like a pregnant woman goes into labour pains before giving birth, so these pains come before the renewal of all things.

24:9 "Then they will hand you over to be persecuted and will kill you. You will be hated by all the nations because of my name.

Throughout the church age there has been persecution of Christian believers, even to death. This is happening at this present time more than at any other time in history. Jesus predicted that there would be times when, in every nation, believers would be at risk of harm from unbelievers, for every nation will hate us. It is always the case that the world hates us, but it only sometimes the case that this hatred spills over to cause violence and murder.

24:10-12 Then many will be led into sin, and they will betray one another and hate one another. And many false prophets will appear and deceive many, and because

lawlessness will increase so much, the love of many will grow cold.

Here is one of the most terrible warnings in the Bible, a warning which is repeated several times in the epistles. Because of the evil increasing in the world, many believers will turn from the faith and become apostates. Rather than suffer for Christ's sake (and not necessarily to death) they will abandon their faith in Him). People have denied Christ for less than death. As a result of their turning from Christ they will, as Judas did, betray their Christian brothers too, in some cases even to the point of death. From experience we know that those who leave Jesus Christ, as close as they have been to us before when they knew the Lord, will hate us and be our complete enemies afterward. That is no fault on our part; it is because they are no longer right with God. Throughout the history of the church there have been false prophets who have claimed to speak in the name of God and Christ. Some might be classified as being outside the church, such as Joseph Smith who founded the Mormons. Others conceal themselves within the church, seeking to do Satan's work by leading the church into destructive error. Many, says Jesus, will be deceived both within and without the church.

24:13 But the person who endures to the end will be saved.

In the face of false teaching, faithfulness to the Lord Jesus Christ and his truth is called for, both from individuals and from the church as a whole. The Bible gives us safeguards to protect us from falling away. For example, we are not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together (Heb. 10:25) but to continue in prayer, fellowship and study of the word (Acts 2:42).

24:14 And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole inhabited earth as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come.

Whatever else happens on earth in terms of natural disaster and spiritual declension, the gospel of Jesus Christ will still have its way. It will be preached to every creature in the entire world, and then and not before then shall the end come. God will give every person a chance to repent and believe on his son Jesus Christ. We could sum up what Jesus has said so far by saying that evil and sin will grow worse and worse on earth, with men being driven by the power of darkness and Satan, yet His gospel will still succeed in saving sinners to the end of time. Whilst these evils are signs that Christ is coming soon, we ought not to suppose that he approves of them; when he comes he shall abolish them (Psalm 46:9 and Isaiah 2:4).

24:15 "So when you see the abomination of desolation — spoken about by Daniel the prophet — standing in the holy place (let the reader understand),

Christ now turns his attention from the general events of the church age to the events at the very end of time. Many commentators go into great detail about the time of Antiochus Epiphanes and the desecration of the temple, equating Daniels words with this event. It is most significant that our Lord did not do this. He spoke to his disciples about a future day; whereas Epiphanes had died hundreds of years before. The abomination of desolation is a desecration of God's Temple (and his holy name) which shall be so severe as to herald the very end of time and bring down the final judgment of God. Since our Lord is speaking of a time further future than AD 33, and since this event did not precede the destruction of the temple in

AD 70, we may readily make several observations: A new temple will be rebuilt in Jerusalem before this event occurs. At the time of writing (2012) this has yet to happen. The Bible predicts a terrible apostasy at the end of time which involves a certain individual, referred to as "the beast" or "antichrist" sitting in the temple of god and proclaiming that he is God, and demanding worship from all nations of the earth at pain of death (see 2 Thess. 2:4, Rev. 13:3-8). Furthermore, he shall honour Satan as his God and oblige every person on earth to receive a brand by way of demonstrating allegiance to Satan, or face certain death by starvation or beheading. He will set up a statue of himself in the temple of God, which by satanic power is able to move, speak, and execute those who will not bow to it (Rev. 13:15-17). The proclamation of this man as a god is the event here referred to as the abomination of desolation.

24:16-18 then those in Judea must flee to the mountains. The one on the roof must not come down to take anything out of his house, and the one in the field must not turn back to get his cloak.

There will of course be some faithful to God alive on earth at that time. It seems correct to suppose these to be the faithful remnant of Jews who shall face the worst time of persecution in the history of their people, but whom God shall preserve and reconcile to himself. The whole nation shall be won to Jesus Christ (Rom. 11:26), though many shall die rather than worship the beast, it appears that God will include them among the faithful who partake in the first resurrection, and we must not suppose that the rapture closes the age of resurrection (Rev. 20:4). Those Jews who live in Judea are to flee to the mountains with all speed, not stopping so long as to pick up a cloak or take any personal effects. This man, the antichrist, is going to

try to round them all up and kill them. But God will provide wings for her escape, and protect Israel miraculously (Rev. 12:13-17).

24:19-21 Woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing their babies in those days! Pray that your flight may not be in winter or on a Sabbath. For then there will be great suffering unlike anything that has happened from the beginning of the world until now, or ever will happen.

Once again, this verse makes clear that these events predicted by Christ are yet to come. The worst time of persecution and suffering the world (and especially Israel) has ever known would, up until now, be a reference to the holocaust. But there was no temple at the time of the holocaust, indicating that an even worse time is yet to come. Clearly, this must be a time of unimaginable evil. It will be especially awful for those women who are pregnant or nursing babies. No doubt many children's lives will be lost. It appears from verse 20 that God is able, in answer to prayer, to delay Satan's purpose, so that the flight from Jerusalem is not in winter (snow, ice and cold might hamper their escape or claim lives itself), and not on a Sabbath, where pious Jews would not run far enough to be safe.

24:22 And if those days had not been cut short, no one would be saved. But for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short.

So terrible would these days be that if God had not in his mercy kept them to a limited period, no mortal flesh would survive them. But for the sake of those whom he has called of the Jewish nation, the days are shortened, i.e. restricted to approx. 3 1/2 years (Rev.

12:14).24:23 Then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or 'There he is!' do not believe him. Just as Jesus warned during the church age, so at this time especially shall arise false messiahs. But they will only bring false hopes and are not to be followed (Rev. 13:10).

24:24 For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect.

They will be permitted to perform great signs and wonders by the power of Satan. It is significant that the antichrist will have a false prophet of his own, commanding fire to come out of heaven in the sight of all men (Rev. 13:11-14). The evidence of this being supernatural will be utterly compelling, but not all that is supernatural is of God.

24:25 Remember, I have told you ahead of time.

Jesus has warned his disciples, and his disciples have warned future generations of these events by recording his words. We have been warned.

24:26-27 So then, if someone says to you, 'Look, he is in the wilderness,' do not go out, or 'Look, he is in the inner rooms,' do not believe him. For just like the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so the coming of the Son of Man will be.

Rather than the false messiahs, the real Christ will be seen coming on the clouds of heaven, appearing to the whole world simultaneously and in an instant. Lightning appears at light speed, and lights up the whole heaven. The coming of Christ will be witnessed by the whole cosmos, northern and southern hemispheres, angels and

demons, and all those in hell shall not fail to witness this event (See Mark 13:26 and Rev. 1:7).

24:28-29 Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather. "Immediately after the suffering of those days, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of heaven will be shaken.

At once, at the end of the brief time (approx. 3 ½ years) of unspeakable suffering, the end will come, preceded by several cosmic events. The sun was darkened as Christ hung upon the cross, and will again be darkened at the time of his coming. As the end of the world approaches, the sun will be partially darkened (Rev. 8:12), and later the whole earth will be plunged into darkness (Rev. 16:10). At the very end of time the sun will no longer be needed, nor the moon (Rev. 21:23). The stars falling from heaven is a reference to their ceasing to exist, vanishing away (2 Pet. 3:10). They shall fall from the sky as ripe figs fall from the tree (Isa. 34:4), but obviously, since stars are massive they will not fall to the earth. They shall be put away like an old garment (Psa. 102:25-26), no longer fit for purpose, together with all the heavenly bodies and the forces (powers, such as gravity) which control them .

24:30 Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and all the tribes of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man arriving on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.

What the sign of the Son of Man is, no one has ever clearly identified. However, it will be a sign of such significance that no one alive of earth shall fail to understand that it is HIS sign, and that it portends His

immediate revelation. The people of earth will mourn when they see this sign, not in repentance but remorse; not in sorrow for their sin, but in sorrow that they will not escape judgment. Following this (the intervening period of time is not specified, but the words used seem to imply almost immediately), they will not just see the sign, but Christ Himself, coming on the clouds of heaven with great power and glory; the son of God will be revealed in all his eternal, almighty, and creative power. His glory is great because God's glory is His person, and it shall be revealed in its full majesty to all people. Christ is not merely exalted above all else, but FAR above all else (Eph. 1:21). Tragically for humankind, it will be in His role as judge and the avenger of wrongs that He appears.

24:31 And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet blast, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

Some, taking this verse chronologically have supposed it to indicate that the rapture of the church does not take place until after Christ's second coming in glory. Yet since other scriptures seemingly contradict this view point, we cannot accept its validity. Christ will sound the trumpet to receive His own to himself, and they will be caught up from every corner of the globe to meet with Christ in the clouds. But later they will return to earth with Him during the battle of Armageddon (Rev. 19:14). Two explanations are therefore possible: either this event is not intended to be placed in chronological order, or that this verse refers to the gathering of God's faithful Jews alive on earth at this time who will obtain a place among His people.

24:32-33 "Learn this parable from the fig tree: Whenever its branch becomes tender and puts out its leaves, you

know that summer is near. So also you, when you see all these things, know that he is near, right at the door.

Just as the changing seasons give evidence of their own approach, so the signs Christ has given are intended to indicate the near approach of his second advent in power and glory.

24:34-35 I tell you the truth, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

Jesus gives the assurance that these things will not fail to happen. They cannot be avoided. The present age will not pass away until all these things are accomplished. This is sure, for He has spoken them, and just as man does not live by bread alone, but by every word of God, so the entire existence of the universe is sustained by His powerful and eternal word (Heb. 1:3). God's word cannot fail, for he God cannot lie (Tit. 1:2).

24:36 "But as for that day and hour no one knows it — not even the angels in heaven — except the Father alone.

Although we are given to know and understand the signs of the times, yet we are not given to know the exact details and precise timings of these events. In particular, we will not know the time of Christ's coming into the clouds to receive his saints. Such knowledge has not been delegated, either to angels or to people, but is known only to God. Despite what some Bible teachers are telling us, God will not give his people any additional understanding at the time of the end; except to say that as these events begin to occur, we shall recognise them for what they really are.

24:37 For just like the days of Noah were, so the coming of the Son of Man will be.

Christ use the illustration of Noah since neither Noah nor his contemporaries were specifically told the time of the flood. God had warned them of its coming, and that they should be ready, but life carried on as normal, without much thought for God; until the day that Noah was taken safely into the ark by God, who called him in and shut the door.

24:38-39 For in those days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark. And they knew nothing until the flood came and took them all away. It will be the same at the coming of the Son of Man.

In their unbelief the people were completely ignorant of what was about to happen. They had not believed Noah's warning, and were consequently unprepared. The flood destroyed the whole world of the ungodly (2 Pet. 2:5). This present world, says Peter, is reserved in the same way for fire in the Day of Judgment and perdition of ungodly men (2 Pet. 3:7).

24:40 Then there will be two men in the field; one will be taken and one left.

It does not seem possible to understand these verses as a reference to anything other than the rapture. Jesus point has been that Noah was taken to a place of safety by God, whilst the ungodly were left outside to face destruction. Believers in Christ will be rescued from the judgment to come by Christ, who will come to meeting them in the clouds before judgment falls on earth. Among earth's millions are only two groups of people: unbelievers

and Christians. At the time of Christ's calling his people away, one man ploughing a field will be taken, snatched up in the rapture to be with Jesus; the other man, an unbeliever, will be left behind to face the wrath of God.

24:41 There will be two women grinding grain with a mill; one will be taken and one left.

Similarly, two women (one a believer and one an unbeliever) shall be occupied in the same trade, but the rapture will be the event which shall finally and irreparably separate the two.

24:42 "Therefore stay alert, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come.

One of the reasons why God does not make the day and time of Christ's coming known to us is to motivate us to stay alert and watchful. The coming of Christ for his own and our gathering together to him is the blessed hope of all believers, and a powerful incentive for faithfulness, bringing renewed strength to our flagging spirits. It is also a powerful warning to prevent us from backsliding, for we know that we must all give account to God when Christ comes again.

24:43 But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have been alert and would not have let his house be broken into.

From this illustration, we see the need to be alert and watchful in the things of God at all times. Don't allow yourself to fall asleep spiritually, or that day will take you unawares like a thief in the night. This warning is repeated by Paul in 1 Thessalonians. 5:1-11. Since we are not in

the dark, let us walk in the light and not live in the dark as we wait for Christ's coming. We will only be ready for the truth to come if we are living in the truth today.

24:44 Therefore you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.

Since Christ's coming will be unannounced, we must be ready at all times. This again seems to indicate that Christ is speaking of his parousia, his coming into the air to be united with his own in the clouds, and event called the rapture, which precedes his return to earth with his saints. I say this because, at his advent, not only do the armies of earth gather to meet him at his coming, the sign of the son of man is visible in heaven, this advent is not unexpected by the inhabitants of earth. But his coming for his own comes silently and suddenly like a thief in the night, and will snatch his people away before the events of the time of trouble take place.

24:45-47 "Who then is the faithful and wise slave, whom the master has put in charge of his household, to give the other slaves their food at the proper time? Blessed is that slave whom the master finds at work when he comes. I tell you the truth, the master will put him in charge of all his possessions.

Luke makes clear that this parable was given in response to Peter's question Lord are you telling this to us or to all? Jesus did not want his disciples to be complacent about their spiritual condition. Those servants who, having been given tasks by their master, are faithfully doing them, will have nothing to fear, no matter what time of day their master returns. Indeed, they shall be blessed for their master will richly reward them, giving them stewardship which will entail joint possession of all that which is his.

24:48-51 But if that evil slave should say to himself, 'My master is staying away a long time,' and he begins to beat his fellow slaves and to eat and drink with drunkards, then the master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not foresee, and will cut him in two, and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

But, if the servant begins to doubt the master's word (that he will return) and by his conduct begins to demonstrate his unbelief, disobeying his master's commands with abusive and drunken behaviour, joining with those who are his master's enemies (a picture of a backslider) then his master will come without further warning, and since he is living like an unbeliever he will be treated like an unbeliever. His doom shall be unchangeably sealed in hell.

The events of the time of the end are spread out; however, the Bible often speaks of them together as if they were one event, the reason being that they inevitably follow one another. If a backslider misses the coming of Christ, yet Christ's words will come true upon him, no matter what the time scale might be. He will end up in hell, where there is eternal agony and regret.

Matthew Chapter 25

Proving Professing Christians

25:1 "At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom.

The time referred to in this parable and the next one is the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ for His Church. Scripture tells us that the church is likened to a bride (Rev. 21:2 and Rev. 21:9) and Jesus Christ as the bridegroom (Mark 2:19 - 20). As yet the marriage has not taken place (Rev. 19:7-9) so the church is spoken of as a virgin and consists of those who have been washed in the blood of the Lamb and made pure and holy by Him.

25:2 Five of the virgins were foolish, and five were wise.

The church is divided into two kinds of professing Christians. Jesus calls half of them foolish and the other half wise. Who are these people? They are all professing to be Christians and part of Christ's church.

25:3 When the foolish ones took their lamps, they did not take extra olive oil with them.

The five foolish or those who had no common sense only had oil in their lamps, in other words only enough to keep the light burning until the oil gave out, they did not take extra oil with them to refill their lamps. They did not know the hour when the bridegroom would come so they should have made sure they had extra oil with them. These people we can liken to those who embrace Christianity as a religion and perform all that go with it but have not embraced the fullness. Paul says they have a

form godliness but deny its power or as the New Living Testament puts it “they will act religious, but they will reject the power that could make them godly” (1 Tim. 3:5). They profess to be Christians and claim to know Him as their Saviour.

25:4 But the wise ones took flasks of olive oil with their lamps.

The wise however took containers with them filled with oil ready to pour into their lamps when the oil they contained run out. These are those who know Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Saviour in truth and experience. They endeavour to make certain that they are ready whatever hour their Lord may come.

25:5 When the bridegroom was delayed a long time, they all became drowsy and fell asleep.

The bridegroom was delayed for a long time and they all became tired of waiting for Him so they fell asleep (1 Thessalonians 5:6; 2 Peter 3:3-4). The word delayed is used in almost every translation but we must not think that the time of the Lord’s coming will be delayed from God’s point of view for God has appointed the time for this to happen and it will do so at that exact time. From Paul’s letters we know that the early church lived in expectation of the return of the Lord Jesus Christ any moment but it has not happened yet. This is what may be considered by human standards as a delay. The Amplified Bible translates Matthew 24:36 But of that [exact] day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.

25:6 But at midnight there was a shout, ‘Look, the bridegroom is here! Come out to meet him.’

At midnight the cry went out that the bridegroom had arrived and the invitation given to come and meet Him! (1 Cor. 15:52).

25:7 Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps.

At the shout they all woke up and trimmed their lamps to get ready to meet Him.

25:8 The foolish ones said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, because our lamps are going out.'

Because of the delay the inevitable happened; the oil in the lamps of the foolish ones run out and they asked the wise to give them some of theirs. These professing Christians were just not ready for the coming of the Lord.

25:9 'No,' they replied. 'There won't be enough for you and for us. Go instead to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.'

The wise told them that they only had enough oil to replenish their own lamps there was not enough for everyone. They would have to go to those who sold oil to get some for themselves. Believers can share by word what they have received from the Lord Jesus Christ they can tell of their experiences with Him but they cannot part with it and pass it on to others. No one can live on the experience of another we have to work out our own salvation (Phil. 2:12).

25:10 But while they had gone to buy it, the bridegroom arrived, and those who were ready went inside with him to the wedding banquet. Then the door was shut.

While they were gone the bridegroom arrived and those who were ready and prepared went inside with Him

to the wedding feast. The door was then shut. This reminds us of the time of Noah when he and his family had all enter the ark God shut the door (Gen. 7:16) the opportunity of being saved from the flood had past. So will it be when the Lord Jesus Christ comes for His church, His own, the day of grace will end the door will be closed and the opportunity of salvation will be gone! (2 Cor. 6:2).

25:11 Later, the other virgins came too, saying, 'Lord, lord! Let us in!'

A little later the other five returned and stood outside calling for the Lord to let them in.

25:12 But he replied, 'I tell you the truth, I do not know you!'

He answered them from within that of a truth He did not know them. Jesus Christ knows every one of those that are truly His own (John 10:14).25:13: Therefore stay alert, because you do not know the day or the hour. In this final verse of the parable the Lord gives the warning that every believer should be, watching, waiting and expecting the Lord's return for no one knows the hour that He will come again (1 Thess. 5:2; Rev. 16:15).

Proving Christian Service

25:14 "For it is like a man going on a journey, who summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them.

The man in this parable is the Lord Jesus Christ who gives to His followers the truth concerning the Kingdom of Heaven and the baptism of Holy Spirit (John 14:26). He dispenses His ministry gifts (Eph. 4:11) and the gifts of the Holy Spirit as He wills (1 Cor. 12:11). Forty days after His resurrection (Acts 1:3) Jesus Christ

returned to heaven having entrusted His disciples with the means to proclaim the Gospel Message (Acts 1:10).

25:15 To one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey.

As we have seen in 1 Corinthians 12:11 the number of talents (gifts) given to these three men were according to the desire of the man, the Lord Jesus Christ before going away: five, two and one respectively.

25:16 The one who had received five talents went off right away and put his money to work and gained five more.

The one who received the most talents, five, immediately put his money to work and doubled it. This was true of the early disciples after Pentecost they straight away used the gifts given to them to proclaim the Gospel Message and there were added to them 3000 people (Acts 2:41).

25:17 In the same way, the one who had two gained two more.

The second man did not sit down and complain that he had only been given two talents but did exactly the same and double his amount.

25:18 But the one who had received one talent went out and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money in it.

The last man with the one talent perhaps was given the greater challenge because he only had one talent. But it was enough for him to do the same as the other two if he had put it to use. Instead he did an

incredible thing; he went and buried it in the ground! (Luke 11:33).

25:19 After a long time, the master of those slaves came and settled his accounts with them.

Like this man the Lord Jesus Christ is coming back and every believer will have to give an account of what they have done with that which He has entrusted them with (2 Cor. 5:10).

25:20-21 The one who had received the five talents came and brought five more, saying, 'Sir, you entrusted me with five talents. See, I have gained five more. His master answered, 'Well done, good and faithful slave! You have been faithful in a few things. I will put you in charge of many things. Enter into the joy of your master.'

The man given five talents came and brought the five He had gained with him and received praise from the Lord. It was not for the amount he brought but for his faithfulness to his Lord that he was commended and rewarded and invited to share in the blessedness of His Lord.

25:22-23 The one with the two talents also came and said, 'Sir, you entrusted two talents to me. See, I have gained two more.' His master answered, 'Well done, good and faithful slave! You have been faithful with a few things. I will put you in charge of many things. Enter into the joy of your master.'

The second man came and brought his two talents and increase and presented them to the Lord and received the same praise and reward as the man who was

given the five talents and invited to enter in to the joy of His Lord.

25: 24-25 Then the one who had received the one talent came and said, 'Sir, I knew that you were a hard man, harvesting where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed, so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. See, you have what is yours.'

Last of all came the man who was given one talent professing that he knew the Lord to be an harsh man reaping in an harvest from where he had not sown. He did not know the Lord at all for Jesus Christ is the meek and lowly (Matt. 11:29) He only gathers fruit from His own seed that has been sown. The man professed to be afraid of what the Lord might do to him if lost the talent and confessed that because of this he hid it in the ground.

25:26-27 But his master answered, 'Evil and lazy slave! So you knew that I harvest where I didn't sow and gather where I didn't scatter? Then you should have deposited my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received my money back with interest!'

The Lord challenged him with his ungrounded excuses for being a lazy wicked man. If he was really afraid of what the Lord would say and do to him he should have put the money in a bank where it would have gained interest for his Lord.

25:28 Therefore take the talent from him and give it to the one who has ten.

No praise, no reward for this man but what was given to him was taken off him and given to the man who brought ten talents back to the Lord.

25:29-30 For the one who has will be given more, and he will have more than enough. But the one who does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. Now throw this useless servant into outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

To those who are faithful to the Lord Jesus Christ and who use that which He has given them to the fullness will be given an abundance. But the one who is not faithful and therefore brings nothing even the little that he has will be taken away from him. The unfaithful and unprofitable will be cast out into the dark place where "people will cry and grit their teeth in pain." (CEV)

Separating Believers from the Unbelievers

25:31-33 When the Son of Man comes in his glory with all of his angels, he will sit on his royal throne. All the nations will be assembled before him, and he will separate people one from another like a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

This separating of believers from unbelievers and the true Christian from the false from out of the nations of the world is likened to a shepherd who parts the sheep from the goats. This will take place when Jesus Christ comes with all his angels at the Last Judgment. The only other reference to this time is in 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10:

25:34 Then the king will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.'

He who is the "King of kings and Lord of Lords" calls them blessed of His Father because they have been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb. They have inherited

eternal life and are heirs of the kingdom (Titus 3:7; James 2:5) that has been prepared for them before the world was made. These are the sheep.

25:35-36 For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.'

Here the Lord makes known the good works of believers that had been created in them by Him (Eph. 2:10; Titus 2:14): feeding the hungry giving a cup of cold water to the thirsty, taking care of the stranger, clothing the naked, nursing the sick and visiting those in prison. All these things Jesus Christ said they had done for Him.

25:37-39 Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or naked and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?'

As far as they were aware they had never seen Him to do these things for Him. 25:40. And the king will answer them, 'I tell you the truth, just as you did it for one of the least of these brothers or sisters of mine, you did it for me. 'The King answers them that of a truth every time that they ministered to the least of their brothers and sisters in Him that they did it for Him.

25:41 "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you accursed, into the eternal fire that has been prepared for the devil and his angels!

To those on the left side, the goats, the foolish virgins, the lazy wicked servants He pronounces the final judgment. To depart from Him for they are cursed because they have sinned against God and not accepted the way of salvation provided for them through His Son. They are cast into the lake of fire prepared for the devil and his angels (Rev. 19:20; Rev. 20:15).

25:42-43 For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink. I was a stranger and you did not receive me as a guest, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.

He reveals their uncompassionate behaviour in refusing to give aid when He was in need of it (Titus 1:16).

25:44 Then they too will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not give you whatever you needed?'

They ask Him when did they ever see Him in need and deny Him help? The suggestion here is that if they had seen Him then they would have met His need but no one else's!

25:45 Then he will answer them, 'I tell you the truth, just as you did not do it for one of the least of these, you did not do it for me.'

His answer to them was in truth they had seen Him in and through those at His right hand, the believers and they did not lift a finger to help them so it was the same as not doing anything to help Him.

25:46 And these will depart into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

These unbelievers will go into eternal punishment
but the righteous into eternal life.

Matthew Chapter 26

The Crucifixion Near at Hand

26:1-2 When Jesus had finished saying all these things, he told his disciples, "You know that after two days the Passover is coming, and the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified."

After teaching about his second coming and final judgment, Jesus turned to his disciples to privately tell them that during the Passover, which was two days away, he would be handed over firstly to the chief priests and then by them to the Romans, to be crucified.

26:3-4 Then the chief priests and the elders of the people met together in the palace of the high priest, who was named Caiaphas. They planned to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him.

At that same time, the chief priests and elders of the people gathered together to plot the arrest and death of Jesus; and although they were unaware of it, this was in fulfilment of God's will and purpose. (Acts 2:23; Acts 4:27-28).

26:5 But they said, "Not during the feast, so that there won't be a riot among the people."

The religious rulers prudently decided not to arrest Jesus during the feast, in front of the crowds, for there were so many who followed Jesus that they feared a riot. So they began to look for a way in which to take Christ secretly, which they soon found in the betrayal of Judas.

Judas Decides to Betray Jesus

26:6 Now while Jesus was in Bethany at the house of Simon the leper,

For his last nights on earth, Jesus found food and lodging in the home of a man named Simon the leper in Bethany, not far from Jerusalem. Since Simon was at home, no doubt Jesus had cured him of his leprosy. The identity of Simon is uncertain – we do not know, for example, whether he was related to the other friends Jesus had in Bethany, Lazarus, Mary and Martha.

26:7 a woman came to him with an alabaster jar of expensive perfumed oil, and she poured it on his head as he was at the table.

While Jesus was eating the evening meal, a woman came and poured on his head and alabaster jar of expensive perfumed oil, as a token of her love and gratitude to Him for forgiving her and saving her soul. It would have cost the woman a lot to purchase this item, and symbolised the giving of her all to Christ. Even so, the acceptable act of our worship to God should involve all that we have and are (Rom. 12:1-2).

26:8-9 When the disciples saw this, they became indignant and said, "Why this waste? It could have been sold at a high price and the money given to the poor!"

Matthew records that all the disciples were angered that this woman had poured out her expansive gift on Jesus head; they thought it an extravagant waste. John in his gospel records more specifically that the unrest began with Judas Iscariot. He complained that the perfume should have been sold for a high price and the money given to the poor, not because he cared about the

poor but because he loved money. As a thief with access to Jesus treasury he often helped himself to whatever was put into it.

26:10-12 When Jesus learned of this, he said to them, "Why are you bothering this woman? She has done a good service for me. For you will always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me! When she poured this oil on my body, she did it to prepare me for burial.

Jesus rebuked the disciples for their hardness of heart and failure to understand what he had been teaching them, which had resulted in their harsh criticism of this woman. The woman herself had evidently understood Christ's teaching, for he says that her actions were good, and that by them she had prepared his body for burial. To show love for someone close to you is even more important than showering gifts upon the poor. The disciples would have ample opportunity to show love to the poor, but Jesus would be on earth for just two more days. In the same way we must show our love to our loved ones while they are here.

26:13 I tell you the truth, wherever this gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will also be told in memory of her.

For her demonstration of love to the soon to die saviour, this woman would be continually remembered, wherever the gospel was preached, for her actions teach several important lessons. Firstly, she is a lesson in gratitude and devotion, for she gave all she had to Jesus Christ in gratitude for his salvation, and she was not ashamed to do this in the face of the disciples' criticism. Then secondly she is a lesson in faith, for she believed

Christ's words concerning his death and acted upon them. Then finally her story teaches that love for Christ must be expressed, for love which is not demonstrated does no good to any. Even the love of God for humankind had to be demonstrated, and was so supremely in the life and ultimately the death of the Lord Jesus.

26:14-15 Then one of the twelve, the one named Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, "What will you give me to betray him into your hands?" So they set out thirty silver coins for him.

Whether this last disagreement with Jesus had brought to a head a long simmering dislike in the heart of Judas, but he took this opportunity to strike a bargain with the chief priests about betraying Jesus to them, away from the public eye. His fee was the price of a slave - 30 silver coins; Joseph was sold as a slave for a similar amount, 20 pieces of silver (Gen. 37:28).

26:16 From that time on, Judas began looking for an opportunity to betray him.

From that time on Judas sought opportunity to betray Jesus, in fulfilment of the Psalm 41:9.

Preparations for the Passover

26:17 Now on the first day of the feast of Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus and said, "Where do you want us to prepare for you to eat the Passover?"

It was customary for the disciples to eat the Passover together with Jesus each year. So they ask him where he would have them to prepare the meal this year.

26:18 He said, "Go into the city to a certain man and tell him, 'The Teacher says, "My time is near. I will observe the Passover with my disciples at your house." ' ' "

Luke gives us more detail about this encounter. The disciples were to follow an unnamed man carrying a pitcher of water on his head. They were to approach the house he entered, and say to the owner of that house that Christ would eat his final Passover there (for the time was near). It seems that this man had been prepared by God in some way for this event, possibly through a dream or revelation.

26:19 So the disciples did as Jesus had instructed them, and they prepared the Passover.

The disciples had come to learn obedience to Jesus, and even as they followed these strange instructions they found things exactly as he had told them. This experience would increase their trust in the Lord, who is always right, down to the tiniest detail.

The Institution of the Communion

26:20-22 When it was evening, he took his place at the table with the twelve. And while they were eating he said, "I tell you the truth, one of you will betray me. They became greatly distressed and each one began to say to him, "Surely not I, Lord?"

As they sat together that evening to eat the Passover meal, Jesus broke the news to them that one of them would betray him. Since Christ had already revealed something of the sinfulness of their hearts to each of these men, they were not able to entirely trust their own selves. Each of them was distressed to think that it might be him, "surely not I?" We notice that the disciples did not begin to

accuse each other. At the Lord's Table we are similarly instructed to examine the state of our own hearts before God (1 Cor. 11:28).

26:23 He answered, "The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me."

In literal fulfilment of Ps. 41:9, Jesus shares a sop of bread with Judas on the night in which he was betrayed, this fulfilment of prophecy being intended as a sign in this instance to Judas himself.

26:24 The Son of Man will go as it is written about him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would be better for him if he had never been born."

Although all that was about to happen to Jesus was in fulfilment of scripture and God's divine purpose, yet no one who participated in the evil about to be done to Christ would be excused. This verse clearly portrays God sovereignly working out his own purposes without overruling the free will of men; instead he harnesses their will to accomplish his ends.

26:25 Then Judas, the one who would betray him, said, "Surely not I, Rabbi?" Jesus replied, "You have said it yourself."

Judas is backed into a corner and hypocritically feigns surprise and disbelief. But Jesus is never fooled by such duplicity. He knew who would betray him (John 6:64; John 13:11).

26:26-28 While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after giving thanks he broke it, gave it to his disciples, and said, "Take, eat, this is my body." And after taking the cup and giving thanks, he gave it to them, saying, "Drink from

it, all of you, for this is my blood, the blood of the covenant that is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.

Judas having left, Jesus proceeds to institute a new memorial to replace that of the Passover, Just as the Passover involved the death and blood of the lamb, so this act would provide a memorial of his broken body and his blood shed on the cross. As Passover commemorated the Jews deliverance from slavery to Egypt, so the communion pictures the deliverance which Christ provides from the slavery of sin through his death. Christ gave himself that we might be redeemed, purchased for God by His blood. This blessing of redemption is closely related to the forgiveness of sins (Eph. 1:7).

26:29 I tell you, from now on I will not drink of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."

The types and pictures found in the Passover were shortly to be fulfilled by Christ's death and thereafter would no longer be needed. Christ would never take Passover again, but he would share the blessings of the redemption which it symbolised with the believers in his kingdom. Barnes says; 'The observance of the Passover, and of the rites shadowing forth future things, here end. I am about to die. The design of all these types and shadows is about to be accomplished. This is the last time that I shall partake of them with you. Hereafter, when my Father's kingdom is established in heaven, we will partake together of the thing represented by these types and ceremonial observances - the blessings and triumphs of redemption.'

26:30 After singing a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

Before going to face his last and fiercest battle at the cross, Jesus pauses to sing hymns of praise to God with his disciples. It is commonly accepted that the hymns sung were the Hallel, or Psalm 113-118: In Christ's singing praise there is a note of the victory which he is about to accomplish. He then sets out to the Mount of Olives, where there is a garden called Gethsemane, to pray there.

Jesus Warns that Self Confidence will Fail

26:31 Then Jesus said to them, "This night you will all fall away because of me, for it is written: 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.'

The Lord Jesus Christ knew His disciples better than they know themselves so He give them this penultimate warning which will be a fulfilment of prophecy (Zechariah 13:7) Before the night is out every one of them will desert Him. The NKJV says "made" which is the inference in the AKJV which uses the words "shall be offended" which means to entrap or entice to sin. Events were about to happen that the disciples would have no control of and they would not be able to overcome.

26:32 But after I am raised, I will go ahead of you into Galilee."

But Jesus gives them this ray of hope that spite of the fact that they would all desert Him, after He is raised from the dead He will go before them into Galilee and meet with them there (Matthew 28:7, Mark 16:7).

26:33 Peter said to him, "If they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away!"

Typically of Peter he impetuously makes the self-confident boast that if all the other disciples were made to stumble he would never fail Jesus.

26:34 Jesus said to him, "I tell you the truth, on this night, before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times."

Jesus tells Peter the truth about himself that on this very night he of all the disciples would not only fail Him in running away but that before the cock crows will deny Him three times.

26:35 Peter said to him, "Even if I must die with you, I will never deny you." And all the disciples said the same thing.

Peter ignores what the Lord has told him and with great energy and force claims that "he" would never deny Jesus even if he had to die with Him. All the other disciples made the same commitment. Although they had been with Jesus for so long and knew that every word He said was true and would come to pass they were blinded by their self-confidence and did not take in what He had said to them.

Jesus Takes the Cup of Suffering

26:36 Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to the disciples, "Sit here while I go over there and pray."

Jesus then led His disciples to a place called Gethsemane which was an olive grove a place where He had often met with them (John 18:2).

26:37 He took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and became anguished and distressed.

As He took Peter James and John further into the grove than the other disciples, he began to show grief and was deeply troubled.

26:38 Then he said to them, "My soul is deeply grieved, even to the point of death. Remain here and stay awake with me."

He then told the three disciples that He was almost crushed with grief even to the point of death and asked them to remain where they were and to stay awake and keep vigilant watch with Him. Here He was giving them an opportunity to support Him in His time of great need.

26:39 Going a little farther, he threw himself down with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if possible, let this cup pass from me! Yet not what I will, but what you will."

Going a little way off from the three disciples He threw himself face down on the ground and earnestly prayed to His Father that if it was possible to let this cup of suffering be taken away from Him. Having prayed this Jesus however submitted Himself to the will of His Father, "nevertheless let your will be done". This cup that Jesus drank was the sufferings and death that He would suffer on the cross - the sins that He bore for the world and the wrath of God upon sinners.

26:40 Then he came to the disciples and found them sleeping. He said to Peter, "So, couldn't you stay awake with me for one hour?"

After this He returned to the three disciples and found them asleep. It was to Peter who had boasted that

he would even die with Him that Jesus says “So, you couldn’t even stay awake with me for one hour?” He did not say this contemptuously but with a heart of compassion for He knew the weakness of the flesh.

26:41 Stay awake and pray that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

He tells the three of them the second time to stay awake and pray so that they will not give in to temptation. Jesus knows their spirit is willing but the body is weak.

26:42 He went away a second time and prayed, “My Father, if this cup cannot be taken away unless I drink it, your will must be done.”

Jesus left them for the second time and prayed to His Father that if the cup of suffering cannot be taken away unless He drinks it then His will must be done.

26:43 He came again and found them sleeping; they could not keep their eyes open.

He came again to the disciples and found them sleeping because they could not keep their eyes open.

26:44 So leaving them again, he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same thing once more.

Leaving them to sleep He went away and prayed for the third time saying the same things again.

26:45 Then he came to the disciples and said to them, “Are you still sleeping and resting? Look, the hour is approaching, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.

Returning to His disciples He found them still fast asleep and wakes them and forewarns them that the hour has arrived and the Son of Man has been betrayed into the hands of sinners.

26:46 Get up, let us go. Look! My betrayer is approaching!"

Telling them to get up He goes to meet His betrayer.

Jesus' Betrayal and Arrest

26:47 While he was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, arrived. With him was a large crowd armed with swords and clubs, sent by the chief priests and elders of the people.

As He was speaking Judas Iscariot arrived with a large crowd armed to the teeth with swords and clubs who were sent by the chief priests and elders. The chief priests were taking no chances in case the followers of Jesus rose up in arms to protect Him.

26:48-49 (Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, "The one I kiss is the man. Arrest him!") Immediately he went up to Jesus and said, "Greetings, Rabbi," and kissed him.

Judas had already arranged with the leader of this crowd that the man who He greets with a kiss is the one that they should arrest. So He goes straight up to Jesus greets Him as Rabbi and kissed Him.

26:50 Jesus said to him, "Friend, do what you are here to do." Then they came and took hold of Jesus and arrested him.

Was Jesus challenges Judas to confess when He asked Him "My friend, why are you here?" (KJV). Because Jesus knew what Judas had done and why he was there. After this they took hold of Jesus and arrested Him.

26:51 But one of those with Jesus grabbed his sword, drew it out, and struck the high priest's slave, cutting off his ear.

John (18:10) tells us that it was Peter took hold of his sword and smote off the ear of the chief priest's servant he being most probable the one nearest to him.

26:52 Then Jesus said to him, "Put your sword back in its place! For all who take hold of the sword will die by the sword.

Jesus tells Peter to put his sword away for those who take up the sword to fight will die by the sword. The apostle John further records that Jesus rebuked Peter for resisting the will of the Father, as he tried to prevent Christ from drinking the cup of suffering (John 18:11). Luke tells us that Jesus touched the servant's ear and healed him (Luke 22:51).

26:53 Or do you think that I cannot call on my Father, and that he would send me more than twelve legions of angels right now?

If He wanted to Jesus could have called upon a greater force than man to deliver Him from His enemies. If He called on His Father to send twelve legions of angels (over 80,000) He would do it immediately.

26:54 But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must come about this way?

If He were to do this then the Scriptures would not be fulfilled (Isaiah 53:4-8).

26:55 At that moment Jesus said to the crowd, "Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest me like you would an outlaw? Day after day I sat teaching in the temple courts, yet you did not arrest me.

Turning to the crowds He asks them why they had come out against Him with swords and clubs to arrest Him as if He were an outlaw. He had been in the temple courts openly teaching the people and they had not arrested Him then. Of course He knew that they feared the people too much to arrest Him in the day time and in public.

26:56 But this has happened so that the scriptures of the prophets would be fulfilled." Then all the disciples left him and fled.

As He spoke these words all His disciples fled for their lives leaving Him alone with the hostile crowd as He had told them they would (Zechariah 13:7).

Trial Before Caiaphas

26:57-58 Now the ones who had arrested Jesus led him to Caiaphas, the high priest, in whose house the experts in the law and the elders had gathered. But Peter was following him from a distance, all the way to the high priest's courtyard. After going in, he sat with the guards to see the outcome.

Although Peter had failed Christ by fighting and then forsaking him in the garden, he returned close

enough to see where he was being taken and to follow him. He entered the high priest's residence and sat among the temple guards to see what would happen to Jesus. At first sight, this seems a very brave thing to do, but it seems that Peter was relying on his own natural courage, and this would fail him later that evening.

26:59-61 The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were trying to find false testimony against Jesus so that they could put him to death. But they did not find anything, though many false witnesses came forward. Finally two came forward and declared, "This man said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God and rebuild it in three days.' "

According to the Law of Moses, an Israelite was not to be put to death except on the evidence of two or three witnesses. In order to feign obedience to this law, the council deliberately sought to get men who would testify falsely against Christ. The remarkable thing was that although many of them could agree to lie about Christ, no two of their testimonies could agree. God had confused their plans, for since Christ was without sin it would be impossible to convict him on the basis of the law. Finally, two were found who had heard Christ say 'destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up' but like the other Jews, they mistakenly thought that he was referring to the temple in Jerusalem. John clarifies that he had actually been speaking of his own body (John 2:19-22).

Matthew Chapter 27

Jesus Handed over to Pilate

27:1 When it was early in the morning, all the chief priests and the elders of the people plotted against Jesus to execute him.

Very early in the morning following His arrest the chief priests and elders met together to consult how they could bring about the death of the Lord Jesus Christ, they had already decided that He should die. They decide to bring a charge against Him so that the Roman governor would take the responsibility of bringing about His execution (Luke 22:2).

27:2 They tied him up, led him away, and handed him over to Pilate the governor.

They still feared Him or an attempt by His followers to deliver Him from their hands for they had Him tied up. They then led Him away and handed Him over to Pontius Pilate the governor of Judea.

The End of Judas

27:3-4 Now when Judas, who had betrayed him, saw that Jesus had been condemned, he regretted what he had done and returned the thirty silver coins to the chief priests and the elders, saying, "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood!" But they said, "What is that to us? You take care of it yourself!"

From the narrative it would appear that although he knew the Jewish rulers plotted to kill Jesus he had banished this thought from his mind. He must have been

at hand when the Sanhedrin met to decide Jesus' fate for he knew almost immediately that they had condemned Jesus to death. For the first time Judas' conscience troubled him and the full extent of what he had done condemned him! Returning the thirty pieces of silver he had received for his betrayal to the chief priests and confessing his sin in betraying an innocent man was a vain attempt to ease his conscience but he had gone too far and it was too late. The chief priest wiped their hands off him and told him it was nothing to do with them it was his problem.

27:5 So Judas threw the silver coins into the temple and left. Then he went out and hanged himself.

As they would not take the money from him Judas threw it into the temple and went out and hanged himself.

27:6 But the chief priests took the silver pieces and said, "It is not lawful to put them into the treasury, because they are the price of blood."

By their actions and words the chief priests condemned themselves in the part that they had played for by it they acknowledged that the money they had given to Judas was unclean, had been given for an sinful purpose, and could not be put into the temple treasury.

27:7 After consulting together they bought the Potter's Field with it, as a burial place for foreigners.

After some discussion they decided that it would be all right to buy a piece of land called the Potter's Field and use it as a burial place for foreigners.

27:8 For this reason that field has been called the "Field of Blood" to this day.

The general public must have heard about this for they changed the name of the field to Field of Blood and it is still called by that name (Acts 1:19).

27:9-10 Then what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled: "They took the thirty silver coins, the price of the one whose price had been set by the people of Israel, and they gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord commanded me."

Matthew says that all this happened in fulfilment of the prophecy of Jeremiah but in actual fact they are not to be found there but it is written in the book of Zechariah 11:12-13:

Then I said to them, "If it seems good to you, pay me my wages, but if not, forget it." So they weighed out my payment -- thirty pieces of silver. The LORD then said to me, "Throw to the potter that exorbitant sum at which they valued me!" So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them to the potter at the temple of the LORD.

Jesus before Pilate

27:11 Then Jesus stood before the governor, and the governor asked him, "Are you the king of the Jews?" Jesus said, "You say so."

Pontius Pilate could not have been unaware of the activities of the Lord Jesus Christ as the whole of Jerusalem and beyond had been stirred and affected by His ministry. Pilate asks Jesus a direct question based on the accusation of the Jewish leaders "Are you the king of the Jews" (Luke 23:2). Jesus simply answered Pilate what was true "What you have said is right".

27:12 But when he was accused by the chief priests and the elders, he did not respond.

However when the Jewish rulers made their accusations against Him He answered them not a word (Isaiah 53:7).

27:13-14 Then Pilate said to him, "Don't you hear how many charges they are bringing against you?" But he did not answer even one accusation, so that the governor was quite amazed.

Pilate was completely taken aback by Jesus' refusal to answer the charges that were being made against Him. As governor many had been brought before him for judgment and he had heard and expected them to give some answer in their defence. But still Jesus did not answer even one accusation.

Barabbas Chosen Rather than Jesus

27:15 During the feast the governor was accustomed to release one prisoner to the crowd, whomever they wanted.

During the feast of the Passover it was customary for the governor at the time to release one prisoner of the people's choice.

27:16 (NKJVTM) And at that time they had a notorious prisoner called Barabbas.

At this time the Romans held in custody a notorious prisoner named Barabbas. He was a thief and had committed murder in an uprising against the Romans (Mark 15:7).

27:17 (NKJVTM) Therefore, when they had gathered together, Pilate said to them, "Whom do you want me to release to you? Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?"

So after he had called together a crowd of Jews Pilate asked them who it was that they wanted him to set free giving them a choice of either Barabbas or Jesus who is called the Messiah by His followers. In presenting the thief and murderer Barabbas in contrast with the innocent, Jesus Christ Pilate was hoping that the crowd would choose Jesus.

27:18 (For he knew that they had handed him over because of envy.)

Pilate was no man's fool he knew that the only reason the chief priests and elders had handed Jesus over to him to put to death was because of envy.

27:19 As he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent a message to him: "Have nothing to do with that innocent man; I have suffered greatly as a result of a dream about him today."

While he was sat on the judgment seat Pilate's wife sent a message to warn him to not to condemn the innocent man that was before him meaning Jesus. Adam Clarke comments that there is no doubt that God had spoken to this woman through a dream.

If this is so then it was entirely for Pilate's benefit He did for it was in God's plan of salvation that Jesus Christ should be crucified. Perhaps it was because of this warning that Pilate washed his hands in water in verse 24.

27:20 But the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowds to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus killed.

The chief priests and elders who were amongst the crowd were persuading the people to ask for the release of Barabbas and to have Jesus executed. Let us keep in mind that the chief priests and elders had a great influence over the lives of the people and many of them would fear the consequences of not obeying them.

27:21 The governor asked them, "Which of the two do you want me to release for you?" And they said, "Barabbas!"

The governor asked them again which of the two did he want them to set free and they cried out Barabbas.

27:22 Pilate said to them, "Then what should I do with Jesus who is called the Christ?" They all said, "Crucify him!"

Pilate had expected them to shout for Jesus but when they did not still wanted to set Jesus free he asks a crowd who had been worked up out of reason by the Jewish leaders what did they want him to do with Jesus. At this point he allowed his authority from Caesar to be taken over by a crowd of unruly people! With one voice they cried "Crucify him".

27:23 He asked, "Why? What wrong has he done?" But they shouted more insistently, "Crucify him!"

Still hoping he asks them why he should put Him to death when He had done nothing wrong. Still they insistently cried "Crucify him".

27:24 When Pilate saw that he could do nothing, but that instead a riot was starting, he took some water, washed his hands before the crowd and said, "I am innocent of this man's blood. You take care of it yourselves!"

However having let go of his power there was nothing he could do with the crowd they began to riot. So he took some water and washed his hands before the people signifying that he had not condemned Jesus and was not guilty or responsible for the death of this righteous man. They were to be guilty and responsible if they put Him to death.

27:25 In reply all the people said, "Let his blood be on us and on our children!"

All the people shouted back we will take the responsibility for His death and our children!

In reality it was not the chief priests, the elders or Pilate that was responsible for the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus Christ it was all the people. For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23 see also Isaiah 53:5).

27:26 Then he released Barabbas for them. But after he had Jesus flogged, he handed him over to be crucified.

Accordingly Pilate released Barabbas and as was the Roman custom before crucifying anyone Jesus was flogged with a lead tipped whip then handed over to the Roman soldiers to be crucified (Isaiah 50:6).

A Parody of the Truth

27:27 Then the governor's soldiers took Jesus into the governor's residence and gathered the whole cohort around him.

The governor's soldiers then brought Jesus into the common hall of the governor's palace and gathered the whole battalion around Him.

27:28 They stripped him and put a scarlet robe around him,

They stripped Him of His own clothes and put upon Him the scarlet robe of one of their officer.

27:29 and after braiding a crown of thorns, they put it on his head. They put a staff in his right hand, and kneeling down before him, they mocked him: "Hail, king of the Jews!"

They then wove a crown from thorn branches and thrust it on His head (the word used to put in the original Greek 'epitithemi' means to impose on in either a friendly or hostile manner. In this case it would have been in a hostile manner). They put in His right hand a reed stick and kneeling down before him they pretended to worship Him and hailed Him as "King of the Jews!.

27:30 They spat on him and took the staff and struck him repeatedly on the head.

They spat in His face and snatched the stick from His hand and repeatedly hit Him on the head with it. This would have pressed the crown of thorns further on His head (Isaiah 50:6).

27:31 When they had mocked him, they stripped him of the robe and put his own clothes back on him. Then they led him away to crucify him.

When they had finished mocking Him they took the robe off Him and put His own clothes back on Him. To the soldiers it was just a game of mocking Him in pretending that He was a king. They did not realise that in truth He was not just King of the Jews but Kings of kings and Lord of lords. They then led Him away to be crucified.

27:32 As they were going out, they found a man from Cyrene named Simon, whom they forced to carry his cross.

The gospels record that Jesus was taken from Pilate's palace carrying his own cross, but following the severe flogging which he suffered he became too weak to carry it further. Collapsing under its weight, the Roman soldiers conscripted a bystander, a Jew from Cyrene, who would have been in the city to observe Passover that he might carry the cross for Jesus as he walked the hill to Calvary.

27:33 They came to a place called Golgotha (which means "Place of the Skull")

Golgotha was a hill outside the Jerusalem wall so named because of its resemblance to a skull and because of the executions regularly performed on it. Golgotha is a local, Aramaic word, the Latin name is often used instead, Calvaria or Calvary.

27:34 and offered Jesus wine mixed with gall to drink. But after tasting it, he would not drink it.

Immediately prior to his hands and feet being nailed to the cross, the Roman soldiers offered Christ a painkiller or sedative, this gall is thought by some to have been an opiate, (related to our morphine). Christ tasted but refused this bitter tasting drink, realising the necessity of his being fully conscious throughout his time on the cross, not least in order to lead at least two penitent souls to salvation, and to comfort his mother and disciples at the foot of the cross, and to announce his ultimate victory.

27:35 When they had crucified him, they divided his clothes by throwing dice.

The callous nature of the Roman soldiers, so inured to the human suffering they inflicted, is here emphasised. Rather than return his clothing to his family, who were present, they gambled over which of them should have it as a bonus for the day's gruesome work.

27:36 Then they sat down and kept guard over him there.

The crucifixion having been effected, the job of the Roman garrison was to ensure no one would try to take the condemned off the cross and save their lives from co-called Roman justice.

27:37 Above his head they put the charge against him, which read: "This is Jesus, the king of the Jews."

It was customary to place the crime of which the condemned was guilty above them on the cross to act as a deterrent to others. By the express will of Pilate, the charge was that he was King of the Jews, a charge with which Pilate taunted the Jewish leaders in return for backing him into a corner and forcing him to have Jesus executed.

27:38 Then two outlaws were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left.

Matthew does not provide us with all the details concerning the crucifixion. To get a full picture, one must compare all the gospel accounts. Of the two outlaws crucified with him, we may assume that they had been taken in the insurrection (Luke 23:25). Luke tells us of the repentance and salvation of one, but not the other (Luke 23:42-43).

27:39-40 Those who passed by defamed him, shaking their heads and saying, "You who can destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself! If you are God's Son, come down from the cross!"

Those who came out from Jerusalem to see the crucifixion cursed and taunted Jesus, as did the chief priests. It is of note that their taunts bear a striking resemblance to the temptations Jesus endured from Satan in the wilderness, in that his deity is tempted rather than his humanity. If you are the Son of God, come down! Do doubt the spite of the crowd was influenced by more than mere human enmity against God.

27:41 In the same way even the chief priests -- together with the experts in the law and elders -- were mocking him:

One might have thought that the religious rulers of the people to be above such taunting of a condemned Jew, but if they were not above his murder, nor were they above gloating at his murder. They considered, vainly that they could rid themselves of the son of God who deserved their obedience (Psalm 2:1-4).

27:42-43 "He saved others, but he cannot save himself! He is the king of Israel! If he comes down now from the cross, we will believe in him! He trusts in God -- let God, if he wants to, deliver him now because he said, 'I am God's Son!'"

They heap insults on Jesus by implying that God would not hear him or want him, for he had blasphemed God by claiming to be his son. In reality, Jesus, the beloved son, was returning to his father (John 16:28).

27:44 The robbers who were crucified with him also spoke abusively to him.

This verse clarified that both robbers initially cursed the Lord Jesus, and so it must have been at some point as they hung on the cross that one of them repented and turned to him for forgiveness. Even then, after this cursing of the dying son of God, instant, full and everlasting cleansing and forgiveness was available for this man.

27:45 Now from noon until three, darkness came over all the land.

A short while into the crucifixion the sun refused to shine and the whole land was plunged into darkness for approximately three hours. This preternatural event was evident since it was Passover the moon was full and so a solar eclipse was impossible. The times on the cross are not definite, John places the crucifixion later than “the sixth hour” but some commentators suggest he was using Roman time, whilst the other gospel writers used Jewish time. More modern commentators suppose that the times are approximate and the truth could be a little in between. Wesley says by this darkness ‘God testified his abhorrence of the wickedness which was then committing. It likewise intimated Christ's sore conflicts with the Divine justice, and with all the powers of darkness’.

27:46 At about three o'clock Jesus shouted with a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" that is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

Gill ‘the meaning is not, that the hypostatical union was dissolved, which was not even by death itself; the fullness of the Godhead still dwelt bodily in him:’ But the

son of God, as he became sin for us, experienced the awful and eternal result of sin on our behalf, and tasted that death which is separation from God during those hours on the cross.

27:47-49 When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, "This man is calling for Elijah." Immediately one of them ran and got a sponge, filled it with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink.

The superstitious standing nearby, either knew no Aramaic or little scripture; or more likely they did but turned Christ's words into an opportunity for deriding him. They said that Christ's cry was a cry for Elijah to come and save him. But the rest said, "Leave him alone! Let's see if Elijah will come to save him."

One of the bystanders is unwittingly used in the fulfilment of scripture from the psalms 'they gave me vinegar for my thirst' (Ps. 69:21). What motivated this individual to do this is unclear. Perhaps he wanted Christ to wet his lips so that he could hear his dying words more clearly. Whatever the case, God was sovereignly overruling even the derision of these bystanders for his own glory. And so the scripture was fulfilled.

27:50 Then Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and gave up his spirit.

Matthew does not articulate the loud cry which Jesus uttered, which John informs us was 'It is finished!' Then bowing his head, Jesus gave up his spirit. He had given his all, made his soul and offering for sin, and gave up his life in triumph; the work of redemption had been accomplished fully.

27:51-53 Just then the temple curtain was torn in two, from top to bottom. The earth shook and the rocks were split apart. And tombs were opened, and the bodies of many saints who had died were raised. (They came out of the tombs after his resurrection and went into the holy city and appeared to many people.)

The death of Christ, like the birth and resurrection of Christ, was accompanied by fearful and miraculous signs. The huge curtain which separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies in the temple was ripped by an invisible hand from top to bottom. The curtain had stood as a reminder that until then the way into God's immediate presence had not been revealed or opened (Heb. 9:8). Only one man the high priest and he only once a year was allowed to enter into the holy place, taking with him the blood of a sacrifice. Outside the Jerusalem wall, a sacrifice had been offered which would forever remove sin, and the event of the torn curtain revealed that through the death of Christ the way into God's presence had been made open for every believer at all times.

Not only symbolic manifestation, but seismic activity accompanied Christ's death. As if groaning under the weight of the sin which had been transacted, the earth quaked and the rocks were split. At the same time, as if to show the absolute victory of Christ's death, the tombs of the dead holy people were opened, ready for the events of Easter Sunday, when, as Matthew tells us here, the dead bodies were raised, and after his resurrection went into the city and appeared to (and were recognised by) many people.

Mat 27:54 Now when the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and what

took place, they were extremely terrified and said, "Truly this one was God's Son!"

Perhaps the dignified way in which Christ died, the love and forgiveness which he displayed to his murderers, and his evident fear of God even upon the cross had already affected the Centurion deeply. But at the sign of the earthquake, and other miracles such as the midday darkness, they were terrified, realising these signs as omens from God, they exclaimed 'truly this was the son of God'. What this title meant to them is not clear. Romans would have been familiar with stories of their 'gods' becoming like men and living in disguise among men. They certainly recognised Christ as being more than a mortal being.

27:55-56 Many women who had followed Jesus from Galilee and given him support were also there, watching from a distance. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee.

From John's account it appears that some women and disciples, including his mother, and John the apostle were near to the cross at the time of Jesus death (close enough to hear a dying man speak). Others stood at a respectful distance, but were witnesses of his death and of the place of his burial.

27:57-58 Now when it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who was also a disciple of Jesus. He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate ordered that it be given to him.

Joseph of Arimathea was not ashamed of the fact that he had become a disciple of Jesus, and being rich he

realised he was in a position to help with the burial of Jesus body. He went boldly to Pilate to request permission to carry out this service. Pilate was surprised that Jesus was already dead and first verified with the centurion before granting permission for Joseph to remove the body.

Matthew Chapter 28

The Resurrection

28:1 Now after the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb.

When the Sabbath was over on the first day of the week as it was beginning to get light, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary whom Mark records was Mary the mother of James and also adds Salome came to look at the tomb (Mark 16:1).

28:2 Suddenly there was a severe earthquake, for an angel of the Lord¹ descending from heaven came and rolled away the stone and sat on it.

Suddenly as they approached the tomb there was a severe earthquake as an angel of the Lord descending from heaven. He rolled the stone away from the mouth of the tomb and sat on it.

28:3 His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow.

The angel shone as bright as lightening and his clothes were as white as snow.

28:4 The guards were shaken and became like dead men because they were so afraid of him.

The soldiers who had been placed there to guard the tomb shook with fear of the angle and became like paralyzed men, unable to speak or move but they could still hear and see!

28:5-6 But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here, for he has been raised, just as he said. Come and see the place where he was lying."

The angel speaking to the women tells them not to be afraid for he knows that they have come looking for Jesus, who was crucified. That He is not in the tomb for He has been raised from the dead just as He said He would. He invites them to come and see the place where He was lying.

Note: Jesus had already risen from the dead before the angel rolled the stone away. He moved the stone so that they could enter and see that it was empty.

28:7 Then go quickly and tell his disciples, 'He has been raised from the dead. He is going ahead of you into Galilee. You will see him there.' Listen, I have told you!"

The women having entered the tomb and seen that Jesus was not there the angel tells them to go quickly and tell His disciples the good news. Jesus has risen from the dead and is already on His way to Galilee to meet them there just as He had told them (Matthew 26:32).

28:8 So they left the tomb quickly, with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples.

They quickly left the tomb filled with fear and yet a great joy and ran to tell the disciples as the angel had told them.

28:9 But Jesus met them, saying, "Greetings!" They came to him, held on to his feet and worshiped him.

However before they reached their destination they received another sudden surprise, Jesus met them! In the Authorised King James it says that He greeting them with the word "All Hail", the Greek is defined by Thayer as meaning to rejoice and be glad. They immediately recognized Him and falling before Him held on to His feet and worshipped Him.

28:10 Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee. They will see me there."

Although they most probably would have liked to stay there with Him tells them not to afraid but to go and tell "my brothers" to go to Galilee and they will see Him there. Although the angel told them to go and tell "His disciples" Jesus calls them here "my brothers". In Matthew 12: 15 He said whoever does the will of my Father in Heaven is my brother and sister. In John 15: 14 He says "you are my friends if you do whatever I command you". But this is the first time that He calls them brothers and such is the relation that all believers have with the Lord Jesus Christ (Hebrews 2:11).

A Conspiracy to Conceal the Truth

28:11 While they were going, some of the guard went into the city and told the chief priests everything that had happened.

While the women were on their way to the disciples some of the guard went into Jerusalem and told the chief priest everything that happened. This is proof that although they were paralyzed with fear and could not speak or move they heard and saw everything that went on. These soldiers knew that when the women arrived at the tomb the stone was still in its place and the seals had

not been broken. They saw the angel roll the stone away and that Jesus was not in there!

28:12-13 After they had assembled with the elders and formed a plan, they gave a large sum of money to the soldiers, telling them, "You are to say, 'His disciples came at night and stole his body while we were asleep.'

The chief priests called the elders together and formulated a plan to conceal the truth. They paid a large sum of money to the soldiers and told them that they were to say that Jesus' disciples came during the night and stole the body away while they were asleep. It would have been extremely unlikely that the disciples being Jews would have come to the tomb during the Sabbath as it is clearly recorded that as soon as the Sabbath was over the women came. If they had all been asleep how could they have known that the disciples stolen the body. These were Roman soldiers they knew what the penalty would have been if they had all been sleeping on duty.

28:14 If this matter is heard before the governor, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble."

The chief priests and elders were confident that they could easily satisfy Pilate with the story and so save the soldiers from being punished. Why were they so confident? Well they knew that Pilate had washed his hands off the whole affair and handed Jesus over to them. He would no longer be interested in the matter.

28:15 So they took the money and did as they were instructed. And this story is told among the Jews to this day.

The soldiers were convinced took the money and did as they were instructed. At the time that Matthew was writing the gospel this story was still being told among the Jews.

The Great Commission

28:16 So the eleven disciples went to Galilee to the mountain Jesus had designated.

Matthew has omitted many of the appearances of the Lord Jesus Christ to His disciples that are recorded in the other gospels and goes straight to them going to the place where Jesus had told them He would meet them after the resurrection.

28:17 When they saw him, they worshiped him, but some doubted.

When they met Him they worshiped Him. John Gill says “with divine adoration, as the eternal Son of God; for so he was now declared to be by his resurrection from the dead” (Romans 1:4). The next part of the verse is difficult to understand “but some doubted”. The reference would include more than just Thomas as it says “some” not one. As all the disciples present had already seen Jesus, including Thomas, after the resurrection it is hard to believe that any of them at this meeting with Jesus in Galilee had any doubts to the fact that He was alive. Young’s Literal Translation has “but some wavered” Using Young’s translation I would comment that none of the eleven disciples here had any doubts that Jesus had arisen from the dead but some of them hesitated for a moment in displaying their worship of Him and thus completely committing themselves to His authority. By the time He gave His disciples the Great Commission I am sure that not one of them held back any more.

28:18 Then Jesus came up and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

Jesus approached them and declared that all authority, power, right and strength has been given to Him in heaven and on earth (Ephesians 1: 20 -22, 1 Peter 3:22, 1 Corinthians 15:25 - 28).

28:19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,

This Great Commission that Jesus gave to His eleven disciples was to all His disciples right up to the present age and until He comes. Go to all the people in every nation and make disciples; that is, to proclaim the Gospel message of salvation. It is a complete message that must be made known, that Jesus died for our sins and was buried and rose again (1 Corinthians 15: 3 - 4). Those who believe should be baptized in water in the Name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost.

28:20 teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

New disciples are to be taught the Word of God and to obey everything that the Lord Jesus Christ has commanded. In fulfilling His commission Jesus gives the promise and full assurance that they must remember that there will never be a time that He will not be with them to the end of the age. That is until Jesus Christ comes again to take His Church to be with Him to Heaven. Amen.

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