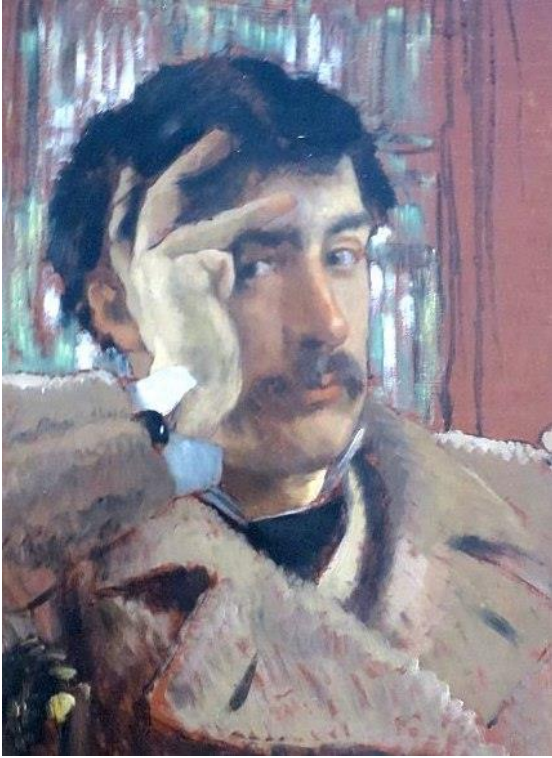


MESSIAH

By Lorri Frandsen

ARTWORK BY JAMES TISSOT



Jacques Joseph Tissot, or James Tissot as he was also known, was a French painter and illustrator who lived from 1836 to 1902. He moved to London in 1871 and became famous as a painter of fashionably dressed women depicted in scenes of everyday life. His greatest works were those of scenes and characters from the Bible. Tissot was Catholic but had a spiritual experience in 1885 that caused him to devote the rest of his life to making paintings about Biblical events. Although French artists, at this time, were moving towards impressionism, pointillism, and oil medium, Tissot leaned towards realism in his watercolors. When he painted 365 watercolors of the life of Christ, he won critical acclaim in Paris, London and New York.

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Published by Grace Life Ministries, Box 3583, Courtenay, BC, Canada

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This book is a simplified narrative account of the life of Jesus in language that is inspiring to people of all ages. It is not a paraphrase of the gospels but rather a vivid, summarized composite of the events recounted by the gospel writers. Some events may be missing, but the main incidents are all included with brief commentary where applicable. The author has tried to write the Lord's story in such a way that readers will be captivated by its truth. Since a full grasp of the mystery of God's grace in Christ Jesus can only come about with the aid of the Holy Spirit's enlightening influence, it was my constant prayer that He would guide me every step of the way to represent His mind and heart as faithfully as possible as I penned these pages. While writing this account, I have been immensely encouraged and inspired as the character of Jesus unfolded, bringing a deeper appreciation and a more intimate experience of His love and grace. My hope is that this book will bring the same inspiration and joy to the reader.

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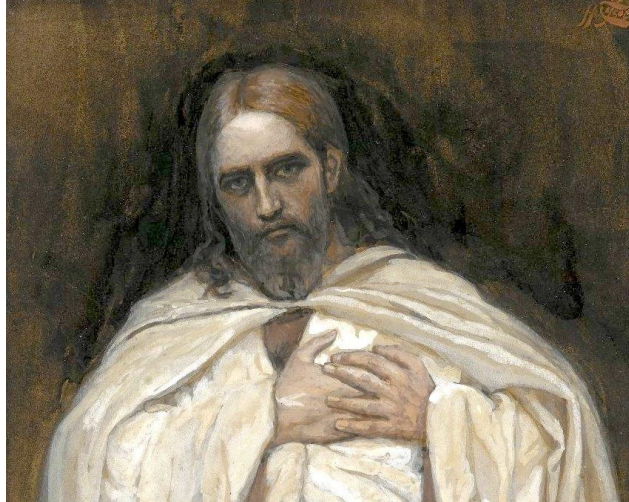
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It is written: "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no heart has imagined, what God has prepared for those who love Him." (1Corinthians 2:9)

In the beginning, before the world was ever created, God had an amazing plan to create human beings made in His image, who would be able to communicate with Him directly. They would be able to love God and become as holy as He, with minds and hearts like His own. They would also have freedom of choice, because without it, love cannot exist. By its very nature, love must be able to freely choose its object of affection. And God definitely wanted to be loved by these beings, even though God was aware that initially they would rebel against Him and go their own way. As God looked into the future He saw that their rescue would come at great cost to Himself. Not all would even want to be rescued, but those who did, would belong to Him and love Him as much as He loved them. God believed it was worth the price and so He began creating this world according to His master plan. He began with two human beings, Adam and Eve, who represented their entire race. All those who came after them would be affected by the decisions made by these two. Just as God had foreknown, the couple rebelled against Him and at the moment of their sin, they died spiritually and the process of physical deterioration set in. Their decision doomed the entire world. They, and all their descendants, were now cut off from God and placed under a death sentence. The Holy God could no longer commune with them because their spirits were dead and their corrupted, mortal bodies were now unfit for heaven. However God greatly loved humankind and He had a plan that would involve recreating them to be sinless in spirit, with eternal, indestructible bodies. God's own Spirit would be combined with theirs, so as to give them a nature like His own and make them worthy with His worth. No longer would His beloved ones be enslaved by sin or separated from Him. However it required God becoming a human being so as to represent humanity, both on the cross, where humankind would die, and in the resurrection, where humanity would be recreated to live with God forever. And so divinity joined with humanity in the Person of Jesus Christ, the God/man who became the Savior of the world.

CHAPTER 1

Birth, Magi, Jesus in the Temple



The Word

What we know of Jesus is mostly written in the New Testament gospels. There are few other historical references to Him outside of the Bible and very few that were written before 30AD. Thankfully we have the four gospels of the New Testament which were written by friends of Jesus - Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Matthew and Luke begin their accounts with the birth of Jesus Christ as a baby in Bethlehem; Mark begins with the Lord's baptism in the Jordan River. However John, the closest to Jesus of all the disciples, begins his narrative at the very beginning of creation, calling Jesus "the Word" who was already there before anything came into being.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him. Without him was not anything made that has been made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness hasn't overcome it. The Word became flesh, and lived among us. We saw his glory, such glory as of the one and only Son of the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:1-5,14)

John's reference to the 'Word' is taken from Old Testament passages such as Psalm 33:6 *'By Yahweh's word, the heavens were made; all their army by the breath of his mouth'* and Psalm 107:19-20: *'When they cry to Yahweh in their trouble, he saves them out of their distresses. He sends his word, and heals them, and delivers them from their graves.'*

John personifies the Word, saying that He was present with God at creation, and was actually God Himself. He goes on to say that this Word had God's very own life in Him and this life served as a light for all people, breaking through the spiritual darkness that was in the world. In fact the world was actually created through the Word. John further states that the Word became flesh and lived among His chosen people, the Jews, for a time. However most of them did not recognize Him as the promised Messiah.

The name "Jesus Christ" is the same as "Jesus the Messiah." The word 'Messiah' comes from a Hebrew word meaning, "anointed one" or "chosen one." The Greeks used the word Christos or, in English, Christ.

One of the reasons why the Jews did not recognize Jesus as their Messiah was because Jesus plainly identified Himself as God, and this was blasphemous to their ears. Usually Jesus referred to Himself as the Son of God, or the Son of Man, but He also made many references to being equal to God and this the Jews could not accept. They were expecting a Messiah who was a prophet like Daniel or Ezekiel, a male descendant from David's line who would become a great ruler during a Messianic Age. He would reign in God's name over all the world until no other gods would be worshipped anywhere. He would make Israel a great and mighty nation, pre-eminent over all other nations and he would rule over the earth with such power that nothing would be able to defeat him. Biblical prophecy also indicated that he would be born through a Jewish woman and the Jewish scholars and priests laboriously pored over the scriptures, trying to discover where he would be born and when this great event would take place. There were over 300 prophecies written from 400 to 1,000 years previous to His coming, one favorite being by the prophet Malachi.

'Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and terrible day of Yahweh... He will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse.'(Malachi 4:5-6)

After Malachi, however, no other prophet arose in Israel for 400 long years. During all that time God was silent and all the Jews could do was anxiously wait for their Messiah, looking for the promised Elijah to come and make him known. Then one day, after centuries of anticipation, the fulfillment of this prophecy finally arrived!

Just as God had promised, He sent the 'Elijah' prophet in advance, son of an old Levite priest named Zechariah who served in the Temple in Jerusalem. This priest had never had children because his wife Elizabeth was barren, and now that he was old, he undoubtedly felt the time for fatherhood was long past.



As Zechariah served before God (high priests were chosen by lot to go into the temple to burn incense), an angel of the Lord appeared before him, standing by the altar of incense. Zechariah was overcome with fear. The angel tried to calm him by saying: *“Don’t be afraid, Zacharias, because your request has been heard, and your wife, Elizabeth, will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. You will have joy and gladness; and many will rejoice at his birth. For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, and he will drink no wine nor strong drink. He will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother’s womb. He will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord, their God. He will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, ‘to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,’ and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to prepare a people prepared for the Lord.”* (Luke 1:13-17)

Unfortunately Zechariah didn't believe the angel, asking: *“How can I be sure of this? For I am an old man, and my wife is well advanced in years.”* (Luke 1:18)

Strange that a priest in God's temple, in the presence of a mighty angel, would want further confirmation of the message, but so it was. Of course the angel was not pleased with this lack of faith. He introduced himself as the mighty 'Gabriel' who stands in the presence of God. The angel was saying in effect: "Do you know who you are questioning?! I received this message from God Himself, in whose presence I stand continually!" This was the very angel who had interpreted a vision for the prophet Daniel hundreds of years earlier, after he and the archangel Michael fought against powerful demonic principalities who were hindering Gabriel from bringing God's message to Daniel concerning Israel and the coming Messiah. Michael (mightiest of all angels) had been summoned to step in to aid Gabriel in the battle. Together the two archangels overcame the opposition. Gabriel's glorious appearance had caused Daniel to be so frightened that he had fallen on his face in abject terror. One can see from this instance that Gabriel was obviously of considerably high status and his appearance reflected this. He had been entrusted with momentous news for Daniel and now he had been given the wonderful privilege of bringing amazing news to Zechariah, only to hear the priest doubt his words. It was a huge insult to God, and Gabriel told Zechariah that because of his unbelief he would lose his ability to speak until the day of his son's birth. Meanwhile, the people outside were waiting for Zechariah and wondering why he stayed so long in the Holy of Holies. When he came out, he couldn't speak to them and they realized he had seen a vision in the temple. When his time of service at the temple was over, he returned home.

Shortly after this, just as Gabriel had declared, Zechariah's wife became pregnant, creating great joy in the hearts of the old couple, and probably more than a little wonder in the minds of their neighbors.

In the Old Testament, Isaac, Samson, and Samuel had been miraculously born to mothers who were barren, and now it appeared that God was doing something unusual with Elizabeth as well. Some may have speculated that the child born to Zechariah and his wife would be a great prophet or maybe even the Messiah himself!

It was in the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy that God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee. This time the archangel was carrying a message for a young girl, a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary, and Gabriel greeted her with the astounding message that God highly favored her. Mary was shocked by the archangel's presence and she was troubled by his words. She was probably only a young girl about 15 years of age, the usual age of marriage at that time, but she was still quite young and probably very innocent. It is understandable that she would have been distressed. Gabriel soothed her with the words: *"Don't be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. Behold, you will conceive in your womb, and give birth to a son, and will call his name 'Jesus.' He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father, David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever. There will be no end to his Kingdom."* (Luke 1:30-33)

Anytime in scripture when God named a child, it was a definite sign that the child would have a divine destiny. In this case, Mary's baby was to be called 'Jesus' which was a fairly common name in the land. It was actually 'Yehoshuah' meaning 'YHWH is salvation'. Mary was still confused because she was a virgin and her marriage was still a ways off, so she wondered how a pregnancy would fit in with her situation. However Gabriel told her that the pregnancy would be no ordinary one. The Holy Spirit would come upon her, overshadowing her with His great power so that a holy infant would be born to her. This babe would be the Son of God Himself. Gabriel's words about the Holy Spirit hovering over Mary drew a parallel with the Holy Spirit hovering over the creation of the world.

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was formless and empty. Darkness was on the surface of the deep and God's Spirit was hovering over the surface of the waters. (Genesis 1:1-2)

Gabriel told her that the power of the Holy Spirit would overshadow her and a holy child would be born to her. This child would be the Son of God. It is doubtful that Mary understood the full import of what Gabriel was saying, but the angel encouraged her faith by telling her of another miracle pregnancy. Her aunt Elizabeth had already conceived even though she was very old. Gabriel added, *'For nothing spoken by God is impossible.'* (Luke 1:37)

Mary's response to this was completely different from that of Zechariah. She was totally submitted to God's will and answered. *"Behold, the servant of the Lord; let it be done to me according to your word."* (Luke 1:38)

Then the angel left her.

Unlike the first Eve who denied humanity eternal life through her disobedience, Mary (the second Eve) obeyed God and held out the prospect of eternal life to all. In doing so, Mary became the fulfillment of an Old Testament prophecy that told of a virgin birth.

Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin will conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. (Isaiah 7:14)

Isaiah used the word 'almah' (virgin) which usually refers to a young, unmarried woman of marriageable age. There were two types of virgin in the Hebrew Scriptures - a true virgin, and a betrothed virgin. A betrothed virgin was referred to as a man's wife because the state of betrothal was considered to be as sacred as the married state, and the difference between the two seems to have been a mere formality.

Most Jewish scholars believed that Isaiah used the word 'almah' because he was referring to a young woman who was betrothed. They did not suspect that Isaiah was also referring to a true virgin who had never known a man.



Isaiah's prophecy stated that the virgin's baby would be called 'Immanuel' (a Hebrew word meaning 'God with us'), implying that in some way Deity would be identified with humanity. This does not mean that the Messiah's name would actually be Immanuel. Isaiah prophesied of the Messiah that *'His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.'* (Isaiah 9:6). None of these titles were Jesus' actual name, but they were descriptions of Him, clearly prophesying that He would be divine. This scripture should have tipped off the Jews that their Messiah would dwell among them as God in the flesh. However, as mentioned earlier, most Jews did not pick up on this clue.

After Gabriel's visit, Mary hurriedly went to visit her cousin Elizabeth in Judea. Usually parents in Israel carefully guarded their young daughters' purity and this was true even of betrothed brides. It is likely that Mary's parents allowed her to visit Elizabeth and Zechariah because they trusted them to watch over their young daughter. The Bible does not tell us whether Mary told her parents of her angelic visitation before going there. However we are told that when Mary entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth, the six-month fetus inside Elizabeth's womb moved strongly and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. She immediately began to prophecy.

"Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! Why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold, when the voice of your greeting came into my ears, the baby leaped in my womb for joy!

Blessed is she who believed, for there will be a fulfillment of the things which have been spoken to her from the Lord!" (Luke 1:42-45)

The Holy Spirit moved Elizabeth to prophecy like this, and already the tiny, unborn prophet in her womb was announcing the coming of the Messiah. Mary was ecstatic and sang a song to the Lord that clearly praised God as her Savior.

"My soul magnifies the Lord. My spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior, for he has looked at the humble state of his servant. For behold, from now on, all generations will call me blessed. For he who is mighty has done great things for me. Holy is his name. His mercy is for generations of generations on those who fear him. He has shown strength with his arm. He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He has put down princes from their thrones. And has exalted the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things. He has sent the rich away empty. He has given help to Israel, his servant, that he might remember mercy, as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and his offspring forever." (Luke 1:46-55)

Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three or four months, until the birth of Elizabeth and Zechariah's son. The birth of this special baby was in some ways like the birth of Samuel in the Old Testament because both Samuel's mother, Hannah, as well as Elizabeth, were given instructions to treat their sons as Nazarites. The Nazarites were a Jewish sect not permitted to drink any alcohol. Also, just as Samuel anointed David as Israel's king, John the Baptist would later baptize (anoint) Jesus as Israel's King and Messiah.

The day came for the baby to be circumcised, as well as named, and the neighbors gathered around, thinking that the child would be named after his father, as was common. However Elizabeth spoke up and said, "No! He is to be called John." This broke with the custom, so they went to Zechariah to find out what he would like to name the child. He asked for a writing tablet, and to everyone's astonishment he wrote, "His name is John." Immediately he was able to speak, and he began praising God, much to the surprise of everyone in Judea. Everyone wondered what this child was going to be since it was obvious that the Lord's hand was upon him. Then Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and he began to prophesy:

"Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people; and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David...salvation from our enemies, and from the hand of all who hate us; to show mercy towards our fathers, to remember his holy covenant, the oath which he spoke to Abraham...And you, child, will be called a prophet of the Most High, for you will go before the face of the Lord to prepare his way, to give knowledge of salvation to his people by the remission of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God, whereby the dawn from on high will visit us, to shine on those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death; to guide our feet into the way of peace." (Luke 1:67-79)

After John's birth, Mary went home to her family, her pregnancy obvious by this time. She would have been at least three or four months along. She must have had some concerns as she approached her hometown.

What would her family and neighbors say? Would they believe her if she told them that she was carrying God's Son? Or would they see her as a fallen woman? Most likely it would be the latter and her family's reputation would be ruined as a result. And then there was Joseph, her betrothed husband. He would know that he was not the father of her unborn baby.

If he didn't believe her story, he would assume she had betrayed him with another man while she was staying at her cousin Elizabeth's home. Mary was already betrothed to Joseph, which was as binding as actual marriage even though the wedding had not yet taken place. The penalty for adultery was death by stoning. That could be her fate if Joseph publicly denounced her as an adulteress. Jewish law was very unforgiving in such matters. Now that she was away from Elizabeth and Zechariah's protection, Mary was on her own.

Well, not really. She had her faith in God's protection to sustain her for she would have remembered Gabriel's visit and his prophetic words to her. Undoubtedly she was convinced that unseen angels were guarding her and the developing baby inside her womb. However, as expected, Joseph did not believe her. Although he was a good man, he was also righteous and he could not bring himself to go through with a marriage to an adulteress who looked to be pregnant with another man's child. However he also didn't want to expose Mary's sin and shame her publicly. He was not interested in revenge in spite of Mary's supposed unfaithfulness. Consequently he determined to divorce her quietly. He was still mulling over this idea when an angel of the Lord came to him in a dream. The fact that God did this is not unusual. After all, the Old Testament gives other examples of God speaking to other people in dreams. Joseph, Solomon, Isaiah, Ezekiel and Daniel all received dreams from the Lord. God often guided His chosen ones in this way and Mary's husband, Joseph, was definitely chosen by God from all eternity to be the father figure for His Son. Consequently God sent His angel to make this very clear to him.

... behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, don't be afraid to take to yourself Mary, your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. She shall give birth to a son. You shall call his name Jesus, for it is he who shall save his people from their sins." (Matthew 1:20-21)

Joseph woke up and did what the angel of the Lord commanded him to do. He took Mary home as his wife but he did not have conjugal relations with her until after she gave birth, understanding that as the mother of God's Child, Mary was to be kept holy (set apart).

Now in those days the Roman emperor, Caesar Augustus, issued a decree that a census was to be taken of the entire Roman world. Roman emperors and governors periodically demanded censuses, although this was the first one for Judea. Because the governor did not collect the taxes over an area himself, he needed an inventory of land and holdings so that he would know what kind of tax money to expect.

Everyone had to go to their place of birth to register, so Joseph was forced to go from Nazareth to Bethlehem, the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. Micah 5:2 specified that the Messiah would come from Bethlehem.

But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, being small among the clans of Judah, out of you one will come ... that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings out are from of old, from ancient times. (Micah 5:2)



A lot of Jews would have been heading to Bethlehem because of the Roman census. Normally Joseph and Mary would have been able to stay with relatives in Bethlehem but apparently this wasn't possible. They couldn't even find an inn to accommodate them. The only place available was a stable, probably sheltering the donkeys used by travellers. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and Mary gave birth to a son. She wrapped the baby in cloths and placed him in a manger. Both Mary and Joseph must have wondered why God's Son rested before them in a wooden trough. The king of the universe surely merited better surroundings. But the awe of seeing this tiny life, supernaturally created, surely overrode all other thoughts.

The Bible says there were shepherds with their flocks living nearby, completely unaware that the Great Shepherd Himself had just been born a little ways away. An angel of the Lord appeared to them and God's glory shone around them. This would have been a very bright light, like the pillar of fire that led the Israelites through the Red Sea.



Understandably the shepherds were terrified but the angel calmed them with encouraging words. The angel said to them, *“Don't be afraid, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be to all the people. For there is born to you today, in David's city, a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. This is the sign to you: you will find a baby wrapped in strips of cloth, lying in a feeding trough.” (Luke 2:10-12)*

Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying: *"Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, good will toward men."* (Luke 2:10-14)

Then the angels returned to heaven, leaving the shepherds to query this amazing event. They determined to go to Bethlehem to see this miracle for themselves, and just as the angel had said, they found Mary and Joseph, with their newborn infant lying in a manger. After seeing him, the excited shepherds spread the word throughout town and all who heard it were amazed.

Back at the stable, Mary, who was apparently the thoughtful type, treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. There was so much to take in. So many things were happening that were beyond human understanding. After this Joseph and Mary had Jesus circumcised on the eighth day so as to fulfill the Law's requirement. The act of circumcision was a physical act contained in the Law of Moses.

"Sanctify to me all the firstborn, whatever opens the womb among the children of Israel, both of man and of animal. It is mine." (Exodus 13:2)

It was at this time that Joseph would have given Jesus his name, signifying Joseph's

It would later be revealed by the apostle Paul that circumcision under the Law actually had great spiritual significance for New Covenant believers. Under the Old Covenant, a ring of physical flesh was removed from a baby's penis to attest to his birth into the Jewish community. But it was only a foreshadowing of a spiritual reality, which would occur later when Christ came on the scene to inaugurate the New Covenant. Through Jesus' death and resurrection, a believer would then be transformed in his soul by the Holy Spirit who would sever his old sin nature (symbolized by the flesh around a penis) from his reborn spirit. That circumcision would make a person an eternal son of Israel.

'But he is a Jew who is one inwardly, and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, not of the letter; whose praise is not from men, but from God.' (Romans 2:29)

In whom you were circumcised with a circumcision not made with hands, in the putting off of the body the sins of the flesh, in the circumcision of Christ. (Colossians 2:11)

legal adoption of the child.

The gospels of Matthew and Luke both carefully list Jesus' genealogy in order to

show that He was the predicted Messiah and King promised throughout the Old Testament.

However the two lists are in reverse order and give a different set of names from David onwards. Matthew focuses on Joseph's lineage through David's son, Solomon. Joseph was a descendent of David. He adopted Jesus, thereby legally making Jesus a 'son of David'. Luke gives an account of Mary's lineage through David's son Nathan, showing Jesus to be biologically descended from David. In Matthew's account Joseph is called the "son of Heli" (actually son-in-law but there was no Greek word for this) because of his marriage to Mary, Heli's daughter. In Luke's account, Joseph is called the son of Jacob, his biological father.

Either way, no matter which genealogy is listed, Jesus is a descendant of David and therefore was eligible to be the Messiah. Surprisingly Mary's genealogy includes the names of women, which was unusual at the time since only men's names were usually listed. However Matthew lists four women - Tamar (who had children by her father-in-law, Judah); Rahab (a Jericho prostitute who helped Jewish spies); Ruth (a Moabite woman who made Naomi's God her own); and Bathsheba (Solomon's mother with whom David committed adultery). These four were not considered respectable Jewish women but they had great faith in God and were ancestors of Jesus. Their inclusion into the Lord's family line reveals the love God has always had for all the nations of the world and His special favor upon women.

Forty days after the birth of Jesus, Mary and Joseph would have taken another trip from Bethlehem to Jerusalem in order to fulfill the purification requirement for Mary. Under the Old Covenant, a woman who gave birth to a baby boy was considered "unclean" for seven days. On the eighth day the boy had to be circumcised. Then the mother had to wait for 33 days to be made pure from her bleeding. During that time she was not permitted to touch anything sacred. After the 33 days were over, she had to bring two offerings to the priest at the Tabernacle - a yearling lamb for a burnt offering and a young pigeon or a dove for a sin offering. The priest would offer these to the Lord to pay for her sin. Then she would be "cleansed" from her bleeding. If she was poor and couldn't afford a lamb, she could bring two doves or two young pigeons instead. (Leviticus 12). As Joseph was likely a carpenter or stonemason, and therefore a poor man, he would not have been able to afford a lamb sacrifice at the Temple. Instead he and Mary brought 2 pigeons as an offering.



An old man named Simeon saw the couple enter the Temple with their baby. Simeon lived in Jerusalem and had been told that very day, by the Holy Spirit, to go to the Temple. He was a man close to the Lord, a righteous and good man, who had received a promise from God that he would not die before he saw the Messiah with his own eyes. He was now very old after waiting for many years to see this wondrous miracle. He, and others in Israel, were

eagerly expecting the Messiah around this time.

The Jews had an idea when their Messiah would appear, taken from the prophecy in Daniel 9:25 where it is stated: *“Know and understand this: From the time the word goes out to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven ‘sevens,’ and sixty-two ‘sevens.’* In Bible prophecy, sixty-nine weeks amounts to 483 years (69 weeks, times 7 days per week, equals 483), using the one-day-for-a-year principle. This is around when Jesus was born into the Jewish world. According to Daniel’s calculations, the Messiah would come and die prior to the year 70 C.E. This is why some godly Jews, like Simeon and Anna, were persuaded that the Messiah could be born during their lifetime.

When Mary and Joseph arrived at the Temple with Jesus, Simeon immediately knew their baby was the One Daniel had spoken of. He realized this through a special revelation from the Holy Spirit. Taking the baby Jesus in his arms, he praised God, saying: *“Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all nations: a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel.”* (Luke 2:28-35)

It must have been overwhelming for Simeon to realize that he was holding the tiny Messiah in his arms! After seeing the Messiah, Simeon felt great peace for he knew that God would bring His salvation to Israel and to the world, just as promised in the Old Testament.

Yahweh has made known his salvation. He has openly shown his righteousness in the sight of the nations. He has remembered his loving kindness and his faithfulness toward the house of Israel. All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God. ...“Arise, shine; for your light has come, and Yahweh’s glory has risen on you. For, behold, darkness will cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but Yahweh will arise on you, and his glory shall be seen on you. Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising. (Psalms. 98:2-3; Isaiah. 60:1-3).



There was another in the Temple that day who recognized the Messiah in the infant Jesus. Her name was Anna, an 84 year-old widow and prophetess who lived at the Temple. It is said of her that *‘she didn’t depart from the temple, worshiping with fastings and petitions night and day’* (Luke 2:37). Probably she was fasting for the sins of Israel and longing for the promised Deliverer. Like Simeon, when she saw Jesus, she also knew by divine revelation that this was the Messiah. She thanked God for Jesus and told everyone who was waiting for God to free Jerusalem, that the Messiah had arrived. Joseph

and Mary were amazed at these events and the wonderful prophecies spoken over their son.

It was further confirmation that God was planning something amazing through the baby Jesus. But it had been no accident that these remarkable events had taken place at the Temple. The prophets had spoken of the appearance of God's Messiah at the temple.

Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me; and the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, behold, he comes!" says Yahweh of Armies. (Malachi 3:1).

There were other times in Jesus' life that this prophecy would be fulfilled, but this first appearance was a very significant event.

After this, Joseph and Mary returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth, where they lived quietly for a time. However a few months later they again traveled to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover and then later returned to Bethlehem, perhaps to visit family.

Magi

While all this was going on, some strange things had been happening in Babylon and Persia. An unusual star appeared in the sky. According to scholars, it could have been an alignment of the planets Jupiter and Saturn (which occurred around 7 BC according to calculations), or else Halley's Comet (which appeared in 12 BC), or even a supernova (as recorded by the Chinese Han dynasty in 5 BC). It also could have been something else entirely for it is said to have moved across the sky so that it could be followed. This star was of great interest to a group of astrologers (also called magicians or Magi) who were highly placed priestly advisors to Babylonian royalty. Matthew called them 'kings'.

The prophet Daniel had been such an advisor in Babylon almost 500 years earlier and perhaps these Magi knew of his amazing prophecies. When they saw the star, they avidly studied the ancient writings to see what it could portend.

They eventually came to the realization that it signified the birth of the King of the Jews. One of the scriptures they may have come across was written by the prophet Balaam, who was probably linked to the Babylonian wise men of Daniel's time. Balaam was contracted by King Balak to curse the Israelites because he saw them as a threat, but the Lord caused Balaam to bless Israel instead. One of his prophecies included an allusion to Jesus.

'I see him, but not now. I see him, but not near. A star will come out of Jacob. A scepter will rise out of Israel' (Numbers 24:17)

But there were other scriptures as well to guide them.

Yes, all kings shall fall down before him. All nations shall serve him. (Psalm 72:11)

*A multitude of camels will cover you, the dromedaries of Midian and Ephah.
All from Sheba will come. They will bring gold and frankincense, and will proclaim the
praises of Yahweh. (Isaiah 60:6)*

However these Magi did not know about Micah's prophecy (which foretold that the Messiah's birthplace would be in Bethlehem) or they would have gone there directly. They assumed the King would be born in Jerusalem and that's where they headed. Although the star appeared at Christ's birth, it would have taken the Magi several months to make the long journey by camel to Herod's palace. Once there, the Magi asked for an audience with Herod and asked him about the new King of the Jews.

"Where is he who is born King of the Jews? For we saw his star in the east, and have come to worship him." (Matthew 2:2)



King Herod, who was the paranoid type, especially when it involved any threat to his rule, was deeply upset by what the Magi told him. Apparently so was everyone else in Jerusalem who heard about it. So Herod got all his chief priests and teachers of the Law together, asking them where the Messiah was going to be born. They told him that it was prophesied by Micah that it would happen in Bethlehem in Judea.

Then Herod secretly called for the Wise Men and questioned them as to when they had first seen the star. He wanted to find out exactly when the King of the Jews had been born so that he could calculate the child's age. After getting the information, he sent the Magi on to Bethlehem, instructing them to search carefully for the little king and report back to him so that he could also worship the child. This was a blatant lie for Herod had a completely different idea in mind.

Meanwhile the Magi saw the star reappear and they eagerly followed it as it went ahead of them, until it finally stopped over the place where Jesus was. They were filled with joy as they entered the house and saw the child with his mother, Mary. Bowing before Jesus, they worshiped Him and opened their treasures of gold, frankincense and myrrh to give to Him. Gold was typically a symbol of divinity. The Ark of the Covenant had been overlaid with gold and some Bible scholars say the gift of gold pointed to Jesus as God in the flesh. Frankincense is a highly fragrant white

resin used as incense in worship. As a symbol of holiness, this gift was symbolic of Jesus' willingness to become a burnt offering for sin.

Myrrh was a spice used in embalming and it was also sometimes mixed with wine in order to dull pain, such as the drink given to Jesus when He was about to be crucified. It symbolized the suffering and affliction Jesus would undergo on the cross. After they paid homage to Jesus, the Magi prepared to return to Babylon but God warned them in a dream not to go back to Herod. So they returned to their country on a different road.

While the Magi were on their way back home, Joseph had a dream where an angel of the Lord appeared to him, saying: *"Arise and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and stay there until I tell you, for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him."*(Matthew 2:13)

Joseph didn't hesitate. He got up during the night, packed up his family, and took them immediately to Egypt, where they stayed until they received news that Herod had died. (Fortunately Joseph and Mary had the finances to do this after receiving the Magi's gifts to Jesus.)

Their escape to Egypt fulfilled the prophecy of Hosea 11:1 where God said, *"I brought my son out of Egypt."*

When the Magi didn't return to Jerusalem, Herod realized he'd been tricked and he was enraged. He summoned his soldiers and commanded them to go to Bethlehem and the area surrounding it, killing all the boys two years old and under. Herod guessed that the child would be this age since the Magi had first seen the star approximately two years ago. Long ago the prophet Jeremiah had prophesied in the Old Testament that this event would happen.

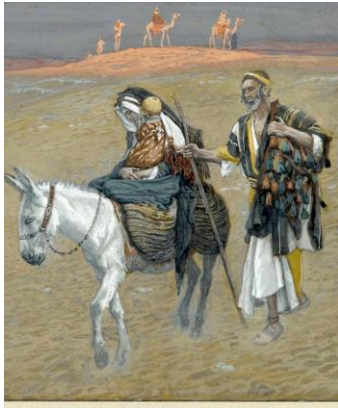
This event was symbolic of what God had done earlier in bringing Israel out of Egypt over a thousand years ago. Now God would bring Jesus (representative of spiritual Israel) out of the same place. Jesus also paralleled Moses in that He was rescued by His parents and would save Israel out of slavery.

A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation, and bitter weeping, Rachel weeping for her children; she refuses to be comforted for her children, because they are no more. (Jeremiah 31:15)

This horrendous event is recorded extra-biblically by a non-Christian writer named Macrobius (A.D. 395-423) who wrote that when emperor Augustus heard that Herod had killed the boys in Syria under two years old, **including his own son**, he is reported to have said: "It is better to be Herod's pig, than his son."

Herod's wicked action to kill these baby boys is reminiscent of the Egyptian Pharaoh's command to throw all Israelite male babies into the Nile.

In both cases, it was the paranoia of these evil kings that led them to commit genocide, yet in both situations the Lord protected His chosen deliverers (Moses and Jesus) when they were still small infants.



God later told Joseph in a dream that he could return to Judea because Herod the Great was now dead. However Joseph heard that Herod's son, Archlaus, was now the ruler there and he was reportedly as cruel as his father had been. Consequently Joseph took his family to Nazareth which was small and out of the way. Matthew says that this fulfilled what was said through the prophets, that Messiah would be called a Nazarene.

Twelve years passed and Jesus was now at the stage of His life when Jewish boys entered the adult community. Many Jewish boys were educated at a local synagogue from the age of five and very likely that was where Jesus received instruction in the Scriptures, although His parents would have taught Him as well. It would have been a deeply personal education. The Old Testament testified to Jesus' existence as the Son of God in countless passages, so for Jesus, it must have been like looking into a mirror. He would have recognized Himself as the 'Angel of the Lord' who appeared to Abraham, Sarah, Hagar, Jacob, and Samson's parents. He would have recognized the identity of Melchizedek, the 'king of righteousness' and priest of the Most High God, as being none other than Himself as a theophany of God. He would have seen His reflection in the Triune God as He contemplated the making of humanity. Creation speaks eloquently of the Maker's character and personality, and Jesus would have had an innate sensitivity to the language of creation. Observing nature's intricate design and activity would have been particularly fascinating to Him because He was the Author of it all. Not only that, but He had information from His parents of angelic visitations and dreams, His miraculous birth, the visits from shepherds and Magi, and the prophecies given in the Temple by Simeon and Anna. As He matured and developed, He would have glimpsed His divine destiny as the Redeemer King who would become the ultimate sacrifice for the sins of His people and for the world at large. In all of this, Jesus would have recognized His heavenly Father and fallen in love with Him, His passion even superseding the love and loyalty He felt towards Joseph and Mary. In fact this is shown in an incident that occurred when his family went up to the Passover festival in Jerusalem.

Jesus in the Temple

After the festival when His parents were returning home, Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem without telling them. Mary and Joseph thought He was with relatives so they traveled on for a day before realizing that no one knew of His whereabouts. Immediately they went back to Jerusalem to look for Him but for three days they had no luck.



Finally they found Him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. He was amazing the teachers with His understanding of the scriptures, but Mary was less than impressed. She had probably suffered the anxieties most mothers experience when they discover their child is missing. When she saw her son, she scolded him saying, *“Son, why have you treated us this way? .. Your father and I were anxiously looking for you.”* (Luke 2:48) Jesus seemed surprised by this, assuming that they would know where He could be found. *“Why were you searching for me?”* He asked. *“Didn’t you know I had to be in my Father’s house?”* (Luke 2:49)

Jesus was openly affirming his identity as God's Son, and it seemed perfectly normal to Him that He would be in the Temple of God. Surprisingly Mary and Joseph did not understand what He was saying to them.

It is recorded that after this, Jesus went down to Nazareth with His parents and He was obedient to them. It is also stated that Mary kept His words in her heart, perhaps pondering them over and over again as Jesus matured and grew in wisdom. Being without sin, Jesus' behavior would have been exemplary, although we are given no further details in the Bible of His development. All we are told is that He won the favor of man and that the grace of God was upon Him. From other scriptures, it is revealed that Jesus had 4 brothers and at least 2 sisters, and that Joseph must have died some time after Jesus was 12, and before He turned 30. This would have made Jesus the head of the household and the protector of His widowed mother and siblings, a responsibility that no doubt further contributed to His role as Shepherd of Israel. Living in this family also would have given Him firsthand experience of personal suffering. He would have had a close-up view of the foibles and weaknesses of human nature, and He would have realized the hardship of living on the earth as He observed people struggle amid sickness and poverty. All of this would have increased His empathy and compassion for humanity.

CHAPTER 2

Baptism, Temptation, Cana Wedding



Baptism

Around 26 AD when Jesus was 30 years old, His cousin John was just starting his public ministry. He was a strange man who wore clothing made out of camel's hair and whose diet consisted of locusts and honey. Some scholars think he may have belonged to the Essenes, a desert cult that despised riches and stressed purity, but others see vast differences between these extremists and John. Essenes dressed in linen shifts and refrained from public appearance, whereas John was clothed in camel's hair and went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. In doing so, John was fulfilling the words of Isaiah the prophet:

The voice of one who calls out, "Prepare the way of Yahweh in the wilderness! Make a level highway in the desert for our God. (Isaiah 40:3,4)

The theme of repentance was popular at this time, harking back to prophetic warnings to the nation such as: *To the Lord our God belong mercies and forgiveness; for we have rebelled against him; neither have we obeyed Yahweh our God's voice, to walk in his laws, which he set before us by his servants the prophets. Yes, all Israel have transgressed your law, turning aside, that they should not obey your voice: therefore*

the curse and the oath written in the law of Moses the servant of God has been poured out on us; for we have sinned against him. (Daniel 9:9-11)

Many people came out into the desert to hear John preach, and even the Jewish leaders sent priests and Levites to inquire about him, wondering if he might not be the Messiah himself. John immediately denied this and said openly that he was not the Messiah.

He explained that he was just the messenger calling out for the Jews to repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of sins. He told them that his message was the preparation for the coming Messiah who would put all things to rights. But he added an ominous warning that the Messiah would bring judgment when He came:

Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly cleanse his threshing floor, and will gather the wheat into his barn; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.”(Luke 3:17)

This analogy was exactly the same as one Jesus used later after starting His ministry. His disciples came to Him and said, “Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field.” Jesus answered, *“The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the people of the kingdom. The weeds are the people of the evil one, and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels. As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. ”* (Matthew 23:36-39)

John the Baptist was something of an eccentric and he feared no man, often using blunt language that was insulting to his hearers. Sometimes he addressed the crowds as hypocritical 'broods of vipers' who were coming to him for baptism in order to escape God's coming wrath, but who weren't truly repentant at all. He admonished them that being the physical descendants of Abraham would not save them.

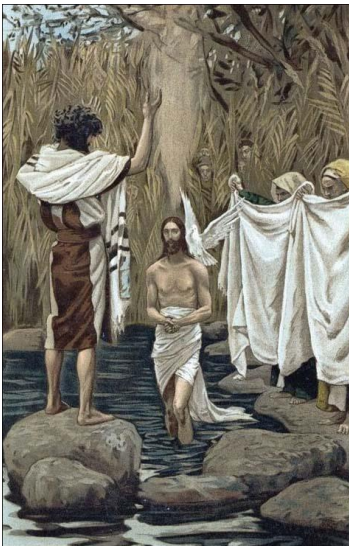
Don't think to yourselves, 'We have Abraham for our father,' for I tell you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones. (Matthew 3:9,10)

One day as John was baptizing the people at the river; Jesus came to be baptized too. As John was praying, heaven opened up and the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus in the form of a dove. An audible voice came from heaven: *'You are my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.'* (Mark 1:11) John saw and heard this and he eagerly told the people: *“Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! This is he of whom I said, ‘after me comes a man who is preferred before me, for he was before me.’ I didn't know him, but for this reason I came baptizing in water: that he would be revealed to Israel... I have seen the Spirit descending like a dove out of heaven, and it remained on him. I didn't recognize him, but he who sent me to baptize in water, he*

said to me, 'On whomever you will see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he who baptizes in the Holy Spirit.' I have seen, and have testified that this is the Son of God." (John 1:29-34)

Jesus' baptism also gave a revelation of God as a Trinity. God is the Father, the Holy Spirit is the Comforter, and Jesus is the Son. This remarkable incident reveals clearly that there is a Tri-unity of Persons within the Godhead. Later Jesus would commission His disciples to go and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the **Father**, and of the **Son**, and of the **Holy Spirit**.

The dove symbolizes peace between God and humankind. It is a symbol going back to the time of Noah when Noah sent out a dove from the ark to see if the floodwaters had receded. The dove brought back an olive leaf, which showed Noah that dry land had again appeared on earth. It meant that God's judgment on the sinful people of that time was over. Since that time, the dove has come to represent peace between God and sinful humanity. The fact that the Holy Spirit, who is normally unseen, appeared as a dove at Jesus' baptism shows that God was testifying to the purity and holiness of Jesus, and to the nature of His mission, which was to bring peace between God and humanity.



John was resistant at first to baptize Jesus. Water is the symbol of cleansing and John knew that Jesus was righteous and didn't need cleansing from sin. John recognized that he himself was unfit to baptize the spotless Lamb of God, but Jesus told him that it should be done because *'this is the fitting way for us to fulfill all righteousness.'* (Matthew 3:15). Perhaps Jesus meant that because He was about to begin His great work, it was necessary that John be recognized publicly as the "voice crying in the wilderness" calling people to repentance in preparation for their Messiah. But His baptism also showed that Jesus identified with sinful humanity, although He had never sinned Himself. His righteousness would fulfill all the requirements of the Law for sinners who could never hope to become righteous on their own.

And of course, the public baptism recorded the triune God, revealing the Father's pleasure with the Son and the Holy Spirit's anointing. The wonderful truth of God's mercy through Jesus Christ was on full display at His baptism.

Temptation

After this, Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan, the devil. The name 'Satan' means 'accuser' and speaks of position rather than formal title. This was the same being who caused Adam and Eve to sin in the Garden and the same one who later accused Job before God and the angelic Divine Council,

seeking to convince God that humankind was not worth redeeming.

For millennia Satan had tried to dissuade the Lord from rescuing His people. He wanted them in his power, along with all the other nations of the world. He was undoubtedly aware of some part of God's plan to redeem humans through Jesus (although he did not know all the details) and he was desperate to stop it.

Now Satan was looking for some way to accuse Jesus and thus disqualify Him as a Savior. He had also tried to destroy Him, even influencing Herod to seek His death when He was a baby, but that plan had failed. Satan had assumed that Jesus' humanity would make Him easy prey, but Jesus was also divine, and that made the job more difficult. God's Son always had angels to guard Him. They had protected Him from childhood on. But then, a rare opportunity came when Jesus went alone into the desert and fasted for forty days and forty nights. As a result the Lord was physically weak and exhausted.

It is important to note that it was God who led Jesus into the desert. Satan had no power over Jesus and could not have tested Him without the Father's permission. (Matthew 4:1)

The tempter approached Jesus carefully; much in the same way he had approached the first humans in the Garden of Eden. Back then Eve had faced temptation in three areas, defined in 1John: 2:6 as *"the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life"*.

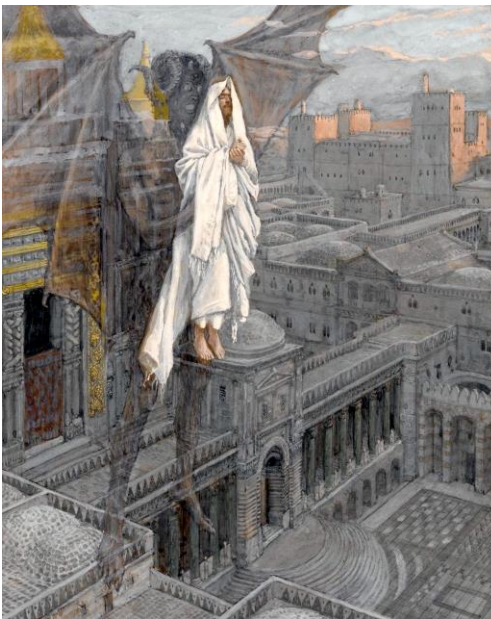
When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took some of its fruit, and ate; and she gave some to her husband with her, and he ate it, too. (Genesis 3:6)

Satan used this same method with Jesus, attempting to stir up the lust of the flesh in Him. He said: *"If you are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread."* (Matthew 4:3) Jesus, however, did not allow the hunger of His human flesh to lead Him into sin. Neither did He give in to the devil's temptation to prove that He was indeed God's Son. There was no need to prove His identity. He knew who He was and He trusted His Father to provide for Him because He believed that all the promises of God were true. This included sustenance and provision in times of physical want, although spiritual sustenance was of even greater importance to the human soul. God's words could satisfy the heart like nothing else. So He replied: *"It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.' (Matthew 4:4)* It was the perfect answer! Satan's first attempt to snare Jesus through the lust of the flesh had failed, but Satan wasn't giving up just yet. He had successfully lured Eve with the promise of being as wise as God Himself if she ate of the forbidden fruit. She had wanted that wisdom in order to give her significance and high value. Satan could empathize. He had wanted the same thing, believing that it could exalt him above God Himself. That rebellion had cost him his

home in heaven and it had cost Adam and Eve their home in Eden. Now Satan had only to get Jesus to desire the power and glory of the Messiah to the extent that He would be willing to take a shortcut to get it.

With that in mind, Satan took Jesus to a high place and showed Him all the kingdoms and nations of the world. How he managed to do that is not explained. Did he physically lift Jesus up there? In the Old Testament the prophet Ezekiel was transported from place to place in a vision from God. *'Yahweh's hand was on me, and he brought me out in Yahweh's Spirit, and set me down in the middle of the valley; and it was full of bones.'* (Ezekiel 37:1)... *'In the visions of God, He brought me into the land of Israel, and set me down on a very high mountain..'* (Ezekiel 40:2) Even the apostle Paul said he was caught up to the third heaven. *'I know a man in Christ, fourteen years ago (whether in the body, I don't know, or whether out of the body, I don't know; God knows), such a one was caught up into the third heaven.'* (2Corinthians 12:2)

However it happened, the devil showed Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. What a vision it must have been! Carefully and slyly, Satan offered: *'I will give you all of these things, if you will fall down and worship me.'* (Matthew 4:9) Satan must have been certain that this would surely stir up the lust of the eyes in Jesus. And it wasn't even an empty offer! As ruler over all of sinful humanity on the earth, Satan could legally hand over authority to whomever he wanted. All he asked in exchange was for Jesus to make Satan His god. Of course that would necessitate rebelling against His Father and switching allegiances, but it was definitely a quick way to gain dominion over the earth. Jesus was unmoved and angrily replied: *"Be gone Satan! It is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only.'"* (Jesus quoting from Deuteronomy 6:13) Another failure! It must have come as a real blow to Satan. There was only one other temptation that might possibly succeed where the other two had failed. This time Satan took Jesus to the very highest pinnacle of the Temple and made a dramatic suggestion.



Satan said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written, 'He will put his angels in charge of you.' and, 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you don't dash your foot against a stone.'" (Matthew 4:6) Satan was quoting from Psalm 91 in the Bible, and his aim was to challenge Jesus into proving that He was the Son of God. If Jesus had complied and jumped off the building, His Father would certainly have sent the angels to catch Him, as promised. And the Israelites would have been amazed if they saw Jesus drop from a great height without a scratch or bruise upon Him. He would be hailed everywhere as their great Messiah. But by forcing His Father to protect Him, Jesus would have been led into a subtle error.

Fortunately Jesus knew His Scripture far better than Satan did. He replied: *It is written, You shall not tempt the Lord your God.* (Jesus quoting from Deuteronomy 6:16).

Satan's last temptation had also failed! What a disappointment! He could do nothing more at this time so he left Jesus there in the desert. Angels came from heaven to attend to the Lord, who must have been physically exhausted from His long fast, and spiritually exhausted from his battle with the enemy. Yet Jesus had won! He had succeeded where Adam and Eve had failed. Unlike them, He did not sin by rebelling against His Father, and Satan was therefore unable to claim power over Him. After this, Jesus returned to Galilee where John was baptizing.

Two of John's disciples saw Jesus walking by and John said, "Look! The Lamb of God!" and the two disciples immediately began to follow Jesus. Jesus asked them what they wanted and they replied, "Rabbi, where are you staying?" (Rabbi means 'teacher'). Jesus led them to where He was staying and they spent the rest of the day with Him. One of the disciples, Andrew, went to find his brother Simon, excitedly announcing that he had found the Messiah. When Jesus saw Simon, He already knew who he was. He looked at him and said, "You are Simon, son of John. You will be called Cephas." (Cephas means Peter, or Rock).

In the Old Testament, when God changed a person's name, it was usually to establish a new identity. God changed Abram's name (high father) to Abraham (father of a multitude) and his wife's name from Sarai (my princess) to Sarah (mother of nations). God also changed Jacob's "supplanter" name to Israel (having power with God). In the New Testament there is also a reference to God changing the names of Christians by giving them a white stone with a new name on it: *"To the one who is victorious, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give that person a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to the one who receives it" (Revelation 2:17)*. The white stone, with the believer's new name engraved on it, could refer to an ancient Roman custom of awarding white stones to the winners in athletic games. The winner of a contest was awarded a white stone with his name inscribed on it, which served as his "ticket" to a special awards banquet. This was similar to Jesus' promise that the believer was assured entrance to the eternal victory celebration in heaven. The white color of the stone could be symbolic of the fact that the Christian is a new creation, perfect in Christ's righteousness.

Peter (Simon) and Andrew made the decision to follow Jesus, but later Jesus would tell His disciples that **He** had chosen them, not the other way around. (John 15:16). Jesus carefully handpicked them all for the enormously important job of taking the good news of the Kingdom to the world. Already they were doing just that, by telling others that Jesus was the Messiah.

The next man to become a follower of the Lord was Philip in Bethsaida where Andrew and Peter lived. Philip was so excited after meeting Jesus that he excitedly ran off to tell his friend Nathaniel that the One Moses had prophesied about had been found, and it was none other than Jesus from Nazareth! Nathaniel was skeptical, sarcastically questioning whether anything good could come from there. Nevertheless he went to see Jesus and as he approached, Jesus said: *"Here truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit."* Nathaniel asked Jesus how He knew him, to which Jesus responded: *"I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you."* Nathaniel was amazed that Jesus could have known this and declared immediately that Jesus could only be the Son of God, the king of Israel. Jesus replied that Nathaniel would see far greater miracles confirming Him.

"Most certainly, I tell you, hereafter you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man." (John 1:47-51)

Jesus was referring to something that had happened to Jacob in the Old Testament. Jacob had been on his way to his relative's house, when he lay down for the night. As he was dreaming, he had a vision of a stairway between heaven and earth with God's angels going up and down. Above the ladder Jacob saw God, who repeated the same promise of blessing He had made to Abraham and Isaac. This dream of a stairway was God's way of showing Jacob that there was a heavenly connection between heaven and earth, and God was reaching out to bless him. Jesus used this stairway as a symbol to describe Himself as the connection between His Father and humanity. He was telling Nathaniel that one day He, Jesus, would ascend to His Father and bring down salvation to humanity.

Jesus' disciples began to baptize in the same area where John was baptizing. Jesus, Himself, did not baptize anyone, but many people came to hear Him teach. This caused some of John's disciples to complain that Jesus was getting more followers than John. But John exhibited no jealousy over this. He told his followers that a person could only receive what was given them from heaven, reminding them that he was not the Messiah.

He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. This, my joy, therefore is made full. He must increase, but I must decrease. (John 3:29-30)

He added that the Messiah was above everyone else, sent by God to speak the words of God. He explained that God had given His Spirit to His Son without limit because He loved the Son and had placed everything in His hands. Then John uttered the powerful statement: *'One who believes in the Son has eternal life, but one who disobeys the Son won't see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.'* (John 3:36) John was testifying that he was of far lower status than Jesus, and it was only right that Jesus be exalted over him. As the Messiah, He was the center of God's plan for saving humanity. Belief in Him would bring eternal life but rejecting Him would bring God's judgment. John couldn't have been clearer in his language. And his words about

Jesus being the Bridegroom had a particular impact because God often used that analogy in the Old Testament when describing His relationship with Israel.

For as a young man marries a virgin, so your sons will marry you. As a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so your God will rejoice over you. (Isaiah. 62:5)

I will betroth you to me forever. Yes, I will betroth you to me in righteousness, in justice, in loving kindness, and in compassion. I will even betroth you to me in faithfulness; and you shall know Yahweh. (Hosea 2:19-20)

Cana Wedding



The analogy of God being Israel's Bridegroom had significant associations with the first public miracle of Jesus, which occurred at a wedding in Cana. Jesus' mother had been invited along with Jesus and His disciples. But by the third day of the wedding celebration, a disaster occurred. The wine had run out! Because it was a wedding, it was expected that the wine would flow for a full week. A good party signified a good blessing on the newly married couple.

In the Bible, most people drank wine. Drinking wine was normal for all Jews, except for Levitical priests in service at the temple (Lev. 10:8, 9), the Nazirites (Numbers. 6:3), and the Rechabites (Jeremiah 35:1-3). In the New Testament, John the Baptist also abstained. But Jesus Himself drank wine, and was charged with drinking too much by His accusers (Matthew 11:18-19). Wine was also used in celebrating the Passover in the Old Testament and it was used in celebrating the Lord's Supper in the New Testament (Luke 22:7-23). And certainly no Jewish wedding or festival was ever without it.

To run out of wine meant that the celebration had been poorly planned and this would be a great embarrassment for the couple and all in attendance. It was Mary who went to Jesus and pointed out the lack of wine to Him. (It appears that Jesus' mother fully expected Him to perform a miracle. Perhaps Jesus had done many such miracles of provision in the past and that was why it came naturally to go to Him with such a problem). Jesus gently asked Mary why she was involving Him since it wasn't yet time to reveal Himself to the public. In other words, He was telling Mary that if He miraculously provided wine, it might reveal His identity as the Messiah too

soon. Mary, however, was unfazed by His objection and told the servants to do whatever Jesus told them. She was obviously completely confident that He would not let her (or the wedding couple) down. Her remarkable faith was not misplaced, for Jesus went into action as soon as she left. Standing nearby were six stone water jars, which were used by Jews for ceremonial washings. Each jar could hold 20 to 30 gallons. Jesus told the servants to fill these with water right to the top.

Then He instructed them to dip some out and take it to the person in charge of the dinner, which they did. The person in charge tasted the wine, not realizing where it came from, and called the groom to one side, exclaiming over the superior quality of the wine. He said, *"Everyone serves the good wine first, and when the guests have drunk freely, then that which is worse. You have kept the good wine until now!" (John 2:10)*

This miracle not only saved the reputation of the wedding party organizers, but it also showed the glory of Jesus, causing His disciples to increase their faith in Him. But there was another reason that this miracle was so important. Jesus would later talk about old wine and new wine, saying, *"No one puts new wine into old wineskins, or else the new wine will burst the skins, and the wine pours out, and the skins will be destroyed; but they put new wine into fresh wineskins." (Mark 2:22)*

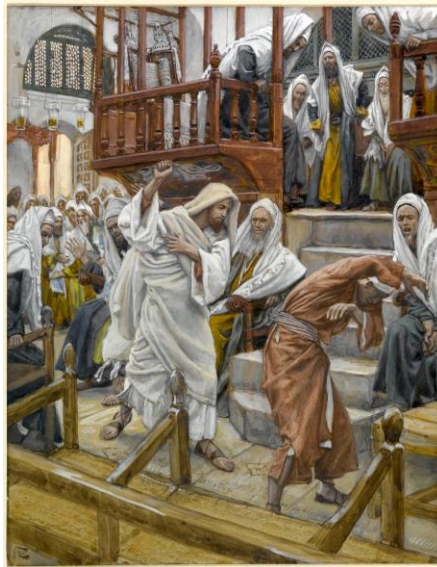
Wine expands when it ferments over time, stretching the wineskins and making them brittle. Using them again by pouring new wine into them would risk bursting them. Jesus used this analogy to proclaim that the New Covenant, which He was bringing in, could not exist with the Old Covenant, which was passing away. The Cana wedding, symbolic of God's marriage to Israel, required a New Marriage Covenant (symbolized by new wine) because the Old Marriage Covenant (old wine) was finished.

The New Testament puts it this way: *But now he has obtained a more excellent ministry, ... he is also the mediator of a better covenant, (with) better promises... For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second. For finding fault with (it), he said, "Behold, the days come...that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah; not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers, in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; for they didn't continue in my covenant, and I disregarded them...For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel. After those days...I will put my laws into their mind, I will also write them on their heart. I will be their God, and they will be my people. (Hebrews 8: 6-10,12-13)*

When Jesus told Mary that His time had not yet come, He was not only referring to a premature coming out as the Messiah, but also to the inauguration of a New Covenant that would wed God's people to Himself forever. This New Covenant would not come into full effect until the Lord died and was resurrected, and when the Old Covenant Temple was completely destroyed. At that point, the Law and Prophets would be completely fulfilled and the Old Covenant age would be over. From then on the New Covenant of grace would be fully in effect.

CHAPTER 3

Temple Cleansing, Nicodemus, The Woman at the Well



Temple Cleansing

Soon it was time for the Jewish Passover Feast so Jesus and His disciples went up from Capernaum to Jerusalem to visit the Temple. When Jesus entered the temple courtyard, He found people selling cattle, sheep and doves, and some people were sitting at tables exchanging money. The animals were being sold as sacrifices and the moneychangers were converting Roman coins (deemed to be unsuitable for the temple) into other currencies. They charged extremely high rates for this service. The whole environment in the courtyard took on the appearance of a chaotic marketplace, whereas it was intended as a place for Gentiles (non-Jews) to worship God. However the courtyard had become so crowded that Gentiles had no room for worship. The Jews may have felt that God didn't care about this, but they were wrong. Jesus regarded the scene with indignation and felt compelled to do something about it. Making a whip out of ropes, He chased all the sheep and cattle from the temple courtyard. Then He scattered the coins of the money exchangers by

turning over their tables. To the dove sellers He said, *“Get these out of here! Stop turning my Father’s house into a market!” (John 2:16)* The disciples watched all this and were reminded of an Old Testament scripture, Psalm 69:9, where it says, *“My great love for Your house will destroy Me.”* Little did they know at the time, that this act by Jesus would seal His fate just as prophesied in the Psalm.

The Jewish leaders in the Temple demanded a sign from Jesus to prove His authority to do what He did. Jesus answered them, *“When you destroy this temple, I will raise it up again in three days.” (John 2:19)* This remark astounded them and they reminded Jesus that it had taken 46 years to build the temple. How was Jesus proposing to raise it in 3 days? But of course Jesus wasn't referring to the temple building at all. The temple He was speaking of was His body, which would be raised from the grave after 3 days, thereby substantiating His divine authority. Later the disciples would remember this incident and what Jesus had said to the Jewish leaders, and it would greatly strengthen their faith in Jesus and the scriptures.

Meanwhile, Jesus and the disciples took part in the Passover Feast and many people in Jerusalem saw Jesus perform signs. They were amazed by this and professed faith in Him as the Messiah, but Jesus did not fully trust them. He knew that people could be unpredictable and change their minds very easily. He was a keen judge of character and was fully knowledgeable of peoples' motives and behavior.

Nicodemus



Many of the Jewish leaders were suspicious of Jesus. As a result, He was not popular with most of them. However there were a few who were curious and would have liked to talk to Jesus, but they were afraid of losing their reputation among the other Pharisees. That's why one Pharisee, named Nicodemus, came to Jesus under cover of night in order to ask Him questions. He was hoping to keep his meeting with the young Rabbi a secret. Nicodemus started the conversation by telling Jesus that he recognized Him as a teacher sent from God because of the signs He was doing.

Jesus wasted no time in getting to the point, stating: “Most certainly I tell you, unless one is born of water and spirit, he can’t enter into God’s Kingdom! That which is born of the flesh is flesh. That which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Don’t marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born anew.’ (John 3:5-7)

Nicodemus was confused and asked how someone could be born when they are old. *“They can’t go back inside their mother! They can’t be born a second time!”* he

exclaimed. Jesus then explained that He was speaking in spiritual terms. No one could enter God's kingdom unless they were born with water and the Holy Spirit. The 'water' Jesus was speaking of was spiritual cleansing. Throughout the Old Testament, water was used to symbolize spiritual cleansing, such as in Ezekiel 36:25: *I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, I will cleanse you.*

Nicodemus would have been familiar with this idea of physical water representing spiritual purification, and as a Pharisee and student of the Law, he should have been able to grasp Jesus' meaning when He spoke of the necessity of a new birth. There were Old Testament scriptures which prophesied about this, such as Ezekiel 36:26: *'I will also give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh.'*

Later, in the epistles of the New Testament, new birth (or regeneration) was again linked to water as a "washing" brought about by the Holy Spirit through the Word of God at the moment of salvation.

Such were some of you, but you were washed. But you were sanctified. But you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and in the Spirit of our God. (1 Corinthians 6:11).

But poor Nicodemus didn't get it. *"How can this be?"* he asked. Jesus replied with a question of His own. How was it that a teacher of the Law didn't understand these things? After all, He was speaking plainly, using earthly symbolism, yet Nicodemus was deaf to His meaning. Jesus explained that He had taken him as far as He could. He could give Nicodemus heavenly explanations, but he wouldn't be able to receive them. Then Jesus added that He had come down from heaven, something no other man could do. He had been in heaven with the Father, and He came down. And just as Moses had lifted up the snake in the desert, the Son of Man would also be lifted up. Then everyone who believed would receive eternal life.

As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life. (John 3:14,15)

It was kind of shocking for Jesus to compare Himself to a snake because snakes are thought of as evil. The snakes in Exodus were killing people and the snake on the pole was a picture of God's curse on the people. But this picture was completely accurate because Jesus would also become a curse.

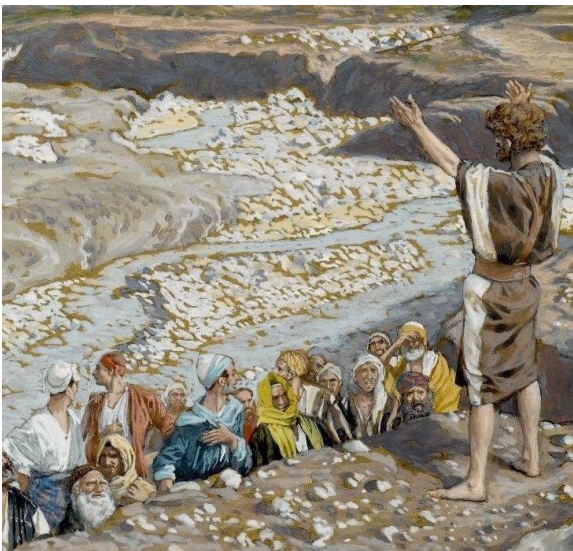
Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us. For it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree," (Galatians 3:13)

In becoming like the snake, Jesus became both sin and the curse for us, and in doing so He was able to take them out of the way so that those who believed in Him could have eternal life. That was what Jesus was meaning when He spoke of 'believing' in Him. He was teaching Nicodemus that he needed to look to Him in faith, just as the dying Israelites in the desert had looked up in faith at the pole with the snake on it.

Their act of faith resulted in healing for their bodies. Similarly, looking to the risen Christ for spiritual healing would bring eternal life through the new birth.

Jesus added some important words to His message: *For God so loved the world, that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God didn't send his Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world should be saved through him.*

He who believes in him is not judged. He who doesn't believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the one and only Son of God. This is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light, for their works were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the light, and doesn't come to the light, lest his works would be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his works may be revealed, that they have been done in God." (John3: 16-21)



After this, Jesus and his disciples were in the countryside of Judea. John the Baptist was still preaching and baptizing there, confronting the people about their sins, even reprimanding King Herod because he had married Herodias, his brother's wife. Herod was greatly angered by this and he had John arrested and thrown into prison. Herod would have executed him, but he was afraid of a riot since all the people believed John was a prophet. Jesus soon heard that John had been arrested and put in prison.

He also learned that the Pharisees were stirred up against Him because of His growing popularity with the people. Consequently He left Judea and went back to Galilee.

Woman at the Well



On the way Jesus had to go through Samaria and He stopped at a town called Sychar where Jacob's well was situated. Because He was tired from the journey, Jesus sat down by the well. It was noon so His disciples went into town to get some food. While they were gone, a woman from Samaria came to get some water and Jesus asked her for a drink. That

shocked the woman because Jews never talked to Samaritans. Jews looked down on Samaritans because their race was a mixture of Jewish and pagan ancestry. The Samaritans worshiped Yahweh as did the Jews, but they only accepted the first five books of the Bible as authorized scripture. Also their temple was on Mount Gerizim instead of on Mount Zion in Jerusalem.

To make matters worse, the Samaritans received into their communities Jewish criminals, refugees from justice, and those who had been excommunicated, thus earning for themselves a bad reputation. Jews avoided Samaritans altogether, even to the point of crossing the Jordan River to bypass Samaria. However Jesus did the opposite. He not only purposely entered Samaria, but He actually spoke with a Samaritan woman, thus blatantly going against Jewish custom. For one thing, she was an outcast, and for another, she was a woman, and Jewish men held a moral standard that forbade a man from being alone with a woman, other than his wife or a relative. However Jesus saw a situation that was more important than cultural and religious standards, and this was why He was speaking with her.

His actions surprised the woman. *"You are a Jew,"* she said. *'How is it that you, being a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?'* (John 4:9) Jesus replied that she was not aware of what a great gift God was giving her because she didn't know who was asking her for water. If she had known, she would have asked **Him** for water and He would have given her living water. That statement greatly intrigued her. But like Nicodemus, she took His words literally and missed the point.

She noted that Jesus had no bucket and the well was deep, so she asked Him how would He get this living water? Jesus answered, *"Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never thirst again; but the water that I will give him will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life."* (John 4:13,14)

Jesus would later repeat the use of water as a symbol of spiritual life when addressing a crowd of worshippers at the temple. In that incident John the apostle records Jesus as crying out: *"If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink! He who believes in me, as the Scripture has said, from within him will flow rivers of living water."* The apostle then adds the postscript: *But he said this about the Spirit, which those believing in him were to receive. For the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus wasn't yet glorified."* (John 7:37-39)

In the message Jesus had given to Nicodemus, water was synonymous with cleansing by the Word (Jesus was called the Word by the apostle John). Here Jesus was referring to the Holy Spirit as living water (eternal life) springing up within the heart of a believer in Christ. Up to this point, no one had received the indwelling Holy Spirit. In the Old Testament, the patriarchs, prophets, and some of the kings had experienced the Holy Spirit coming upon them, but He had never come as a permanent resident in their souls. He had also not in-dwelt the general Jewish populace. This was one reason why Nicodemus and the Canaanite woman were unable to understand the spiritual meaning behind Jesus' words. The Samaritan woman was very interested in the water Jesus spoke of, because she didn't want to keep coming to the well. And Jesus knew exactly why that was. She had come to the

well at the very hottest time of day so as to avoid meeting up with her neighbors.

She wanted this special water so that she would never again have to face them at the well. Unexpectedly Jesus told her, *“Go. Get your husband and come back.”*

His question must have pierced like a knife for it aimed directly at the guilt and shame she was trying to hide. She quickly replied that she had no husband, and Jesus agreed with her. *You said well, ‘I have no husband, for you have had five husbands; and he whom you now have is not your husband. This you have said truly. (John 4:16,17)*

No wonder the woman went to the well when no one was likely to be there! Five husbands! And living in sin with another man! Under the Old Testament Law, her multiple marriages may have been tolerated (Moses permitted divorce), but fornication was a capital offence. Nevertheless Jesus didn't condemn her.

He certainly could have, but in her case, He didn't need to. Her heart had already condemned her many times over. Perhaps she was surprised that He didn't reject her as so many others had, but what really amazed her was how Jesus knew so much about her life. She exclaimed: *“I can see that you are a prophet!” (John 4:19)* Then she hastened to ask His opinion on the correct place of worship (a major topic of controversy between Jews and Samaritans).

Jesus answered that salvation was of the Jews, but a time was coming when it wouldn't matter where the Father was worshipped because true worshippers would worship Him in Spirit and in truth. The Samaritans now worshipped on Mt. Gerizim and the Jews in Jerusalem, but God was looking for those who would worship Him in Spirit. This kind of worship could occur in any earthly location because it was centered in the human heart. The woman replied: *“I know that Messiah comes, he who is called Christ. When he has come, he will declare to us all things.” (John 4:25)* Like the Jews, this Samaritan woman was waiting for a coming Messiah to straighten things out. Her hope was that the many differences of opinion between Jews and Samaritans would then finally be resolved. Jesus replied with the forthright statement: *“I am he, the one who speaks to you.” (John 4:26)*

At that moment Jesus' disciples returned and although surprised that Jesus was talking with a woman, they did not question Him about it. Meanwhile the woman left her water jar and went back to the town. She told her neighbors all about Jesus, wondering if He might be the Messiah. She was so convincing that the townspeople made their way toward Jesus. Before they reached Him however, Jesus' disciples were urging Him to eat something. Jesus told them He had food to eat that they knew nothing about, food that involved bringing salvation to the lost. Just as physical food sustains the body, Jesus was talking about the spiritual satisfaction that comes from doing God's work. Jesus encouraged the disciples to open their eyes because the fields (of human souls) were ripe for harvest. He alluded to 'One' who was even now gathering in the crop for eternal life and getting paid (meaning Himself). One had planted (Jesus) and another gathered (the Samaritan woman was gathering a crowd back at her village) and consequently they could now be glad together. He added: *I sent you to*

reap that for which you haven't labored. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor. (John 4:38)

It is likely that Jesus was referring to Himself and the Samaritan woman as the ones who had done the hard work, and He was informing His disciples that it would now be their responsibility to reap the harvest.

As it turned out, Sychar was indeed a good harvest because many believed in Jesus because of the woman's testimony about Him. In fact they tried to get Jesus to stay with them. Jesus agreed to stay for two days, and as a result even more people believed in Him. The townspeople said to the woman, *"Now we believe, not because of your speaking; for we have heard for ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world."* (John 4:42)

Jesus had gone against the rules, valuing people above tradition, and as a result, many outcast sinners came to faith and inherited eternal life in Samaria.

CHAPTER 4

Official's Son, Rejection, Four Fishermen, Evil Spirit



Official's Son

Fifteen months had passed since Jesus left his hometown in Nazareth and during that time He had made 5 trips between Nazareth, Bethany, Cana, Capernaum, Jerusalem, and Sychar. Now He decided to return to Cana where He had turned water into wine. When He got there, He was given a warm welcome because news of what He had done at the Passover Feast had been broadcast all over the countryside. Jesus taught in various synagogues and everyone had words of praise for Him. A royal official who was in Cana had heard of Jesus and all the miraculous healings He had done. Because he had a son lying sick at home, this official begged Jesus to come and heal his boy who was very close to death. Jesus told him, *"Unless you see signs and wonders, you will in no way believe."* (John 4:48) to which the official desperately replied, *"Sir, come down before my child dies."* Jesus told him he could go on his way because his son would live. The man believed Jesus and left. While he was still on his way home, his servants met him with the news that his son was better. After discovering the exact time when the boy's fever had left him, the official realized that this was exactly when Jesus had told him that his son would live. Consequently he and his whole family became believers. This was the second miracle that Jesus performed in Galilee, although it was not the second miracle of

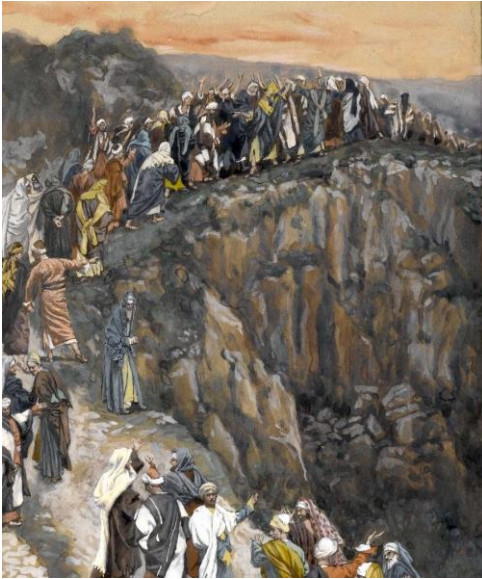
His ministry. While in Jerusalem at the Passover Festival, Jesus had performed many other signs that caused many to believe in His name.

Rejection



Coming to His hometown, Jesus went to the synagogue as was His custom, and stood up to read from the scroll of the prophet Isaiah that was handed to him. Unrolling it, He found the place where it is written: *The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to heal the broken hearted, to proclaim release to the captives, recovering of sight to the blind, to deliver those who are crushed. (Luke 4:18 with Jesus quoting Isaiah 61:1)*

After reading this, Jesus rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down, saying to them, *"Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."* All were amazed at His gracious words, but then they asked themselves, *"Isn't this Joseph's son? Where did this man get this wisdom?" (Luke 4:22)* They knew that Jesus was a lowly carpenter's son, and they knew his mother Mary, and His brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas, plus his sisters. They began to grumble among themselves. Who did Jesus think He was?! He was as common as they were! What could He do to prove He was the Messiah? Jesus responded by saying that a prophet is respected everywhere but in his own hometown. He added that the crowd would undoubtedly quote the proverb: 'Physician, heal yourself,' meaning the crowd felt Jesus had no right to talk about healing the blind and oppressed as if He was the Messiah, because He had done nothing to prove He was greater than any other ordinary person. A doctor had to prove that he had superior medical knowledge and could heal sickness in himself before people would trust him to prescribe medicine for them. No one trusted a doctor who had a hacking cough and couldn't even make himself better. In other words, the townspeople wanted a miracle from Jesus to prove that He was truly the Messiah. In response Jesus used the examples of Elijah and Elisha in the Old Testament to compare their situation with His own. Just as the two prophets had to go to the Gentiles with their message because of Israel's unbelief, so Jesus would have to do the same. This comparison greatly enraged the crowd and they got up and took Him to the edge of the hill in order to throw Him off the cliff. The reason they wanted to kill Jesus was not only because He was rebuking their unbelief, but because they believed that anyone who identified himself as the Son of God was an arrogant blasphemer, and the Mosaic Law called for that person to be stoned. They felt that if Jesus wouldn't offer proof that He was the Messiah, then He deserved to be executed under the Law. Therefore they felt justified in killing Him.



However Jesus walked right through them and went on His way. By divine power, and maybe by the force of a word or look, Jesus stilled their passions and passed silently through them. Because of the townspeople's lack of faith, Jesus was unable to do many miracles in Nazareth, except for healing a few sick people. Consequently He didn't stay there for very long but moved to Capernaum to live. From that time on Jesus began to preach, "*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.*" (Matthew 3:2)

The kingdom of heaven (i.e. the kingdom of God) is the rule of the eternal, sovereign God over the entire universe. Every authority that exists has been established by God, so in reality, the kingdom of heaven includes everything that exists. More specifically it is a spiritual rule over the hearts and lives of those who trust in Jesus. Repentance is a first step in entering the kingdom of heaven, which then leads to being reborn as a new creature. The prophet Daniel said: .. *the God of heaven (shall) set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed, nor shall its sovereignty be left to another people; but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever.*' (Daniel 2:44) This was the kingdom Jesus was ushering in and He told His disciples that it was coming soon.

Four Fishermen



One day as Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret, the people were crowded around him to listen to Him preach the word of God. There were 2 boats at the water's edge which some fishermen had left as they washed their nets. Jesus got into the boat belonging to Simon Peter, and asked him to put out a little from shore. Then He sat down and taught the people from the boat. When He had finished speaking, Jesus told Peter to put the boat out into deep water and let down the nets for a catch.

Peter answered that they had worked all night and caught nothing. However because it was Jesus who was asking, he would do it anyway. When they had done so, they caught such a huge number of fish that their nets began to break. They had to signal their fishing partners in another boat to come and help them. Both boats were so filled up that they began to sink.

When Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' feet and said, *"Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, Lord."* (Luke 5:8)

This was similar to an Old Testament scripture where Isaiah, upon coming into God's presence, exclaimed: *"Woe is me! For I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell among a people of unclean lips: for my eyes have seen the King, Yahweh of Armies!"* (Isaiah 6:5)

Peter obviously recognized that he was in the presence of God and it overwhelmed him. Peter's companions were also astonished at the catch of fish and perhaps they recognized the significance of this miracle in association with such scriptures as Psalm 135:6. *'Whatever Yahweh pleased, that he has done, in heaven and in earth, in the seas and in all deeps.'* The large number of fish also may have reminded them of Ezekiel 47:9. *It shall happen, that every living creature which swarms, in every place where the rivers come, shall live; and there shall be a very great multitude of fish; for these waters have come there, and the waters of the sea shall be healed, and everything shall live wherever the river comes.* This prophecy spoke of the gospel, which would flow like a river, bringing eternal life to a great multitude of redeemed sinners whose number would be as countless as the fish of the sea. Jesus understood Peter's dismay and said, *"Don't be afraid; from now on you will be fishers of men."* This was the Lord calling Simon and the others to ministry, so they pulled their boats up on shore and left everything to follow Him. A little farther, Jesus saw James, son of Zebedee, and his brother John in a boat, preparing their nets. He called to them as well, and they left their father in the boat with the hired men and followed Jesus. They went down to Capernaum and on the Sabbath Jesus taught the people, amazing them with His teaching because His words had great authority, unlike the Jewish rabbis who taught from the traditions of those who taught before them. Jesus, however, spoke directly to the heart and with total confidence.

Evil Spirit

In the synagogue where He was teaching, there was a man possessed by a demon, causing the man to cry out at the top of his voice: *What do we have to do with you, Jesus, you Nazarene? Have you come to destroy us? I know you who you are: the Holy One of God!"* (Matthew 1:24)

The demons recognized Jesus as the Messiah and saw His coming as an invasion of their territory. Jesus reacted with a stern rebuke. ***"Be quiet!"*** He said. ***"Come out of him!"*** Then the demons threw the man down before them all and came out without injuring him. All the people were amazed at the authority and power with which Jesus gave orders to evil spirits, forcing them to obey Him. Quickly the news about Jesus spread throughout the surrounding area.

CHAPTER 5

Peter's Mother-in-Law, Leper, Paralytic, Matthew Called



Peter's Mother-in-Law

Jesus, along with James and John, went to Peter's home where his mother-in-law lay in bed sick with a fever. Jesus was informed about her condition and He immediately went to her, took her hand and helped her up. As He did so, the fever miraculously left her and she got up to serve them. That evening the townspeople brought to Jesus all the sick and demon-possessed and Jesus healed them and drove out many demons. However He would not let the demons speak because they knew who He was. Perhaps the wicked spirits wanted to publicize Jesus so that it would appear that He had their support. By hailing Him as Master, it could appear that Jesus was linked together with demons in some way. Or perhaps the demons hoped to expose Jesus so that they could stir the people against Him, as they had done in Nazareth. Either way, the evil spirits saw that Jesus clearly didn't want His identity randomly revealed, so they tried to work against Him.

Next morning at dawn, Jesus left the house and went to a solitary place to pray. Peter and his companions finally found Him, and they informed Jesus that everyone wanted to see Him. He was becoming very popular and eager crowds were beginning to form around Him. Jesus didn't encourage that, however. He felt it was now time to travel elsewhere to preach the kingdom message. Consequently He and His disciples went throughout Galilee, preaching in synagogues and driving out demons.

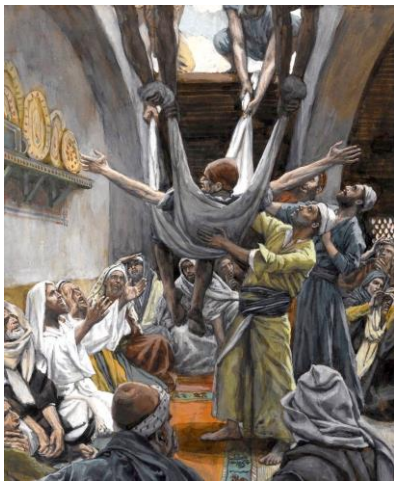
News about him spread all over Syria, and people brought to Him all who were ill with various diseases. Many were suffering severe pain; some were demon-possessed; others had seizures or were paralyzed. Jesus healed them, and as a result, ever-greater crowds from Galilee, Jerusalem, Judea, and the region across the Jordan followed Him.

Leper



At one place Jesus came down from the mountainside and as usual large crowds followed Him. A man with leprosy came and knelt before Him, saying: *“Lord, if you want to, you can make me clean.”* (*Matthew 8:2*) Jesus was indignant at this poor man's suffering and He reached out His hand and touched the man (something no one else would ever do for fear of catching the disease). *“I am willing,”* He said. *“Be clean!”* Instantly the man was cleansed of his leprosy. Then Jesus told him to tell no one what had happened, but to show himself to the priest and offer the gift Moses commanded, as a testimony to them. But the healed man was too ecstatic to keep quiet and went about spreading the news. As a result, Jesus couldn't enter the nearby towns openly, but stayed in lonely places instead. Yet the people still came to Him from everywhere.

Paralytic



A few days later, Jesus again entered Capernaum and the people heard that He had come home. They gathered in such large numbers that there was no room left, not even outside the door of the place where He was preaching. Four men carried a paralyzed man on a stretcher, hoping to get him to Jesus so he could be healed, but the crowd made it impossible to get anywhere near Jesus. Undaunted, they made an opening in the thatched roof above Jesus and lowered the stretcher down. Jesus was impressed with their persistent faith and told the paralyzed man, *“Son, your sins are forgiven.”* (*Mark 2:5*)

That statement greatly displeased some teachers of the law who were sitting there, thinking to themselves that Jesus was blaspheming because they knew that only God could forgive sins.

Immediately Jesus knew in His spirit what they were thinking and He said to them, Immediately Jesus, perceiving in his spirit that they so reasoned within themselves, said to them, *“Why do you reason these things in your hearts? Which is easier, to tell the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven;’ or to say, ‘Arise, and take up your bed, and walk?’ (Mark 2:8-10)* Then Jesus told the man to get up, take his mat, and go home. The man did exactly that, and walked out in full view of them all, thereby amazing everyone.

Many praised God, saying, *“We have never seen anything like this!”* In telling the man that his sins were forgiven, Jesus was fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy by *‘proclaiming good news to the poor...and setting the oppressed free’*. God, in Christ Jesus, was bringing salvation to humanity and He had complete authority to declare forgiveness of sin to this paralytic. However the crowd was not convinced that Jesus could make such pronouncements. They knew that only God could forgive sin and they were not even convinced that Jesus was the Messiah. His statements could certainly have been taken as blasphemous if they were not true, and blasphemers were stoned in Israel. Stoning was a tradition harking back to an incident in Moses' time when two men had fought, and one of them blasphemed God's name and cursed. The Lord had told Moses, *“Bring out of the camp him who cursed; and let all who heard him lay their hands on his head, and let all the congregation stone him. You shall speak to the children of Israel, saying, ‘Whoever curses his God shall bear his sin. He who blasphemes Yahweh’s name, he shall surely be put to death. All the congregation shall certainly stone him. The foreigner as well as the native-born, when he blasphemes the Name, shall be put to death. (Leviticus 24:10-23)*

This was why the people of Nazareth had attempted to throw Jesus off a cliff. Undoubtedly this crowd would have done something similar, if it were not for the healing miracle. The people were mystified that Jesus could make a paralytic walk, which caused them to wonder if He might not be who He claimed to be. There had to be some heavenly power behind Him. Some people were convinced that Jesus must be the Messiah and they offered praise to God, but there were others who had doubts.

Matthew Called

Another time Jesus went out beside the lake and another large crowd came to Him. As He walked along, He saw a man named Levi (also known as Matthew) sitting at a tax collector's booth. Tax collectors were not a popular bunch. The Pharisees had particular disdain for them. Not only did tax collectors work for the hated Roman government, but also they were Jews who became rich at the expense of their own people. Many overcharged the people and skimmed off the top of what they

collected. Consequently they were seen as enemies to be shunned.



Yet Jesus broke with cultural tradition yet again when He stopped at Matthew's booth to speak with him. *"Follow me,"* Jesus told him, and Levi (or Matthew) got up and followed him. While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and sinners were eating with Him and His disciples, for there were many who followed Him. When the Pharisees saw Him eating with the sinners and tax collectors, they asked His disciples: "Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?" This was not an unusual question since in Jesus' day, rabbis and other spiritual leaders were the highest members of Jewish society (because they strictly held to the Law and

traditions).

They stayed away from those they considered "sinners" because they felt they had a clean image to maintain. It puzzled them that Jesus, who was so zealous for God, should mix with 'low' people like Matthew. They didn't understand that spending time with the publicans and sinners was part of Jesus' mission. If He was to reach the lost, He had to have contact with them.

In fact, when He heard the Pharisees grumbling about Him, He said, *"Those who are healthy have no need for a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."* (Mark 2:17)

This is why Jesus gladly accepted Matthew's invitation to a dinner party. It was a wonderful opportunity to share the good news of the kingdom with those who most needed to hear.

CHAPTER 6

Healing at Pool, Jesus' Authority



Healing at Pool

Some time later Jesus went to Jerusalem for one of the Jewish festivals. There was a pool in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate, which was also known as Bethesda meaning 'house of mercy'. It was surrounded by five columns and many disabled people gathered there, probably because it was a shaded area, but also because of a legend that told of an angel that would sometimes stir up the water. It was believed that the first person to enter the pool after it was stirred up would get healed from whatever ailment they had. Jesus went to the pool and saw a man there who had been an invalid for 38 years. He asked the man if he wanted to be healed and the man replied that he had no one to help him into the pool when the angel stirred up the water. He said that others always went in before him. The man obviously believed the legend and probably had been coming to the pool for many years, hoping to be made well. Perhaps it was his desperation that touched Jesus' heart, for He said to the man, *"Get up! Pick up your mat and walk."* (John 5:8) At once the man was cured, and he picked up his mat and walked. This happened on a Sabbath, so there were Jewish leaders

about. They witnessed the miracle but instead of being awed by it, they were offended, and scolded the healed man for carrying his mat on the Sabbath. It was a ridiculous response, but the religious leaders were blinded to everything except their own religiosity.

The Old Testament Law urged the Israelites to keep the Sabbath in spirit and in truth, but during the 400 years between the Old and New Testaments, the Jewish scholars, scribes, and Pharisees had added many senseless rules to define how the Sabbath was to be kept. The Law itself said simply that no work was to be done on that day, for it was to be kept holy. The Jewish leaders, however, classified what was work and what was not. They decided that only food equal to a dried fig, wine to fill one cup, milk enough to swallow, a small amount of honey to put on a wound, water enough to moisten eye salve, ink enough to write 2 letters of the alphabet, paper enough to write a notice, and a reed to make a pen were permissible. Lifting a lamp from one place to another or lifting a child, etc. were not allowed. The Pharisees especially were always on the lookout for anyone breaking one of these rules, so it was not surprising that when they saw the man carrying his mat, they were incensed. The victim of their censure replied that the one who had healed him had instructed him to pick up his mat and walk. The Pharisees then wanted to know who had healed him, but the man didn't know.

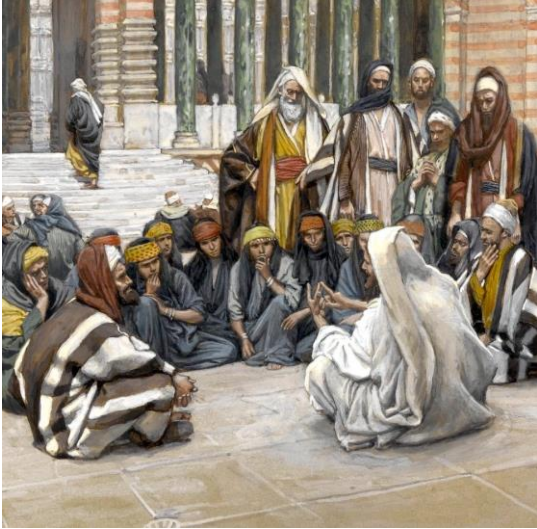
Meanwhile Jesus had slipped away into the crowd and the Pharisees were unable to find Him. Later Jesus met the man at the temple and said to him: *Behold, you are made well. Sin no more, so that nothing worse happens to you. (John 5:14)* This seems to indicate that the man's ailment had been related to sinful conduct or some character flaw in his life. It is certainly possible since the man went away and told the Jewish leaders that it was Jesus who had made him well. He obviously knew Jesus would get into trouble with the Jewish leaders, so his motive seemed malicious, and, at the very least, totally ungrateful.

Because Jesus often did healing miracles on the Sabbath, the Jewish leaders began to persecute Him. Jesus defended His actions by saying, *"My Father is still working, so I am working, too." (John 5:17)* That just made them angrier than ever, and for this reason they tried even harder to kill Him, not just for breaking the Sabbath, but because He was calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God.

So Jesus answered them: *If I testify about myself, my witness is not valid. It is another who testifies about me. I know that the testimony which he testifies about me is true. You have sent to John, and he has testified to the truth. (John 5:31-33)*

Jesus' Authority

Jesus went on to say that He had evidence even greater than that of John. He referred to His baptism when the Father had audibly testified to His identity as the Son of God and had sent the Holy Spirit to anoint Him. But Jesus knew they had not received His Father's witness. He told them that they had never heard God's voice nor seen His form. In fact, God's word did not dwell in them because they not believe in the One He had sent.



Jesus added: *You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and these are they which testify about me. Yet you will not come to me, that you may have life. I don't receive glory from men. But I know you, that you don't have God's love in yourselves. I have come in my Father's name, and you don't receive me. If another comes in his own name, you will receive him. How can you believe, who receive glory from one another, and you don't seek the glory that comes from the only God? (John 5:39-44)*

Jesus also told them that He didn't need to accuse them before His Father because Moses himself accused them. They built their hopes on the writings of Moses yet it was he who wrote of Jesus. If they wouldn't believe Moses, then how were they to believe anything Jesus said? One can imagine the anger these words would have aroused in the Pharisees. And so they kept on hounding Him from place to place, seeking to oppose and denounce Him.

One time John's disciples came to Jesus and asked Him why His disciples didn't fast. The Pharisees and John's disciples did a lot of fasting, so it seemed strange to them that the disciples of Jesus didn't. Jesus answered, *"Can the friends of the bridegroom mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast. (Matthew 9:15)*

Jesus was referring to Himself as the bridegroom. Because He was currently with them, it was a time for celebration, not mourning, when people usually fasted. The reference to Himself as the bridegroom had deeper meaning of course. Earlier, John the Baptist had presented himself as the "friend who attends the bridegroom," and by this he was referring to Jesus as the bridegroom. John added that the bride belongs to the bridegroom and by this he meant that Israel (the Bride) belongs to Jesus. Of course, he was referring to spiritual Israel specifically.

In the Old Testament there was not a clear separation between the physical and spiritual aspects of Israel. References to Israel could refer to the physical nation of Israel, or to the spiritual Israel (those who had faith in God). Or it could refer to both. Context determined how the word was used. However in the New Testament, the emphasis increasingly focuses on spiritual Israel and often links her to the Church.

But it is not as though the word of God has come to nothing. For they are not all Israel, that are of Israel. Neither, because they are Abraham's offspring, are they all (God's)

*children. ... "That is, it is not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as heirs. (Romans 9:6-8)
Know therefore that those who are of faith, the same are children of Abraham.
(Galatians 3:7)*

The entire Bible speaks of this relationship between God and Israel as a marriage. Even in the Old Testament, the Song of Solomon was not only a picture of the sensual love between a husband and wife, but also as a metaphor of God and His Bride. This is why John the Baptist described Jesus, as God's Son, married to Israel.

For your Maker is your husband; Yahweh of Armies is his name. The Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer. He will be called the God of the whole earth. (Isaiah 54:5)

In the Old Testament, however, God's marriage to Israel went horribly wrong when she became unfaithful to Him.

I saw ... that backsliding Israel had committed adultery.. I had put her away and given her a bill of divorce, yet treacherous Judah, her sister, had no fear; but she also went and played the prostitute. (Jeremiah 3:8)

...(The new covenant will not be) according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; ... (which) they broke, although I was a husband to them, says Yahweh. (Jeremiah 31:32)

Israel had broken the old marriage agreement (covenant) with God. Yet there was hope, because God promised to make a new covenant with Israel.

"This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time," declares the Lord. "I will put My law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be My people. (Jeremiah 31:31-33)

Sadly, many who were used to the old covenant did not want the new covenant that God was making with Israel. The Pharisees were obviously in this group. However at the wedding of Cana, when Jesus made new wine for the celebration, the wine steward had declared it to be better than the old. This was an allusion to the superiority of the new covenant over the old. Just as Jesus made new wine that was better and superior to the old, He was making a new covenant with Israel that was superior to the old one.

CHAPTER 7

Sabbath, Paralyzed Hand, Chosen 12



Sabbath

Jesus and His disciples walked from town to town bringing the good news of God's kingdom to the people. One time they were walking through some fields of wheat on a Sabbath day and because they were hungry, the disciples began to pick the grain and eat it. Some Pharisees saw this as harvesting and right away accused the disciples, saying it was unlawful to labor on the Sabbath day. Jesus pointed out to the Pharisees that the priests who served in the Temple ate the Showbread every Sabbath, which was freshly baked from harvested grain. No one thought that they were in the wrong. Jesus was showing the Jewish leaders that God's purpose for the Sabbath and the Showbread went beyond legalistic command. The Sabbath was instituted by God to benefit humans. The Pharisees were missing this very important point. The disciples of Jesus were hungry on the Sabbath and 'harvesting' the grain was permissible because satisfying their physical needs was compatible with the Sabbath's purpose. The Sabbath was made for them, not the other way around.

Jesus said: *'I tell you that something greater than the temple is here. If you had known what these words mean, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the guiltless. For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.'*(Matthew 12:6,7,8)

Jesus referred to Himself as being "something greater than the Temple" because He was the fulfillment of the Temple with all its sacrifices. Because He was also the fulfillment of the Sabbath, He could boldly declare that He was the "Lord of the

Sabbath day".

As the true Sabbath-Rest, Jesus would deliver humankind from hopelessly laboring for righteousness in order to be accepted by God. The Sabbath (Jesus) had been specifically created for the benefit of man.

There remains therefore a Sabbath rest for the people of God. For he who has entered into his rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from his. Let us therefore give diligence to enter into that rest, lest anyone fall after the same example of disobedience...Having then a great high priest, who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold tightly to our confession. (Hebrews 4:9-11, 14).

From this scripture we can see that Jesus is the great High Priest and the Sabbath rest. But He also referred to Himself as the Bread of Life, as symbolized by the Showbread in the Tabernacle. The Showbread, or "Bread of the Face" foreshadowed Jesus as the Bread through which God would be seen.

"I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will not be hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread which comes down out of heaven, that anyone may eat of it and not die. (John 6:35, 49-50)

As they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks for it, and broke it. He gave to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." (Matthew 26:26)

Just as the Showbread was made to provide sustenance to the Levitical priests and to King David when he was in need, so Jesus would give His body as spiritual sustenance to all who 'ate' of His body. And just as the Sabbath was made for humans to give them rest from physical labor, Jesus, as the fulfilled Sabbath rest, came to give humans spiritual rest from their futile attempts to make themselves acceptable to God. In everything He was saying, Jesus could not have made His identity as God more obvious to the Pharisees. His words clearly pronounced that He was the fulfillment of all Jewish Law, sacrifice, and ceremony. He was Lord over the Temple. That's why He could chase out the moneychangers. He was Lord over the Sabbath. That's why He allowed His disciples to 'harvest' grain for food. But the Pharisees were not clear about His meaning. Their hearts were spiritually darkened and consequently they did not understand Him. At least they could not accuse Him of blasphemy if they were uncertain of His meaning, which is also possibly why Jesus often spoke to them in parables in order to keep His meaning hidden from them. He needed time to finish His mission before it ended with His execution on the cross.

Paralyzed Hand

Another time when Jesus went into a synagogue, a man with a withered hand was there. Some of the people were watching Jesus closely to see if He would heal the man on the Sabbath day. If He dared to do it, they could accuse Him of breaking the Law. Jesus told the man to stand where everyone could see him.



Then Jesus asked, *“Which is lawful on the Sabbath day: to do good or to do evil, to save a life or to kill?”* (Matthew 12:12) No one answered His question, and their hard-hearted lack of response angered Jesus. He looked at them, and He felt very sad because they were so stubborn. Then He told the man to hold out his hand, and as the man did so, his hand was made completely whole. The Pharisees had seen enough, and immediately left the synagogue to make plans to kill Jesus. Jesus knew exactly what they were plotting, so He left that place. Many people followed Him, and He healed all who were sick, warning them not to tell others who He was.

This was to fulfill what Isaiah the prophet had said: *“Behold, my servant, whom I uphold; my chosen, in whom my soul delights—I have put my Spirit on him. He will bring justice to the nations. He will not shout, nor raise his voice, nor cause it to be heard in the street. He won’t break a bruised reed. He won’t quench a dimly burning wick. He will faithfully bring justice. He will not fail nor be discouraged, until he has set justice in the earth, and the islands will wait for his law.”* (Isaiah 42:1–4)

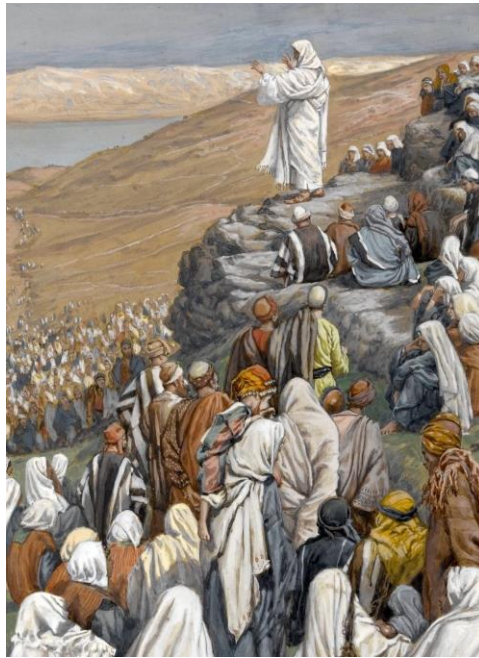
Chosen Twelve

Jesus went with His disciples to a lake and a large crowd from Galilee followed them. The people came from all over because they heard about all that Jesus was doing. He had healed many of them and all the sick people were pushing towards Him to touch him. Some in the crowd had evil spirits inside them. These demon spirits would make their human hosts bow before Jesus while shouting out, *“You are the Son of God!”* The demons probably hoped that they could get Jesus in trouble with the Pharisees, for if Jesus did not repudiate their words, the Pharisees could accuse Him of blasphemy. But Jesus commanded the spirits to be silent and would not let them reveal who He was.

Next, Jesus went up on a mountainside and called those He had chosen to be with Him, and they came to Him. Jesus had many disciples (literally 'learners') but the ones He was choosing now would become apostles (sent ones). He picked out twelve, the number of fullness, which is reminiscent of the twelve sons of Jacob and the twelve tribes of Israel. These twelve were to go out and preach, and Jesus gave them authority to cast out demons. They were: Simon (to whom he gave the name Peter), James son of Zebedee and his brother John (to them He gave the name Boanerges, which means “sons of thunder”), Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, Simon the Zealot, and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed Him.

CHAPTER 8

Sermon On The Mount



Jesus saw the overflowing crowds and went up on a hill with His disciples to teach them. Looking at them gathered below, He proceeded to tell them how they could enter the kingdom of heaven.

He began by saying: **Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.** (*Matthew 5:3*)

Jesus was saying that the heart attitude of those entering the eternal kingdom must be an attitude that recognizes that we can do nothing to save ourselves. Sin kills the soul and makes righteous living impossible. Only by perceiving that we are completely helpless to make ourselves righteous, will we turn to Jesus to make us right with God.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. (*Matthew 5:4*)

Those who are honest with God about their sin will experience grief, because they will see how corrupt they are and how wasted and wrong their lives have been. The essence of repentance sees the sin in our lives and comes to hate it. The Holy Spirit comforts such people when He enters their lives to reassure them of His love and forgiveness in Christ.

Blessed are the gentle (meek), for they will inherit the earth. (Matthew 5:5)

Meek people put their confidence in Jesus' unconditional love and acceptance for them, and have no need to ambitiously try to lord it above others. They do not seek to be made righteous by their own efforts and merits, but joyfully revel in the perfection God gives them in Christ. Knowing they are perfect in God's eyes as a free gift to them, they feel no need to compete with others for recognition. Humility is the result of accepting the perfect righteousness of Christ and resting in His boundless approval.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. (Matthew 5:6)

Those who have a deep longing and desire to know God, who long to be clean and perfect in mind and heart like He is, will receive the righteousness of Christ and be made perfect in Him. This is the eternal 'water' that satisfies spiritual thirst forever. This is the bread of life that feeds the soul and spirit.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. (Matthew 5:7)

But you, Lord, are a merciful and gracious God, slow to anger, and abundant in loving kindness and truth. (Psalm 86:15) To be merciful is to show forgiveness and compassion to those in need. The greatest demonstration of God's mercy was when Jesus Christ offered Himself as the sacrifice for sin in order to save us. *'Not by works of righteousness, which we did ourselves, but according to his mercy, he saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit.'* (Titus 3:5). Mercy is the quality that God looks for in His followers because it reflects His own character. God promises that those who show mercy to others will also receive mercy.

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

Being pure in heart means having a heart that has no hidden motives, but is honest and sincere in its desire to please God. King David prayed in Psalm 51:10 *"Create in me a pure heart, Oh God, and renew a right spirit within me."* Only God can make our hearts pure. He did this by creating an entirely New Creation that has the mind and heart of Christ, which is perfectly righteous and pure. Those who come to Christ for salvation are made into new creatures energized by the life of Christ. *Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old things have passed away. Behold, all things have become new. (2Corinthians 5:17)*

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

The Hebrew word for "peace," is shalom, meaning calm and tranquility. The Greek word "eirene" means "unity and accord." Jesus was focusing on the spiritual meaning of the word, which refers to the believer's restoration with God and the resultant peace we feel in our hearts, knowing we are no longer the Lord's enemies.

Peace was the purpose of Christ's coming to earth and this is why it was prophesied that He would be called the 'Prince of Peace'.

For to us a child is born. To us a son is given; and the government will be on his shoulders. His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. (Isaiah 9:6).

The peace Jesus gives is very different from what the world offers, which is temporary and limited at best. The Lord's peace removes fear and gives comfort in the midst of trials and crisis. With this kind of peace in our hearts, we can move out in faith and overcome the world.

Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you; not as the world gives, I give to you. Don't let your heart be troubled, neither let it be fearful. (John 14:27)

I have told you these things, that in me you may have peace. In the world you have oppression; but cheer up! I have overcome the world." (John 16:33)

Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 5:10)

It seems strange that righteous people would be persecuted for being moral, peaceable, and merciful. Why would the world see this as offensive? Yet the Lord warned His followers that because the world hated Him, they would encounter the same hatred. This is because the world is the opposite of the kingdom of God in its pursuits, priorities, and principles. The world's focus is on money, power, and the praise of men, whereas the kingdom of heaven is focused on God and His interests. People in the world love unrestrained sex. God's people cherish purity of mind, body, and spirit. Worldly people love to party and indulge their appetites. Believers in God embrace self-control. The world loves wealth and luxury. Christians live simply and are content with what the Lord gives them. The world is steeped in pride and arrogance, whereas believers walk in humility. These differences expose the worldly minded and convict them of sin. This is not appreciated by those who love the world and take pleasure in its excesses. Consequently the righteous will always encounter persecution, just as Jesus did.

Blessed are you when people reproach you, persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven. For that is how they persecuted the prophets who were before you. (Matthew 5:11,12)

The usual response to being insulted and slandered is to become angry, defensive, and/or depressed. No one enjoys persecution. So it is surprising that Jesus taught His followers to rejoice when they were mistreated, looking ahead to the reward waiting for them in heaven. He reminded them that persecution is nothing new. The prophets in the Old Testament were treated in this exact same way.

The apostle Paul warned that *Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. ..Because it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in him, but also to suffer on his behalf, (2 Timothy 3:12; Philippians 1:29)*

If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed; because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. On their part he is blasphemed, but on your part he is glorified. (1 Peter 4:14)

Therefore we don't faint, but though our outward man is decaying, yet our inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is for the moment, works for us more and more exceedingly an eternal weight of glory; while we don't look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal. (2 Corinthians 4:16-18)



After teaching about kingdom blessings coming to the poor, meek, and persecuted, Jesus next turned His attention to a different crowd. *“But woe to you who are rich! For you have received your consolation. Woe to you, you who are full now, for you will be hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep. Woe, when men speak well of you, for their fathers did the same thing to the false prophets. (Luke 6:24-28)*

Jesus seems to be condemning rich people, but this is not the case since the Bible says that *Yahweh's blessing brings wealth, and he adds no trouble to it. (Proverbs 10:22)*

Later in the New Testament the apostle Paul tells Timothy that riches are not forbidden, but those who are wealthy should generously share with those less fortunate.

But those who are determined to be rich fall into a temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful lusts, such as drown men in ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some have been led astray from the faith in their greed, and have pierced themselves through with many sorrows. Charge those who are rich in this present world that they not be haughty, nor have their hope set on the uncertainty of riches, but on the living God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy; that they do good, that they be rich in good works, that they be ready to distribute, willing to communicate; laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold of eternal life. (1 Timothy 6:9-10, 17-19)

Clearly the kind of wealth Jesus was warning about in His Sermon on the Mount was a wealth acquired at the expense of others through oppression and exploitation. James, the brother of Jesus had these words to say about such people.

Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming on you. Your riches are corrupted and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and your silver are corroded, and their corrosion will be for a testimony against you, and will eat your flesh like fire. You have laid up your treasure in the last days. Behold, the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you have kept back by fraud, cry out, and the cries of those who reaped have entered into the ears of the Lord of Armies. You have ... taken your pleasure. You have nourished your hearts as in a day of slaughter. You have condemned, you have murdered the righteous one. (James 5:1-6)

Next Jesus told His followers that they were to be like salt. Jesus was probably referring to the properties of salt, one of which is to give taste to food. Salt also preserves food from rotting. Maybe Jesus was meaning that His followers were to preserve the world by spreading the gospel of God's truth and salvation throughout the earth. This would have a sanctifying effect that would protect the world from corruption and safeguard it against God's judgment.

Jesus and the Law

Many of the things Jesus taught were so different from what the Pharisees had been teaching that some people probably wondered if Jesus really was a heretic, like the Pharisees accused Him of being. Was He radically overthrowing the Old Testament Law? Perhaps it was to set their minds at rest that Jesus explained His stand on the Law and Prophets.

Don't think that I came to destroy the law or the prophets. I didn't come to destroy, but to fulfill. For most certainly, I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not even one smallest letter or one tiny pen stroke shall in any way pass away from the law, until all things are accomplished. Whoever, therefore, shall break one of these least commandments, and teach others to do so, shall be called least in the Kingdom of Heaven; but whoever shall do and teach them shall be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven. For I tell you that unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, there is no way you will enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. (Matthew 5:17-20)

This was a clear statement that Jesus came to fulfill the Law, not abolish it. The Law would stand until such time as its requirements were completely satisfied. *"This is what I told you, while I was still with you, that all things which are written in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms, concerning me must be fulfilled."* (Luke 24:44)

New Testament scriptures make it clear that Jesus did indeed fulfill the Law, and in doing so He abolished it. The Law had acted as a guardian to Israel to sanctify the Jewish culture through moral decision-making.

However the Law was never able to give eternal life or make people perfectly righteous. Only Jesus could do that. Once He redeemed mankind by becoming the Head of a New Creation (after His death and resurrection), believers who believed in Him were spiritually placed into that New Creation, and the Law no longer had a part to play in their lives as a guardian. Instead, they were given the Holy Spirit to motivate their new hearts to willingly do what was righteous. External commandments were not needed.

For Christ is the fulfillment of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. (Romans 10:4)

But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, confined for the faith (locked up until the faith that was to come would be revealed. So that the law has become our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor. (Galatians 3:23-25)

Having abolished in the flesh the hostility, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man of the two, making peace. (Ephesians 2:15).

Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ... that we might be justified by faith in Christ, and not by the works of the law, because no flesh will be justified by the works of the law. (Galatians 2:16).

But if Jesus fulfilled the entire Law in the first century AD, why did He say it would remain in effect until 'heaven and earth' passed away? These words have confused many Christians because, after all, the universe is still here. Some Bible teachers try to solve the problem by separating the sacrificial system from the Ten Commandments, saying Jesus fulfilled only the ceremonial, sacrificial aspects of the Law, leaving the Commandments still in effect for believers today. This would effectively place Christians under a legal system of works until the universe is no more. We would be under obligation to keep the Law in totality, and we would be under its curse if we disobeyed its commandments.

For whoever keeps the whole law, and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all. (James 2:10)

For as many as are of the works of the law are under a curse. For it is written, "Cursed is everyone who doesn't continue in all things that are written in the book of the law, to do them. (Galatians 3:10)

So if we can't keep the Law, but it remains until heaven and earth pass away, where does that leave us? Actually it all depends on how we interpret "heaven and earth" in this passage. A literal interpretation of a physical heaven and earth would mean that the Old Covenant Law would be in effect for as long as mankind exists, until the end of time.

However there is another way to interpret the phrase. The Bible often uses figurative language to describe cataclysmic happenings. In Isaiah 13:1-13, a prophecy was given against the nation of Babylon.

'Therefore I will make the heavens tremble, and the earth will be shaken out of its place in Yahweh of Armies' wrath, and in the day of his fierce anger'. (Isaiah 13:13)

The language makes it sound like a worldwide destruction was going to happen, but it was referring to Babylon's destruction in 539 BC. When the Medes destroyed Babylon (Isaiah 13:17), the Babylonian world came to an end. The physical heaven and earth (universe) did not end, but the entire Babylonian culture collapsed. The Bible used figurative language to describe this apocalyptic event.

Isaiah also gave a description of the fall of Edom described in similar language: *Their slain will also be cast out, and the stench of their dead bodies will come up; and the mountains will melt in their blood. All of the army of the sky will be dissolved. The sky will be rolled up like a scroll, and all its armies will fade away, as a leaf fades from off a vine or a fig tree. For my sword has drunk its fill in the sky. Behold, it will come down on Edom, and on the people of my curse, for judgment. (Isaiah 34:3-5)*

This language was meant to describe Edom's fall as a nation, not the end of the world.

When Jesus used the term 'heaven and earth', He was employing it as the prophets had used it in the Old Testament scriptures. What He was saying in Matthew 5:17-18 was that the Law would not end until everything concerning it in the Old Covenant age (old heaven and earth) was fulfilled. Jesus Himself would be the One fulfilling the Law when He bore the death penalty for sin on the cross, thereby redeeming mankind from the Law's curse and setting us free from its condemnation.



The Pharisees didn't understand what Jesus meant about fulfilling the things written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets, and they certainly had no idea that the Old Covenant was to end shortly. They meticulously followed the 613 commands in the Mosaic Law, including thousands of manmade rules of their own. For instance, the Law for the Sabbath commanded the Jews to keep the Sabbath holy and not work on Saturdays, but Jewish scholars created 39 categories of what 'work' meant.

Then they created another 39 sub-categories under each of those 39 categories! Most Jews didn't even try to keep all those rules, but the Pharisees prided themselves on trying to keep most of them. Of course not even they expected to be 100% successful. They imagined that God would overlook a broken rule here and there since they were doing so well on the average. They felt great superiority over the common people, who didn't even know all the rules and who broke them repeatedly. To their mind, a Pharisee had a much better chance of gaining heaven than a sinner from the rabble crowds. The common people thought so too.

They looked up to the Pharisees as religious authorities and they meekly submitted to the heavy burdens of guilt and condemnation heaped upon them by the teachers of the Law. However Jesus' teachings did not follow the party line. He spoke with grace and wisdom and the crowds were enraptured with what He had to say. Even some of the Pharisees were drawn to His words at first. So when Jesus said that He had come to fulfill the Law, they probably nodded with approval, applying their own idea of what He meant by the word fulfillment. To the Pharisees, fulfilling the Law meant trying to keep the commands in the Torah so as to become righteous enough to gain God's acceptance. And in their minds, when it came to law keeping, nobody had better track record than they did. But then Jesus uttered words that must have shaken their confidence to the core.

The Spirit and The Letter of the Law



"You have heard that it was said to the ancient ones, 'You shall not murder;' and 'Whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.' But I tell you, that everyone who is angry with his brother without a cause will be in danger of the judgment; and whoever says to his brother, 'Raca!' will be in danger of the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of Gehenna. "If therefore you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has anything against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.

Agree with your adversary quickly, while you are with him on the way; lest perhaps the prosecutor deliver you to the judge, and the judge deliver you to the officer, and you be cast into prison. Most certainly I tell you, you shall by no means get out of there, until you have paid the last penny. (Matthew 5:21-26)

This was a standard that not even the Pharisees expected. Jesus was equating anger with murder! In other words, Jesus was teaching that refraining from the act of murder was not enough. The hatred that causes a person to hurl insults at another is the same hatred that causes another to commit murder.

The attitude is the same in both cases and that attitude makes a person guilty before God and eligible for judgment! In fact, an unresolved grievance from an offended party could damn a person to hell! Then Jesus drove His point further with His next words.

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery;’ but I tell you that everyone who gazes at a woman to lust after her has committed adultery with her already in his heart. If your right eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out and throw it away from you. For it is more profitable for you that one of your members should perish, than for your whole body to be cast into Gehenna (hell). If your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off, and throw it away from you. For it is more profitable for you that one of your members should perish, than for your whole body to be cast into Gehenna. (Matthew 5:27-30)

The crowds, especially the Pharisees, must have been stunned by this word picture. Surely this was taking obedience to the Law too far! Was Jesus serious about this? And if He wasn't, why did He use such harsh words? For shock value? One can imagine that this method certainly got the attention of the crowd.

Even the Pharisees would have recognized themselves as sinners under this standard, for what man hasn't looked at a woman with lust? These impossible standards put the Pharisees on the same level as the common rabble! This was exactly what Jesus wanted to do. He wanted to show the Pharisees that they were in need of salvation from their sins as much as any other person. He was showing how sin really works, beginning in the spirit of man before manifesting in outward action. And even if the thought never becomes action, both thought and deed are equally sinful and they bring God's inevitable condemnation and judgment.

Jesus' picture of gouging out an eye or cutting off one's hand illustrated the serious nature of sin and its power to condemn to hell. Jesus was not advocating that these drastic measures be put into practice literally, but He did want to make sure that His audience took the matter of sin seriously.

On the same topic, Jesus added: *“It was also said, ‘Whoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorce, but I tell you that whoever puts away his wife, except for the cause of sexual immorality, makes her an adulteress; and whoever marries her when she is put away commits adultery. (Matthew 5:31-32)*

Even though divorce and remarriage were permitted under the Mosaic Law, broken marriages were the source of great pain and social instability in Jewish society. The Pharisees often debated on this topic, but generally they were biased towards the husbands' rights, whereas the well being of wives was not considered. A man seeking a divorce could simply get a certificate of divorce and the woman could be divorced against her will. This is why Jesus described the divorced woman as a 'victim' of adultery, and the one who married her as a guilty adulterer. Jesus said divorce was not permissible except in cases of immorality.

Jesus also had this to say on the subject of vows: *Again you have heard that it was said to them of old time, 'You shall not make false vows, but shall perform to the Lord your vows,' but I tell you, don't swear at all, neither by heaven (for it is the throne of God) nor by the earth (for it is the footstool of his feet) nor by Jerusalem (for it is the city of the great King). Neither shall you swear by your head, for you can't make one hair white or black. But let your 'Yes' be 'Yes' and your 'No' be 'No.'* (Matthew 5:33-37)

The Old Testament has about 30 references to vows in relation to offerings and sacrifices made to God. The Lord was very strict about the making and breaking of vows. Jephthah in the Old Testament is an illustration of this.

After being victorious in battle, he foolishly promised to sacrifice to God the first thing that came out to meet him as he returned home. It happened that his beloved daughter, an only child, was the first one to welcome him. Jephthah was heartbroken, but he knew that God expected him to carry out his oath. It is likely that his daughter was consecrated to serve in the Temple and not sacrificed as a burnt offering as Jephthah originally promised. After all, God hates child sacrifice. Nevertheless the young girl never married or had children, thus ending Jephthah's family line. It shows how careful one must be when making a promise to God. Perhaps this is why Jesus told His followers not to swear at all, but to simply let their Yes be 'Yes,' and their No be 'No'. Jesus was not, however, discouraging careful, thought-out promises, such as wedding vows or a legal contract.

Mercy and Vengeance

The Mosaic Law had the 'eye for an eye' concept in its justice system. God had given this law in order to regulate justice in cases of injury so that the punishment would fit the crime. The natural temptation for an injured party is often to exact revenge out of proportion to the crime, but this law prevented that. The law was probably only meant to be a guideline, however, as there is no evidence that the 'eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth' principle was carried out literally in Israel. However capital crimes were punished with execution if there were multiple witnesses, and other crimes resulted in fines or payment in goods, such as supplying wages to a man who was accidentally injured and couldn't work due to his employer's negligence. However, over time the Pharisees and scribes had taken the "eye for an eye" principle to mean that personal revenge was acceptable. If someone hurt or insulted you, you could hurt him back in equal measure. But Jesus taught that this was not the intent of God's law.

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy'. But I tell you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who mistreat you and persecute you, that you may be children of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Don't even the tax collectors do the same? If you only greet your friends, what more do you do than others? Don't even the tax collectors do the same?"

Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect. (Matthew: 5:43-48)

In speaking in this way, Jesus must have further shocked the Pharisees for although they were arrogantly self-righteous, even they couldn't claim to be as merciful or perfect as God. They must have wondered how it was even possible to love an enemy when he spat on you, took away your possessions, and lorded it over you. It was much easier to practice the eye for eye concept of justice, although the Pharisees had forgotten that it had initially been instituted by God as a legal guideline for government law enforcement, not as a practice for social relationships. In matters of civil justice involving retribution and punishment, it is up to the police and courts to carry out the penalties. Believers are to be guided by a much higher law of love that returns evil with blessing.

This is not to say that Jesus was advocating pacifism, which has the potential to put us and loved ones in mortal danger. He was dealing with the lesser issues of personal insults against our dignity, lawsuits over property rights, and violations of personal liberty. In such cases, God's people were to surrender their rights, showing kindness and forgiveness instead of seeking revenge. Jesus would later exemplify this when the high priest interrogated Him concerning His disciples and his teaching.

Jesus answered him; "I spoke openly to the world. I always taught in synagogues, and in the temple, where the Jews always meet. I said nothing in secret. Why do you ask me? Ask those who have heard me what I said to them. Behold, these know the things which I said." When he had said this, one of the officers standing by slapped Jesus with his hand, saying, "Do you answer the high priest like that?" Jesus answered him, "If I have spoken evil, testify of the evil; but if well, why do you beat me?" (John 18:19-23)

In this instance we see that Jesus was not passive in His response. He was holding the officer to account for abusing his position by this unjust act of aggression. But Jesus was by no means lashing out in anger or motivated by vengeance. The apostle Paul affirmed this principle when he told Christians: *Don't seek revenge yourselves, beloved, but give place to God's wrath. For it is written, "Vengeance belongs to me; I will repay, says the Lord."* (Romans 12:19)

Paul took his own advice when he was personally opposed by a coppersmith while preaching the gospel to the churches. This is what he told Timothy: *Alexander, the coppersmith, did much evil to me. The Lord will repay him according to his deeds, of whom you also must beware; for he greatly opposed our words. (2 Timothy 4:14-15)*

Paul wanted to warn Timothy and the other believers to be wary of the metalworker's wickedness, but he was not seeking revenge for the abuses he had suffered at his hands. He was leaving vengeance to God, trusting that the Lord would effect justice.

In certain cases like this, where Paul was hindered in preaching the gospel by Alexander, the coppersmith, one may forgive the offender (by not seeking retribution or revenge) and still ask the Lord to bring justice to the situation. The metalworker was a hindrance to the work of God and caused Paul's ministry much harm. Paul said that Alexander had rejected his faith and conscience. Eventually Paul "handed him over to Satan to be taught not to blaspheme" (an apostolic curse allowing Satan to put pressure on the man through illness or mishap so that he would repent of his sins and hopefully be saved. (1 Corinthians 5:5). Paul told Timothy: *"The Lord will repay him for what he has done"* (2 Timothy 4:14). Paul was not personally seeking revenge on Alexander, but he was trusting God to deal justice to the man.

Perfection

When Jesus said: *'You must be perfect - just as your Father in heaven is perfect'*, He was holding up an impossible standard that no one could hope to attain. Even if the word 'perfect' means 'completion' as some Bible scholars maintain, the word still conveys an impossibly high measurement of righteousness - one equaling that of God Himself! Even the Pharisees knew they could never equal the purity and righteousness of God. Jesus was indicating that God's Law requires perfection.

The Law of Moses demanded complete obedience, not just in the letter, but in the spirit as well. The Law also had to be obeyed as a whole, not just in part. All the teachings Jesus was giving were designed to emphasize this. Undoubtedly the people in the crowd felt overwhelmed. Who could possibly live this way? To never lust or feel rage? To never retaliate against insults or defend one's personal rights? To bless those who curse us? To never commit a single sin?! Only a person who was so completely righteous that ordinary fleshly urges had no power over him, could hope to fulfill such stringent requirements. Surely no human on earth could do it. But there was One who could. And He was standing right in front of them.

One day Jesus Himself would provide His followers with the perfection God required. Those who trusted in Him would be justified before God's Law because they would no longer be ruled by their former life. That former old life (i.e. old nature) was programmed to sin and stood condemned before the Lord. It would have to be destroyed and replaced with a new spirit - a new life - that would be divine, complete, and perfect. It would be Christ's very own life that would energize and motivate them. This Christ life could never be diminished or enslaved, so giving up the right to retaliate in the face of an insult would be inherent. Blessing would be so inbuilt into the new nature that returning good for evil would be the norm. Temptations to lust or rage would be overcome by a righteous predisposition that would overrule such fleshly inclinations. Though it might struggle for supremacy, the flesh would be consistently overcome by the new life inside the believer.

All this would happen because of Jesus and the work He would do on the cross. Even now Jesus was preparing the hearts of the people to cease trusting in their own works in order to receive His perfect righteousness instead. By recognizing the futility of their own efforts to attain right standing with God, they would one day accept Christ as their Redeemer and Sin Sacrifice.

For by one offering he has perfected forever those who are being sanctified. (Hebrews 10:14)

Charity, Prayer, Fasting, and Forgiveness

Jesus had much to say about hypocrisy, a particular tendency of the religious leaders and Pharisees of that day. Hypocrisy is when we claim one thing with words, but act in a different manner. It's much like acting or pretending.

Jesus had this to say about it: *Be careful that you don't do your charitable giving before men, to be seen by them, or else you have no reward from your Father who is in heaven. Therefore when you do merciful deeds, don't sound a trumpet before yourself, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may get glory from men. Most certainly I tell you, they have received their reward. But when you do merciful deeds, don't let your left hand know what your right hand does, so that your merciful deeds may be in secret, then your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly. (Matthew 6:1-4)*

In the Old Testament scriptures, the Lord told the prophet Isaiah: *The Lord said, ... 'this people draws near with their mouth and with their lips to honor me, but they have removed their heart far from me... (Isaiah 29:13).*

Speaking insincerely and pretending to be devout worshippers of God was what the Pharisees were particularly guilty of doing. They loved the praise of men so much that they even put on a show of being generous by blowing trumpets before giving to the poor. They didn't really care about the poor people. They were doing it for their own benefit. Jesus said that God would not reward them for this. They would get no commendation from Him. This also applied to the way in which they were fasting.

Moreover when you fast, don't be like the hypocrites, with sad faces. For they disfigure their faces, that they may be seen by men to be fasting. Most certainly I tell you, they have received their reward. But you, when you fast, anoint your head, and wash your face so that you are not seen by men to be fasting, but by your Father who is in secret, and your Father, who sees in secret, will reward you. (Matthew 6:16-18)

Fasting is not a command in the New Testament and the Jews were only commanded to fast on one day out of the year, on the Day of Atonement. Jesus sometimes fasted, but His disciples did not make fasting a common practice. In fact, they came under condemnation from the Pharisees because of this.

Jesus defended them, saying that guests of the bridegroom (an allusion to Himself) did not fast while the groom was with them. The Pharisees, however, liked to fast so that they could appear devoutly religious and superior to those who were not as religiously rigorous as they were. Jesus exposed and rebuked their hypocritical motives. Jesus then taught on repetitious and meaningless prayers, saying these also would get a person nowhere.

Pray like this: 'Our Father in heaven, may your name be kept holy. Let your Kingdom come. Let your will be done, as in heaven, so on earth. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts (sins), as we also forgive our debtors. Bring us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For yours is the Kingdom, the power, and the glory forever. Amen.' (Matthew 6:9-13)

Basically this prayer honors God and His holiness, asks that His reign in heaven would be extended to the earth, asks for daily needs, forgiveness of sins, and protection from Satan. Many Christians think that Jesus intended this prayer to be recited word for word but that would make it repetitious and meaningless, which Jesus warned against. The Lord's Prayer is not a magic formula. It merely offers guidance as to how to pray. The interesting thing about this prayer are the words: *Forgive our sins, just as we have forgiven those who did wrong to us.* Jesus added: *For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you don't forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.* (Matthew 6:14, 15)

This idea of forgiving debts comes from Exodus 22:25-27 where it was forbidden to charge interest on a loan or keep a man's pledge towards a debt past sunset. Jesus used the picture of cancellation to explain forgiveness. The first thing we have to understand is what forgiveness really is, and what it is not. In the Bible, forgiveness is the releasing of God's penalty for sin. This doesn't mean that God merely looks the other way when an offence is committed, or forgets about the Law, which He instituted. This would make Him unjust. On the contrary, God has always condemned sin and it was He who pronounced death as the penalty. *For the wages of sin is death...(Romans 6:23).*

Also Jesus was not saying that unless we forgive, God would withhold forgiveness (i.e. salvation) from us. That would make God's salvation dependent on forgiveness as a meritorious work. *For it is by grace (that) you have been saved, through faith, and this not from yourselves; it is the gift of God, not by works, so that no one can boast.* (Ephesians 2:8,9)

So how does forgiveness operate alongside God's justice, since it wipes out debt so that we can escape the just penalty of sin? The answer of course is the cross. That is where both mercy and justice - two characteristics of God's nature - were completely satisfied. Justice was carried out when Jesus took the penalty for sin upon Himself as mankind's Representative. God's forgiveness was only possible once justice was accomplished, because in actuality, no one gets away with sin.

Either one pays the penalty for sin in hell, or one is placed spiritually into the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ so that HIS payment for sin is reckoned to our account. Only in this way could God's mercy and justice exit side by side. Jesus paid a heavy price to bring us God's forgiveness and because of His example, we are to emulate this selfsame trait. Many scriptures in the New Testament emphasize this.

Ephesians 4:32 says, *And be kind to one another, tender hearted, forgiving each other, just as God also in Christ forgave you.* Colossians 3:13 says, *bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, if any man has a complaint against any; even as Christ forgave you, so you also do.*

Forgiveness is a standard for righteousness, and a very high one at that (like those standards Jesus talked about, such as never lusting after a woman, or never hating our neighbor. Fallen humanity cannot attain such high standards because it is dead spiritually and does not have the spiritual resources to live righteously.

Therefore as sin entered into the world through one man, and death through sin; and so death passed to all men, because all sinned. (Romans 5:12)

You were made alive when you were dead in transgressions and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the children of disobedience; among whom we also all once lived in the lust of our flesh, doing the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. (Ephesians 2:1-3)

..because the mind of the flesh is hostile towards God; for it is not subject to God's law, neither indeed can it be. (Romans 8:7)

Then why did Jesus say that forgiving others was essential in order to experience God's forgiveness? Why is the command to forgive repeated so often in the scriptures? The answer is that forgiveness is a divine operation requiring God's very own nature (life) working inside us. Faith transforms us from within, enabling Christ's divine nature to replace our old nature. Without that new nature, we cannot forgive. Without that new nature we cannot be right with God. In other words, forgiveness is a divine act requiring God's divine life. The Holy Spirit enables our new nature to see how marvelously God has pardoned us, with the result that our gratitude overcomes whatever bitterness or anger we may have felt when offended by others. This is what Jesus wanted the crowds to understand.

Jesus was addressing forgiveness in personal relations. In civil or criminal matters, forgiveness does not mean doing away with the legal penalty for the offence committed. If a man murders another man, or steals from him, society requires that he be put in jail or pay a fine. This is because civil societies operate according to the Law to keep the peace. Payment for the crime is required in any just society just as God required it for humanity in order to fulfill His just nature.

Riches, Light, Possessions

What we most value is often evident in the things we own and collect. Too often our riches become more important to us than the well being of others, such as the poor. Jesus taught that this is a poor investment when it comes to eternal reward.

Don't be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom. Sell that which you have, and give gifts to the needy. Make for yourselves purses, which don't grow old, a treasure in the heavens that doesn't fail, where no thief approaches, neither moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. (Luke 12:32)

When we live for Jesus' sake and serve Him by being generous with our resources, we store up treasure in heaven. Even small acts of service are noted by God.

Whoever gives one of these little ones just a cup of cold water to drink in the name of a disciple, most certainly I tell you he will in no way lose his reward." (Matthew 10:42). The apostle Paul said: And whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord, and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ. (Colossians 3:23-24).

God's people are meant to reflect God's truth and righteousness in their character and actions. This is their testimony to the world. When they do this, they function as light that dispels darkness and brings praise to God.

You are the light of the world. A city located on a hill can't be hidden. Neither do you light a lamp, and put it under a measuring basket, but on a stand; and it shines to all who are in the house. Even so, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven. (Matthew 5:14-16)

It can be a challenge to discern what is light (truth) and what is darkness (deception), but we need to do it. What we focus on, such as what we watch on the internet, what movies we see, what kinds of books we read, etc. will determine our mindset. Exposure to righteousness will result in a healthy mindset, whereas exposure to dark elements will result in an unhealthy mindset. This is exactly what Jesus spoke to the crowd on the Mount.

The lamp of the body is the eye. Therefore when your eye is good, your whole body is also full of light; but when it is evil, your body also is full of darkness. ...If therefore your whole body is full of light, having no part dark, it will be wholly full of light, as when the lamp with its bright shining gives you light." (Luke 11:34)

Jesus was born into a family that was not rich according to the world's standards, so He was well aware of the concerns poor people had about financial security. In fact, most of the people who followed Jesus were poor and at the bottom of the social scale. They scraped to make a decent living and often fell onto hard times. This fact probably prompted Jesus to offer the following words of comfort and assurance.

Therefore I tell you, don't be anxious for your life, what you will eat, nor yet for your body, what you will wear. Life is more than food, and the body is more than clothing. Consider the ravens: they don't sow, they don't reap, they have no warehouse or barn, and God feeds them. How much more valuable are you than birds! Which of you by being anxious can add a cubit to his height? If then you aren't able to do even the least things, why are you anxious about the rest? Consider the lilies, how they grow. They don't toil, neither do they spin; yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if this is how God clothes the grass in the field, which today exists, and tomorrow is cast into the oven, how much more will he clothe you, O you of little faith? Don't seek what you will eat or what you will drink; neither be anxious. For the nations of the world seek after all of these things, but your Father knows that you need these things. But seek God's Kingdom, and all these things will be added to you. (Luke 12:22-31)

Other scriptures also encourage believers not to worry about their needs.

In nothing be anxious, but in everything, by prayer and petition with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. (Philippians 4:6)

1 Peter 5:7 says we are to *"cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you."*

God promises to take on our problems so that we don't need to be burdened by them. He does this because He loves us and is concerned about what happens to us. This is the wonderful advantage the people of God have over those who don't know Him. Unbelievers have no such assurance or comfort in the face of an uncertain future.

Judging, Seeking, Narrow Gate

Judging is a fault that is common to fallen humanity. Jesus spoke some direct words concerning this and the Pharisees would have been particularly affected by them. Their religious pride often led to disdain and condemnation of those they considered beneath them.

Don't judge, and you won't be judged. Don't condemn, and you won't be condemned. Set free, and you will be set free. Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over... For with the same measure you measure it will be measured back to you. (Luke 6:37-38)

In this passage, Jesus was referring to condemning others for committing an offence that affects us personally, or one we personally take issue with. The offence creates anger, resentment, and bitterness in us, so that we hold a grudge against the offender. Jesus warned that if we condemn others harshly, it would rebound back on us, whereas a forgiving attitude will result in favor and kindness shown to us.

Jesus explained His teaching with a parable. *"Can the blind lead the blind? Will they not both fall into a pit? The student is not above the teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like their teacher."*

Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, 'Brother, let me take the speck out of your eye,' when you yourself fail to see the plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye. (Luke 6:39-42)

A speck in another person's eye is a ridiculous picture, but that was the point Jesus was making. Most of us do not have the wisdom, experience, or integrity to properly discern matters in other people's lives (not to mention that we are all prone to flaws ourselves), so it is ridiculous to try to enlighten others when we are blind ourselves. Such judgment is pointless and absurd.

However this does not mean that we are to never make negative assessments of any kind, as some would suggest. There are different types of judging and some are even necessary. It must be remembered that Jesus also taught: *"Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravening wolves. By their fruits you will know them. Do you gather grapes from thorns, or figs from thistles? (Matthew 7: 15-16)*. Here Jesus is saying that we are to make evaluations of others' actions in order to keep from being misled by deceptive words.

And we need to identify sin in order to be able to protect against it. Without accurate judgment by church leaders, the weak and untaught would be defenseless against the predatory false teachers (wolves) that infiltrate churches and fellowships. Even the world itself depends on judging others. In fact, our entire legal system depends on accurate judgment to effect fair and righteous management of society. So we see that judgment is necessary, but it must be of the right kind. Jesus commanded us to judge correctly. *"Stop judging by mere appearances, but instead judge correctly" (John 7:24)*.

Unfortunately, even when Christians judge appropriately, they are often accused of being intolerant and condemnatory, especially when they preach the gospel. This is because the gospel addresses the fact that mankind has sinned and everyone is in need of a Savior. It also exposes false teaching and wrong actions. Many unbelievers are not receptive to this. Some find the suggestion that they are morally deficient highly offensive, and their responses can be extreme. Some others assume that Christians are hypocritically claiming to be morally superior and they naturally resent the implication. John the Baptist got into trouble with King Herod and his wife Herodias when he spoke out against their adultery. John the Baptist was preaching a righteous message that accurately assessed wicked behavior, but when the king and his queen were the recipients of his censure, it was like casting pearls before swine. In the end, the truth, along with John himself, were trampled and torn to pieces, just as Jesus warned when He said: *Don't give that which is holy to the dogs, neither throw your pearls before the pigs, lest perhaps they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces. (Matthew 7:6)*

Jesus next encouraged His disciples to seek the Father, believing that He would respond favorably to their requests.

Ask, and it will be given you. Seek, and you will find. Knock, and it will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives. He who seeks, finds. To him who knocks it will be opened. Or who is there among you, who, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, who will give him a serpent? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him! Therefore whatever you desire for men to do to you, you shall also do to them; for this is the law and the prophets. (Matthew 7:7-12)

He was not saying that they would always receive what they asked for, but that God is always pleased with persistent faith and delights to give us good gifts. He desires that we passionately look to Him for all our needs and wants. Just as a person knocks on a door to gain entrance, a believer should pray in faith for God's provision.

Asking is verbal request; seeking is persistent passion; and knocking is committed action. Everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. It is a promise we can depend on because God's love is that of a Father who delights in giving good gifts to His children.

Then someone, (who perhaps found all these moral standards somewhat daunting) asked Jesus, *"Lord, are they few who are saved?"* Jesus replied: *"Strive to enter in by the narrow door, for many, I tell you, will seek to enter in, and will not be able. When once the master of the house has risen up, and has shut the door, and you begin to stand outside, and to knock at the door, saying, 'Lord, Lord, open to us!' then he will answer and tell you, 'I don't know you or where you come from.' Then you will begin to say, 'We ate and drank in your presence, and you taught in our streets.' He will say, 'I tell you, I don't know where you come from. Depart from me, all you workers of iniquity.' There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and all the prophets, in God's Kingdom, and yourselves being thrown outside. They will come from the east, west, north, and south, and will sit down in God's Kingdom. Behold, there are some who are last who will be first, and there are some who are first who will be last."* (Luke 13:23-30)

The Lord's reply was a prophetic warning that there would be some surprises concerning those who made it into the kingdom of heaven. The 'house' symbolized the Kingdom of God and the 'owner' was the Father. The 'door' was Jesus. The door was narrow because it was the only way into the Kingdom and only a minority would actually enter in. At that time the door to the Kingdom was open to the Jews, but eventually this door would be closed, an allusion to the time when Jesus would come in judgment upon Israel and salvation would pass from the Jews to the Gentiles. Jesus later confirmed this by saying: *"Therefore I tell you, God's Kingdom will be taken away from you, and will be given to a nation producing its fruit. (Matthew 21:43)*

Jesus added that some of the Jews would attempt to enter the Kingdom of God after He was gone, but these would be turned away because even though they had eaten with Jesus and heard His teachings, they had not become His followers. T

hey would regret that they had rejected Him when they saw multitudes of Gentiles from the four corners of the earth receive the promises made to Israel. The Gentiles had not served God under the Old Covenant, and were 'newcomers' to the Kingdom (the last ones to receive it) whereas the Jews had labored long under the Old Covenant (being the first concerning the promises). Yet this order would be reversed when the last (Gentiles) became the first to enter the Kingdom, and the first (Jews) would be last. Even lowly sinners despised by the religious Jews would enter the Kingdom ahead of them.

Most certainly I tell you that the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering into God's Kingdom before you. For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you didn't believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him. When you saw it, you didn't even repent afterwards... (Matthew 21:31-32).

At that time some Pharisees came to Jesus and told Him to leave that place because Herod was looking to kill Him. Many of the Pharisees had little love for Jesus, but they had even less for Herod. Jesus told them to *'Go and tell that fox, 'Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I complete my mission. Nevertheless I must go on my way today and tomorrow and the next day, for it can't be that a prophet perishes outside of Jerusalem.'* (Luke 13:32-33)

Jesus called Herod a 'fox', which was viewed by the Jews as an unclean animal. A fox is also a crafty, cunning creature and Herod was most certainly all of that. Jesus was making a negative allusion to the king, and He was also defiantly promising to pursue and complete His mission until it was His time to die in Jerusalem. Reaching His goal on the 'third day' was a reference to His resurrection from the dead, which would complete mankind's salvation.

Tree and Its Fruit, House Builders

There are many warnings in the scriptures concerning false prophets and Jesus saved some of His strongest words for them.

"Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravening wolves. By their fruits you will know them. Do you gather grapes from thorns, or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree produces good fruit; but the corrupt tree produces evil fruit. A good tree can't produce evil fruit; neither can a corrupt tree produce good fruit. Every tree that doesn't grow good fruit is cut down, and thrown into the fire. Therefore by their fruits you will know them. (Matthew 7:15-20)

False preachers are deceptive and they often come in the guise of gentle, meek people who are compassionate and kind. Their speech is attractive in order to conceal their evil character. Jesus called them snakes, because like Satan in the Garden of Eden, they are subtle and persuasive as they seek the downfall of their victims. Good people have good hearts and they speak truth, but evil people speak lies. Jesus warned that they would come under judgment for every false word uttered.

Jesus continued His blunt denunciation of false people by likening them to builders of a house.

Everyone who comes to me, and hears my words, and does them ...is like a man building a house, who dug and went deep, and laid a foundation on the rock. When a flood arose, the stream broke against that house, and could not shake it, because it was founded on the rock. But he who hears, and doesn't (obey my words), is like a man who built a house on the earth without a foundation, against which the stream broke, and immediately it fell, and the ruin of that house was great. (Luke 6:47-49)

Jesus is the 'Rock' on which we must build our lives if we are to survive God's judgment. Many scriptures bear this out.

He is 'the stone which was regarded as worthless by you, the builders; which has become the head of the corner. There is salvation in none other, for neither is there any other name under heaven.. given among men, by which we must be saved!" (Acts 4:11-12)

For no one can lay any other foundation than that which has been laid, which is Jesus Christ. (1 Corinthians 3:11)

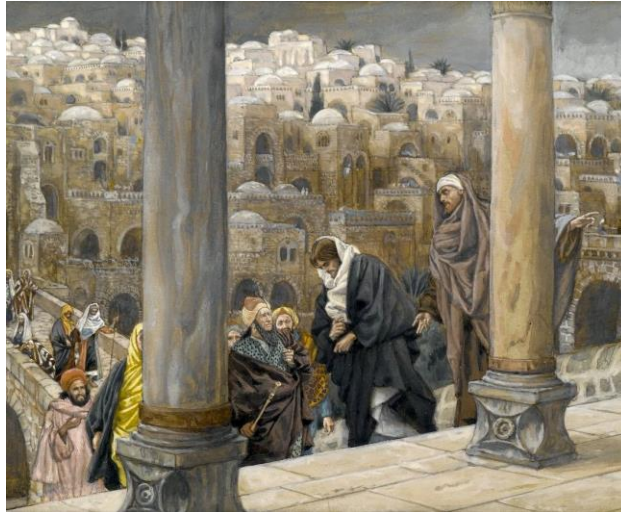
Because it is contained in Scripture, "Behold, I lay in Zion a chief cornerstone, chosen, and precious: He who believes in him will not be disappointed." (1 Peter 2:6)

Those people who truly obeyed Jesus' teachings were His true followers. They were building their faith on Him (the Rock and Foundation of eternal life), trusting Him for the way to salvation. These ones would not be destroyed in the Judgment.

When Jesus finished saying these things, the people were amazed at His teaching, because He did not teach like their teachers of the Law. He taught like a person who had authority (which of course He did as the Son of God).

CHAPTER 9

Officer's Servant, Widow's Son, John's Messengers



Officer's Servant

Jesus next entered Capernaum where some Jewish elders met him. They asked Jesus to accompany them to a Roman commander's home. Usually the Jews hated the Romans, viewing them as invaders, but they respected this particular Roman because he had helped build a synagogue for the Jews and was sympathetic to their religion. This officer had a servant whom he valued highly but who had taken seriously ill. After hearing that Jesus was a healer who could do miracles, the officer asked the Jewish elders if they would do him a favor by asking Jesus to come to his house to heal his servant. Jesus agreed but as He approached the house, the officer sent friends to give Him a message.

“Lord, I’m not worthy for you to come under my roof. Just say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I am also a man under authority, having under myself soldiers. I tell this one, ‘Go,’ and he goes; and tell another, ‘Come,’ and he comes; and tell my servant, ‘Do this,’ and he does it.” When Jesus heard it, he marveled, and said to those who followed, *“Most certainly I tell you, I haven’t found so great a faith, not even in Israel. (Matthew 8:9-10)*

Jesus was amazed. He turned to the crowd following Him and exclaimed that He had not found anyone in Israel with such strong faith. Clearly the Gentile commander believed that Jesus had divine authority and was far superior to him, to the point that he felt unfit to be in Jesus' presence. His humility and faith gained him the blessing he sought. Jesus sent the messengers back to the commander's house and when they arrived, they found the servant completely healed.

Widow's Son



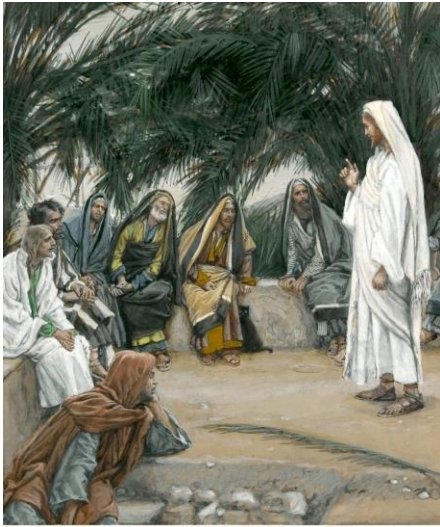
Awhile later, Jesus and His disciples, followed by a large crowd, approached the gate of a town called Nain. A funeral procession was going on. It was for a young man, the only son of his widowed mother, and Jesus was moved to compassion for her. This woman was a widow like His own mother, and so Jesus would have known the pain such women suffer. However Mary had not been left totally destitute after Joseph died. She had been fortunate to have Jesus to protect and provide for the family. However the poor widow of Nain had no one to take care of her now that her son was dead.

Life could be very hard for a woman without a husband or grown son to care for her. She could be exploited and taken advantage of, which was often the case. In the Old Testament, God had much to say about helping the vulnerable, revealing His special concern for orphans and widows.

Yahweh preserves the foreigners. He upholds the fatherless and widow, but the way of the wicked he turns upside down. (Psalm 146:9)... You shall not take advantage of any widow or fatherless child. (Exodus 22:22)... Learn to do well. Seek justice. Relieve the oppressed. Judge the fatherless. Plead for the widow. (Isaiah 1:17)

Jesus, being God, was especially tuned in to the cries of the fatherless and oppressed. Now the villagers of Nain were about to see God's loving concern displayed in a marvelous miracle. First Jesus gently told her not to cry. Then He stopped the procession by touching the shroud of the young man lying on the stretcher. Out loud He said: *"Young man, I say to you, get up!"* Amazingly the dead man sat up and began speaking. Jesus then gave him back to his astonished mother. Not surprisingly the people were filled with wonder and began to praise God, exclaiming that a great prophet was in their midst. *"God has come to help His people!"* they shouted. Very quickly news of Jesus and what He had done spread throughout Judea and the whole countryside. Crowds began to follow Him because His teaching captivated them. Some were so impressed that they offered to become His disciples.

One day, as Jesus and His followers were walking along a road, a man told Jesus that he would follow Him wherever He went. But Jesus didn't encourage him, knowing that people often promise things without counting the cost. He told the man that foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man had no permanent home.



Another time Jesus called a man to follow Him, but the man gave the excuse that he had to bury his father first. He might have been referring to an actual funeral that he needed to attend, but it is more likely that he meant that his father was old and needed him, so he couldn't follow Jesus until after his father died. Jesus replied: *“Leave the dead to bury their own dead, but you go and announce God’s Kingdom. (Luke 9:60)* Jesus was saying that the man's concern was an earthly one, more suited to the earthly minded, whereas what Jesus was calling him to do was of eternal significance. The Kingdom of God had to be the number one priority in his life.

Perhaps Jesus was referring to the spiritually dead who should deal with such things as funerals for the physically dead. Let the worldly people who don't know God take care of earthly concerns, while those who follow Jesus should focus on proclaiming eternal life. On still another occasion, a man told Jesus that he would follow Him after he said good-bye to his family. Jesus' reply to this man was that no one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God. He saw the double-mindedness and hesitancy behind the man's excuse and declared that he would be of no use in the kingdom of God. Putting one's family above the Lord disqualified him for service. This doesn't mean that Jesus was advocating neglect or unconcern for one's parents. He just wanted His spiritually alive followers to make telling others about new life in Christ their priority above all else.



That evening Jesus told His disciples to take Him in their boat and sail to the other side of the lake, leaving the crowds behind on the shore. There were some other boats that went with them. Sometime in the night a furious storm arose, threatening to sink the boat as the waves rose higher and higher. Jesus was in the stern, asleep on a cushion, sleeping so soundly that He was not aware of the storm. He was probably exhausted from ministering to the crowds.

Perhaps this was why He had wanted to get away from them for a time in the first place. The disciples were seasoned fishermen but the storm's intensity was so great, that they feared for their lives. They frantically woke Jesus up and said to Him, *“Teacher, don’t you care if we drown?”*



Jesus got up and rebuked the wind and waves, commanding them to be still. Immediately the wind died down and the sea became completely calm. Then turning to His disciples, Jesus asked: *“Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?”* It seems that Jesus expected them to know that, as God's Son, His Father protected Him, and if they were with Jesus, they were safe as well.

But the disciples were terrified and amazed by the power over the elements that Jesus displayed. They asked: *“What kind of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?”* (Matthew 8:27)

The disciples should have known the answer to their own question. The Old Testament was full of allusions to God's sovereignty over the weather. Jesus displayed this same sovereignty over the raging storm, which pointed directly to His divine identity.

Who causes the clouds to rise from the ends of the earth; who makes lightning with the rain; who brings the wind out of his treasuries. (Psalm 135:7)

When he utters his voice, there is a tumult of waters in the heavens, and he causes the vapors to ascend from the ends of the earth; he makes lightning for the rain, and brings the wind out of his treasuries. (Jeremiah 10:13)

At the very least, the disciples must have known that Jesus was someone as great as Moses himself, since Moses was enabled by God to command the waters.

Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and Yahweh caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all night, and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided. (Exodus 14:21)

John's Messengers

While the disciples were wondering about Jesus' identity, John the Baptist had questions of his own while languishing in Herod's prison. He had heard that Jesus and the disciples were going from place to place preaching the kingdom of God, but nothing of political importance had come of it. Israel was still ruled by the Romans and Herod was still in power. John called 2 of his followers and told them to go to Jesus to ask Him if He was the One prophesied as the Messiah, or if they were to expect someone else - someone who would overthrow Roman rule and set Israel free from their oppression.

When they came to Jesus with John's message, Jesus showed no displeasure with John. He was aware that John had not seen the miracles of healing from diseases, sicknesses and evil spirits. He told the messengers to tell John what they had seen and heard, and He included an exhortation for John to believe and not doubt.

The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. Blessed is he who finds no occasion for stumbling in me.” (Matthew 11:5-6)

Jesus then turned to the crowd and asked them what they had expected from John the Baptist. Perhaps Jesus was anticipating that some in the crowd might be troubled by John's doubts. If John doubted that Jesus was the Messiah, then they might also have the same doubts. Jesus reminded the people that they had gone into the desert expecting a prophet, and that is exactly what John was. He was the one prophesied about in the Old Testament.

Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me...says Yahweh of Armies. (Malachi 3:1)

Jesus added that there was no human being greater than John because of his divine mission to prepare people for the kingdom of God, and to introduce the Messiah. John understood more than anyone else in the Old Testament. Of all the prophets, John had the greatest spiritual enlightenment because he had actually seen the One that others had only prophesied about. But John's spiritual insight was limited because John was from the Old Covenant. Those living in the New Covenant were privileged beyond anyone living in the Old era because they had a far greater revelation of God's plan for mankind. John didn't have that so his questions were understandable. However his doubts were not an indicator that John was mistaken about Jesus being the long awaited One.

The people listened to this explanation and those who had repented of their sins and been baptized by John accepted it, but the Pharisees who had never repented, did not. They were not willing to accept that Jesus was who He claimed to be. He didn't fit their expectations. Jesus knew it and He compared them to children in a marketplace who called out: *'We played the flute for you, and you didn't dance. We mourned for you, and you didn't lament. (Matthew 11:17)* Jesus was referring to how fickle they were, finding fault no matter what one did. John had been accused of being demonized because He dressed in a strange manner and lived like an ascetic. When Jesus did the opposite, eating and drinking with the people, He was accused of being a glutton. You couldn't win with such people. Their expectations were always changing and they criticized those who did not conform to their tastes. Jesus ended His message by quoting the proverb *"wisdom is justified of her children"* meaning that time would tell whether an action was correct or not by what it produced. John and Jesus behaved differently, but eventually it would be borne out that the criticism leveled against them was unjustified.



servants.

Some of those who believed Jesus' words were women and they were often the most committed of all His followers. Several are mentioned in the Bible as traveling with Jesus and the 12 apostles. There was Mary Magdalene who had been demon-possessed with seven evil spirits until Jesus delivered her. Another was Susana and there were several others, including Joanna, the wife of Chuza who was the manager of Herod's household. Joanna would have been especially wealthy as her husband had a high position at Herod's court. Joanna is mentioned as being among the first to witness the empty tomb after Jesus was resurrected, and she was one of the first to proclaim that Jesus Christ had risen. Tradition tells us that Chuza lost his position in Herod's palace because of his wife's conversion to Christianity and her testimony among Herod's

CHAPTER 10

Jesus & Satan, Demoniac, Blasphemy



Demoniac

On one trip, Jesus and His followers sailed to a place called the Gerasenes, which was across the lake from Galilee. As Jesus came ashore, a demon-possessed man ran up to Him and fell on his knees, shouting at the top of his voice: *“What have I to do with you, Jesus, you Son of the Most High God? I adjure (beg) you by God, don’t torment me.”* For Jesus said to him, *“Come out of the man, you unclean spirit! (Mark 5:7,8)*

The voice belonged to the man, but the ones crying out were the spirits within him who didn't want to leave the man's body. Interestingly, the man had run towards Jesus, yet the evil spirits inside him wanted nothing to do with Jesus. Perhaps they were compelled to come by the Lord's power. At any rate, their victim was a wild man, naked, who lived among the tombs. He seemed to have little self-control because the demons would often make this poor man scream and cut himself with stones. They had been tormenting the man for a long time, forcing him to live like a wild animal.

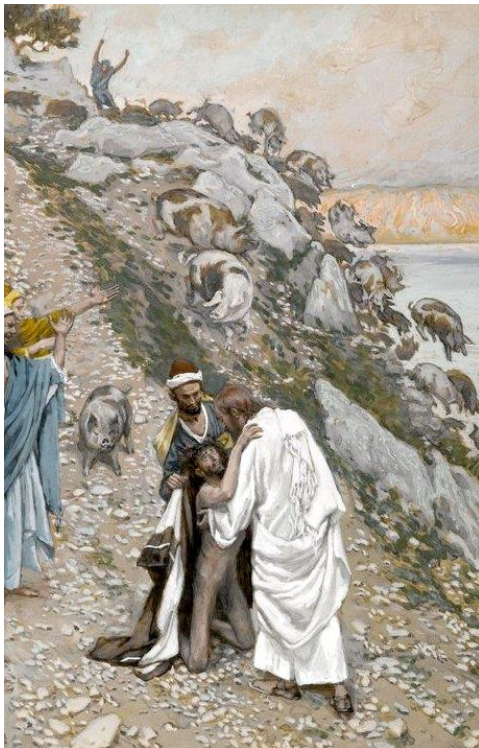
When the neighboring villagers had tried to subdue the demoniac with chains, the demons gave him supernatural strength to break the chains asunder and escape his guards. Now Jesus was commanding the demons to leave and this was what they most feared. Jesus demanded to know what name the spirits went by and they answered, "Legion" meaning many. (A legion was a Roman unit of 3000 to 6000 soldiers.) The demons continued to beg Jesus not to order them to the Abyss, which is the name for a deep hole that is bottomless. The Bible mentions this place several times in the book of Revelation.

‘The fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star from the sky, which had fallen to the earth. The key to the pit of the abyss was given to him.

He opened the pit of the abyss, and smoke went up out of the pit, like the smoke from a burning furnace. The sun and the air were darkened because of the smoke from the pit. Then out of the smoke came locusts on the earth, and power was given to them, as the scorpions of the earth have power.”(Revelation 9:1–3, 11)

I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand. He seized the dragon, the old serpent, which is the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole inhabited earth, and bound him for a thousand years, and cast him into the abyss, and shut it, and sealed it over him, that he should deceive the nations no more, until the thousand years were finished. After this, he must be freed for a short time. (Revelation 20:1–3)

Bible scholars believe that this Abyss is what Peter referred to as 'hell' in 2 Peter 2:4. *‘God didn’t spare angels when they sinned, but cast them down to Tartarus, and committed them to pits of darkness, to be reserved for judgment’*



Knowing what awaited them once they were cast out of the man, the demons begged Jesus to let them enter a large herd of swine feeding on the hillside nearby. To the demons, living in a herd of pigs was preferable to living without a body in the Abyss. Surprisingly Jesus gave them permission, and as soon as the demons entered the swine, the animals were thrown into a great frenzy. They rushed off the cliff into the lake and drowned, and the demons were left to their dreadful fate after all. Those tending the swine saw the whole thing and ran off to report what had happened to the townspeople. The villagers arrived to find the demonized man at Jesus' feet, dressed and completely sane. The swineherds had told them the whole story and it frightened them. They requested Jesus to leave the region, so He got into a boat and prepared to depart.

The healed man, however, begged Jesus to let him go with Him, but Jesus told him to return home and tell the villagers what God had done for him. And so the man went away and testified about Jesus all over town.

What is interesting about this story is that the demons knew exactly who Jesus was and they also knew He had great power over them. They recognized His authority and they knew where they were destined to end up. Perhaps living in the bodies of men and animals delayed their doom for a time. Some wonder why Jesus permitted the demons to possess the pigs, especially as He must have known the outcome. It isn't really explained, but it could have been to show the people God's power over the demonic spirit realm.

The townspeople were certainly awestruck, but this didn't draw them to Jesus. His display of power intimidated them, even as Peter had been overwhelmed in the boat when he had seen Jesus calm a raging storm. In that instance Peter had asked the Lord to 'depart' from him because he saw himself as deeply sinful in the Lord's presence. This could have been a similar situation, which explains why Jesus told the healed demoniac to return to the town to witness to the people. Perhaps He knew they would be more receptive if the testimony came from the cured man's lips.



As Jesus went on from there, two blind men began to follow Him, crying out, "Have mercy on us, Son of David!" Jesus asked them if they believed that He could heal them, and they replied, "Yes, Lord." Jesus then touched their eyes and said, "According to your faith let it be done to you." They must have had great faith for their sight was immediately restored. Jesus warned them sternly not to tell anyone what had happened, but they were too excited to keep it to themselves and went about spreading the news everywhere.

The blind men called Jesus the 'Son of David'. This title is used to describe Jesus in 17 verses in the New Testament. He was called this because He was the fulfillment of the prophecy of the seed of David.

Samuel gave this prophecy to David: *"When your days are fulfilled, and you sleep with your fathers, I will set up your offspring after you, and I will establish his kingdom. He will build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his father, and he will be my son. If he commits iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men (fulfilled on the cross when Jesus died for mankind); but my loving kindness will not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away before you. Your house and your kingdom will be made sure forever before you. Your throne will be established forever."* (2 Samuel 7:12-16).

The prophecy had a double reference to both David's son, Solomon, and also to Jesus Christ, a descendant of David by adoption through Joseph and by blood through Mary. *"As to his earthly life [Christ Jesus] was a descendant of David"* (Romans 1:3). By using the title "Son of David" the blind men were honoring Jesus and revealing their faith in Him as the Messiah.

Blasphemy

While they were going out, a demon-possessed man who was mute was brought to Jesus. After casting out the evil spirit, the man could speak and the crowd was amazed. Nothing like it had ever happened in Israel before. But some Pharisees who saw this murmured among themselves that Jesus was casting out demons by the power of Beelzebub, the prince of demons. Jesus knew what they were thinking and said to them: *"Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation."*

A house divided against itself falls. If Satan also is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand? For you say that I cast out demons by Beelzebul. But if I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your children cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges. But if I, by God's finger, cast out demons, then God's Kingdom has come to you. (Luke 11:17-20)

Jesus was saying that if casting out demons is a sign of satanic activity, then what about their own exorcists? Were they also energized by demonic powers? Jesus then gave the example of a strong man guarding his house in order to keep his possessions safe, but then a stronger man attacks and overpowers the homeowner and takes away all he owns. Jesus was alluding to Himself as the stronger man who overcomes the homeowner (representing Satan). Because Jesus has greater power than Satan, He could deliver the demonized from Satan's clutches. Jesus then warned the Pharisees that whoever was not with Him was against Him, and whoever did not work with Him was actually an enemy. He also warned them that people could be forgiven all sorts of sin, including slander, but not slander against the Holy Spirit, which constituted blasphemy (i.e. defiant irreverence). That was an eternal sin and would not be forgiven. The Pharisees had irrefutable proofs of God's presence in their midst and they saw first hand the miracles that Jesus was doing. To attribute all this divine work of the Holy Spirit to Satan was unpardonable. This kind of blasphemy was their final rejection of God's grace and they would be given no further chance to be forgiven. They had made their decision and God would allow them to go to perdition unhindered. Jesus also taught that when an evil spirit is cast out of a man, it passes through empty places but finds no rest. It then seeks to return to the body it was in before, only this time it takes other demons with it so that the last state of that man becomes worse than the first. This means that if a person is delivered from evil spirits, but does not turn to God, his spirit is vulnerable to even greater demon possession. Jesus continued ministering throughout all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness. He saw the crowds and how helpless they were, like sheep without a shepherd, and He felt great compassion for them. He lamented that although the harvest was plentiful, the workers were few.

The Bible has several examples of demon possession (Matthew 9:32-33; 12:22; 17:18; Mark 5:1-20; 7:26-30; Luke 4:33-36; Luke 22:3; Acts 16:16-18). From these passages we can see that sometimes demons cause physical ailments such as deaf-mute symptoms, epilepsy, blindness, etc. At other times the demonized person is moved to do evil things. Demons can also give supernatural physical strength and knowledge beyond the norm, or cause depression and suicidal thoughts. Scripture, however, has no examples of a true believer in Christ being possessed by a demon. Many theologians believe that this is because a Christian has the Holy Spirit living within. Demon-possession is increasing in the West because many people are opening themselves up to demonic influence through the occult and various new age beliefs and practices.

CHAPTER 11

5000 Fed, John Beheaded, Warnings, A Sword Instead of Peace



5000 Fed

At this time, the people of Galilee heard that Jesus was in their area. When people saw Him coming, they ran ahead to tell others and soon crowds were coming from all over to hear Him preach. Jesus saw that many came on foot and He had compassion for them. It was already evening and very late. The people had been so enthralled with Jesus' teaching that they had forgotten about food and had been hesitant to return to their homes. Some of the disciples suggested that Jesus send the crowds away so that they could go into the surrounding villages and buy some food, but Jesus told the twelve: *"You give them something to eat!"* The disciples were understandably surprised. They objected that they didn't have enough money for the thousands that had gathered. Jesus then asked them how much food they had. After checking with the people, they came back with a mere five loaves of bread and two fish. Jesus then did an amazing thing. He commanded all the people to sit down on the grass in groups of hundreds and fifties. Then He took the five loaves and the two fish, looked up to heaven and blessed the food, after which He broke the loaves and fish into pieces and gave them to the disciples to set before the people. Amazingly everyone had enough to eat and there were still twelve full baskets of the broken pieces of bread and fish! Five thousand people dined that day! This might have reminded the crowds of how God had miraculously fed the Israelites in the desert with manna from heaven when they were seeking the Promised Land.



By now it would have been very late indeed, and after sending the crowds away, Jesus got His disciples to get into a boat and sail for Bethsaida without Him. He would meet them later, but right now He wanted to be by Himself so He could pray. It was the middle of the night when the disciples encountered a strong wind on the sea. Suddenly they saw Jesus walking on the water a little distance away.

Perhaps Jesus was aware that the enemy might try to harm His followers as had happened once before, when Satan had stirred up a great storm against them. He could have been just checking up on them, which is why He started to pass by. However the disciples saw Him and cried out in fear, thinking He was a ghost. Jesus immediately spoke with them: *It is I, do not be afraid.* Peter called back: *Lord, if it's You, tell me to come to You on the water.* Jesus told him to come and as Peter got out of the boat, he found he was actually walking on top of the waves, but when he saw the wind whirling around him, he became frightened and began to sink. He cried out to the Lord to save him, and immediately Jesus reached out His hand and caught him. *You of little faith,* Jesus said, *why did you doubt?* As He and Peter climbed into the boat, the wind suddenly died down. The other disciples were totally amazed and they worshiped Jesus, saying, *Truly you are the Son of God.*

When Jesus and his disciples came to Gennesaret, and moored their boat at the shore, people from all over the region recognized them and came running, carrying their sick on pallets. Wherever Jesus went, the people laid the sick before Him, begging Him to heal them. Some hoped to get healed by just touching the fringe of His cloak, and those who did so, were cured.

John Beheaded

Jesus has been doing the entire ministry thus far, but it came time to send out the twelve disciples on their own. He was preparing them for the time when they would not have Him with them. Jesus gave the twelve disciples authority to proclaim the kingdom, cast out demons, and heal diseases. He told them to take nothing with them but rather to seek receptive people who would open their homes to them. If they encountered opposition in certain towns, they were to shake the dust from their feet and go elsewhere. The town would be testifying to its own doom through its rejection of the message of Christ. It was a dangerous mission for the disciples because some of the towns could easily be stirred up against them.

If the townspeople went to King Herod and accused the disciples of making trouble, the king could have them arrested or killed. The memory of what had happened to John the Baptist was still fresh in their minds.

The king had arrested John because he criticized him for marrying his brother's wife, Herodias. When the queen heard of it, she was filled with hatred for John and pressured Herod to execute him. However the king knew John was a holy man and he feared to kill him. In fact, he had even enjoyed listening to John's preaching, although it often frightened and disturbed him. However on his birthday, when he threw a large party for his military commanders and the leading men in Galilee, he was tricked into having John executed. Herodias daughter, Salome, had danced for the king and pleased him so much that he promised to give her anything she wanted, even half of his kingdom! Salome had asked her mother what she should ask for and Herodias immediately saw her advantage. She told Salome to ask for the head of John the Baptist on a platter. The king was dismayed that his emotional response to his stepdaughter's sensual dance had come to this. However he couldn't back down from his promise, which he had made with oaths before his dignitaries, so he ordered the execution. When John's head was brought to Salome, she gave it to her mother, and thus an evil woman got her wish to have a righteous man destroyed.

John's disciples had learned of their beloved leader's death and they came and took away his body for burial. This had happened not too long ago and now King Herod was disturbed because of the miracles Jesus was doing. It especially concerned him that some people were saying that John the Baptist had been raised from the dead. Some said Elijah or some great prophet from the past had appeared. Herod assumed he had gotten rid of John for good, so he couldn't figure out why all this was happening. Had John really returned from the dead, and was he now working through the man called Jesus? Soon it was reported that Herod wanted to see Jesus for himself. Jesus knew all this because the disciples had reported it to Him, yet He kept right on teaching and preaching the kingdom of God. He would not allow the evil king to diminish His ministry in any way. And now He was commissioning His disciples to do the same, trusting God to protect and provide for them.

Warnings

However Jesus did not commission them without also warning them of the repercussions of ministry. He admonished them to be on their guard because some of them would be arrested and tried in local councils. Some would be flogged in synagogues. That was daunting news in itself, and then Jesus added that they would be witnesses to governors, kings, and Gentiles. He told them not to worry about what they should say because the Holy Spirit would speak through them. Jesus also warned them that following Him would mean that some of their families would be divided as a result. Those who didn't believe in Jesus would hate the ones who did. Believers would be hated by everyone because of Him, but the one who kept his faith until the end of the Age would be saved. If they received persecution in one

place, they were to escape to another. Before they had finished going through the towns of Israel, Jesus promised that He would return.

But when they persecute you in this city, flee into the next, for most certainly I tell you, you will not have gone through the cities of Israel, until the Son of Man has come. (Matthew 10:23)

With these words, Jesus was intimating that they would suffer a great deal of persecution but they were not to be dismayed because He would return within their lifetimes. He added that all these things would happen to them because they were His followers. He told them: *“A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his lord. (Matthew 10:24)* If they had called Him a Beelzebub, it would certainly happen to them as well. But they were not to be afraid of their detractors. Everything would come out into the open one day. What Jesus was now telling them in secret, would eventually be proclaimed from the rooftops. And if some lost their lives in the process, they were not to fear because no one could kill their soul. He told them to be afraid instead of God who could destroy both body and soul in hell. However they were to realize that they were greatly loved by God who knows what happens to even the smallest of His creation. Not even a sparrow falls without His knowledge. They were of far greater worth than many sparrows and He would be watching over them. Jesus added: *Everyone therefore who confesses me before men, him I will also confess before my Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies me before men, him I will also deny before my Father who is in heaven. (Matthew 10:32-33)*

A Sword Instead of Peace

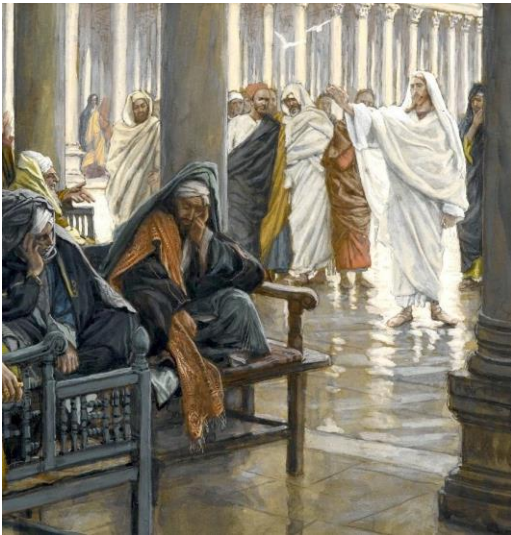
This probably discomfited some of Jesus' followers, especially after hearing that they would be hounded from town to town, arrested, beaten, and even killed for their faith in Him. Those were distinct possibilities if they publicly acknowledged Jesus. If they denied Him, they would be rejected by Him as well. It seemed that no compromise was allowed. Some may have assumed that following the Prince of Peace would mean they would have an easy existence on the earth, but Jesus disappointed them in this as well, saying: *“Don't think that I came to send peace on the earth. I didn't come to send peace, but a sword. For I came to set a man at odds against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. A man's foes will be those of his own household. He who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he who loves son or daughter more than me isn't worthy of me. He who doesn't take his cross and follow after me, isn't worthy of me. He who seeks his life will lose it; and he who loses his life for my sake will find it. (Matthew 10:34-39)*

Jesus, as the Prince of Peace, would bring peace between God and mankind, but when it came to worldly relationships, just the opposite would happen. Families would be split because of Him. Disciples would be torn between loyalty to Jesus and loyalty to friends and family. It would be very challenging because Jesus required complete loyalty and commitment from His followers. He plainly taught that human

ties had to be secondary, for if a disciple considered earthly bonds more important than his bond to Jesus, he was not worthy as a follower of Christ.

A disciple had to be willing to follow Jesus even into death, and by this He was referring particularly to the spiritual realm where those who come to Christ as Savior must be willing to exchange their own life to gain His.

The disciples could clearly see what Jesus meant about persecution. The Pharisees were already attacking Him because He often healed on the Sabbath. Jesus defended His works by saying that His Father was always at work and therefore so was He. That made the Pharisees even more enraged because Jesus was calling God His own Father, and making himself equal with God. Jesus never backed down, however.



His confidence was unassailable because of the intimacy and equality that existed between Him and His Father. Jesus never acted independently and had no personal agenda that was distinct from the Father's will. He explained this by saying: *"Most certainly, I tell you, the Son can do nothing of himself, but what he sees the Father doing. For whatever things he does, these the Son also does likewise. For the Father has affection for the Son, and shows him all things that he himself does. He will show him greater works than these, that you may marvel. (John 5:19-20)*

Jesus added that just as His Father raised the dead and gave them life, He also gave life to whomever He chose. Both He and the Father had the power to give life (physical and spiritual) to the dead. Not only that, but the Father wasn't even judging anyone because that role had been entrusted to Jesus. This was because God wanted all to honor Jesus in the same way that He was honored. And whoever refused to honor the Son was therefore not honoring the Father. Furthermore, those who believed what Jesus was telling them would receive eternal life and pass over from death to life. They would not be judged or condemned. In fact, Jesus said, a time was coming, and actually was on the brink, when the dead in their graves would hear the Son of God's voice and come out of their graves. He was referring to the time of judgment when all those in Sheol would arise. Those who had lived good lives would receive life while those who had done evil would be condemned. He added: *For as the Father has life in himself, even so he gave to the Son also to have life in himself. He also gave him authority to execute judgment, because he is a son of man. (John 5:26-27)*

Jesus was given authority to judge but His judgment would be based only on what He heard from His Father. And His audience didn't have to take His own word for it either. That He had such authority could be seen from all the miracles He was doing,

which surely testified that God had sent Him.

Not only that but there was the time when the Father Himself had testified about His Son in an audible voice at His baptism. They had missed that because they were too deadened spiritually to have heard His Father's voice or seen the form of the Holy Spirit descending on Him. Jesus told them bluntly that God's Word didn't dwell in them and that was why they didn't believe in what He was telling them. Although they looked into the Scriptures diligently, thinking that they would find eternal life there, they missed completely what the Scriptures were saying about Him.

You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and these are they which testify about me. (John 5:39)

One can imagine the angry murmuring that went on among the Pharisees while Jesus was saying all this to them. But Jesus went still further, saying: *'but I know you, that you don't have God's love in yourselves. I have come in my Father's name, and you don't receive me. If another comes in his own name, you will receive him. How can you believe, who receive glory from one another, and you don't seek the glory that comes from the only God? (John 5:42-44)*

The Pharisees saw themselves as pure, holy, and favored by God. They were sure of their moral superiority over everyone else because of the many rules they kept and all the studying they did. They were the Law-keepers who followed the teachings of Moses. They were always right and people deferred to them and their regulations.

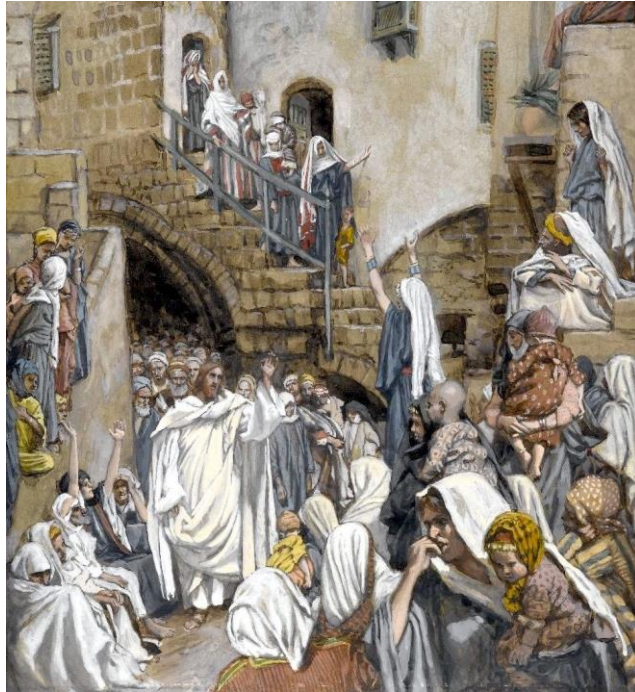
But here was someone who was not in the least impressed by them, who spoke with an authority above their own, and whose words cut like a knife into their hearts. No one had ever dared to criticize them like this young Nazarene rabbi was doing.

Jesus ended by saying: *"Don't think that I will accuse you to the Father. There is one who accuses you, even Moses, on whom you have set your hope. For if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote about me. (John 5:45-46)*

The words of Moses foreshadowed Jesus as the coming Messiah. Everything Moses wrote about the Tabernacle was a display of God's redemptive plan and pointed to Jesus Christ, the Word of God, who would fulfill the picture of the Old Testament tabernacle. Although the Pharisees read the Torah continually, they never grasped the meaning behind the written words of Moses, or the other prophets who wrote about the Messiah. Jesus knew that if they wouldn't believe Moses, they would also never believe His own words either.

CHAPTER 12

Unrepentant Cities, Jesus' Mother and Brothers, Sign of Jonah



Unrepentant Cities

Jesus went through many towns performing miracles, but He began to denounce them for their lack of repentance, saying that even wicked towns like Tyre and Sidon would receive less judgment than Israelite cities like Chorazin and Bethsaida. Tyre and Sidon existed prior to 2000 BC. The Old Testament prophesied the overthrow of these cities (Isaiah 23; Jeremiah 25; 27; 47; Ezekiel 26–28; Joel 3; Amos 1:9–10; Zechariah 9:1–4). Alexander the Great conquered Tyre in 332 BC and the Persian king Artaxerxes conquered Sidon around 345 BC. These ancient Gentile cities had never been blessed with Jesus' presence and power like the Israelite towns of Chorazin and Bethsaida. Consequently the Israelite towns had greater accountability. Jesus said it would be more bearable for the people of Tyre and Sidon at the judgment than for the Israelites. He also targeted Capernaum as being under God's judgment for rejecting Him, saying: *Whoever listens to you listens to me, and whoever rejects you rejects me. Whoever rejects me rejects him who sent me.* (Luke 10:16)

Then Jesus praised the Father for having hidden the truth from the so-called wise and educated, while revealing it to 'little children' instead. He meant that the simple-hearted were more open to His revelation than the educated skeptics.

He maintained that no one really knew Him except the Father, and no one really knew His Father except for Him, and those who received Jesus' revelation of Him.

Then Jesus gave a blessed summons, saying: *“Come to me, all you who labor and are heavily burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart; and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”* (Matthew 11:28-30)

The people who accepted Jesus as the Messiah were often lower on the socioeconomic scale of Jewish society. Many were poor and uneducated, often oppressed by the wealthy elite. They fit Jesus' description of being harassed and burdened. Jesus was offering to take the burdens of such people on Himself, promising that they would find Him a humble, gentle Comforter who would give rest and peace to their souls. Many of the common people gladly took Him up on His offer, and these were the people Jesus considered His family.

Jesus' Mother & Brothers

Once when He was preaching in a house, Jesus' biological family came to speak to Him. When He was told that His mother and brothers were waiting outside, Jesus said to the crowd: *“Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?”* Then He pointed at His disciples and said, *‘Behold, my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father who is in heaven, he is my brother, and sister, and mother.’* (Matthew 12:48-50)

Jesus clarified His words by adding that whoever did the will of His Father in heaven was His brother, sister, and mother. Jesus went on to say that the very purpose for His coming to earth was to be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.

But we see him who has been made a little lower than the angels, Jesus, because of the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor, that by the grace of God he should taste death for everyone. For it became him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many children to glory, to make the author of their salvation perfect through sufferings. For both he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one, for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brothers (Hebrews. 2:9-11).

(Although Jesus shared His mother's DNA with his earthly brothers and sisters, most of them were not believers until after His resurrection).

Sign of Jonah

As the crowds increased, Jesus focused His attention on those who were not of His spiritual family, denouncing them as a wicked generation who kept asking Him for a sign proving that He was the Messiah. He told them that they would only be given the sign of Jonah.

The Israelites all knew the Old Testament account of Jonah who had been commissioned by God to preach judgment to the Ninevites, but who had run away to sea instead. God had caused a giant fish to swallow Jonah, which had spit him out on land 3 days later. Jesus said that just as Jonah had been a witness to the Ninevites by coming out of the fish (symbolic for the grave or death), so He too would be a witness to His generation. Jesus was actually prophesying that He would be in the grave for 3 days, after which He would come to life. This would be the sign that Jesus was all He claimed to be. Jesus added that the Queen of Sheba had come from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, but the Jews had someone far greater than Solomon testifying before them, yet they rejected Him. Both the Queen and the men of Nineveh would one day rise up at the Judgment and condemn these Jews for not receiving Jesus' testimony.

One day a Pharisee invited Jesus to eat with him but he was surprised when Jesus didn't wash first before the meal, and he questioned Him about it. The Pharisee wasn't concerned about this for reasons of hygiene, but rather for religious reasons. Pharisees always washed their hands before eating, even if their hands were clean. Water would be poured from a container twice over the hands and a blessing would be recited. This was to get rid of any impurity such as coming into contact with a dead animal. The Pharisees were very strict about this, so the fact that Jesus didn't perform the ritual was noteworthy. Jesus gave the Pharisee a stinging reply, telling him that Pharisees were careful to clean the outside of a cup or dish, but inside they were full of greed and wickedness. He added a strong rebuke.

Woe to you Pharisees! For you tithe mint and rue and every herb, but you bypass justice and the love of God. You ought to have done these, and not to have left the other undone. Woe to you Pharisees! For you love the best seats in the synagogues, and the greetings in the marketplaces. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like hidden graves, and the men who walk over them don't know it." (Luke 11:40-44) (i.e. they were spiritually dead)

Jesus was far from politically correct and refused to let the Pharisees get away with their hypocrisy and arrogance. One of the experts of the Law told Jesus that when He said these things about the Pharisees, He was offending them as well. This drew Jesus's fire their way.

"Woe also to you lawyers (experts of the Law)! For you load men with burdens that are difficult to carry, and you yourselves won't even lift one finger to help carry those burdens. Woe to you! For you build the tombs of the prophets, and your fathers killed them. So you testify and consent to the works of your fathers. For they killed them, and you build their tombs. Therefore also the wisdom of God said, 'I will send to them prophets and apostles; and some of them they will kill and persecute, that the blood of all the prophets, which was shed from the foundation of the world, may be required of

this generation; from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zachariah, who perished between the altar and the sanctuary.' Yes, I tell you, it will be required of this generation. Woe to you lawyers! For you took away the key of knowledge. You didn't enter in yourselves, and those who were entering in, you hindered." (Luke 11:46-52)

These were ominous warnings that Jesus was giving out to the Jewish leaders. He said they were responsible for the guilt incurred by their forefathers when they killed the prophets, and they would be held accountable even as far back as Abel. Then Jesus went outside and the Pharisees and teachers of the Law followed Him, haranguing Him fiercely with questions in the hope that He would say something that could be used against Him.

CHAPTER 13

Parables



Parable of the Sower

That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the lake. There were so many people following Him that He had to get into a boat and speak to the crowds from there. He told them some parables, one being about a farmer who went out to sow his seed. He said some seeds fell along the path and birds came and ate it up. Other seed fell on rocky places where there was not much soil. It sprang up quickly, but when the sun came up, the plants were scorched and they withered because they had no root. Other seeds fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. Still other seeds fell on good soil where it produced crops a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. Jesus followed up His teaching by explaining that the parable referred to how people responded to the message about the kingdom of God. The first type of person heard the gospel but couldn't understand it, so the devil was able to snatch the Word away. The rocky ground listener heard the Word, received it with joy, but it didn't go deep into the soul and when trouble or persecution came because of the Word, he quickly fell away. The thorny soil

referred to someone who heard the Word, but the worries of life and the allure of riches choked the Word so that no fruit was produced. The good soil represented someone who heard the Word, understood it, and a bountiful harvest of good fruit resulted in varying amounts.

The disciples asked Jesus why He spoke to the people in parables, and Jesus told them that the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven was for believers. The parables were designed to draw hearts that were in-dwelt by faith because of inner revelation. These people would be given greater revelation so that they had an abundance of understanding. Those without faith would end up with no understanding whatever. Jesus quoted from the prophecy of Isaiah 6:9-10: *“Go, and tell this people, ‘You hear indeed, but don’t understand; and you see indeed, but don’t perceive.’ Make the heart of this people fat (blind). Make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and turn again, and be healed.”*

Jesus was using Isaiah’s passage to condemn the spiritual blindness of the Jews. He said that the faith in people’s hearts determined how much revelation they would receive. No faith, no revelation. However from other scriptures, it is clear that faith, in itself, is not something that people have innately.

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works that no one would boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9)

Faith is given to us by God and we cannot attain it by our own power or free will. God bestows grace, mercy, and faith according to His holy plan and purpose, and because they all originate with Him, He gets all the glory. This gift of faith depends on God’s choosing to elect some and predestine them to salvation.

As the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of God. As many as were appointed to eternal life believed. (Acts 13:48)

Not only so, but Rebekah also conceived by our father Isaac. For being not yet born, neither having done anything good or bad, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him who calls, it was said to her, “The elder will serve the younger.” Even as it is written, “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated. “What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? May it never be! For he said to Moses, “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.” So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who has mercy. For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, “For this very purpose I caused you to be raised up, that I might show in you my power, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.” So then, he has mercy on whom he desires, and he hardens whom he desires. (Romans 9:10-18)

Many scholars have tried to reconcile the two seemingly opposed perspectives of God’s sovereignty and man’s free will. The human perspective stresses that salvation is dependent on our faith, or choice. The divine perspective indicates that God sovereignly chooses who will come to salvation. Both perspectives seem to

parallel one another throughout the Bible. This has confused many Christians and has caused division and controversy as well. Jesus often spoke from both perspectives.

“Most certainly I tell you, he who hears my word, and believes him who sent me, has eternal life, and doesn’t come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life. (John 5:24)

No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up in the last day... It is written in the prophets, ‘They will all be taught by God.’ Therefore everyone who hears from the Father, and has learned, comes to me... “For this cause have I said to you that no one can come to me, unless it is given to him by my Father.” (John 6: 44,45, 65)

So it appears that without the Lord’s enablement, no one can come to God on his own. Faith is required for salvation but faith is a gift from God and cannot be manufactured by the human heart. Yet mankind is responsible for his faith, or lack of faith, concerning God’s offer of salvation. Stubborn rebellion and disobedience disqualifies one from God’s enlightenment. Jesus explained that the disciples were blessed because they saw and heard the truth. They were greatly privileged because many of the prophets and righteous people in the Old Testament, who had longed to see and hear what the disciples were now hearing, had never received that benefit. Presumably the disciples had seen the truth because the Father had taught them and drawn them to Jesus. This is why they became believers.

But a responsibility came with such privilege. Jesus said that the disciples were to be like a lamp on a stand, shining the truth of the Kingdom to the world. Lamps were not meant to be placed under tables or beds because light was meant to be out in the open, just like the truth of the gospel. Jesus added that the disciples needed to be careful how they listened because how well they understood the truth would determine how much further revelation they would receive.

For whoever has, to him will be given, and he will have abundance, but whoever doesn’t have, from him will be taken away even that which he has. (Matthew 13:12)

Wheat and Weeds Parable



Jesus told them another parable about the kingdom of God. This one involved a sower who sowed good seed in his field, but an enemy came in the night and secretly sowed weeds among the wheat. When the wheat sprouted, the weeds also appeared. The owner’s servants were confused by this and asked the owner where the weeds came from.

“An enemy did this,’ he replied, whereupon the servants asked if they should go and pull up the weeds. The landowner said no because he was concerned that they might accidentally pull up the wheat along with the weeds.

He told them to let both grow together until the harvest. At that time the harvesters would collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned, and then they would gather the wheat and bring it into the barn.

After telling this parable, Jesus left the crowd and went into the house. When they were out of the public eye, His disciples asked Jesus to explain what He meant by the parable. Jesus explained that the one who sowed the good seed was the Son of Man. The field was the world, and the good seed represented the people of the kingdom. The weeds were the unbelievers and the enemy was the devil. The harvest was the end of the Old Covenant age, and the harvesters were angels. As the weeds were pulled up and burned in the fire, so it would be at the end of the age. The Son of Man would send out His angels, and they would weed out of His kingdom everything that caused sin and all who did evil. They would throw the wicked into hell where there would be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous would shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father.

Mustard Seed

In another parable, Jesus compared the kingdom of heaven to a mustard seed which a man planted in his field. Mustard seeds are very tiny but when they grow, they turn into large trees so that the birds can come and perch in the branches. Jesus was telling the disciples that the kingdom looked small now, but one day it would grow into a great kingdom that would shelter many people. He also used the example of leaven to illustrate the same thing. A woman mixed some yeast into about sixty pounds of flour until it worked all through the dough. The Kingdom of God would permeate the world similarly.

Hidden Treasure and a Pearl



Jesus used a parable to explain how valuable the kingdom of heaven was by comparing it to a treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field. A similar story involved a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.

Jesus was affirming that the kingdom of heaven was of more value than anything

else in the world. Nothing could compare to its great value. Entrance into it would require making God first in one's life.

Parable of a Net

Yet another parable compared the kingdom of heaven to a net that was let down into a lake and, when pulled up, was full of all kinds of fish.

The fishermen pulled it up on the shore and collected the good fish in baskets, but threw the bad away. Jesus explained that this was how it would be at the end of the age. The angels would come and separate the wicked from the righteous and throw the wicked into the blazing furnace, where there would be weeping and gnashing of teeth. This referred to the coming judgment on Israel that would separate wicked unbelievers from the righteous. Jesus was prophesying about the judgment foretold in Daniel.

I saw thrones placed, and on one the ancient of days sat: his clothing was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool; his throne was fiery flames, and its wheels burning fire. A fiery stream issued and came out from before him: thousands of thousands ministered to him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him: the judgment was set, and the books were opened.... Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt (judgment) (Daniel 7:9-10; 12:2)

Jesus asked His disciples, *"Have you understood all these things?"* and they replied that they did. Jesus then told them that every teacher of the Law who became a disciple in the kingdom of heaven was like the owner of a house who brought out of his storeroom both new treasures as well as old. Jesus and the disciples were born under the Law (Old Covenant) but they were now in the kingdom of heaven (New Covenant). They were in a transition time where old covenant truths and principles (treasures) were being fulfilled and superseded by new ones. A teacher of the Law, who was now a disciple in the kingdom of heaven, had to know how to rightly divide the truths about the two covenants when teaching others.

CHAPTER 14

Woman Healed, Jairus, 72 Sent Out, Feeding 4000



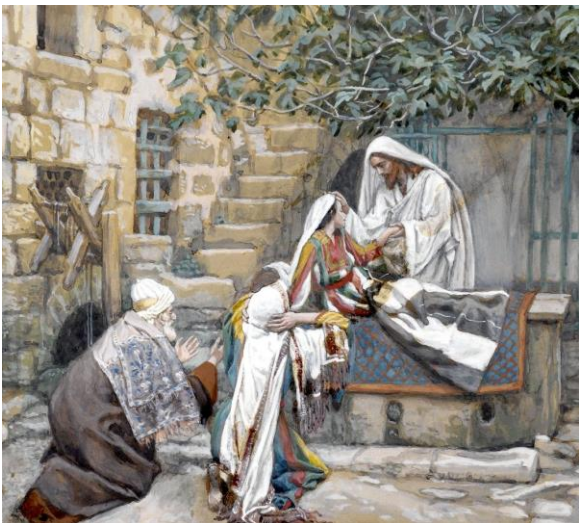
Woman Healed

In one of the places where Jesus went, a crowd surrounded Him, and a synagogue leader named Jairus fell to the ground at the Lord's feet. He begged Jesus to come to his house where his only child, a 12-year-old daughter, lay dying. Jesus began following the man to his house but the crowd was so packed that it was hard to move forward. A woman who had a menstrual bleeding condition for twelve years came up behind Jesus. She had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and spent all she had to find a cure, but it was no use. She just kept getting worse and worse. According to the Laws in Leviticus, a woman was impure for seven days from the beginning of her menstrual flow, and anyone touching her would be unclean until evening. This poor woman had been unclean for 12 years! Her condition would have socially ostracized her and caused her to live a lonely, miserable life. Society would have shunned her and even condemned her. This is

probably why she didn't dare approach Jesus directly, but came up behind Him and surreptitiously touched His cloak. This was very daring on her part because Jesus was a rabbi and making a holy person like Him unclean with her touch could have brought severe censure.

However she had absolute faith that touching just the edge of Jesus' cloak would bring healing, and her faith was rewarded for her blood flow stopped immediately. She could feel in her body that she was healed. Jesus realized at once that power had gone out from Him and He turned to the crowd, asking: *"Who touched My clothes?"* The disciples were surprised at this question, reminding Jesus that it was a big crowd so anyone might have brushed up against Him. But Jesus kept looking around to see who had done it. He had felt power go out from Him in response to someone's faith and He wanted to give her the opportunity to declare her faith and healing in public. It is very likely that Jesus knew exactly who had touched Him, but it was for the woman's sake that He called her out on what she'd done. The woman, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell at His feet, trembling with fear, and confessed what she had done. Most people would have been greatly angry with an unclean person daring to touch them, thereby making them unclean as well. The Pharisees and Jewish leaders certainly would have been. But Jesus of course was not angry, and said to her, *' Daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace, and be cured of your disease.'* (Mark 5:34)

Jairus



Meanwhile, a servant from the house of Jairus arrived to tell his master that he needn't bother Jesus anymore because his daughter had died. Jesus overheard this and told Jairus not to be afraid. *"Just believe,"* He said, *"and she will be healed."* When they arrived at Jairus' home, Jesus did not let anyone accompany Him inside except for the parents, and Peter, John, and James. The professional mourners were wailing outside and Jesus told them to stop because the young girl was not dead, but asleep.

They laughed at Him, probably thinking Him a fool to assume they were unable to tell the difference between a dead body and one that was merely in slumber. But Jesus was speaking spiritually. He was well aware that the child's spirit had departed and was in Sheol, but unlike the crowd, He knew she wouldn't stay there for long. He was about to perform the amazing miracle of bringing her back to life. So, once inside the house, Jesus took the girl by the hand and said, *"My child, get*

up!” and her spirit immediately returned to her body, much to the astonishment of her parents. Jesus told them to give their daughter something to eat, ordering them not to tell anyone what had happened. As for the young girl, she may have experienced what many others who have died report after returning from the dead.

Perhaps she had seen a light at the end of a tunnel, and while her body lay lifeless on the bed, her spirit may have hovered over the room, seeing everything that was going on. Maybe an angel had taken care of her during her brief time in death's grasp. Whatever she experienced, she would never have forgotten it, or the wonderful Messiah who had made a special visit to her home to bring her back to life.

Undoubtedly this event would have excited great curiosity among the people who were certain that the child had been truly dead, and if the details of the miracle were made known, it would have brought a lot of attention to Jesus, which He didn't want at this time. Too much recognition too soon could actually hinder the Lord's ministry, drawing unwelcome interest from King Herod or the Pharisees. This is why Jesus told the girl's parents to keep the miracle to themselves, although it must have been a great temptation to tell everyone the wonderful thing Jesus had done in bringing their beloved daughter back from the dead.

Next along the way Jesus and His disciples met up with a demon-possessed man who was mute. Some people had brought the man to Jesus, obviously expecting Him to help the man in some way. It's not clear if the crowd understood that a demon was behind the man's problem because they were amazed when Jesus drove it out and the man began to speak. They had never seen anything like this in all of Israel. However some Pharisees who were there muttered that Jesus drove out demons by the power of Satan, an accusation they had made before. They were not about to admit that Jesus had power from God because then Jesus would become even more popular with the people. This young Rabbi was gaining a significant following and the Pharisees feared losing their power and control over the crowds. Using whatever means possible, they were determined to undermine Jesus' ministry any way they could.

72 Sent Out

Jesus appointed 72 of His followers to go into the neighboring towns to preach the news of the kingdom. He sent them out two by two and told them to take no supplies with them. His instructions were similar to the guidelines He had given to the Twelve earlier - to find a home where their message was received, and to use that as their base, accepting the hospitality offered to them because, as workers in the Kingdom, they were worthy of their wages. They were to heal the sick as well. If, however, they were not welcomed in a town or city, they were to wipe the dust of that place from their feet as a warning to the inhabitants. Jesus told them that because the Kingdom had come near and the people had rejected it, they would suffer a fate worse than that of Sodom. Later the 72 returned and they were filled

with joy because they had seen many miracles take place because of their ministry. Even demons submitted to their commands in the name of Jesus. The Lord was not surprised, replying that He had seen, in the Spirit, Satan fall like lightning from heaven because of the authority He had given His disciples.

He had given them His authority to '*trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy*' (Luke 10:19) so that nothing would harm them. But He exhorted them to be even more jubilant that their names were written in heaven. He wanted them to be more excited about having eternal life than having power over the spiritual realm.

4000 Fed



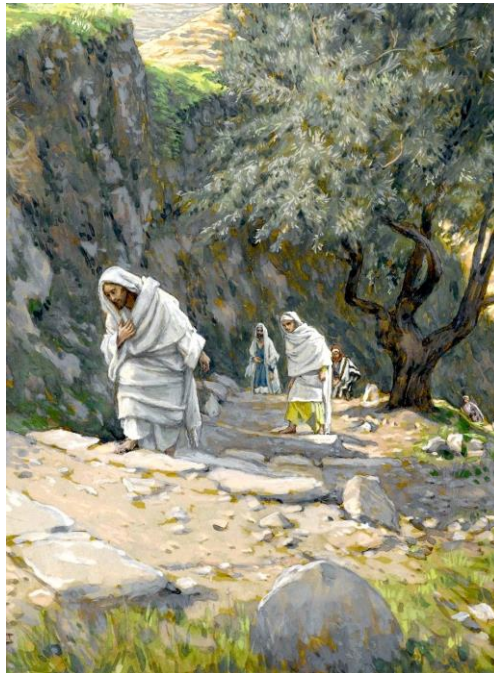
During those days another large crowd gathered, numbering around 4000. They had been with Jesus for 3 days and had nothing to eat. Jesus felt sorry for them and told His disciples that He couldn't send them home now because they would collapse from hunger along the way. He then asked His disciples how much food they had, but they told Him they only had 7 loaves of bread.

Jesus told the crowd to sit down on the ground and took the bread, giving thanks, and then distributed it to His disciples to share with the people. There were a few small fish as well and these were also distributed. Amazingly, the people ate and were satisfied, with several baskets of leftovers.

This event took place in the region of the Gerasenes, in the region around the Decapolis where some Gentiles lived. This was the second time Jesus had fed thousands of people on a few fish and loaves of bread. Earlier He had fed 5000 near Bethsaida, close to the Sea of Galilee, a Jewish region. Both miracles show Jesus' love for all His people, both Jew and Gentile, and His desire to provide for them. This provision of physical food for the people foreshadowed the day when He would feed humanity spiritually with His very own body and blood on the cross.

CHAPTER 15

Bread of Life, Woman's Faith, Blind Man, Peter Declares Jesus



Bread Of Life

After this Jesus and His disciples left for Capernaum, leaving the crowds behind. However the people who had been fed on the mountain loved the fact that Jesus could provide them with food and so they got on boats and sailed after Jesus and the disciples. Once on land, Jesus called the people to Him and began to teach. He knew that food was still uppermost in their minds, so that became His topic. In the Old Testament God had given Moses rules regarding what the Israelites could and could not eat. These dietary rules were for the protection of the people's health, but over time many Jews, especially the religious leaders, had become obsessed with the delineation of clean (pure) and unclean foods. They came to believe that forbidden foods could actually make a person spiritually unacceptable before God. However Jesus told them: *There is nothing from outside of the man, that going into him can*

defile him; but the things which proceed out of the man are those that defile the man. (Mark 7:15)

After delivering this message, He left them and entered a house. His disciples followed and asked Him what He meant by His words, and Jesus was slightly exasperated with their ignorance.

Are you also without understanding? Don't you perceive that whatever goes into the man from outside can't defile him, because it doesn't go into his heart, but into his stomach, then into the latrine..? For from within, out of the hearts of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, sexual sins, murders, thefts, coveting, wickedness, deceit, lustful desires, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, and foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and defile the man." (Mark 7:18-23)

Jesus was saying that all foods are clean because they do not affect anyone spiritually. It was the evil thoughts that came from sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, and other sins that defiled a person on the inside (in his heart).

When Jesus went to the synagogue, the crowds still followed Him and He again returned to the topic of food. He told them that they were looking for Him, not because of the signs He performed (which would signify a spiritual search for God) but because they saw Him as a welfare program. They were impressed that He could feed them from a little bit of bread and fish. They wanted Him to always provide food for them, thereby making their lives easier. Jesus told them not to work for food that spoils, but for food that endured to eternal life, which He would give them. Jesus told them that His Father had placed His seal of approval on Him and they needed to focus on Him as the Source of eternal sustenance. Still not getting it, the people asked what they needed to do to accomplish the works God required. In other words, they were asking Jesus what they had to do to insure God's provision and blessing. Jesus answered, *"The work of God is this: to believe in the One He has sent."* This didn't satisfy the crowd and they asked Jesus to give them a sign to prove that they should believe in Him. This was quite amazing since Jesus had just provided food for 4000 people from a few loaves of bread and a few fish! This miracle should have been all the proof they needed, but the people wanted more. They alluded to their ancestors who had been provided with manna every single day while traveling in the desert. They were hoping Jesus would do the same thing for them. But Jesus told them that it wasn't Moses who had given the Israelites the manna, but His Father in heaven. Now God was giving them the true manna (bread) from heaven that gives life to the world. The crowd immediately asked Jesus to give them that bread, not understanding that Jesus was speaking of spiritual matters. So Jesus came right out and said: *"I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will not be hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty" (John 6:35)* However Jesus could see that the crowd was taking everything He said literally. He told them that they didn't believe in Him because His Father had not drawn them. If He had, they would have come to Jesus and Jesus would have accepted them as His own, not losing a single one. They would have received eternal life and the promise of being resurrected on the coming day of judgment. But this was not at all what the Jews had hoped to hear. They began to grumble about Jesus, denouncing Him for putting

on airs, refusing to believe that He had come down from heaven. Jesus told them to stop grumbling and then repeated what He had said earlier.

No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up in the last day. It is written in the prophets, 'They will all be taught by God'. Therefore everyone who hears from the Father, and has learned, comes to me. (John 6:44-45)

He added that only He had seen the Father in heaven. He had come from God as the Bread of Life who could give eternal life to anyone who believed in Him. He reminded the crowd that the manna their ancestors had eaten did not give them that. The Israelites had all died in the wilderness. However He, Jesus, was the living Bread. In fact this bread was His flesh and whoever ate of it would live forever. Immediately the Jews began to argue sharply among themselves, asking how He could possibly give them His flesh to eat. It sounded ridiculous to their ears. Their literalistic minds could not perceive the Lord's spiritual language.

Jesus, however, persisted in His explanation, saying: *"Most certainly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you don't have life in yourselves. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood lives in me, and I in him. As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father; so he who feeds on me, he will also live because of me. This is the bread, which came down out of heaven—not as our fathers ate the manna, and died. He who eats this bread will live forever."* (John 6: 53-58)

Jesus couldn't have made it clearer. He was plainly stating that eternal life was in Him and only He could provide life to the human soul. Receiving this life meant receiving Christ by believing in Him. When Jesus mentioned eating His Body (flesh) and drinking His blood, He wasn't speaking of cannibalism. He was speaking metaphorically about giving His life to everyone who partook of Him (His sacrifice on the cross). Eating the manna in the wilderness had physically sustained the Israelites, but it offered nothing for the soul. Jesus, however, was spiritual Bread and He could provide eternal life. This fact should have greatly excited the Jews because many of the Old Testament scriptures promised a new relationship with God, and here was One who claimed to be able to fulfill that promise. The Jews would also have been aware of the Table of Showbread in the Holy of Holies and the blood of the Atonement offered each year for the sins of Israel. Steeped as they were in Old Testament teachings, and devoted to their Temple ceremonies, they should have seen that Jesus was referring to Himself as the promised Lamb Sacrifice who would atone for the sins of the nation. But they missed the point entirely and rejected both Jesus and His message.

Chosen By God

Unfortunately His disciples had a hard time with this teaching as well. Jesus was aware of this and asked them if they would have an easier time believing Him if they saw Him ascending to heaven where He was before. This was a plain reference to

His eternality as God. He further explained that His words were filled with the Holy Spirit and with life, but it required faith to release that life into the heart. He was well aware that some of them did not have faith, particularly the one who would betray Him in the end. Jesus then told His followers that there was a reason why some did not have faith in Him. *“No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him...(John6:44)*

This was a hard teaching, indicating that faith in Christ required the Father’s agency. It implied that the Father and Jesus worked together in selecting certain ones for salvation. Those who were not selected would never come to saving faith, as no one ever chose God on their own.

There is no one who understands. There is no one who seeks after God. (Romans 3:11)

Many felt insulted by these words and from that time on many of Jesus’ disciples no longer followed Him. When Jesus asked the twelve if they were also going to leave, Peter asked: *“Lord, to whom would we go? You have the words of eternal life. (John 6:68)*

This declaration of faith must have pleased Jesus, but He reminded them that although He had chosen all twelve, one was a devil, meaning Judas. Jesus did not identify the betrayer but He seemed to want the disciples to know that one among them had not been called or drawn by the Father, even though Jesus purposely selected him as a disciple. After telling them that no one could believe in Him without the enablement of His Father, He wanted to be sure that the disciples understood that one of them did not truly believe in Him, but was included in their number for another purpose entirely. This one would be eternally lost because he had never been one of Jesus’ own in the first place, and therefore the Lord’s promise to not lose a single disciple would not apply to him.

Woman’s Faith

After the disappointing time with the Jews in Capernaum, Jesus went to the region of Tyre and Sidon, where a Canaanite woman approached Him. She cried out: *‘Have mercy on me, Lord, you son of David! My daughter is severely possessed by a demon!’(Matthew 15:22)*

Calling Jesus the ‘Son of David’ indicated that, although a Gentile herself, she knew Jewish scripture and believed that Jesus was the promised Messiah. Most likely she had also heard about Jesus’ healing miracles and how He could cast out demons. Surprisingly, Jesus ignored her as she knelt before Him. This did not stop the poor woman’s persistent pleas, which were so vocal that they were beginning to draw unwanted attention. Jesus’ disciples were troubled by this and urged Him to send her way. But Jesus turned to the woman and told her that He had been sent to the lost sheep of Israel. He told her: *“It is not appropriate to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs.” (Matthew 15:26)*

This seemed like a cruel thing to say, and very unlike the Lord, but the Jews in that time referred to Gentiles as 'dogs' because they were considered unspiritual and unclean. It was a common appellation and the woman would have understood this, but she persisted in her petition, replying that even the dogs get to eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table. It was a remarkable response and Jesus commended her by saying, *"Woman, great is your faith! Be it done to you even as you desire."* (Matthew 15:28)

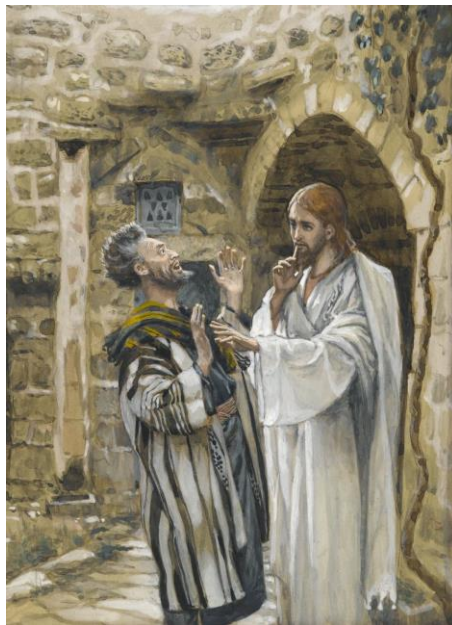
And her daughter was healed at that same moment. The fact that Jesus ignored the woman at first, and then used an insulting metaphor to describe her, must have surprised the disciples. They had witnessed the Lord's compassion in every situation except this one. Even the Samaritan woman at the well had received mercy and favor. The disciples must have been perplexed by the Lord's change of tactics. But very likely Jesus wanted to test the woman's faith, and it is also possible that He was using this incident as a demonstration of God's acceptance of anyone who believed, whether Jew or Gentile. It also put in stark contrast the unbelief of the Jews in Capernaum, and the absolute faith of a lowly Gentile woman. Clearly race did not guarantee God's favor and acceptance, but faith did. It was a lesson that the disciples would be learning over and over again.

Peter Declares Jesus

When Jesus and His disciples went across the lake, it was discovered that they had forgotten to take bread with them. When Jesus began to warn His followers about being on guard against the 'leaven' of the Pharisees and Sadducees, the disciples thought Jesus was rebuking them for their oversight in not bringing food along. Jesus was annoyed with their lack of perception. How could they think He was concerned about not having bread, right after providing bread for 4000 people? Obviously He could provide food any time He wanted, yet the disciples kept missing the point of what He was saying to them. Jesus was referring to the insidiously false teachings of the Pharisees and Sadducees which permeated hearts and poisoned minds against the truth.

CHAPTER 16

Blind Man, Transfiguration, Demonized Boy, Temple Tax, Who Is Greatest, Feast of Tabernacles



Blind Man

They came to Bethsaida, and there a group of people brought a blind man to Jesus, begging Him to heal him. Perhaps this crowd was more interested in seeing a miracle than having this poor man regain his eyesight, because Jesus took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village to a place more private. Then Jesus spit on the man's eyes and put His hands on him, after which He asked the man if he could see anything. The man said he could see people that looked like trees walking around. Jesus then put His hands on the man's eyes and suddenly the man could see perfectly. He must have been bubbling over with joy and excitement, eager to tell everyone what had happened, but Jesus told him to bypass the village and go straight home.

This wasn't the only time Jesus used saliva to heal someone. There are several such recorded incidents in the gospels. There were other methods of healing He used as well, although usually He healed with a simple word of command. But perhaps in this instance, using His saliva was for the purpose of inspiring faith in the recipient.

Some Jewish rabbis considered saliva to be a valid treatment for blindness, believing it to have healing properties. Also the mixing of saliva with mud is reminiscent of God's creation of mankind, so perhaps this too inspired the blind man's faith to believe in Jesus' divine creative power.

When they came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, Jesus asked His disciples what the people were saying about Him. They told Him that some said He was John the Baptist, or Elijah, or Jeremiah, or one of the other prophets. Then Jesus asked them what they thought. It was Peter who answered, *"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."* (Matthew 16:16) Jesus blessed Peter for his response, saying that the Father in heaven had given Peter this revelation. He called Peter a rock (Peter's name means 'rock' and he was living up to his name by his firm belief in Jesus). The Lord added that the church of Christ would be built upon Peter's leadership and not even the gates of Hades would be able to overcome it. He added that He would give Peter the keys of the kingdom of heaven so that whatever he bound on earth would be bound in heaven, and whatever he loosed on earth would be loosed in heaven. Jesus was giving Peter authority to invite, or bar, people from entering the kingdom. It would be Peter who would preach in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2), inviting 3000 Jews into the Kingdom. Later Peter would preach to the Samaritans (Acts 8), again unlocking the door of salvation for them. After that Peter would bring the gospel to a Roman centurion's household, thus opening the kingdom to the Gentiles (Acts 10). This formality of unlocking and opening the door to salvation to different people groups was necessary because the Jewish mindset was so firmly set on the idea that only the Jews could be saved. It required Peter's formal invitation and the the visible display of the Holy Spirit coming upon these groups to convince the Jewish Christians that salvation was open to the Gentiles as well.

Transfiguration



After six days Jesus took Peter, James and John up a high mountain where He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as snow. Beside Him Moses and Elijah appeared and began to talk with Jesus. Peter was so awestruck that he blurted out: *"Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah."* (Matthew 17:4) At that moment, a bright cloud covered them, and a voice from the cloud said, *"This is My Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased. Listen to Him!"* The disciples fell

facedown to the ground, terrified, but Jesus came and touched them, telling them to get up and not be afraid. When they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus.

The Bible says that Moses and Elijah 'appeared' to the disciples, but they obviously did not have physical bodies. It is also unlikely that they had glorified bodies since Christ had not yet risen from the dead. Yet they were clearly identifiable and visible as they spoke with Jesus. This was also true of Samuel in the Old Testament who was called up from Sheol and was recognizable to King Saul. So it would seem that Samuel, Elijah and Moses had spirit forms of some kind.

The reason for the transfiguration was likely to give Jesus' disciples a greater understanding of His divinity. Seeing Him in His glory would certainly have been a faith building experience. Symbolically, Moses and Elijah represented the Law and the Prophets, but God's voice clearly indicated His Son's supremacy over them. God made it clear that the words of Jesus had the highest authority. Jesus was bringing in the New Covenant that would fulfill the Law and the Prophets and replace the Old Covenant. Also, by seeing Jesus in His glorified form, the disciples were able to get a glimpse of His coming glorification and enthronement as King of kings and Lord of lords. Later the apostle John would say: *We saw his glory, such glory as of the one and only Son of the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:14).*

Peter also wrote: *For we did not follow cunningly devised fables, when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received from God the Father honor and glory, when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." We heard this voice come out of heaven when we were with him on the holy mountain. (2 Peter 1:16-18).*

As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus told His disciples to tell no one what they had just witnessed, until after His resurrection from the dead. If the Pharisees heard about what had just happened, they would have immediately sought to kill Him. Jesus knew He only had a short time to prepare the disciples for kingdom ministry before His enemies would come for Him. He forewarned His disciples about this, but they were confused and their minds were spinning. How would Christ's death fit in with the promises in Scripture about the Messiah being King over Israel, ruling over the nations with righteousness and justice, and overthrowing His enemies?

The Old Testament prophecies also indicated that Elijah would precede the coming of the King. But they had just now seen Elijah, in spiritual form, speak with Jesus on the mountain, only to disappear into heaven along with Moses. Would he come back physically to introduce the Lord as King of the Jews? Jesus was here, but Elijah had gone back to Sheol, so how did that fit in? Jesus answered their questions by explaining that Elijah had already come but he wasn't recognized and was killed. He

added that the same murderers would also kill Him. Finally it dawned on the disciples that Jesus was referring to John the Baptist as the promised Elijah. They had been told this before but seeing Elijah on the mountain must have raised some doubts in their minds. Certainly the rest of the Jews were looking for a literal return of the prophet. They had stumbled over the passages about the coming Elijah, taking them literally instead of metaphorically.

Demonized Boy

When they came down to the crowd, a man came up to Jesus and knelt before Him. He asked Jesus to heal his son from seizures, which often caused the boy to fall into the fire or into water. The boy suffered considerably and the father was desperate. He had already asked Jesus' other disciples to heal his son but they couldn't do it. When He heard this, Jesus had a strong reaction. He replied, *"Faithless and perverse generation! How long will I be with you? How long will I bear with you? Bring him here to me."*(Matthew 17:17) Jesus then rebuked the demon, and it came out of the boy, and he was healed at that moment. Later the disciples asked Jesus in private why they were unable to cast out the demon, and Jesus told them it was because of their lack of faith. He said, *'For most certainly I tell you, if you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, you will tell this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you.'* (Matthew 17:20)

It appears that Jesus was exasperated with His disciples' lack of faith, which seems justified when one looks at the many instances where they continued to lack comprehension and spiritual insight after witnessing astounding miracles performed by the Lord. They had seen Him heal countless people, raise the dead, cast out demons, walk on water, feed 9000 people on a handful of bread and fishes - not to mention myriad other miracles - and yet their faith was weak. Not only that, but Jesus had trained them personally, giving them clear, straightforward teaching that they should have easily grasped. The disciples weren't stupid. It wasn't a problem of intellect, but of spirit. Jesus' disciples had not yet been born again; had not yet received new hearts; and were still wearing a spiritual veil over their minds that made them, at least partially, blind to the truth. They were privileged to be in the presence of God's Son, seeing His miracles and hearing His words, but they were still natural men. It would take much more to strip away the blinders and bring revelation to their sluggish minds and hearts.

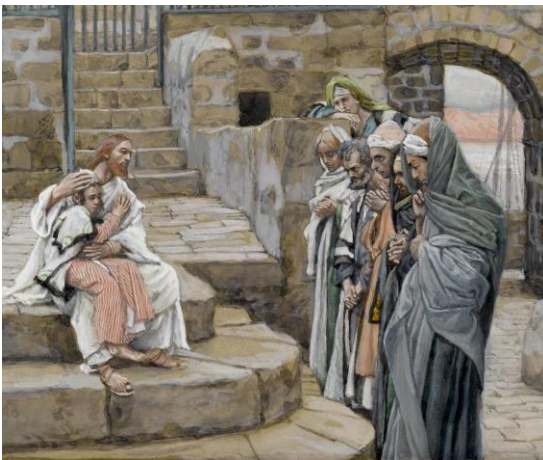
Temple Tax

After Jesus and His disciples arrived in Capernaum, the collectors of the two-drachma temple tax came to Peter and asked if Jesus paid the tax. Peter replied that He did. Every Jewish male over 20 paid the temple tax for the maintenance of the temple. In the Old Testament, God told Moses to collect this tax at the time of the census taken in the wilderness. From then on, every Jewish male paid this tax annually. It amounted to about two days' wages. Peter assumed that Jesus would pay it as well. Later when Peter was with Jesus, the Lord asked him from whom earthly kings collected duty and taxes. Was it from their own children or from

others? Peter must have been astounded that the Lord would know about his conversation with the tax collectors. After all, He hadn't been present at the time. Jesus seemed to have an uncanny way of knowing things. Peter answered that kings taxed their people, not their own children, whereupon Jesus responded: *"Then the children are exempt."* Jesus was basically telling Peter that because the temple was His Father's house, why should the Son of God pay a tax to His own Father?

However Jesus added that in order to not cause offence with the Jews, He would comply with the tax rule. He then instructed Peter to go to the lake and throw out his line, taking the first fish caught. Inside the fish's mouth there would be a four-drachma coin, which was enough to pay the tax for all of them. Peter followed Jesus' instructions and found the fish and money exactly as foretold. This was yet another miracle pointing to the omnipotence and omniscience of the Lord's divine nature. It wasn't always evident, however, because Jesus often intentionally veiled His attributes. This is why so many of the Jews saw nothing remarkable in Him. However, for the sake of instructing and inspiring His disciples, Jesus often revealed His divine side. In this instance, Jesus was giving Peter an object lesson to show him that although the children of the kingdom were free from earthly religious constraints and traditions, sometimes it was better to forego one's freedom in order to maintain a good witness.

Who Is Greatest?



At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked Him who was the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Jesus called a young child to Him, and placed the child among them, saying: *"Most certainly I tell you, unless you turn (repent), and become as little children, you will in no way enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. Whoever therefore humbles himself as this little child, the same is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven. Whoever receives one such little child in my name receives me."* (Matthew 18:3-5)

It appears that the disciples of Jesus were as competitive and ambitious as are most people in the world. Social status, political power, and fame are important standards in all cultures. But by placing the child before them as an example of the greatest in the kingdom, Jesus revealed that it was a big mistake to apply earthly standards to the kingdom. This probably astounded the disciples, especially as children in Jesus' time were not regarded as special, except to their own parents. They may have understood that Jesus loved children because He loved everyone who was weak and helpless, and children are certainly all of that. They are also dependent and know almost nothing about life, functioning more on emotion than reason. So how could they have anything to offer the kingdom? And what did Jesus mean that one had to

become like one of them in order to enter the kingdom? Perhaps it slowly dawned on them that self-effort, independence, and personal achievement were not what God was looking for. He desired spiritual children who were exactly like earthly children - trusting, openhearted, humble, and dependent.

These qualities were necessary in order to come to Christ for redemption. But Jesus had more to say on this topic.

He told them that whoever welcomed a little child in His name would also be welcoming Him, and whoever welcomed Him, also welcomed His Father. Jesus and His Father were spiritually linked to little children because such ones were the most receptive to God. These humble, unassuming little ones, who were considered the least important of anyone, were actually the greatest in the Kingdom. Their humility was a trait valued by God because it more easily predisposed a person to repentance. Seeing oneself as small, helpless, lost, and of no importance (like a child) brings one closer to God. This is why Jesus was so often around sinners, prostitutes, the poor and outcast. They were the ones who saw themselves as lowly, helpless, and of no account. They had the humble heart of a small child.

The Jews, especially the Pharisees, were self-righteous, seeing no need for repentance or salvation through Jesus Christ. They saw themselves as great spiritual teachers, especially favored by God. Ironically they were actually the least in God's eyes. It was His chosen humble ones who were the closest to His heart. And woe to those who harmed them!

Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to stumble, it would be better for him that a huge millstone should be hung around his neck, and that he should be sunk in the depths of the sea. Woe to the world because of occasions of stumbling! For it must be that the occasions come, but woe to that person through whom the occasion comes! (Matthew 18:6-7)

This was an ominous warning about negatively influencing believers in Christ and weakening their faith. Such a person would have been better off dead because a terrible fate awaited him for his evil actions. Then Jesus warned His disciples to never despise children because they are under the watchful care of angels who have preferential access to the Father. In other words, children are under God's special protection and He is intimately concerned about them. It must have been a bit mind-blowing for the disciples to hear all this. Clearly God's perspective on things was far removed from what was commonly believed.

After this, Jesus ministered in and around Galilee, but He avoided Judea because the Jewish leaders there were looking for a way to kill him.

Feast of Tabernacles

When the Festival of Tabernacles was near, Jesus' brothers sarcastically suggested that He go to Judea so show Himself to the world if He wanted to become famous. Jesus' brothers still did not believe that Jesus was who He claimed to be. Jesus told

them that He wouldn't go to the festival because the time to fully disclose His identity hadn't arrived yet. There was no danger for them because the world did not hate them, whereas He was hated because He pointed out the world's sins. Jesus stayed in Galilee until after His brothers had left for the festival.

Meanwhile the Jewish leaders at the festival were watching for Jesus and asking His whereabouts. They were looking for a way to arrest Him. The crowds were divided in their opinion about Him.

Some said He was a good man; others said He was a deceiver. However they said these things privately, fearful of incurring the displeasure of the Jewish leaders.

Jesus eventually did go to the Festival, but secretly. Halfway through the festivities, He went up to the temple courts and began to teach. Everyone who listened to Him was amazed at how He could have so much learning without being taught by their leaders. Jesus told them that His teaching came from the One who sent Him. He added that anyone who wanted to do God's will would recognize that He was speaking the truth. But Jesus knew that many in the crowd were not interested in God's will, even though they pretended to be devout followers of the Law. Jesus saw through their hypocrisy. He told them that Moses had given the Jews the Law but they didn't keep it, and instead of accepting the Messiah that Moses spoke about, they were now trying to kill Him. The people were offended. *"You are demon-possessed,"* they answered. *"Who is trying to kill you?"* Jesus then referred to a miracle He had performed on the Sabbath, which had incensed them. He explained that the patriarchs and Moses had given them circumcision and they often circumcised boy babies on the Sabbath, so why were they angry with Him for healing a man's whole body on the Sabbath? He ended by exhorting them to judge correctly, not by mere appearances. They needed to think past their shallow and legalistic assumptions and see the true meaning behind Jesus' actions. The crowds were surprised that Jesus was speaking so openly and no one was stopping Him. They began to wonder if the authorities had concluded that He really was the Messiah. Yet they were sure that He couldn't be, since He was well known among them. It was common knowledge in Israel that the true Messiah would be a mysterious figure and no one would know from whence He came. (In actuality, Jesus was that mysterious figure whose true origins were largely unrecognized in Israel). Jesus told the crowd that, while they knew Him in a physical sense, they didn't really know Him because they didn't know the Father who sent Him. That statement incensed the people who saw it as a great insult. They immediately tried to seize Jesus, but no one could lay a hand on Him because it wasn't time for Him to die yet. Some in the crowd, however, believed that Jesus was the Messiah because of the wondrous signs He had done. They asked one another: *"When the Christ comes, he won't do more signs than those which this man has done, will he? (John 7:31)* The Pharisees heard the crowd whispering this about Him and were alarmed. Clearly they had to stop Jesus before any more of the people were persuaded that He was the Messiah.

Meanwhile Jesus forewarned the crowd that He would only be with them for a short time longer, after which He would return to the One who sent Him. They would look

for Him, but would not find Him because He would be where they could not come. The Jews began to discuss among themselves the possibility that Jesus was going away to teach among the Greeks, but of course this was not what Jesus meant. He was referring to the fact that He would go to heaven, and the unbelieving Jews would never find Him because they were not able to go there.

On the last and greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, *"If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink! He who believes in me, as the Scripture has said, from within him will flow rivers of living water."* (John 7:37)

By *'living water'* Jesus was referring to the Holy Spirit who would later be given to those who believed in Him. This would happen after He was glorified. Some who heard Jesus speak said He was a Prophet, even the Messiah. But many doubted that the Messiah would come from a place like Galilee. The Old Testament said that the Messiah would come from David's descendants and from Bethlehem, the town where David lived. Because the facts of Jesus' birth were not common knowledge, the people were not aware that His history and genealogy perfectly fulfilled these prophecies. Consequently there was a real mix of opinion about Him. The Jewish leaders wanted to arrest Him, and sent for the temple guards to seize Him, but the guards were unable to do it. When they were asked by the Pharisees why they didn't bring Jesus in, they replied: *"No one ever spoke the way this man does."* This angered the Pharisees who accused them of being as deceived as the common people. They disparaged the crowds as being ignorant masses who knew nothing about the Law and who were therefore cursed. However Nicodemus, who had secretly visited with Jesus some time earlier, asked, *"Does our law judge a man, unless it first hears from him personally and knows what he does?"* (John 7:51) That only got the others angrier and they accused Nicodemus of being ignorant too. They asked him mockingly, *'Are you also from Galilee? Search, and see that no prophet has arisen out of Galilee.'* (John 7:52)

CHAPTER 17

Prostitute, Testimony, Children of Abraham, Children of the Devil



Prostitute

A Pharisee named Simon invited Jesus to have dinner with him at his home, and while they were reclining at the table, a prostitute entered the room with an alabaster jar of perfume. She came up behind Jesus and stood there, weeping. After a while she moved closer, wetting Jesus' feet with her tears and wiping them with her hair. Then she took the jar of perfume and poured it over His feet while everyone was watching. The Pharisee who had invited Jesus to his house thought to himself that Jesus couldn't be a prophet, or He would have known that the woman was a sinner and would never have allowed her to touch Him. But Jesus, in that mysterious, knowing way of His, asked: *"Simon, I have something to tell you...A certain lender had two debtors. The one owed five hundred denarii, and the other*

fifty. When they couldn't pay, he forgave them both. Which of them therefore will love him most?"(Luke 7:40-42)

Simon saw this as a no-brainer and replied that the one whose debt was bigger would be more grateful. Jesus agreed and then turned Simon's attention to the woman. *"I entered into your house, and you gave me no water for my feet, but she has wet my feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hair of her head. You gave me no kiss, but she, since the time I came in, has not ceased to kiss my feet. You didn't anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little."* Then Jesus said to her, *"Your sins are forgiven. Your faith has saved you; go in peace'*

The other guests thought Jesus was being presumptuous because only God could forgive sins. Of course, had they but known it, that is exactly Who was offering forgiveness to the woman. The poor sinning woman, lowest of the low, had just received the greatest gift God could give her, while the arrogant and merciless Pharisee and his guests had received nothing.

Testimony

Jesus began speaking to the people, declaring that He was the Light of the world and by following Him, they would never walk in darkness. The Pharisees challenged Him by saying He was just bragging on Himself. Where was the proof? Jesus replied that even if He was the only One testifying to Himself, it was still valid because He knew who He was and from where He had come, whereas they knew nothing about Him. Their evaluation was shallow, built on human standards. He, however, was not passing judgment on anyone, but if He did, His judgments were accurate because His Father stood with Him. (The Law stated that the testimony of two witnesses was valid, so that meant that what Jesus and His Father testified was absolutely true.)

Children of Abraham



In spite of all Jesus had said regarding His identity, many in the crowds were still pushing for more information, asking who His father was.

“Who are you?” they kept asking.

“Just what I said,” Jesus replied.

“When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he, and I do nothing of myself, but as my Father taught me, I say these things. He who sent me is with me. The Father hasn’t left me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to him.” (John 8:28-29)

Many still didn’t realize that Jesus was speaking of His heavenly Father, but there were others who did believe Him. However Jesus knew the hearts of these ‘believers’ and challenged the depth of their faith by exhorting them to hold on to His teaching. This would prove whether or not they were genuine disciples. If they were true believers, they would know the truth and it would set them free. The crowd replied that they were Abraham’s descendants and had never been slaves of anyone. How could they be any freer than that? Jesus replied that everyone who sins is a slave to sin, and since everyone has committed sins, including the descendants of Abraham, everyone needed the truth to set them free from sin’s bondage. Jesus added that slaves find no permanent place in a family, but a son belongs to it forever. Being Abraham’s descendants did not make them free, but the Son of God could set them free. Then He confronted them about seeking to kill Him because they would not accept the words of truth given to Him by His Father. He was doing what He had learned from His Father and they were doing what they had learned from theirs. The Jews retorted that Abraham was their father, but Jesus rejected that. *“If you were Abraham’s children,”* He said, *“you would do what Abraham did.”* Then Jesus accused them of trying to kill the very One who was telling them the truth, whereas Abraham would never have done what they were doing. Their actions had been taught to them by their own father, someone far different from

Abraham. The crowd must have figured out what Jesus was getting at because they angrily rejected the idea of being illegitimate children, claiming God as their Father.

Children of the Devil

Then Jesus became even more confrontational: *“If God were your father, you would love me, for I came out and have come from God. For I haven’t come of myself, but he sent me. Why don’t you understand my speech? Because you can’t hear my word. You are of your father, the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and doesn’t stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks on his own, for he is a liar, and its father. But because I tell the truth, you don’t believe me. Which of you convicts me of sin? If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me? He who is of God hears the words of God. For this cause you don’t hear, because you are not of God.”* (John 8:42-47)

This greatly infuriated the Jews who retaliated by accusing Jesus of being a demon-possessed Samaritan. Jesus, of course, denied this, saying He honored His Father and was not possessed by a demon. He also wasn’t seeking glory for Himself. He was merely telling them that whoever obeyed His word would never see death. At this they exclaimed, *“Now we know that you have a demon. Abraham died, (also) the prophets; and you say, ‘If a man keeps my word, he will never taste of death.’ Are you greater than our father, Abraham, who died? The prophets died. Who do you make yourself out to be?”* (John 8:52-53)

Jesus was unfazed by their rage and calmly answered that it was His Father who glorified and exalted Him, not He Himself. He could not deny who He was, even though the Jews accused Him of telling boastful lies. If He told them other than the truth about Himself, He would be as big a liar as they were. He told them the truth and obeyed what His Father told Him to do. In fact, Abraham, the one they called their father, knew who He was and had rejoiced at the thought of seeing Him come, and he actually did see it, and was glad.

This was mind-boggling to the Jews. *“You are not yet fifty years old,”* they said to Him, *“and you have seen Abraham?!”* Jesus answered, *Most certainly, I tell you, before Abraham came into existence, I AM.* (John 8:58)

Jesus was not only eluding to the fact that He had existed before Abraham, but He was also declaring His divinity as God incarnate. ‘I AM’ was God’s name in the Old Testament, given to Moses by God Himself.

God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM,” and he said, “You shall tell the children of Israel this: ‘I AM has sent me to you.’ (Exodus 3:14.)

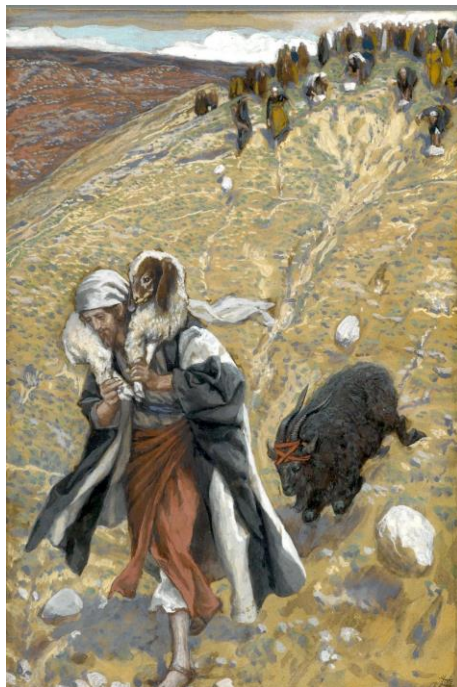
If the Jews had been paying more careful attention, they would have noted that Jesus used the phrase ‘I AM’ seven times. He had declared I AM the Bread of Life (John 6:35); I AM the Light of the World (John 8:12); I AM the Door of the Sheep (John 10:7, 9); I AM the Good Shepherd (John 10:11,14); I AM the Resurrection and the Life (John 11:25); I AM the Way, the Truth and the Life (John 14:6); and I AM the

True Vine (John 15:1, 5). Jesus could not have made a more deliberate and forthright declaration of His Godhood.

Such a statement was sheer blasphemy to the Jews and they picked up stones to stone Him. They did this because the Law condemned anyone who blasphemed God's name and the penalty for such blasphemy was death by stoning. However their murderous intention was foiled because Jesus hid Himself and slipped away from the temple grounds.

CHAPTER 18

Lost Sheep, Lost Coin, Prodigal, Shrewd Manager, Rich Man and Lazarus



Lost Sheep

Jesus often told stories and parables to explain spiritual truths to His disciples. This helped them to recall important points that Jesus wanted them to remember and it gave emotional impact to His words. It also simplified concepts that could otherwise be difficult to grasp. Furthermore, because Jewish culture often used word pictures in this way, the crowds were comfortable with this method.

One story Jesus told was about a shepherd who had a hundred sheep, but one of them got lost. The shepherd left the other 99 sheep in a field and went out to find the missing one. Finally he found it and tenderly lifted it to his shoulders and joyfully carried it home. He was so excited about having found the little sheep that he called together all his neighbors and friends and asked them to celebrate with him. Jesus told His disciples that this is how it was in heaven when a sinner repented of his sins. Jesus was making the point that He, as the Good Shepherd, was seeking to save the penitent. It was the weak and humble, knowing themselves to be in need of salvation, who would be rescued from their sins. They would be taken home to heaven in joyful celebration.

Lost Coin



Jesus told another story about a married woman who had ten silver coins and then lost one. He suggested that in the case of such a loss, the woman most likely would light a lamp and search carefully throughout the house until she found it. She would be so happy when she found it that she would call all her friends and neighbors together to celebrate. This story was similar to the one about the lost sheep.

The coins Jesus mentioned could have been Jewish bridal jewelry that hung on a veil or around the woman's neck, often given by the groom as a dowry to the bride's father. These coins would have had special significance. The Greek word for these coins indicates that each one was equivalent to a Roman denarius, about a day's wages. This means that the money lost was quite a significant sum. Jesus was indicating through this story that something valuable had been lost and there was great rejoicing when it was found, just as God greatly values every sinner who repents of his sins and celebrates with great rejoicing when such a person is 'found'. However, there is another possible meaning behind this story. If Jesus was talking

about bridal jewelry, then the coins could have represented the members of His Body, the Bride. Jesus told His disciples that it was His Father's will that He not lose a single believer because each one is infinitely precious to God.

This is the will of my Father who sent me, that of all he has given to me I should lose nothing, but should raise him up at the last day. (John 6:39)

It is written in the prophets, 'They will all be taught by God.' Therefore everyone who hears from the Father, and has learned, comes to me. (John 6:45)

Prodigal Son

There was also the story about a man with 2 sons. The younger son asked his father for his share of the estate and once he received it, he left for a distant country. Once there, he squandered his money with wild living until he had nothing left. To make matters worse, a famine spread across the land so that he couldn't even get a decent job. Eventually he found work feeding cornhusks to pigs, but by this time he was so hungry that he even wished he could eat the pigs' food. Finally, in dire straits and close to starvation, the young man thought of his home where his father's servants never went hungry.



He knew he didn't deserve to be called his father's son after his riotous living and after wasting his inheritance, but he could always ask his father to hire him as a servant. As he headed back to his country and was still some distance from home, his father saw him in the distance. The father's heart was filled with compassion for his son and he ran to meet him, throwing his arms around him and kissing him. The son admitted that he had sinned against his father and told him that he was unworthy to be called his son, but the father turned to the servants and commanded them to bring the finest robe, sandals, and jewelry for his boy. They were also to prepare a feast in celebration of his son's homecoming. The father said, *'For this, my son, was dead, and is alive again. He was lost, and is found.'* (Luke 15:24)

As the party carried on, the older son heard the dancing and music and asked the servants what was going on. When he heard that his brother had returned and his father was rejoicing by throwing a big party for him, the older son was angry and refused to go in. The father went to him outside and pleaded for him to join the celebration, but he stubbornly refused, saying: *"These many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed a commandment of yours, but you never gave me a goat, that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this, your son, came, who has devoured*

your living with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him.' (His father) said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. But it was appropriate to celebrate and be glad, for this, your brother, was dead, and is alive again. He was lost, and is found.' (Luke 15: 29-32)

Jesus told this beautiful story to illustrate the gracious heart of His Father, who is willing to totally forgive us if we only come to Him with penitent hearts and the realization that we need a Savior. Like the father in the story, God seeks to show mercy and grace to the humble, longing to welcome us with open arms as sons and daughters in the kingdom of heaven. The older brother represents those who are self-righteous, like the Pharisees, who see no need for repentance and who resent God's compassion for the undeserving. Pride keeps these ones from recognizing their need for Jesus as their Savior with the result that they remain outside the kingdom of heaven. It is interesting that the father in the story said that his son was dead but had come to life. Jesus was probably alluding to the fact that though a sinner is born spiritually dead, He would give eternal life to anyone who believed in Him and trusted Him for salvation.

The Shrewd Manager



The next parable Jesus told was different from the others because the characters were not exactly good guys. However there was a principle in the story that He wanted the disciples to recognize. The story centered around a steward and his boss (a steward is the manager of his boss's resources). The boss was very rich and he heard that his steward was cheating him by wasting his money. He planned to fire the manager but first he demanded that he provide accounting of all his transactions. The manager realized that he had only a short time to provide for his future once his job was terminated, so being shrewd and sneaky, he came up with a plan. He called the debtors who owed money to his boss to come to him, and then he asked them the amount still owing. The debtors told him and the manager then discounted their bills by half.

The debtors were very happy and as a result they were now kindly disposed to the manager. Of course the manager was counting on them returning the favor some time in the future. When the boss found out what the manager had done, he wasn't angry. Instead, he commended him for being so clever. Jesus commented that

unbelievers were often more shrewd in dealing with others than believers were. Using worldly wealth to gain friends was a smart idea, especially as it applied to the kingdom of God. Those who shared their wealth in order to expand the kingdom (sharing the gospel and helping others materially) would cause those who were benefited to welcome them into heaven with open arms. It was tantamount to laying up treasure in heaven. Investment of this nature represented true riches (heavenly rewards), and those who invested like this would be given greater responsibility and stewardship because they were trustworthy. However those who were not faithful in using their possessions for the kingdom would not be blessed. Jesus added that no one could serve two masters because one will be loved and the other despised, and this certainly applies to God and money. If God is one's Master, then one's wealth is at His disposal. The Pharisees, however, loved money more than God, and Jesus challenged them by saying: *"You are those who justify yourselves in the sight of men, but God knows your hearts. For that which is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God. (Luke 16:15)*

After Jesus' resurrection, John and James remembered these words and had this to say to about wealth: *'Don't love the world or the things that are in the world. If anyone loves the world, the Father's love isn't in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, (doesn't belong to) the Father, but (belongs to) the world. The world is passing away with its lusts, but he who does God's will remains forever. (1John 2:15-17)*

You adulterers and adulteresses, don't you know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. (James 4:4)

The Rich Man and Lazarus



Yet another story the Lord told had to do with a rich man who was always dressed in expensive clothing and lived a very extravagant life. He enjoyed luxuries of every kind. At the gate of his palatial home, there was a beggar named Lazarus who suffered from open sores; the feral dogs often came to lick his wounds. He was always hungry, so he would wait at the rich man's gate, hoping to eat just the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table. Eventually the poor man died from his illness and the angels came to carry his spirit to 'Abraham's bosom', a place in Sheol where believers went). Then the rich man also died and was buried. His spirit went to Sheol too, but to the part where the unbelievers suffered in torment.

The rich man happened to look up, and far away in the distance he saw Abraham with Lazarus by his side. He called out to Abraham, begging him to have pity on him by sending Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water to cool his tongue, because he was in agony in the fire. But Abraham replied, *'Son, remember that you, in your lifetime, received your good things, and Lazarus, in the same way, bad things. But now here he is comforted and you are in anguish. Besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, that those who want to pass from here to you are not able, and that no one may cross over from there to us.'* (Luke 16:25-26)

The rich man then asked Abraham to send Lazarus to his family to warn his five brothers so that they would not share the same fate with him in Hades. But Abraham replied, *'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.'*

The rich man persisted saying: *'but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.'* Abraham replied that if they would not listen to Moses and the Prophets, then they would not be convinced even if someone rose from the dead.

There were several points to this story that Jesus wanted to make. One was that there was a heaven and a hell, separate from one another with no possibility of crossing from one side to the other. Another was that those who lived complacent, selfish lives without regard for God or their fellow man could expect to end up in hell, in the lake of torment. Of particular interest was the fact that the rich man was fully conscious of where he was and why. He had gloried in his wealth without sharing it with the poor, and now he was in hell from which he would never escape. The story made it clear that he was where he was because he had never paid attention to Moses and the Prophets who gave warnings about living a godless lifestyle. They had also pointed to Jesus as the coming Savior of mankind, but because the rich man had never believed the Old Testament scriptures, he would certainly not be persuaded by Jesus' resurrection from the dead.

CHAPTER 19

Faith & Duty, Ten Healed, A Man Born Blind, Pharisees Investigate



Faith & Duty

Jesus often taught His disciples along the way as they traveled from town to town. His teachings covered a wide range of topics, one being the necessity to forgive those who offend repeatedly.

If your brother sins against you, rebuke him. If he repents, forgive him. If he sins against you seven times in the day, and seven times returns, saying, 'I repent,' you shall forgive him."(Luke 17:3-4)

Jesus stipulated that before the offender could be forgiven, he was to be confronted and rebuked. If he responded by repenting of his behavior, then forgiveness was in order. Jesus was well aware of the frailty of human nature and the tendency for people to repeat offences out of weakness. This is why Jesus stated that no matter how often a brother or sister failed in their performance, he was to be forgiven if he could be brought to see the error of his ways. It is obvious that Jesus was not advocating forgiveness for someone who was a malicious offender with no remorse for his offences. Just as no one can expect God to forgive them unless they see themselves as sinners in need of mercy, those who offend must exhibit a similar response.

As the disciples heard this teaching, they must have felt overwhelmed because they asked the Lord to increase their faith. Jesus replied: *"If you had faith like a grain of mustard seed, you would tell this sycamore tree, 'Be uprooted, and be planted in the sea,' and it would obey you. (Luke 17:6)* In other words, it only required a little faith to see miracles happen.

The disciples didn't always feel weak in faith however. Sometimes they felt so much confidence that it bordered on the presumptuous, such as the time when Jesus and His disciples were rejected by Samaritan villagers. This aroused great anger in the two disciples dubbed "the sons of thunder".

When his disciples, James and John, saw this, they said, "Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from the sky, and destroy them, just as Elijah did?" (Luke 9:54)

These two disciples felt that the Samaritans had insulted the Lord. Earlier they had heard Jesus warn of coming judgments on towns and cities that refused to accept Him, so they felt that these Samaritans should be destroyed, and they offered to do the job themselves! James and John were reputed to have quick tempers, and perhaps they felt it was time for Jesus to make good on some of the dire warnings He had given in the past. They wanted to see justice and punishment happen. However it is surprising that they thought they had the power in themselves to destroy a population! Jesus rebuked them for their arrogance and their presumptions. Perhaps that is why He told them a story that clearly put His disciples in their place.

The story consisted of a servant who had been plowing in the fields and looking after sheep all day. Jesus asked His disciples what the servant's master would say when the servant came in from the field. Would he prepare a meal for the servant and invite him to eat, or would the master expect the servant to serve a meal to him? Would the master thank the servant for fulfilling his commands? The obvious

answer was in the negative. The master is above the servant. The greater one issues commands and the lesser is expected to obey. Jesus then added: *Even so you also, when you have done all the things that are commanded you, say, 'We are unworthy servants. We have done our duty.'* (Luke 17:10)

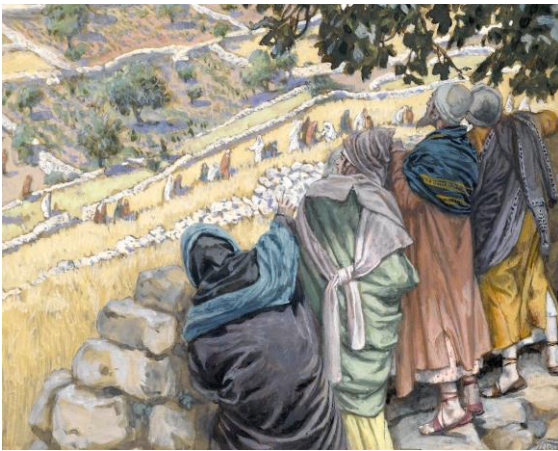
The disciples were being told that they were servants and their duty was to obey God. In the case of the Samaritans' rejection of Jesus, the role of Judge belonged to God alone. James and John were trying to usurp that role by assuming they had the right to judge and destroy. They were forgetting who the Master was. This human tendency to inflate one self above God has been going on since Adam and Eve obeyed the serpent's temptation to eat the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden. They wanted to be like God, having His wisdom, and the resultant power that came with it.

The serpent said to the woman, "You won't surely die, for God knows that in the day you eat it, your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took some of its fruit, and ate; and she gave some to her husband with her, and he ate it, too. (Genesis 3:4-6)

It is astounding that creatures could ever suppose themselves on an equal footing with their Creator, but it appears to be the essence of sin itself. The core of sin is pride and the archangel Satan was the first creature to succumb to its influence. The humans came next. There are many Scriptures that address the problem of human pride. Proverbs 16:18-19 tells us that *'Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall. It is better to be of a lowly spirit with the poor, than to divide the plunder with the proud'*.

Just as pride was the downfall of Satan who had the audacity to think He could replace God as the rightful ruler of the universe, Adam and Eve thought they could attain God's omniscient wisdom. Pride takes the credit (glory) for God's accomplishments and ascribes greatness to itself. It is in essence self-worship. Satan, Adam, and Eve all wanted to be 'gods' who could do great things. The truth is that all we accomplish in this world is only possible because of God's enablement. Only the Lord deserves the glory, and only He can judge the world and its occupants. It is most dangerous to step out of God's order and assume His divine prerogatives.

Ten Lepers Healed



On the way to Jerusalem, ten men who had leprosy met up with Jesus. Leprosy was one of the 61 defilements listed in the Jewish laws. A leper could not come within six feet of any other human,

including his own family. If the wind was blowing, he couldn't come within 150 feet of anyone. There was no medicine at that time for this dreaded disease, so lepers were forced to live in leper communities until they got better or died.

This was why the 10 lepers stood at a distance, calling out to the Lord in a loud voice, "*Jesus, Master, have pity on us!*" Jesus saw them and told them to show themselves to the priests so that they could be declared clean. As they went off to do as Jesus commanded, they were instantly healed and cleansed of leprosy. One of them, a Samaritan, after recognizing that he was cleansed, came back to Jesus, praising God in a loud voice and throwing himself at Jesus' feet.

Jesus asked, "*Weren't the ten cleansed? But where are the nine? Were there none found who returned to give glory to God, except this stranger?*"(Luke 17:17-18)

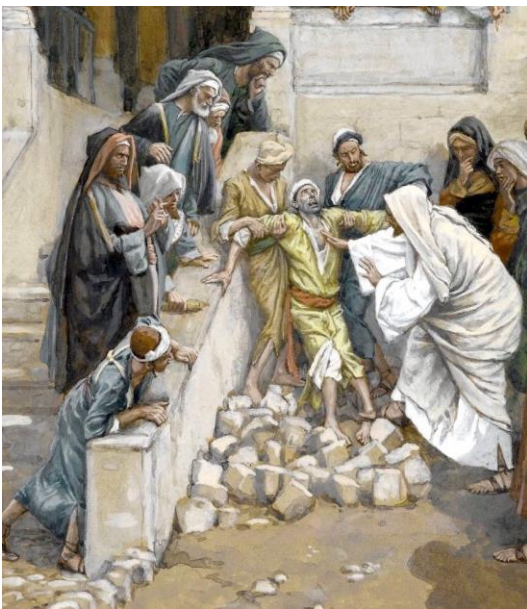
Then Jesus told him to rise and go for his faith had made him well.

Gratitude for God's many blessings is something many people neglect. It is so easy to take God's goodness and kindness for granted. Those who are unbelievers do this every day of their lives.

Because, knowing God, they didn't glorify him as God, neither gave thanks, but became vain in their reasoning, and their senseless heart was darkened. (Romans 1:21)

As believers, we should be especially grateful to God for the amazing things He has done for us through Jesus Christ. Our sins are forgiven; we have power over the flesh so that we are no longer slaves to sin; we have been reborn as new creations with Christ's divine nature; we have the indwelling Holy Spirit as our Teacher and Comforter; we are guilt-free and no longer in bondage to the Old Covenant Law; we have homes in heaven already prepared for us; we have been immortalized through being raised with Christ; we reign with Him in the heavenly realm; we have God's promises of protection and provision; we are declared to be God's very own children; and myriad more. Of all people on the face of the earth, Christians have the most to be thankful for.

Give thanks to Yahweh, for he is good; for his loving kindness endures forever. (Psalm 136:1)



Giving thanks always concerning all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to God, even the Father. (Ephesians 5:20)

Man Born Blind

As Jesus went along, He saw a man who had been blind from birth. His disciples asked Jesus whether this was because the parents had sinned, or was it because of the man's

sins. While it is true that sin can lead to consequences (genetic birth defects or diseases from sexual promiscuity) Jesus replied that in this case, it was the fault of neither. Sickness and disease are the result of Adam's sin that cursed mankind as a whole. Disease also comes through Satan's schemes, such as the boils and physical torment the enemy brought upon Job, a righteous man. Jesus told His disciples that the reason this particular man was born blind was so that God could be glorified.

The man's healing would be a testimony to God's great power and mercy. Jesus then spit on the ground and made mud with His saliva, putting it on the man's eyes. He told the man to go wash it off at the Pool of Siloam. The man did as instructed and as a result, he went home seeing. Imagine the man's wonder and amazement as he went along, seeing trees, houses, and people for the first time in his life! His neighbors were amazed to see this former beggar now completely healed. Some couldn't believe that it was the same man. They asked him to explain exactly what had happened and he told them. Then they wanted to know where Jesus was, but the man didn't know. Before too long, the Pharisees heard about the miracle and they also wanted to know where Jesus was, especially as the healing had occurred on the Sabbath. To their mind, this was an infraction of the Law proving that Jesus could not possibly be from God. He was an offender who needed to be punished. In reality, the Pharisees were totally blinded by their legalism, unable to appreciate the amazing miracle right before their eyes. They were so hardened that they could feel no joy for the man who could now see after a lifetime of being blind. However some of them wondered how a sinner could perform such signs, so they were divided in opinion. Then they turned back to the blind man to interrogate him some more.

Finally they approached the man's parents to verify his identity, but the parents were afraid to say too much because the Pharisees had already decided that whoever acknowledged Jesus as the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. The parents would only admit that the healed man was indeed their son and he had been blind from birth. They added that they knew nothing about the healing and that the Pharisees should ask their son, not them, for details.

Pharisees Investigate

The Pharisees had no intention of dropping the matter so they once again summoned the man, telling him to give glory to God by admitting the truth because there was no way Jesus could be anything but a sinner. At this, the man replied: *"I don't know if he is a sinner. One thing I do know: that though I was blind, now I see."* (John 9:25) When they began to question him again, he finally had enough and answered, *"I told you already, and you didn't listen. Why do you want to hear it again? You don't also want to become his disciples, do you?"* This sarcastic question enraged the Pharisees. They began hurling insults at him, accusing him of being Jesus' disciple. *"We are disciples of Moses!"* they proclaimed. *We know that God has spoken to Moses. But as for this man, we don't know where he comes from.* At that, the man gave another sarcastic rejoinder: *"How amazing! You don't know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes. We know that God doesn't listen to sinners, but if anyone is a worshiper of God, and does his will, he listens to him. Since the world began it has*

never been heard of that anyone opened the eyes of someone born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.” (John 9:25-33)

It was quite a defense, clearly affirming the man’s conviction that Jesus’ healing powers proved that He was righteous and from God. It was also a rebuke for the Pharisees’ ignorance. The Pharisees were insulted, calling the healed man a lowly sinner and denouncing him for daring to lecture them. Then they excommunicated him from the synagogue.

Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and He went looking for him. The man obviously had faith and Jesus wanted to follow up on it. When He found him, He asked the man if he believed in the Son of Man. The man replied: *“Who is he, Lord, that I may believe in him?”* Jesus said to him, *“You have both seen him, and it is he who speaks with you.”* The man said, *“Lord, I believe!” and he worshiped him. (John 9 36-38)*

After this Jesus made the statement that He had come into the world for judgment, so that the blind would be able to see, and those who could see would become blind. In other words, Jesus was saying that He had come into the world to give spiritual sight to those who were blind to the truth, while keeping in the dark those who assumed to know the truth. Some Pharisees heard Jesus say this and asked if He was referring to them as being blind. Jesus replied that if they were truly blind (unaware of their lost condition), they would not be guilty of sin because they could claim ignorance, as was the case with the common poor people who did not know much about the Old Testament and therefore often sinned unknowingly. The Pharisees, however, had lots of knowledge because they studied the scriptures constantly, and yet they refused to accept that they were lost sinners in need of salvation. They assumed that they were holy and righteous in themselves, and thus their guilt remained.

CHAPTER 20

Pharisee & Tax Collector, Persistent Widow, Sinning Brother, Unmerciful Servant, Rich Fool



Pharisee & Tax Collector

The Pharisees were confident of their own righteousness and arrogantly looked down on everyone else as being inferior to them. For this type, Jesus told a parable meant to expose their hypocrisy. The story was about two men who went to the Temple to pray. One was a Pharisee and the other was a tax collector. The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: *'God, I thank you, that I am not like the rest of men, extortionists, unrighteous, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week. I give tithes of all that I get.'* (Luke 18:11-12) This man exhibited no repentance for sin because he didn't see himself as a sinner. He was self-righteous, trusting in his human works, such as fasting and tithing, to gain acceptance with God. However the tax collector stood at a distance, too ashamed to even look up to heaven. He beat his breast in sorrow and prayed: *'God, be merciful to me, a sinner.'* This man knew

himself to be in need of God's grace and mercy. He came to God with nothing but a longing for God's forgiveness. Jesus ended the story by explaining that it was the repentant sinner who went home justified before God rather than the Pharisee. He added that all those who exalt themselves would be humbled (brought low) whereas those who humble themselves would be exalted. This is what Isaiah had meant when he prophesied: *Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low. The uneven shall be made level, and the rough places a plain.* (Isaiah 40:4)

Persistent Widow

Another story Jesus told His disciples was about persistent prayer. It involved a judge who had no fear of God and didn't care what people thought of him. In his town there lived a poor widow who kept coming to him with a plea for justice against her adversary. The judge kept refusing but he finally realized that the widow was not going to give up and she would bother him until he did something for her. Jesus explained that if the unjust judge finally dispensed justice for the widow, how much more would a merciful God provide justice for His chosen ones who cry out to Him continually? He would definitely not put them off but would see that they received justice quickly.

Jesus was making a subtle allusion to His second coming when He would come as a Judge to exact justice against the self-righteous Jews for persecuting God's people. They had killed the prophets of old and were now persecuting Jesus and His disciples. The Lord was telling His followers to persevere in prayer when they suffered, believing that God would surely provide justice on their behalf. Then He asked a surprising question. *'However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?'* (Luke 18:8) In other words, would His people have enough faith to believe for justice when He came back to judge the Jews?

Sinning Brother

Earlier Jesus had taught His disciples about forgiveness between brethren, but now He returned to the topic to explain how forgiveness worked if an offender wouldn't repent after being confronted with his sin. In such cases, where reason and discussion were without effect, the offended party was to take along one or two others as witnesses and again confront the offender with his sin. If he refused to listen in the company of the witnesses, then the matter was to be presented to the Church. If the offender still refused to repent, then he was to be put outside the Church and treated as a pagan or a tax collector. Jesus said that the Church had the authority to make decisions concerning who would be included in their number, and who would be rejected. In fact, Jesus was investing in His followers a great amount of power to command, determine, and judge in matters of faith.

Most certainly I tell you, whatever things you bind on earth will have been bound in heaven, and whatever things you release on earth will have been released in heaven. Again, assuredly I tell you, that if two of you will agree on earth concerning

anything that they will ask, it will be done for them by my Father who is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am in the middle of them.”(Matthew 18:18-20)

The ramifications of this were astounding for if only two believers were in agreement about anything they asked, it would be done for them by the Father in heaven. It must have greatly encouraged and comforted the disciples to hear this wonderful news.

However Peter, who had been given the keys to the kingdom and would undoubtedly be responsible for making many Church decisions regarding feuding brethren, saw a potential problem with Jesus’ teaching on forgiveness. Should an offender really be forgiven if they repeated offences as many as 7 times? Jesus shocked Peter by telling him that an erring, but penitent brother or sister was to be forgiven not just 7 times, but 77 times! Then He told a parable to further explain what He meant.

Unmerciful Servant

Jesus explained that the kingdom of heaven was like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. One man owed him ten thousand bags of gold but when the man told his master that he was unable to repay him, the king ordered that he and his wife and his children all be sold to repay the debt. The servant was dismayed and fell on his knees, begging his master for mercy. He promised to repay the debt eventually if only the king would be patient. The king felt sorry for the man and canceled the debt and let him go. However as the servant went on his way, he met up with a fellow servant who owed him a hundred silver coins. He roughly grabbed the man and began to choke him, demanding repayment of the debt. When the debtor fell to his knees and begged for mercy, the servant refused, dragging him off to prison until the debt was repaid. Other servants saw all this and they went to tell their master about it. The king called the servant in and rebuked the man. *‘You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt, because you begged me. Shouldn’t you also have had mercy on your fellow servant, even as I had mercy on you?’ (Matthew 18:32-34)* Then the angry king handed him over to the jailers to be tortured until he paid back all he owed. Jesus told the disciples that this would be how His heavenly Father would treat those who would not sincerely forgive a sinning brother or sister who repented and asked for mercy.

Jesus’ parable was not advocating the forgiveness of the impenitent who had no intention of righting their wrongs, but for those who felt true remorse for offences and wanted to make things right. The nature of Christ is to forgive those who repent and Jesus was making it clear that He fully expected His followers to exhibit this kind of mercy.

Rich Fool

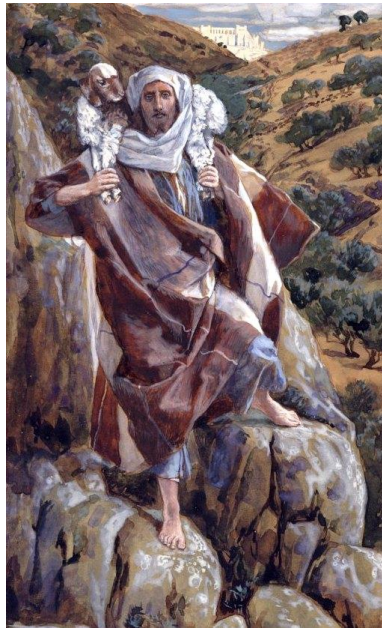
Perhaps it was the context of righting wrongs that inspired someone in the crowd to ask Jesus to command his brother to divide an inheritance with him. However Jesus challenged the man for presumptively assigning Him as the arbiter in his situation. Jesus must have recognized the real motive behind the man's demand because He immediately gave out a strong warning against greed. *"Beware! Keep yourselves from covetousness, for a man's life doesn't consist of the abundance of the things which he possesses." (Luke 12:15)*

Then He told them a parable about a rich man who had an abundant harvest and wondered what he should do with the bountiful crops. After pondering the situation, he decided to tear down all his existing barns and build bigger ones in which to store the surplus grain. Seeing that he had enough grain to last him for many years, he thought about how he could now take life easy and just eat, drink, and be merry. But that night God came to him, saying: *'You foolish one, tonight your soul is required of you. The things which you have prepared—whose will they be?'* (Luke 12:20)

Jesus warned that this was how it would be with whoever stored up things for himself but was not rich toward God. Living a selfish, greedy life would only result in the loss of everything in the end. All material possessions would be gone and there would be no lasting testimony of honor for such a misspent life. It would all be useless when it came time to pass into the hereafter. After hearing this story, perhaps the man asking for his half of the inheritance reconsidered his request and chose a different focus for his life, one that centered on God instead of himself.

CHAPTER 21

Good Shepherd, Unbelief of the Jews, Repent or Perish, Crippled Woman Healed



Good Shepherd

One time when Jesus was talking to some Pharisees, He told the story of a shepherd and his sheep. He said that a shepherd will enter the sheep pen by a gate, but thieves and robbers climb over it or try to enter in some other way. Sheep learn to recognize the voice of the shepherd so that when he calls, they immediately follow. But if a stranger comes, the sheep don't recognize his voice and they will not follow him. In fact, they will run from him. The Pharisees did not understand the allegory so Jesus had to explain it for them. He informed them that He was the gate for the sheep and the others (meaning the Pharisees, Jewish leaders, or false prophets) were thieves and robbers. He said: *I am the door (gate). If anyone enters in by me, he will be saved, and will go in and go out, and will find pasture. (John 9:10)* He was meaning that

whoever came to Him for salvation would find rest for his soul (symbolized as finding green pastures). Anyone promoting another way to God was actually a thief who sought only to kill and destroy. Only Jesus could bring abundant life. As a good shepherd, He cared so greatly for the sheep that He would lay down His own life for them. In contrast, those typified as hired hands cared nothing for the sheep because the sheep did not belong to them. When a hired hand saw a wolf approaching, he would abandon the sheep and run away, leaving the defenseless sheep to be attacked and scattered.

It was the same with the self-serving Pharisees and other religious leaders. They manipulated and controlled the people without caring for their souls, looking out only for themselves. Jesus contrasted their selfishness with God's protective love and commitment to His people, stressing the intimate relationship He had with them. *"I am the good Shepherd,"* Jesus said. *'I know my own, and I'm known by my own, even as the Father knows me, and I know the Father. I lay down my life for the sheep. (John 10:14-15)* This intimacy between the Father, Jesus, and God's people went deep and united them together. Jesus added that there were other believers from a different sheep pen (i.e. Gentiles) who had yet to join this intimate relationship. They too would hear His call and come to Him. In the end, there would be one flock with one Shepherd. This would happen after He laid down His life for His followers and then rose again. The Father loved Jesus for His willingness to do this, especially as it was entirely of His free will that He would make the sacrifice. Jesus was pointing to Himself as the rightful Savior of God's people whereas the Pharisees were self-serving charlatans. The Jews who heard these words were divided in their response. Some were impressed by Jesus' words and miracles, while others were insulted and accused Him of being demon-possessed and insane.

Unbelief of the Jews

By this time it was winter and Jesus was in Jerusalem for the Festival of Dedication. He was walking in the temple courts in Solomon's Colonnade when some Jews gathered around Him, again demanding that He tell them plainly whether or not He was the Messiah. Jesus' reply hints at His exasperation with their unbelief and repetitious demands. Continuing His earlier analogy of the shepherd and sheep, Jesus accused the Jewish leaders of being unable to recognize Him because they were not His 'sheep'. This was why even Jesus' miracles made no impression upon them, whereas those who belonged to God listened to His voice and followed Him.

I am the good shepherd. I know my own, and I'm known by my own; even as the Father knows me, and I know the Father. I lay down my life for the sheep. (John 10:27-28)

This statement described explicitly the inviolable relationship between God and His people. Those belonging to God could never be lost or snatched out of His care. They were completely protected by God. Jesus added that He and the Father were one, thereby implying that He Himself, as the Good Shepherd, protected His sheep as well. The Jewish leaders were enraged by the Lord's words, especially the last part about being 'one with the Father'. They clearly recognized that Jesus was claiming to

be the Messiah and He was also claiming equality with God. Finally He was speaking plainly enough for them! Now they felt completely justified in executing Him for blasphemy. They began picking up rocks to stone Him but Jesus said to them, *“I have shown you many good works from my Father. For which of those works do you stone me?”* (John 10:32) The leaders retorted that they were not stoning Him for any good work, but rather because He was claiming to be God. Jesus turned the argument around on them by asking them why it was then written in the Law, *“Isn’t it written in your law, ‘I said, you are gods?’* (John 10:34)

This came from an Old Testament scripture: *They don’t know, neither do they understand. They walk back and forth in darkness. All the foundations of the earth are shaken. I said, “You are gods, all of you are sons of the Most High. Nevertheless you shall die like men, and fall like one of the rulers.”* (Psalm 82:5-7)

The context of this passage is God’s statement that earthly judges (gods) must act with true justice because they too will be judged by the Almighty God. They were like ‘gods’ on the earth, like sons of the Most High, but they would die like mere mortal men who would have to give an account to God for how they used their authority. The term ‘god’ was also used when God sent Moses to Pharaoh, saying, *“Behold, I have made you as god to Pharaoh; and Aaron your brother shall be your prophet.* (Exodus 7:1). This was because Moses was speaking as God’s judge or representative. Jesus was making the point that the Pharisees were charging Him with blasphemy because He called Himself the “Son of God” but their own Scriptures gave the same term to judges in general. If influential men could be considered “gods,” how much more could the Messiah rightfully apply that term to Himself. Jesus then told them not to believe Him because of His words, but because of His miraculous works. These spoke for themselves and clearly revealed that He and His Father were one (united in the Godhead). Again the leaders tried to seize Him, but He escaped their grasp, perhaps in the same way He was able to elude His opponents at other times.

Repent or Perish

After this Jesus headed towards Jordon to the place where John had once baptized. He stayed there for a time and many believers came out to see Him. Some people warned Jesus about the governor, Pontius Pilate, who had mixed the blood of Galileans with their sacrifices. There is no other mention of this event in the Bible or in history so it is unclear to what this is referring. Pilate was the governor of Judea in 26 AD and he often came against the Jews whom he saw as stubborn and fanatical. This reference seems to indicate that he clashed with some people from Galilee, some of whom he killed as they were worshipping. Certain Jews apparently assumed that the Galileans had brought this horror upon themselves through their rebellion and sin. Jesus used their supposition to draw parallels to their own condition.

Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all perish in the same way. (Luke 13:2)

Jesus explained that they were just as guilty as the ones who had suffered those tragedies.



Then He told them a parable about a man who had a fig tree growing in his vineyard but when he inspected it, he found there was no fruit on its branches. He had been looking for fruit for 3 years and always the tree remained barren. He was finally fed up and commanded it to be cut down, but his manager suggested leaving it for one more year and providing extra fertilizer and aeration. If it still didn't bear fruit, then it could be cut down.

Of course the fig tree in the parable symbolized the nation of Israel, which continually disappointed God by continuing in sin and rebellion. The parable revealed that God would give the Jews a short period of grace (which would be through the ministry of Jesus and His followers), but if there were still no fruits of repentance, God would judge the nation and destroy it.

Crippled Woman Healed

One Sabbath Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues, and a woman was there who was bent over, having been crippled by an evil spirit for 18 years. Jesus saw her and called her forward, saying: *"Woman, you are freed from your infirmity."* (Luke 13:12)



Then He put His hands on her, and immediately she straightened up and praised God. She must have been delirious with joy to finally walk with full dignity; to at long last be able to look people in the eye instead of having to continually gaze at the ground. Because of her healing she would no longer be an object of pity or scorn. Witnessing this amazing miracle should have caused great jubilation throughout the synagogue, and there were doubtless some who shared the

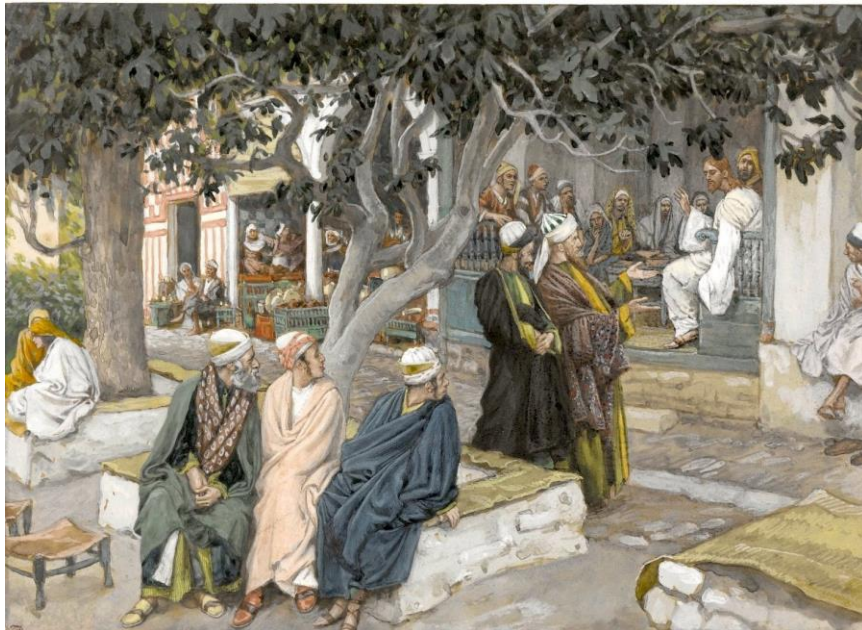
woman's joy, but because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, the synagogue leader scolded the people, saying: *"There are six days in which men ought to work. Therefore come on those days and be healed, and not on the Sabbath day!"*

Jesus angrily rebuked the man, along with all those siding with him. *"You hypocrites!"* He retorted. *Doesn't each one of you free his ox or his donkey from the stall on the Sabbath, and lead him away to water? Ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan had bound eighteen long years, be freed from this bondage on the Sabbath day?"* (Luke 13:15-16)

Jesus was astounded that these leaders had more concern for their animals' welfare than for a poor Jewish woman. His words shamed His opponents, but the rest of the people were delighted with all the wonderful things He was doing. Of course that would have been seen as a direct threat to the Pharisees who needed the respect of the people if they were to retain their dominance over them. If the crowds saw Jesus as having greater wisdom and power than the religious leaders, then those leaders could lose their hold over the populace. Already their control was slipping fast. How could they possibly compete with this young carpenter's teaching and miracles? Plus, Jesus was refuting their arguments and exposing them as hard-hearted hypocrites who cared nothing for the people. Soon the crowds would choose the compassionate Jesus over the cold-hearted religious leaders - something they could not allow. Obviously they had to stop Jesus before the people were completely won over by Him.

CHAPTER 22

Pharisee's House, Discipleship, Divorce, Rich Ruler, Vineyard Workers



Jesus at Pharisee's House

One Sabbath Jesus was dining at the house of an important Pharisee and the guests there were watching Him carefully. In front of Jesus was a man suffering from an abnormal swelling of his body. The Pharisee had probably invited this man to be present at his house, knowing that Jesus would likely heal him. After all, the Lord had healed on the Sabbath before. If Jesus healed this man in front of the Pharisee and the other religious leaders in attendance, they would be witnesses to the fact and this would give them the perfect excuse to have Jesus arrested for breaking the Law. Jesus knew it was a setup because He asked the Pharisees and experts in the law, *"Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?"* Perhaps unsure where this question was headed, the leaders remained silent. Jesus then took hold of the man and healed him right there in front of them, afterwards sending him on his way. He may have sent him away to protect him from being harassed by the Pharisees as had

happened when Jesus healed a man born blind. Jesus then turned to the religious leaders and asked them what they would do if one of their children or a valuable animal, like an ox, fell into a well on the Sabbath. Would they not immediately pull it out? The Pharisees were silenced, unable to say anything. They could not deny that they would save the child or animal, even it happened on the Sabbath.

But if they said so, they knew Jesus would then argue that it was therefore acceptable to heal on the Sabbath as well. The clever reasoning of the Lord had completely dumbfounded them and overturned their plans to ensnare Him.

Jesus noticed how the guests at this dinner were picking places of honor at the table. Jesus took this opportunity to teach the guests a parable about a wedding feast. He told them not to take the place of honor at the table in case a more distinguished guest arrived and the host, who had invited them both, would require the first one to give the honored seat to the important guest. This would humiliate him, so it was better to take the lowest place. That way, when the host came, he would tell him to move up to a better place, thus showing him honor in front of all the guests. Jesus ended the parable by saying: *'Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.'* (Matthew 23:12) Then Jesus told His host that when he gave a lunch or dinner, he should not invite his friends, relatives, and rich neighbors because they would just return the favor. Instead, he should give a banquet for the poor, the lame, and the blind, because in that way he would be blessed. Even though the poor guests could not repay the host's act of kindness, he would be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous. Obviously the Lord gave these Pharisees and religious leaders a lot to think about, and they probably went home frustrated that their plans to humble Jesus had resulted in them being humbled instead.

Cost of Being a Disciple

Large crowds were now traveling with Jesus, and as He had done at other times, He now challenged their commitment to Him by telling them plainly of the cost involved. Commitment to the Lord required putting Him before their families - even giving up their lives for Him. If they could not bear severance of their social ties or surrender their lives in order to follow Him, then they could not be His disciples. They needed to think carefully about this. Jesus illustrated this with an example of a man building a tower. Obviously the man would first sit down and estimate the expenses of such a venture to see if he had enough finances to complete it. If the man just went ahead and laid a foundation without counting the cost, he could possibly run out of money and be unable to finish the project. Then everyone who saw this would ridicule the man as being foolish. It was the same with a king who went to war against another king without first considering whether his army could overcome a larger opposing army. A smart king would consider the situation and if he thought it was unlikely that he could win the battle, he would send out a delegation in advance to ask for terms of peace. Jesus used these examples to exhort His followers to think carefully about the cost of becoming His disciple. It would definitely require sacrifice.

Jesus followed up with the reminder that His disciples were to be like salt, a commodity much valued in the ancient world for its preservative properties. The Mosaic Law required that all Temple offerings presented by the Israelites contain salt. The salt purified the offerings so that they were acceptable to God.

These offerings symbolized Christ's disciples who were to be pure offerings consecrated to God for kingdom service. They were also to extend their preservative effect by bringing the gospel of God's grace to the world so that many could be saved from the corruption and sin. Jesus added: *Salt is good, but if the salt becomes flat and tasteless, with what do you season it? It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile. It is thrown out. He who has ears to hear, let him hear.*"(Luke 13:34-35)

In other words, if an aspiring disciple did not count the cost of following Jesus and later found that he was unable to follow through in his commitment, he would be unfit for the kingdom of God (having lost his saltiness). Jesus said: *For everyone will be salted with fire, and every sacrifice will be seasoned with salt. (Mark 9:49)* indicating that discipleship would not be easy. *'Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another.'*"(Mark 9:50) This meant they were to preserve the bond of unity and peace among themselves, which would be crucial if they were to reach the world with the gospel and be examples of Christian brotherhood.

Divorce

Jesus left Galilee and went into Judea to the other side of the Jordan. Large crowds followed Him as usual, and He healed them there. Among the crowd were some Pharisees who came to test Him. They asked Jesus if it was lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason. They asked this question because there was a lot of controversy about divorce at the time. The two most common views were quite opposite, one deriving from a teacher named Hillel who advocated that a Jewish man could divorce his wife for any reason whatsoever, and the other view from a teacher named Shammai who taught that divorce was to be strictly limited. The Pharisees hoped to corner Jesus into choosing one or the other viewpoint, thus decreasing His popularity with the opposing side. Jesus handled the Pharisees by referring to the very beginning of the Scripture where it is said that God made them male and female *'Therefore a man will leave his father and his mother, and will join with his wife, and they will be one flesh'.* (Genesis 2:24) Jesus added that this made the couple one flesh and therefore what God had joined together was not to be separated. The Pharisees didn't like that answer, so they pursued the matter by asking why Moses had permitted a man to give his wife a certificate of divorce so that he could send her away. They were undoubtedly thinking of the Law's provision that stated: *When a man takes a wife and marries her, then it shall be, if she finds no favor in his eyes, because he has found some unseemly thing in her, that he shall write her a bill of divorce... When she has departed out of his house, she may go and be another man's wife. If the latter husband hates her, and writes her a bill of divorce... or if the latter husband dies...her former husband, who sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife, after that she is defiled; for that is abomination before Yahweh. (Deuteronomy 24:1-4)*

Jesus responded that Moses had permitted the divorcing of wives because men's hearts were hard, but divorce was not the ideal and had never been God's original plan. (It is interesting that only the men are mentioned as doing the divorcing.)

According to Moses, if a husband saw some type of uncleanness or indecency in his wife, whatever that might be, a divorce was permitted. But Jesus said that this permission was in recognition that some husbands could act abusively towards their unwanted wives, making their lives hell on earth. To protect women from harsh treatment and contempt from their spouses, divorce was allowed as a way out, both for the husband who no longer wanted his wife, but also for the rejected woman. However Jesus didn't end the matter there. He added that God's view was that anyone who divorced his wife, except for sexual immorality, and married another woman, was actually committing adultery. This statement would have shocked the Pharisees. Not only had Jesus placed before them a standard much higher than the Law demanded, but He had also avoided taking sides on the issue between the two prevailing views. As usual, Jesus had cleverly evaded their trap by avoiding getting embroiled in controversy. However the Lord's teaching dismayed Jesus' disciples.

*"If this is the case of the man with his wife,' they said, 'it is not expedient to marry."
(Matthew 19:10)*

Jesus replied that not everyone could stay celibate, except maybe for eunuchs who were born that way, or had been made that way by others. Additionally there were those like Himself who chose celibate lives for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Jesus said that if a person could do the latter, it was good for him to do so in order to focus exclusively on preaching the gospel to the world.

One thing noteworthy about Jesus' teaching was His reference to marriage being between a man and woman, not between two people of the same gender. For the Jews this was a given, as the Law was stringently clear on the matter.

*If a man lies with a male, as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination: they shall surely be put to death; their blood shall be upon them.
(Leviticus 20:13)*

The apostles later confirmed this with New Testament scripture. *'For this reason, God gave them up to vile passions. For their women changed the natural function into that which is against nature. Likewise also the men, leaving the natural function of the woman, burned in their lust toward one another, men doing what is inappropriate with men, and receiving in themselves the due penalty of their error. (Romans 1:26-27)*

However the Greek and Roman cultures of that time tolerated homosexuality. In fact, 13 out of the first 14 Roman Emperors are deemed to have been bisexual or exclusively homosexual. Also, homosexual marriages were not uncommon in these cultures. Nero was reported to have married two other men. In the first marriage, he

took the role of the bride when he married his freedman, Pythagoras. Later Nero was the groom in a marriage to a young teenage eunuch named Sporus who replaced Nero's concubine, Poppaea Sabina, whom he had executed.

His marriage to Sporus was very public with all the solemnities of matrimony, including a marriage settlement. The 'bride' was dressed in bridal finery with a rose-colored veil, and a friend gave the "bride" away as required by law. Then Nero invited numerous guests to the wedding, and after the ceremony was over, he conducted his new bride home.

Such behavior horrified the Jews in Jesus' time, although today in the 21st century, such same-sex marriages are viewed as acceptable and such unions are practiced in many parts of the world. From the Old Testament scriptures and from what Jesus said, however, this is 'shameless' and 'detestable' in the eyes of God.

Rich Young Ruler

One time a rich young ruler approached Jesus, addressing Him as 'good teacher' and asking Him what he had to do to inherit eternal life. Jesus asked: *"Why do you call me good? No one is good except one—God. (Mark 10:18)* This was Jesus' way of challenging the young man to recognize that only God was perfectly righteous. Undoubtedly Jesus knew beforehand that this young man had a presumptuous view of himself. So Jesus referred the man to the commandments - do not commit adultery, do not murder, do not steal, do not bear false witness, honor your father and mother, etc.

The young ruler naively replied that he had kept all the commandments from his youth. He was probably very sincere in spite of his naivety and arrogance because Jesus let him down gently, saying: *"You still lack one thing. Sell all that you have, and distribute it to the poor. You will have treasure in heaven. Come, follow me." (Luke 18:22)* When the young man heard this, he became very sad, for he was extremely rich. Jesus, seeing that he was crestfallen, exclaimed how difficult it was for those who had wealth to enter the kingdom of God. In fact it was easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God. Jesus may have been using a figure of speech that exaggerates for the sake of emphasizing something. Jesus did this at other times, such as when He referred to a "plank" in one's eye (Matthew 7:3-5) and swallowing a camel (Matthew 23:24). Jesus had made the young ruler realize that there was at least one commandment that he was unable to keep. He coveted riches and was unwilling to give them to the poor, choosing earthly treasure over heavenly treasure. Covetousness was forbidden according to the 10th commandment of the Law. This was well known of course, but many Jewish rabbis taught that rich people were blessed by God, making them more likely candidates for heaven. Jesus destroyed that idea and also made it clear that the Law's commandments were impossible for anyone to keep perfectly. This must have humbled the young ruler and he probably went away a much humbler man.

Those who heard this conversation were as dismayed as the ruler, for they asked Jesus *“Then who can be saved?”* Jesus told them that what was impossible with man was possible with God.

In other words, man cannot save himself, especially when he has a lot of the world’s goods, but God can change hearts and save even the very wealthy. Peter reminded the Lord that he and the disciples had left their homes to follow Him. Perhaps Peter was seeking the Lord’s commendation for having done what the rich young ruler couldn’t, or perhaps he just wanted reassurance that because of their sacrifice, they were guaranteed treasure in heaven. Jesus assured Peter that anyone who had left home or family for the sake of the kingdom of God would receive much more than what had been sacrificed, both in the present life and in the age to come.

Vineyard Workers

Peter’s affirmation of his willingness to make sacrifices and the wealthy ruler’s hesitancy to do likewise may have been the reason for the Lord’s next parable. In this one, Jesus compared the kingdom of heaven to a landowner who went out in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard. Finding some, he agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them into his vineyard. Later on, the landowner saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing and he offered them a job working in his vineyard. He didn’t fix a wage at that time, promising to pay them fairly. They agreed and away they went. At noon, and later at 3:00 and 5:00 in the afternoon, the landowner hired some others as well. When evening came, the owner told his foreman to call all the workers and pay them, beginning with the last ones hired. All the workers received the exact same wage of one denarius. Naturally the ones who were hired first expected to receive more because they had worked longer.

When they saw that this was not the case, they began to grumble against the landowner. However the landowner insisted that he was not being unfair because they had agreed to one denarius. If he wanted to give the last ones hired the same wage that was none of their concern. He insisted that he had every right to do what he wanted with his own money. Then he challenged the grumblers by asking if they were envious because he was being generous. Jesus ended by saying: *“So the last will be first, and the first last. For many are called, but few are chosen. (Matthew 20:16)*

Jesus was actually speaking prophetically about those who would be called to enter the kingdom of heaven. The first group to be called was the Jews, but the call would later go out to the Gentiles as well. God would show no favoritism because He would extend the same salvation (wages) to all. This would offend the Jews who would think they deserved greater blessings because they had been called God’s people from the beginning. However God could do what He wanted with His creation. Jesus was using this parable to show that God’s salvation didn’t depend on race, seniority or merit, but rather on God’s sovereign choice.

CHAPTER 23

Good Samaritan, Mary & Martha, Festival of Shelters, Blind Guides



The Good Samaritan

Jesus kept having run-ins with Pharisees who repeatedly condemned Him for healing people on the Sabbath. These religious leaders did not show compassion for those being healed, being far more concerned about the regulations Jesus supposedly violated. Although Jesus always bested them with His wise answers and exposed their faulty arguments, they kept trying to lay snares for Him, hoping He would do or say something that would be incriminating. This happened again when an expert in the Law tested Jesus by asking: *“Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?”* Jesus replied with a question of His own, asking the man what his opinion was, as written in the Law. The religious expert answered: *“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and*

with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.” Jesus said to him, “You have answered correctly. Do this, and you will live.” (Luke 10:25-28)

(This was called the Royal Law by the apostle James in the New Testament when he said: *However, if you fulfill the royal law, according to the Scripture, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself;” you do well. (James 2:8)*

Jesus commended the religious expert for answering correctly and told him that if he did that, he would have eternal life. The expert, however, wasn't satisfied with the Lord's answer. He didn't seem to be concerned about the first requirement of the Royal Law (loving God with all his being). Perhaps this was because he was confident that he had adhered to all the standards of the Law and thereby proved his devotion to God. However the part about loving his neighbor gave him pause. It was understandable that everyone should love his friends and family, but surely Jesus didn't mean that everyone was his neighbor. However Jesus did have the habit of associating with Samaritans and sinners, so the Lord's definition of a neighbor might be more inclusive than his own. This prompted the man to ask Jesus to define the meaning of the word 'neighbor'. In reply, Jesus told him a parable, which was designed not only to answer his question, but to also expose his heart in the process.

In the story, a man was traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho when robbers suddenly attacked him. They stripped him of his clothes and severely beat him, leaving him half dead on the side of the road. A Jewish priest happened to come along, but when he saw the beaten man on the road, he passed by on the other side. Then a Levite came along but he also passed by on the opposite side of the path. As the two religious leaders continued on their way, a Samaritan who was traveling by saw the beaten man and took pity on him.

Israelite priests were always Levites, but Levites weren't always priests. Levites who were descended from Aaron served in the Temple, while Levites who were not descended from Aaron, were given lesser ceremonial offices under the priests. Both were consecrated to the performance of religious duties. Although the parable does not tell us why these 2 religious leaders ignored the fallen man, it may have been that they didn't want to become ritually unclean by touching his wounds. The Law stated that a person could become impure from skin diseases, discharges of bodily fluids, touching something dead, or eating unclean foods. If a person did become unclean, he had to take steps to return to a state of cleanness. Priests especially were to avoid becoming ritually defiled, or else they could not carry out their sacred duties in the Temple. Purification always involved waiting a period of time and could also involve ritual washings. These two religious men may not have wanted to go through the trouble of all that. They were like so many of the Pharisees Jesus encountered in the synagogues, who were meticulous about observing the legal technicalities of the Law even to the point of becoming blind to the sufferings of the unfortunate.

Samaritans were a racially mixed society with Jewish and pagan ancestry, generally

despised by the Jews who refused to even associate with them.

Like the wounded victim on the road, Samaritans knew what it was to be rejected and treated with disdain. The Samaritan in the parable bandaged up the poor man's wounds, put him on his own donkey, and brought him to an inn where he continued to take care of him. Next day he gave some money to the innkeeper to continue caring for the man, promising to return and reimburse the innkeeper for all expenses.

Jesus ended the parable by asking: "*Now which of these three do you think seemed to be a neighbor to him who fell among the robbers?*" (Luke 10:36) The answer was obvious and the expert in the Law gave the only possible answer, saying it was the one who had mercy on the beaten man. Jesus then replied, "*Go and do likewise.*"

The Pharisee had nothing more to say, for Jesus had given him his answer, or rather, He had maneuvered the religious expert to provide the answer. The parable made it clear that a neighbor was anyone in need, and loving a neighbor 'like yourself' meant having compassion and mercy for the unfortunate even if it came with a cost. The priest and Levite in the parable represented people who were zealous to keep the Law but failed to care for their fellowman. By implication their failure to fulfill the second requirement of the Royal Law showed that they did not have eternal life. If this expert in the Law recognized himself in the characters of the priest and Levite, it is hoped that he changed his ways after hearing this parable, even though it must have been galling for him to think that the character of a despised Samaritan could ever serve as an example to a Jewish religionist.

Without a doubt there were many Pharisees and teachers of the Law who were not entirely without compassion, but the difference between them and the Samaritan in the story lay in the fact that the Samaritan was entirely selfless in showing mercy to a complete stranger, no matter how much it inconvenienced him. The two religious men in the parable were like most people whose compassion is often limited and even quite self-serving. This was like the attitude of the Pharisees who challenged Jesus in the synagogues when He healed on the Sabbath. They were not against healing the sick, but they felt the sanctity of a holy day was more important than a person's suffering. Jesus had strongly rebuked them for their cold hearts. Although they gave the impression that they strictly obeyed God's Law, the Pharisees were blind to the fact that the Law's primary target was the heart. God's commandments were meant to be kept in the spirit of the Law, not just the letter. Jesus relentlessly stressed this throughout His ministry. For instance, He taught that the law against adultery could be broken even if no actual sex act was involved. A lustful thought was enough to break the spirit of the Law. A person might never commit an act of murder, but if he felt hatred for someone, it was synonymous with the act itself.

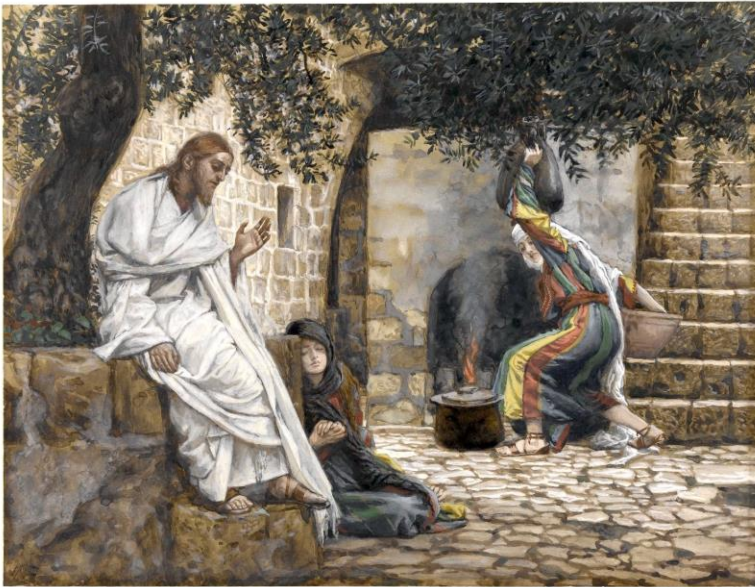
Pharisees and legalists throughout time have always congratulated themselves on keeping the Law's outward standards while ignoring the condition of their hearts. In fact, many even believe they are able to keep the Royal Law's command to 'love one's neighbor as oneself', not realizing the true parameters of the command. It is

not enough to perfunctorily give alms to the poor (which the Pharisees did if others were around to appreciate their show of generosity).

The apostle Paul told the Corinthian church that all the altruism in the world is useless unless it arises from a pure and loving heart. *'If I (give) out all my goods to feed the poor, and if I give my body to be burned, but don't have love, it profits me nothing. (1Corinthians 13:3)* Unfortunately the heart of mankind cannot keep the Royal Law as it is meant to be kept. Only Jesus can love perfectly from a pure heart.

What the Pharisees, religionists, Samaritans, prostitutes, tax collectors, and everyone else needed back then, (and what we all need today) is the heart of Jesus in order to love God with all our soul, body and mind, and our neighbor as ourselves. Centuries earlier God had promised the prophet Ezekiel that one day this is exactly what would happen. *'I will also give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh.'* (Ezekiel 36:26). Jesus fulfilled that promise by giving us His heart, a 'heart of flesh', full of compassion and mercy for others and a deep passionate devotion for God.

Martha and Mary



Jesus and His disciples came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to Him. Her sister Mary was enthralled with Jesus' teaching and loved to sit at His feet listening to what He said. Martha had a different personality, more concerned about practical things, like making the preparations for visitors, than for delving into theological matters.

Martha was annoyed with Mary because her sister was so caught up in the things Jesus was telling her that she forgot all about helping her with the housework. Finally Martha came to Jesus and delivered an exasperated rebuke to both Him and Mary by asking: *"Lord, don't you care that my sister left me to serve alone? Ask her therefore to help me."* But Jesus didn't comply as expected. *"Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is needed. Mary has chosen the good part, which will not be taken away from her."* (Luke 10:40-42)

This was a gentle rebuke to Martha for getting her priorities mixed up. It was true

that as an important visitor to their home, it was right to make preparations for Jesus and His disciples. Martha was right in doing so.

But Jesus knew that Mary's neglect of housework was not done out of laziness, but because she was passionate about the truths of God. Mary had chosen the preeminent priority in life. Getting close to God was by far the most important thing she could ever do. Jesus would never take that away from her. In contrast, Martha, who was preoccupied with doing the dishes and sweeping the floors, was missing out on the important things Jesus was sharing.

In this way Mary was exhibiting a greater love for Jesus than Martha, because to passionately seek the truth of God is to seek Jesus Himself, who IS the Truth. Mary had truly chosen the better.

Blind Guides

The crowds in Jerusalem were confused because although the Jewish leaders obviously wanted to kill Jesus, they weren't saying a lot about Him - at least not publicly. Everyone else, however, was talking about Jesus and His claims to divinity. Many opposed such a notion. They kept returning to the fact that Jesus was a well-known local, whereas the Messiah was likened to Melchizedek in the scriptures, who was said to be without lineage.

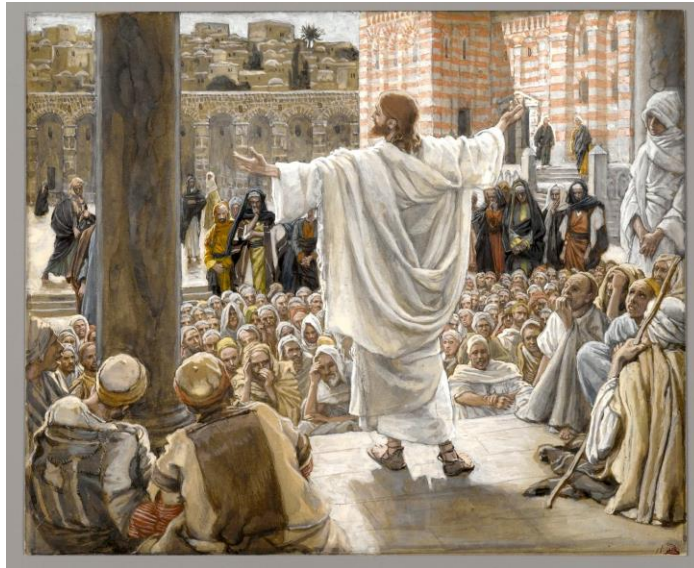
Without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God), remains a priest continually. (Hebrews 7:3)

Of course, the Jewish leaders liked to emphasize the Lord's humble origins, being completely blind to the fact that Jesus in His divinity was *without 'beginning of days or end of life'*. This was because they didn't even belong to God. Jesus denounced these leaders for their negative responses to Him, which proved their lack of insight into spiritual things. No matter how rigorously they studied and memorized the Scriptures, they were blind leaders headed for destruction because they could not see the truth in front of them. Jesus said of them: *Leave them; they are blind guides. If the blind lead the blind, both will fall into a pit."* (Matthew 15:14)



CHAPTER 24

Life-Giving Water, Division, Woman Caught in Adultery



Life-Giving Water

It was the last day of the feast and Jesus made a public proclamation: *"If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink! He who believes in me, as the Scripture has said, from within him will flow rivers of living water."* (John 7:37-38)

Jesus was likening the Holy Spirit to living water (eternal life), which He would give to all who came to Him for salvation. Up until this time the Spirit had not yet been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified. However before that great event there were times when the Holy Spirit came upon people temporarily, as He did when He overshadowed Mary and caused the Seed (Jesus) to be conceived within her, or when He moved Mary, Elizabeth, Zechariah, and Simeon to prophecy concerning the Messiah.

Division Among the People

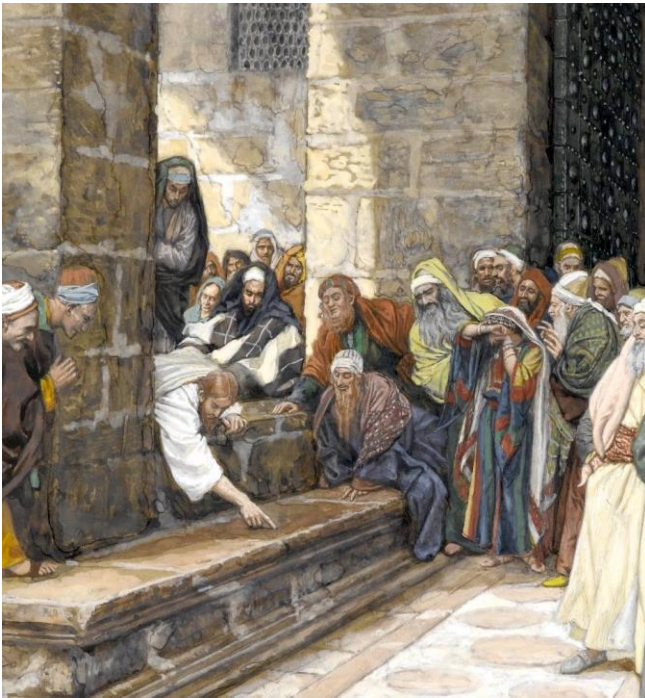
When the people heard Jesus talk about living water, some thought He was a prophet or even the Messiah, but others protested that the Messiah would ever come from Galilee since the scriptures indicated that he would come from David's

village of Bethlehem. In this the people were correct.

But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, being small among the clans of Judah, out of you one will come ... that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings out are from of old, from ancient times. (Micah 5:2)

The mysterious events of Jesus' birth in Bethlehem had been kept secret in order to protect Him from King Herod's edict to murder all babies 2 years old and under. Therefore the people were unaware of the true events of the Lord's birthplace and merely assumed that Jesus had been born in Galilee.

Woman Caught in Adultery



Early in the morning Jesus returned to the temple and the crowds followed Him there to hear Him teach. The scribes and the Pharisees came too because they had yet another plan to entrap Jesus. They brought a woman who had been caught in adultery and they placed her in front of Jesus, accusing her of her sin.

Interestingly, the second party in the adulterous act was nowhere to be seen. Although the woman had been caught, the adulterous man had escaped, or been allowed to do so. It's very likely that the whole thing was a setup and these leaders had ensnared the poor woman.

Now having captured their first victim, they exultantly hoped to capture Jesus as their second. The first thing they did was to remind Jesus of the Law of Moses which commanded that 'such women' be stoned.

The man who commits adultery with another man's wife, even he who commits adultery with his neighbor's wife, the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death. (Leviticus 20:10)

(Notice that the Law commanded that both parties in the act be punished but the Pharisees picked on the woman alone.)

The Pharisees then demanded that Jesus give His opinion as to what should be done with the sinful woman. This was meant to test Jesus so that they could bring some charge against Him. If the Lord told them to let the woman go, they could accuse

Jesus of teaching against the Law of Moses.

He would lose all credibility with the people as a result. If Jesus agreed with the Law and told them to stone the woman, many would witness the brutal act and Jesus would henceforth be feared. He would lose His reputation as a compassionate, merciful Savior and the people would turn away from Him. Either way, the Pharisees saw it as a win/win situation for their own side.

Unexpectedly Jesus said nothing. He then stooped down to write something with His finger on the ground. The Jews kept haranguing Him to give them His answer and finally He stood up and said to them, *“He who is without sin among you, let him throw the first stone at her.” (John 8:7)* Then Jesus once again bent down and wrote on the ground. Many believe that the words Jesus wrote on the ground in some way drew attention to the sins of the men judging the woman so that they were unable to condemn her without condemning themselves. At any rate, when they heard Jesus’ words, they went away one by one, beginning with the older ones, and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before Him.

Jesus stood up and said to her: *‘Woman, where are your accusers? Did no one condemn you?’* She said, *“No one, Lord.”* Jesus said, *“Neither do I condemn you. Go your way. From now on, sin no more.” (John 8: 10-11)*

Jesus had saved the woman’s physical life, but it seems probable that His grace saved her in an even more profound way. By offering her mercy, she had the chance to start over and live a better life with God at its center.

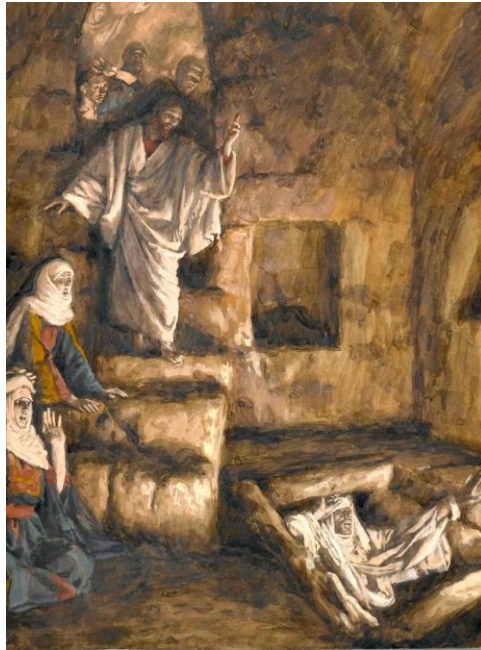
The amazing thing about this event was the way in which Jesus turned a situation that demanded justice and punishment into one extending grace and mercy instead - yet without abrogating the Law’s demands in the slightest. Jesus had told the Pharisees to go ahead and carry out the punishment for adultery, thus affirming the Law of Moses. This was because the Law’s punishment for sin was valid under the Old Covenant. Its purpose was to restrain wickedness in Jewish society and Jesus didn’t argue with that. However the Pharisees were not seeking civil justice, or they would have apprehended both guilty partners and brought them to the magistrates. Instead, they were making a moral judgment on the adulterous woman and Jesus was showing them that only someone who was perfectly righteous was morally qualified to condemn sin. In other words, only God could do that. Jesus, as God, could certainly condemn the woman, but He refused to do so because His current mission was to save, not to punish.

The Pharisees had hoped that Jesus would side either with justice or mercy, and that this polarization would cause Him to lose followers. Instead Jesus’ wisdom and grace only served to increase His reputation with the people, who were impressed that Jesus would not disobey the Law of Moses, (thus maintaining the righteousness of God), while still revealing God as merciful and compassionate. Jesus had won yet another round with the Pharisees.

Jesus' mercy for the woman caught in adultery undoubtedly contributed to His popularity with women for He had many female followers, some even joining Jesus and His disciples during their evangelistic travels through the countryside. The wealthier ones provided financial support for these trips and some, like Mary and Martha, were special friends of the Lord. For a popular Rabbi like Jesus to have women followers in His entourage, or to admit them as personal friends, was unusual since at that time in Jewish history women were often treated as second-class citizens. By the first century, women were generally prohibited from conversing with men and only prostitutes went about freely on the streets. Women could not testify in court and were often illiterate since the rabbis didn't see the need for women to learn to read in order to study the Scriptures. The Talmud (Jewish rabbinical writings) stated: "It is foolishness to teach Torah to your daughter" (Sotah 20a). Then Jesus came along and taught everyone - men and women. He even addressed women in private conversation, such as the Canaanite woman at the well. (John 4:27). Although some of the women accompanying Jesus had high standing in society, there were others of ill repute, such as prostitutes or those possessed by demons. Jesus did not forbid these women from following Him, even though it brought Him criticism and contempt from the Jewish leaders. Jesus also healed many women, offering them forgiveness and salvation. They seemed to have no fear of Him and it was undoubtedly because He was always kind and gentle with them. It is small wonder that women congregated around the Lord and loved Him so dearly.

CHAPTER 25

Death of Lazarus, Resurrection and Life, Jesus Raises Lazarus, Plot to Kill Jesus, Woes



The Death of Lazarus

Lazarus, brother to Mary and Martha, became very sick. This trio was very close to Jesus and He loved them dearly. He often stayed at their home to rest from His travels. So when Lazarus became ill, the two sisters sent for Jesus right away, saying, *“Lord, he whom you love is ill,”* expecting that Jesus would hurry to Lazarus’ side and heal him. But Jesus did the exact opposite. When He was told the news of His friend’s illness, He told His disciples that the sickness would not lead to death but would bring glory to God through glorifying the Son of God. Then He stayed two days longer in the place where He was, before taking His disciples to Judea. The disciples were nervous about this trip. They warned Jesus that the Jews were seeking to stone Him so it wasn’t a good idea to go there at this time. Jesus answered, *‘Aren’t there twelve hours of daylight? If a man walks in the day, he doesn’t stumble, because he sees the light of this world. But if a man walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light isn’t in him.’* (John 11:9-10) Jesus was referring to the fact that there was only so much time left for Him to bring the light of God’s truth. Without that light, the world would remain lost and stumble in spiritual darkness, having no inner light to guide them.

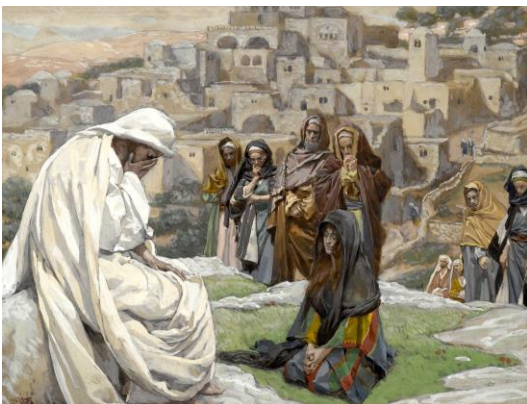
In other words, Jesus was on a mission to bring salvation to the world and He had to take every opportunity afforded Him. Then Jesus added that Lazarus had 'fallen asleep' but He was going to awaken him. The disciples assumed that if this was so, Lazarus' illness couldn't be all that serious and he would recover on his own, thereby making the risky trip to Bethany unnecessary. In actuality, Jesus was speaking figuratively, likening Lazarus' death to sleep. However the disciples didn't catch His meaning and still could not understand why Jesus wanted to make this trip. Finally Jesus explained, *"Lazarus is dead. I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, so that you may believe. Nevertheless, let's go to him."* (John 11:14,15) Thomas then said to the other disciples: *"Let's go also, that we may die with him."*

It appears that the disciples thought that Jesus would be arrested in Judea, and very likely the Jewish leaders would have Him executed. Bravely they decided to follow Him to His death.

Resurrection and Life

When Jesus arrived in Bethany, Lazarus had already died and been in a tomb for 4 days. Many Jews had come to his funeral and they stayed to comfort Mary and Martha who were both deeply grieving the loss of their brother. Martha was the first to hear of Jesus' arrival and she went to meet Him at the edge of town, but Mary was still at home. The first thing Martha said when she saw Jesus was: *"Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give You."* Jesus told her that Lazarus would rise again, but Martha assumed He was speaking of the resurrection, so she replied that she understood her brother would be raised up at the end of the age. But Jesus wanted her to see that resurrection power was standing right in front of her, so He said: *"I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in Me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?"*

Martha affirmed that she believed He was the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world. Then she went back home to get Mary, telling her privately that the Teacher had arrived and was calling for her. When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to meet Jesus, who was still some way from the village. The Jews who were consoling her saw her hasty departure and assumed she was going to the tomb to weep, so they followed her.



As soon as Mary saw Jesus, she fell at His feet, saying: *"Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died."* Jesus saw her anguished weeping, along with the mourners who had come with her, and He was deeply troubled in His spirit. Although He had stayed away at the time that His friend lay dying, it was not because He hadn't cared. If He had been present when Lazarus was ill, He undoubtedly would have healed him.

However Jesus wanted to use this incident with Lazarus to show the people that He was the Son of God who could save them.

Jesus asked the mourners where they had laid Lazarus and they showed Him the place. Then the sorrow in Jesus' heart overwhelmed Him and He wept. This was not the first time Jesus shed tears, and the other instance when He wept is probably related to this one. It occurred when Jesus lamented over the city of Jerusalem: *"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, just as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not have it"* (Luke 13:34). In that situation, Jesus was weeping over the lost souls in Jerusalem who continually rejected God and would therefore die in their sins. It broke His heart because He could see into the future - 40 years ahead to be exact - to AD 70 when more than 1,000,000 Jews in Jerusalem would die in one of the most horrendous sieges in recorded history. The death and destruction would be indescribable. Many would go into eternity forever shut off from God. The city would fall and the Temple would be destroyed, thereby bringing an end to the Old Covenant age with its sacrificial system. God would turn away from His rebellious people and offer His salvation to a people not previously called by His name. That salvation would center on none other than the Lord Jesus Christ who was now calling the Jews to repentance before it was too late.

As Jesus watched the people mourning over Lazarus, He may have been thinking of the much greater sorrow that awaited so many of these Jews. It was not for Martha, Mary, and Lazarus that He wept, for He knew beforehand that He would restore Lazarus back to life and their present sorrow would quickly turn to joy. And He was not weeping over the state of their souls because they believed in Him and had eternal life. However, most in Jerusalem did not believe and did not have life. It was for these that Jesus wept, for unless they received Him as Savior, they would have no hope after death and would be separated from God forever. The Jews, however, thought Jesus was grieving for Lazarus and they remarked to one another that Jesus must have greatly loved him, although they could not understand why someone who could give sight to the blind was not able to keep His friend from dying.

Raising Lazarus

Jesus was again overcome emotionally as He approached the cave where Lazarus was buried. A stone lay against the entrance and Jesus told the people to move it aside. Martha objected because her brother had been dead for 4 days and by this time the odor of putrefaction would be overwhelming, but Jesus reminded her that if she believed, she would see the glory of God. After the stone was removed, Jesus lifted up His eyes and prayed to His Father: *"I know that you always listen to me, but because of the multitude that stands around I said this, that they may believe that you sent me."* (John 11:42) Then Jesus cried out with a loud voice, **"Lazarus, come out!"** To the utter astonishment of the crowd, Lazarus came out with his hands and feet bound with strips of linen, and his face wrapped with a cloth.

Jesus then told the crowd to unbind him and set him free. Many of those who witnessed this amazing miracle consequently believed in Jesus and gave glory to God. However others went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done.

The Plot to Kill Jesus



The chief priests and Pharisees were so concerned about the news that they gathered the council, or Sanhedrin, together. *What are we doing? they asked, 'for this man does many signs. If we leave him alone like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.'* (John 11:48)

In this, they had some reason to be concerned.

The Romans, who had invaded Israel and now ruled over the land, had wanted to minimize conflict with the Jewish people. With this in mind, they had restored the Sanhedrin's authority and given them the responsibility for the religious and civil laws of the Jews. It was in the Sanhedrin's interest to keep the relationship with Rome as peaceful as possible. However Jesus was claiming to be God, asserting authority over Torah, and threatening to overthrow the Temple, thus threatening that peace. If the people believed Jesus' claims and made Him their Messiah, it might prompt a rebellion against Rome, which would cause the Romans to clamp down on the people and take away all power from their leaders. The wrath of Rome would crush and destroy Israel. One man, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, *"You know nothing at all, nor do you consider that it is advantageous for us that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation not perish."* (John 11:49-50)

Although Caiaphas didn't know it, he had unwittingly prophesied that Jesus would die for the people so as to save them. This prophecy did not come from Caiaphas himself, but was inspired by God's anointing which rested upon the position of high priest. After this meeting, it was decided that Jesus would be put to death. It now just required a time and opportunity to put His death sentence into effect, although they had to come up with some legal charge against Him first. That was the only thing holding them back. So far, they had nothing to pin on Jesus that justified execution. They couldn't very well put Him to death for healing people or raising someone from the dead. The crowds would be in an uproar if they killed Jesus without just cause.

The Lord was aware of what was going on so He no longer walked openly among the Jews. Instead, He went into a region near the wilderness, to a town called Ephraim where He stayed with the disciples.

Woes on the Pharisees and the Experts in the Law

It was once again the time for the Passover and many went to Jerusalem to purify themselves ahead of the Feast. As they stood in the Temple, the people began to discuss with one another whether or not Jesus would come to the feast. They wondered if He would risk making an appearance now that the chief priests and Pharisees had given orders to be notified of His whereabouts in order to arrest Him. In spite of the danger, Jesus went to the Temple to teach and afterwards even accepted a Pharisee's invitation to a dinner where many Jewish leaders were in attendance. However Jesus was well aware of His host's motivation in inviting Him.



This was not a friendly group who wanted to show hospitality to the popular young rabbi. These religionists meant to trap and kill Him. As Jesus had done on other such occasions, He used the opportunity to deliver a strong message, exposing the hypocrisy and wickedness of His hosts. He called them hypocrites for shutting the door of the kingdom in people's faces, while not going in themselves.

He pronounced woes upon them for travelling over land and sea to win a single convert, only to make them twice as sinful as they themselves were. He rebuked them for proclaiming that swearing by the Temple or its altar meant nothing, but swearing an oath by the gold of the Temple, or the gift upon the altar, was binding. Jesus denounced them as blind fools for valuing gold above the Temple, and viewing the gift as more precious than the altar that made the gift sacred. Jesus said that anyone who made an oath by the Temple swore by the One who dwells in it, and anyone who swore by heaven swore by God's throne and He who sits on it. Jesus also denounced them for being so particular to tithe their spices, only to neglect the more important matters of the Law such as justice, mercy and faithfulness. Tithing was good but they should have practiced the latter as well. They were blind guides straining at a fly but swallowing a camel (i.e. they were concerned about the lesser issues, while ignoring the important ones). They looked so pure and righteous on the outside when they did this, like a clean cup or dish, but inside they were dirty with greed and self-indulgence. *"Blind Pharisee!"* Jesus said, *'First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean.'* (Matthew 23:26)

Jesus didn't stop there. He also called them whitewashed tombs, beautiful on the outside, but full of dead men's bones and everything unclean on the inside.

They built tombs for the prophets and decorated the graves of the righteous, insisting that if they had lived in the times of their ancestors, they would never have shed the blood of the prophets, yet they were the descendants of the very ones who had murdered the prophets! *"Go ahead, then,"* Jesus stormed, *"and complete what your ancestors started!"* He was referring to their wicked plans to murder Him, of which He was well aware. *'You snakes!'* He thundered. *'You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell?'* (Matthew 23:33)

Jesus accused the Pharisees of being hypocritical, arrogant, self-serving, greedy, and spiritually dead. He accused the experts in the Law of being cold-hearted, legalistic persecutors of God's prophets and apostles who would be held accountable for their bloodshed all the way from Abel to Zechariah. In fact, the judgment for their crimes would come upon their current generation! After this, Jesus went outside and the Pharisees and teachers followed Him, opposing Him fiercely and besieging Him with questions.

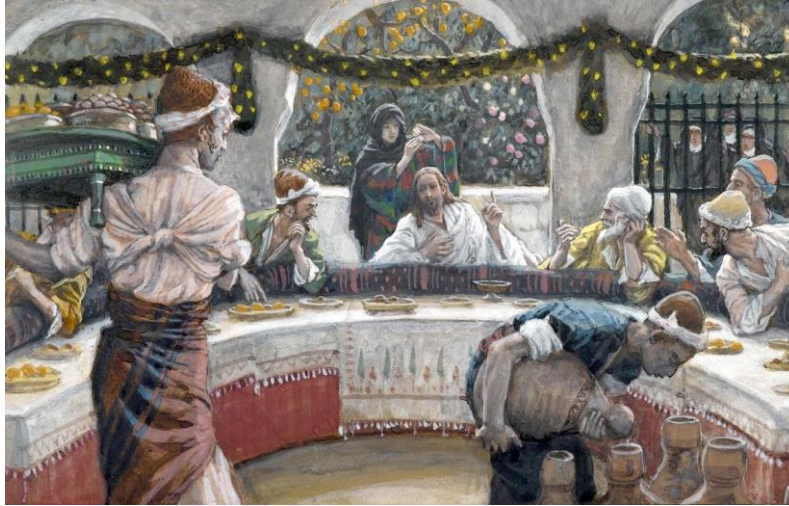
The Pharisees had hardened hearts that necessitated harsh language in order to pierce their self-righteous complacency. Jesus was giving them every opportunity to be saved, even though they refused to listen. A time was coming, however, when that opportunity would be gone. They only had a short time to enter the kingdom of heaven.

Even today, God's Spirit continually seeks to move people's hearts to see the truth and believe in Him. However, if a nation or individual remains steadfastly resistant to the Lord's call, God may turn away from them. Without His influence, a hard heart becomes even more hardened against the truth. This is why God is described as 'hardening' hearts when He finally decides to no longer strive against human resistance to His love and mercy. Of course not all people are equally resistant to God, and some are much more 'open' spiritually than others. Even so, all are equally unable come to God on their own because... *"None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one. Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive. The venom of asps is under their lips. Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood; in their paths are ruin and misery, and the way of peace they have not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes." (Romans 3:9-18) ...This is because "the mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God. (Romans 8:7)*

Salvation must be by God's grace, through the avenue of faith. And even faith is not something we can work up within ourselves. It is a gift from God. For by grace are you saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast. (Ephesians 2:8,9) *...It does not, therefore, depend on human desire or effort, but on God's mercy. (Romans 9:16)*

CHAPTER 26

Jesus Anointed At Bethany, Watchful Servants, Faithful or Unfaithful, Wedding Feast, Children



Jesus Anointed at Bethany

It was now a few days before the Passover and Jesus went to the home of Simon the leper (who had probably been healed by Jesus) where a dinner was being given in His honor. Martha was there serving the dinner, and so was Lazarus who was among those reclining at the table with Jesus. Mary was there too and she took out a pint of pure spikenard, an expensive essential oil worth a year's wages. This oil was very aromatic and often used in making perfumes. She poured it over Jesus' feet and wiped His feet with her hair. The sweet-smelling fragrance filled the whole house. Judas Iscariot objected to the extravagance, asking why the perfume hadn't been sold instead and the money given to the poor. It wasn't that he cared about the poor at all, but he was in charge of the disciples' communal moneybag and he often used to help himself to what was put into it. He was thus bemoaning a lost opportunity to snatch some pilfered cash. Jesus told Judas to leave Mary alone, saying: *"She has kept this for the day of my burial. For you always have the poor with you, but you don't always have me."* (John 12:7-8) The Lord was indicating that Mary's act was prompted by her love for Him and the knowledge that He would soon die. After sitting at His' feet so often, hearing Him teach about His impending death, Mary had believed Jesus' words, whereas the disciples were still slow to grasp their meaning.

Meanwhile a large crowd of Jews found out where Jesus was and they came to see Him. They also wanted to see Lazarus whom Jesus had raised from the grave.

There was still much talk about this miracle and many Jews believed in Jesus because of it - so many in fact, that the chief priests had decided that they had to kill Lazarus as well as Jesus.

Watchful Servants

Jesus addressed the crowd, exhorting them to always be ready for service. He likened this to keeping lamps burning such as when servants wait for their master to return from a wedding banquet. When the master comes and knocks at the door, the alert servant is ready to let him in. Jesus said: *Blessed are those servants, whom the lord will find watching when he comes. Most certainly I tell you, that he will dress himself, and make them recline, and will come and serve them. (Luke 12:37)* Jesus added that they were to be ready even if the master came in the middle of the night or toward dawn. Most homeowners never knew when a thief was coming and that's why their house could be broken into. But the Jews were not to be caught by surprise like that. *Therefore be ready,' Jesus warned, 'for the Son of Man is coming in an hour that you don't expect him.'* (Luke 12:40) Jesus was referring to the time when He would return in judgment upon Israel, which would result in the destruction of the Temple and the city of Jerusalem. He had warned His followers about this many times. The end of the Old Covenant was coming soon and would be replaced by the New Covenant wherein Jesus' blood would provide for the forgiveness of sins for the whole world.

"Many Bible scholars, old and current, affirm that the end of the Old Covenant occurred in 70 AD when Titus attacked Jerusalem and burned down the Temple.

"The coming of Christ in A.D.70 was a coming in judgment on the Jewish nation, indicating the end of the Jewish age and the fulfillment of a day of the Lord. Jesus really did come in judgment at this time, fulfilling his prophecy in the Olivet Discourse." (R.C. Sproul, The Last Days According to Jesus, p. 158)

"I challenge anyone to prove my statement untrue if I say that the entire Jewish nation was destroyed less than one whole generation later on account of these sufferings which they inflicted on Jesus. For it was, I believe, forty-two years from the time, when they crucified Jesus, to the destruction of Jerusalem." (Origen (second century) (Contra Celsum, 198-199)

Faithful or Unfaithful

Peter asked Jesus if the parable's warning applied to them as well as to the Jews listening. Jesus then elaborated His meaning by telling of a master who put his faithful and wise manager in charge of his household servants to provide for their care. It was obviously to the manager's advantage to be found doing a good job when his master returned. The master would then reward him by putting him in charge of all his possessions.

However if the manager presumed that his master would not come back for a long while and so began mistreating the servants, while reveling in feasting and drunkenness himself, it would be very bad for him when the master showed up unexpectedly. He would be cut to pieces, beaten with many blows, and thrown out with the unbelievers. Then Jesus added: *“To whomever much is given, of him will much be required; and to whom much was entrusted, of him more will be asked.”*

(Luke 12:48) In other words, the Jews, as God’s chosen people, had been given the responsibility to bring God’s light to the world. They had received the Old Covenant blessings such as the Temple, sacrificial system, the prophets, Torah, etc. in order to testify about God to the nations. Instead of fulfilling their call to bring the truth about God to the world, they had used God’s blessings for themselves and mistreated those outside the Covenant. Jesus said they would pay for this by being destroyed and assigned a place with the unbelievers. Peter probably realized that as Jesus’ disciples, they had more light than the general Jewish populace so their responsibility was even greater. What they did with the blessings given to them by Jesus would determine His response to them when He returned.

Jesus ended by saying: *‘But I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how distressed I am until it is accomplished!’* *(Luke 12:50)* These words indicate that Jesus was longing for the end of the Old Covenant to be fulfilled but there was still a time of suffering awaiting Him that had to come first. He added that He had not come to bring earthly peace, but rather peace between mankind and God. So many of the Jews thought that the Messiah would unite Israel and exalt it above all the nations of the world so that the Jews could finally live in peace in their land. Jesus shot down that hope. Far from rallying the Jews together in unity, Israel’s Messiah was bringing controversy and dissension, cutting families apart forever, as people took sides for or against Him.

Wedding Feast

When one of those at the table heard Jesus’ words, he made a remark about celebrating the kingdom of God: *“Blessed is he who will feast in God’s Kingdom!”* *(Luke 14:15)* This reference seemed especially appropriate since everyone was enjoying a feast in Simon’s home, and the Passover Feast would soon be upon them. Jesus was always quick to use any situation as a teaching opportunity and He did so now by telling the story of a certain man who prepared a great banquet and invited many guests. When everything for the banquet was ready, the man sent his servant to inform all the guests that they could now attend the party. But all the guests began to make excuses. Some said they had business dealings that couldn’t be put off and they asked to be excused. Others had just married and couldn’t come. Everyone had some sort of excuse to not attend. When the servant told his master this, the owner of the house became angry and ordered his servant to go quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame. But after doing so, the servant reported that there was still room for more guests. Then the owner told the servant to go even further to the roads and country lanes to invite people to come until the house was completely filled.

Jesus ended by saying that the master declared to his servant: *'I tell you that none of those men who were invited will taste of my supper.'* (Luke 14:24)

Of course Jesus was referring to the Jews who were being invited to feast in God's kingdom, but who were too preoccupied with their own lives and with other interests to give heed to God's call. Because of their insult, the invitation would be extended to Gentile nations instead, and these would fill the kingdom of heaven whereas the Jews would be locked out.

Little Children



Some of the people brought babies to Jesus for Him to bless. Jesus responded by placing His hands on the children and praying for them. However the disciples saw this as a nuisance and they rebuked the parents for wasting His time. But Jesus called the children to Him and said, *'Allow the little children, and don't forbid them to come to me; for the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to ones like these.'* (Matthew 19:14) It was well known that Jesus loved children. He healed them, delivered them from demonic oppression, and raised at least one from the dead (Jairius's daughter).

What's more, Jesus alluded to the humility and trusting acceptance of children as necessary qualifications to receive the kingdom of God. The humble faith of a child allows us to receive God's gift of salvation.

CHAPTER 27

Jesus Predicts His Death, A Mother's Request, Bartemaeus, Blind Men, Triumphal Entry, Unbelief



Jesus Predicts His Death

At the Passover, some Greeks were there to worship and they came to Philip with a request to see Jesus. Philip may have been uncertain about this since Jesus' ministry had so far been mostly to the Jews, so he told Andrew about it and together they approached Jesus with the Gentiles' request. Jesus replied that it was very close to the time for Him to be glorified. He meant that soon He would be lifted up as the Savior of the world and all the nations would come to Him. Already the Greeks were seeking Him out. Jesus reminded His disciples that before His glorification, He would die and He illustrated this by recounting how a single kernel of wheat had to fall into the ground and die in order to germinate into many seeds. Jesus knew that His death would result in many coming to life. Through His death, Jesus would be taking humanity to the grave with Him, and through His resurrection a new humanity would come into being that would live forever with God. Jesus added that for one to follow Him, and to thus belong to this new humanity, he would have to take up his cross and follow Jesus to His death. This was not to be taken literally of course. Jesus meant that a follower had to hate his earthly, fleshly life enough to be willing to discard it entirely in exchange for Christ's eternal life and divine nature. The old self would be replaced entirely with the new. Only by 'taking up the cross' in this way would he be able to live forever in heaven with the Lord.

Then Jesus expressed His feelings about the upcoming events that awaited Him. *"Now my soul is troubled,"* He said. *"What shall I say? 'Father, save me from this time?' But for this cause I came to this time. Father, glorify your name!"* Then a voice came from heaven: *"I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again."* (John 12:27-28)

Most of the crowd heard the Father's voice as rumbling thunder and some thought an angel must have spoken to Jesus. The Lord, however, said that the voice was for their benefit, not His. The Father was affirming His plan to glorify His name through Jesus' work on the cross. But the great suffering that the crucifixion would bring was troubling Jesus. He knew His death was part of God's divine plan, but it was still a daunting prospect - not only the physical part, but the part that would be played out in the spiritual realm. He would be representing the entire human race as He faced down men and demons and went down to the grave. There, His soul would be separated from His Father for the first time. This would render judgment on the world and satisfy the just penalty of God's Law. Then, because He was without sin of His own, the grave would lose its hold over Him and He would rise from the dead, thereby bringing about Satan's downfall and creating a new humanity that was perfect with His own righteousness. The Father's audible voice affirmed that He would surely bring all this to pass, and it must have comforted Jesus to hear it, but the words were mostly for the crowd's benefit so that they would recognize their Messiah and glorify God when Jesus was lifted up on the cross. The crowd, however, objected to Jesus' words, saying that they had always been taught in the Law that the Messiah would remain forever. What Jesus was now telling them didn't line up. How could the Son of Man be lifted up? In fact, they wondered who this 'Son of Man' was in the first place? And as for the voice from heaven, most of the crowd had heard only thunder, so it did not impact them overmuch. Jesus told them that they would only have the light (Himself) for a little while longer, so they needed to walk in that light while it was with them so that darkness would not overtake them. *'Whoever walks in the dark does not know where they are going,'* He said. *'Believe in the light while you have the light, so that you may become children of light.'* (John 12:36)

After this, Jesus left the crowds and hid Himself from them, perhaps because He didn't want to stir them up. The crowds were often very unpredictable, sometimes seeking to kill Him and at other times seeking to make Him king over Israel. Either response was a threat to the Lord's mission if it precipitated events contrary to God's ordered plan.

A Mother's Request

One day the mother of James and John came with her two sons to ask Jesus for a favor. She knelt before the Lord and asked if He would grant her sons positions of honor in the kingdom, one to sit on His right hand and the other on His left. It is not certain whether this idea was her own or that of her sons, but Jesus told her that she didn't know what she was asking. Then turning to James and John, Jesus asked them if they could drink from the cup He would shortly drink from.

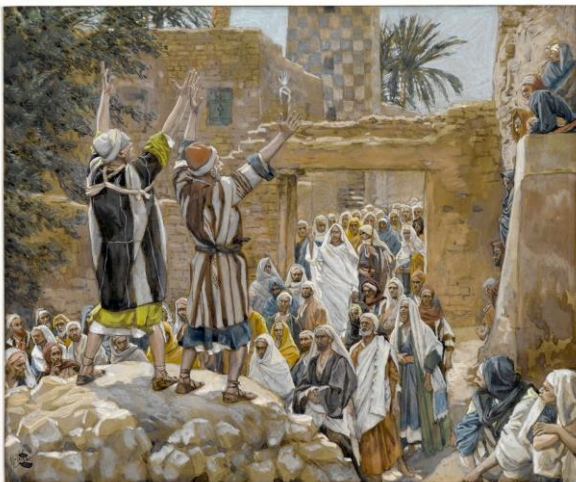
“We can,” they answered, and Jesus replied: *“You will indeed drink my cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with, but to sit on my right hand and on my left hand is not mine to give; but it is for whom it has been prepared by my Father.”*(Matthew 20:23)

It seems that James and John, with the help of their mother, were hoping to ingratiate themselves with Jesus because they sought preeminence in God’s kingdom. This understandably angered the other disciples. In order to quell division and jealousy, Jesus called them together, saying: *“You know that the rulers of the nations lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you, but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. Whoever desires to be first among you shall be your bondservant, even as the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”* (Matthew 20:25-28) These words against worldly aspirations would have totally upended their ambitions and deflated any notions of superiority among the twelve.

Blind Bartimaeus

As Jesus approached Jericho, a blind beggar named Bartimaeus was sitting by the roadside. When he heard the crowd going by, he asked what was happening and was told that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by. Immediately Bartimaeus called out, *“Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”* He made such a noise that some of the people in the crowd scolded him to be quiet. However Bartimaeus only shouted louder, *“Son of David, have mercy on me!”* Jesus stopped and ordered the beggar to be brought to Him. Jesus asked him what he wanted and the poor blind man replied: *“Lord, I want to see.”* Jesus responded, *“Receive your sight; your faith has healed you.”* Immediately Bartimaeus received his sight and followed Jesus, praising God. The crowd, when they saw what had happened, also praised God. Once again persistent faith in the Messiah and His healing power brought about a miracle.

Two Blind Men Healed



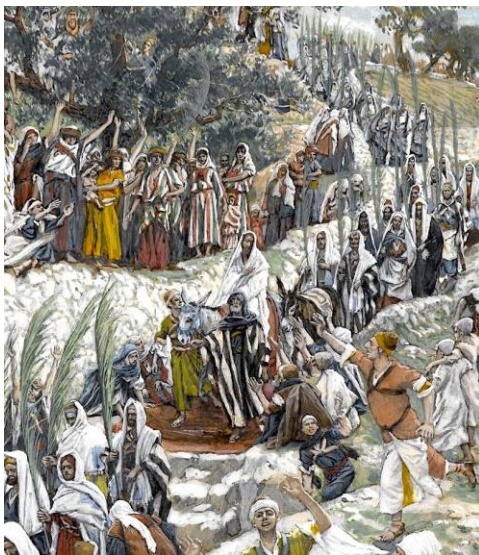
On the way back from Jericho, a large crowd was again following Jesus and this time two blind men were sitting by the roadside. Like Bartimaeus, when they heard Jesus was coming by, they too shouted, *“Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!”* As before, the crowd tried to quiet them but the blind men persisted in their pleas. Jesus had compassion on them and touched their eyes, whereupon they immediately received their sight and followed Him.

Triumphal Entry



Jesus went on ahead to Jerusalem and came to a hill called the Mount of Olives. He sent two of His disciples to go to a nearby village where He said they would find a colt tied up. This colt had never been ridden, but the disciples were to untie it and bring it to Jesus. If anyone asked them what they were doing, they were to reply: *'The Lord has need of it.'* The disciples found the colt, just as they were told, and as expected, the owners wanted to know why they were taking it. When they heard that Jesus needed it, they offered no further objection. The disciples then threw their cloaks over the back of the colt, and Jesus sat on it.

As they proceeded on their way, a large crowd began to assemble and the people spread their cloaks on the road before the Lord. When Jesus came near the place where the road veered off to the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began to loudly praise God for all the miracles they had seen. They began to sing: *"Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest!" (Luke 19:38)* This was the second time in His life that Jesus had been referred to as a king. The first time had been at His birth when the Magi had been seeking Him. Now, by calling Jesus a king, the crowd was fulfilling the prophecy of Zechariah.



'Rejoice greatly, daughter of Zion! Shout, daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King comes to you! He is righteous, and having salvation; lowly, and riding on a donkey, even on a colt, the foal of a donkey. ...he will speak peace to the nations: and his dominion will be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth.' (Zechariah 9:9-10) However when the chief priests and the teachers of the law heard the children shouting *"Hosanna to the Son of David,"* they were indignant, asking Him if He heard what they were saying. Jesus replied that He did and He recited these scriptures to them: *'From the lips of children and infants you, Lord, have called forth your praise.'*

Jesus was quoting from a Psalm that said: *From the lips of babes and infants you have established strength, because of your adversaries, that you might silence the enemy and the avenger. (Psalm 8:2)*

The priests and teachers of the Law would have been familiar with this scripture and they would have recognized its implication. If it was God who was calling forth the praise of these children who were hailing Jesus as the Son of David, then opposing their praise was tantamount to opposing God. As there wasn't much the Pharisees and teachers of the Law could say to that, the confrontation ended right there, and Jesus left them to go to Bethany, where He spent the night.

It was usual in the ancient Middle Eastern world for rulers to ride horses if they went to war, but they often rode on donkeys if they came in peace. By riding a donkey, Jesus was making the statement that He was coming in peace to bring blessing to God's people. He was also claiming divinity, and the people who were praising Him were offering Him His due. Nothing could stop creation from giving glory to its Creator and therefore nothing could stop Jesus from being lauded as the King He was. He said that even if His followers kept silent, the very stones would cry out. He was referring to the fact that all the earth is designed (and commanded) to give praise to God. *'Praise the Lord from the earth, you great sea creatures and all deeps, fire and hail, snow and mist, stormy wind fulfilling his word! Mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars! Beasts and all livestock, creeping things and flying birds!' (Psalm 148:1-10)*

In the midst of the celebration, while Jesus was approaching Jerusalem, He gazed at the city and began to weep over it, saying: *"If you, even you, had known today the things which belong to your peace! But now, they are hidden from your eyes. For the days will come on you, when your enemies will throw up a barricade against you, surround you, hem you in on every side, and will dash you and your children within you to the ground. They will not leave in you one stone on another, because you didn't know the time of your visitation."* (Luke 19:42-44)

These were ominous words indeed, and would be fulfilled in 70AD when the Roman ruler, Titus, would utterly destroy Jerusalem. The historian Josephus described it as one of the bloodiest sieges in history. Jesus foresaw it all - the Roman legions charging into the city with such fierce fury that nothing could stop them. He saw the slaughter and flight, the heaps of corpses around the altar of the Temple and blood flowing down the Temple stairs. He saw the Roman legions crushing the remaining Jewish resistance and chasing those who attempted to flee the city. Altogether 1.1 million people (mostly Jewish) would be killed during the siege. The rest would become slaves and many would be forced to become gladiators, eventually dying in the arena. Small wonder that Jesus grieved over Jerusalem as He saw its fated destruction! By rejecting their God and Messiah, the Jews were unleashing God's wrath and cutting themselves off from His protection. As a result, they would be completely defenseless against the coming tide of evil.

Unbelief Among the Jews



The devastation that was coming to the Jews was due to the fact that even after seeing Jesus perform so many signs in their presence, they still would not believe in Him. Their rejection continued unabated. The prophet Isaiah had long ago seen Jesus' glory and foretold that this would happen.

“Lord, who has believed our report? To whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? For this cause they couldn't believe, for Isaiah said again, “He has blinded their eyes and he hardened their heart, lest they should see with their eyes, and perceive with their heart, and would turn, and I would heal them.” (John 12:38-40)

Isaiah used poetic language to explain how the Jews would refuse Jesus' message from God and remain spiritually blind and deaf to His call. They were just like Isaiah's audience - hearing, but never understanding; seeing, but never perceiving. Jesus warned that God would harden their hearts by no longer extending His grace to them for much longer. They had been given every evidence that Christ was the Messiah but they still wouldn't accept the truth. This was not God's fault and He couldn't be expected to strive with them forever. He would remove the influence of His Holy Spirit and let them believe the enemy's lie since they didn't want the truth. They had only themselves to blame for this.

They didn't receive the love of the truth that they might be saved. Because of this, God sent them a working of error (deception), that they should believe a lie; that they all might be judged who didn't believe the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.’ (2 Thessalonians 2: 10-12)

In whom the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that the light of the Good News of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should not dawn on them. (2 Corinthians 4:4)

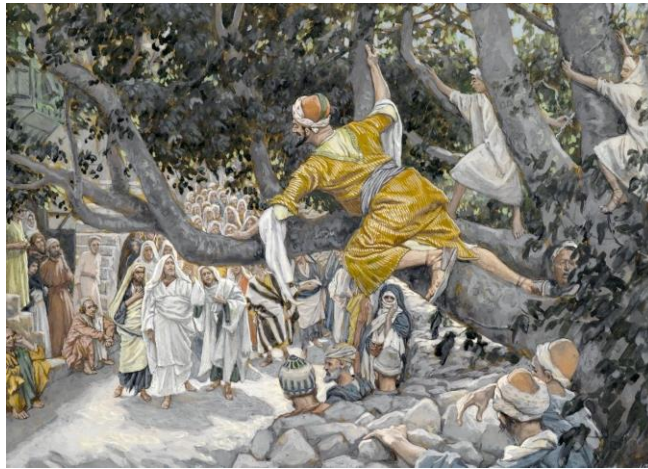
Jesus assured the crowd of Jews that He was not condemning them because His current mission was to save them, but a time of reckoning was on the horizon. There was a Judge who would one day condemn all those who rejected the Lord and refused to accept His words, for the words that Jesus spoke were directly from His

Father.

“Whoever believes in me, believes not in me, but in him who sent me. He who sees me sees him who sent me. I have come as a light into the world that whoever believes in me may not remain in the darkness. If anyone listens to my sayings, and doesn’t believe, I don’t judge him. For I came not to judge the world, but to save the world. (John 12:44-47)

CHAPTER 28

Zacchaeus, Fig Tree, Jesus at Temple, Jesus Authority, Parable 2 Sons, Parable of Tenants



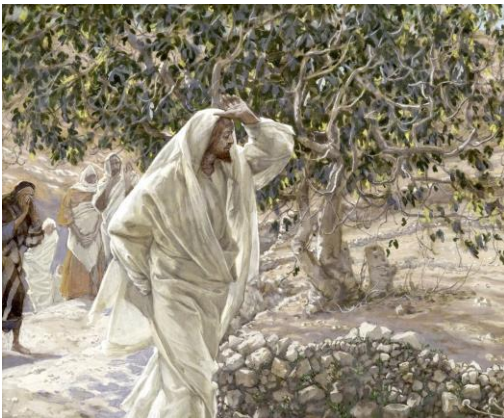
Zacchaeus the Tax Collector

Jesus entered Jericho and the crowd was packed tightly against Him. A wealthy tax collector named Zacchaeus wanted to see Jesus but he was short of stature and unable to peer over the crowd. However he ran ahead to a sycamore-fig tree and climbed it in order to see Jesus coming. Amazingly, the Lord stopped when He reached the spot beneath Zacchaeus' tree and in a show of His divine, supernatural knowledge, He addressed the tax collector by name, saying: *"Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for today I must stay at your house."* (Luke 19:5) Zacchaeus must have been astounded to be singled out in this way. Tax collectors in Israel were much hated by their countrymen because they collected taxes for Rome and were known for lining their pockets with the added surcharges they demanded from the people. Many Jews thought of tax collectors as traitors to their own people, which is why when Jesus invited Himself to Zacchaeus' home, the people grumbled: *'He has gone in to lodge with a man who is a sinner.'* Zacchaeus, however, was overjoyed and immediately told Jesus: *"Behold, Lord, half of my goods I give to the poor. If I have wrongfully exacted anything of anyone, I restore four times as much."* Jesus said to him, *"Today, salvation has come to this house, because he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save that which was lost."* (Luke 19:8-10)

By calling Zacchaeus “a son of Abraham” Jesus was declaring to the crowd His acceptance of Zacchaeus’ faith for salvation. It was exactly such sinners that Jesus had come to save.

Zacchaeus’ willingness to give away half his money and to repay four times the amount he had cheated from others indicates that he had truly repented of his sinful ways. Later James, the brother of Jesus, wrote: *‘What good is it, my brothers, if a man says he has faith, but has no works? Can faith save him? And if a brother or sister is naked and in lack of daily food, and one of you tells them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled”; and yet you didn’t give them the things the body needs, what good is it? Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead in itself. (James 2:14-17)*

Fig Tree Withers



Early next morning Jesus got hungry while on His way back to the city. When He saw a fig tree by the road, He went up to it but found that there were no figs. Then Jesus did a strange thing. He cursed the tree by saying: *“May you never bear fruit again!”* and the tree withered immediately. The disciples were understandably amazed and asked the Lord how the tree could have withered so quickly.

Jesus explained that faith was so powerful that if they believed, they could even command a mountain to throw itself into the sea, and it would be done. *“If you believe,”* He said, *“you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer.”* James, brother to the Lord, later said much the same thing: *‘But let him ask in faith, without any doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, driven by the wind and tossed. (James 1:6)*

Someone may wonder why we don’t see great miracles happening today if all it takes is a little faith. Actually, we do see astounding miracles today, but not as often as happened in the ministry of Christ and in the early church. However, we need to remember that Jesus is the Son of God and many of His miracles were designed to signify His deity. That is why His miracles were so astounding and why they never failed. He is God and we are not. But the apostles and early church disciples also did many miracles because this was essential to the establishment of the kingdom. There was an intense display of the Lord’s power when the Church was in its infancy because it was necessary to authenticate and protect it. One example is Peter’s denunciation of Ananias and Sapphira who fell dead from God’s judgment because they lied to the Holy Spirit. Their deceit was a threat to the Church and they may not have been true Christians since many false brethren were claiming Christ for reasons of personal gain at that time. Paul pronounced blindness as a judgment on a

sorcerer named Elymas who tried to prevent Paul's witness of the gospel to the proconsul. The sorcerer instantaneously lost his sight and remained blind for a time.

The apostles did many miracles meant to advance the kingdom, purify the Church, and call attention to the gospel of Christ. Similar miracles still happen today in various parts of the world, especially in areas where the gospel has not been heard. Therefore it is absolutely true that miracles are for the church today and God still rewards faith as always.

Jesus Cleanses the Temple



Jesus went to the Temple and entered the court of the Gentiles. According to the Old Testament design for the Temple, this court was to be a place of prayer for non-Jewish people who believed in Israel's God. However it was now being used as a market for sellers to prey on the poor and use the Temple as a means to make money for themselves. This defiled the Temple and made the Lord very angry.

Consequently He drove out the moneychangers and cleansed the Temple. This was the second time He did this. In the first event, Jesus used a whip to drive out the sellers, although no whip is mentioned in the second event. However in both instances Jesus effectually prevented people from carrying any merchandise through the Temple. This would have stopped all commerce. According to some accounts, the high priest Caiaphas had allowed commerce to develop in this court, so by purging the Temple, Jesus was in effect challenging the High Priest's authority and accusing him of defiling God's House.

The Authority of Jesus Questioned

Next day Jesus went to the Temple courts again and the chief priests and elders approached Him, demanding to know by what authority He had cleared out the moneychangers. *"By what authority do you do these things? they demanded. (Mark 11:28)* Jesus knew they were looking to trap Him with His words, so He cleverly turned the tables on them. *"I will also ask you one question,"* He said. *'Answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things. The baptism of John—was it from heaven, or from men? Answer me.'* The elders and priests discussed it among themselves, realizing that if they said John had authority from heaven to baptize, Jesus would challenge them as to why they didn't believe in Him, for John had testified that Jesus was the Messiah. But if they said the baptism was merely of human origin, the people would be indignant for they believed John was a prophet.

To say one or the other put them in an uncomfortable position. Far from trapping Jesus, it was they who were now trapped. Finally they answered that they didn't know where it came from. Jesus then said: *"Neither do I tell you by what authority I do these things."* (Mark 11:33)

The Parable of the Two Sons

Jesus then told them a story of a man who had 2 sons. The father asked his sons to work in the vineyard, but one refused. However he later changed his mind and did what his father asked. The second son agreed to obey his father, but later didn't go after all. Jesus then asked which of the 2 sons obeyed their father. The Pharisees answered that the first son was the obedient one. Jesus then drew a parallel between the 2 sons in the story and the kingdom of heaven. He explained that the tax collectors and prostitutes were like the first son who initially refused to be obedient to God, but later responded to God's call and entered the kingdom. The Pharisees and teachers of the Law emulated the second son who verbally promised obedience and loyalty to God but were actually disobedient in practice. Jesus explained that John the Baptist had come to show them the way of righteousness, but they hadn't believed him. Instead, the sinners and outcasts of society believed John and they subsequently entered the kingdom heaven whereas the Jewish leaders were excluded.

The Parable of the Tenants

Jesus told another parable about a landowner who planted a vineyard, dug out a winepress, and protected it all with a wall and watchtower. Then he rented out the vineyard to some farmers before moving to another place. Harvest time approached and the landowner sent his servants to the tenants to collect his harvest, but the tenants beat up one servant, killed another, and stoned a third. The landowner sent more servants but the tenants did the same thing to them as well. Finally the landowner sent his son, thinking that the tenants would surely respect him. However when the tenants saw the landowner's heir coming, they plotted to kill him and steal his inheritance. They grabbed the young man, threw him out of the vineyard, and murdered him. Jesus then asked: *"When therefore the lord of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those farmers?"* (Matthew 21:40) The ones listening to the parable replied: *"He will destroy those miserable men, and will lease out the vineyard to other farmers, who will give him the fruit in its season."* Then Jesus drew a parallel they weren't expecting. He quoted the Scriptures that said: *"The stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner. This is Yahweh's doing. It is marvelous in our eyes."* (Psalm 118:22-23)

The Jews were aware that a cornerstone was the main stone placed at the corner of a building. It was the largest and heaviest so as to give solidity to the structure. It had a spiritual significance as well. Through the prophet Isaiah, God had long ago promised to *"Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious cornerstone of a sure foundation."* (Isaiah 28:16)

Later, the apostle Paul identified that cornerstone as Jesus when he wrote: *'So then you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God, being built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the chief cornerstone; in whom the whole building, fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord.'* (Ephesians 2:19-21)

Jesus was plainly carrying on His theme from His earlier conversations with the Pharisees and teachers of the Law. In the first parable He had told them that their words of loyalty to God did not match up with their actions; at heart they were disobedient and rebellious. As a result, others would enter the kingdom ahead of them. In the parable of the landowner and tenants, Jesus was prophesying that their rebellion would lead to the murder of God's own Son - Himself. In His allusion to the Cornerstone, promised by God through the prophet Isaiah, He was showing them that by rejecting their Messiah, they were in grave danger. Without the Cornerstone, the entire edifice of Israel would topple and fall to the ground.

Daniel, another Old Testament prophet, had also likened the Messiah to a stone "*cut out, but not by human hands,*" which would smash into the nations of the world and completely destroy them. *'In the days of those kings, the God of heaven shall set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed, nor shall its sovereignty be left to another people; but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever. Because you saw that a stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the brass, the clay, the silver, and the gold; the great God has made known to the king what shall happen hereafter: and the dream is certain, and its interpretation sure.'* (Daniel 2:44-45) (i.e. the iron, the brass, and the clay represented the nations of Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome)

Daniel's stone or 'rock' was a metaphor similar to the 'cornerstone' Isaiah mentioned. Removing the Cornerstone (i.e. rejecting the Messiah through unbelief) brought terrible consequences. Just as the 'rock cut out' would bring judgment to the nations of the earth, those who rejected the Cornerstone would be broken and crushed in judgment. With these words the Lord was plainly warning the Jewish leaders that rejecting Him would be fatal.

CHAPTER 29

Taxes, Resurrection & Marriage, Greatest Command, Whose Son, Widow's Gift



Taxes to Caesar

In spite of their many failed attempts to trap Jesus in His words, the Pharisees had no intention of giving up. They came up with another plot to bring about His downfall, and this time they brought along the Herodians (a non-religious party who wanted political independence for the Jewish people, but supported the dynasty of Herod and the general policy of the Roman government). Although there were great differences between the two parties, they were united in their desire to get rid of Jesus. They were sly however, and approached Jesus through words of flattery.

“Teacher, we know that you are honest, and don’t defer to anyone; for you aren’t partial to anyone, but truly teach the way of God. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?” (Mark 11:14)

It was a trick question because if Jesus said ‘no’ the Herodians would charge Him with treason against Rome. If He said ‘yes’ the Pharisees would accuse Him of being disloyal to the Jewish nation, and the crowds would withdraw from Him. Jesus wasn’t fooled for a minute, well aware of their malicious intent. He immediately denounced them as hypocrites trying to entrap Him, but then He commanded them to show Him a coin used for paying the tax. They brought him a denarius and Jesus asked them: *“Whose image and inscription?”* The denarius was made of silver and featured the emperor’s image on it. The Jews considered such images idolatry, and this was another reason the Pharisees hoped Jesus would say

'yes' to paying the tax. If Jesus authenticated the tax, it would be the same as authenticating the coin with its image (idolatry).

The Pharisees could then accuse Jesus of breaking the second commandment (*You shall not make an engraved image for yourself, any likeness of what is in heaven above, or what is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. (Deuteronomy 5:8)*) thus casting doubt on His claim to be the Son of God. In answer to Jesus' question, the Pharisees and Herodians answered: "*Caesar's.*" Jesus said to them: '*Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.*'

Jesus was drawing a distinction between the earthly and spiritual realms. In the world, Caesar minted coins and the populace used Roman money for their financial transactions. In return, the government required taxes in order to function. Therefore it was legitimate to pay taxes to Caesar. However, in the heavenly realm, God's image was stamped upon humankind and therefore all of humanity was obligated to His demands.

So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him, male and female He created them. (Genesis 1:27)

When the Pharisees and Herodians heard the Lord's answer, they were amazed. His answer was masterful in its subtlety, simplicity, and intellectual superiority. Once again their nefarious plans were upended and there was nothing they could do except go away.

Resurrection and Marriage



Next it was the turn of the Sadducees to question Jesus. Sadducees were aristocrats, most of whom were wealthy and held powerful positions (such as the chief priests and council members of the Sanhedrin). They tended to support Rome and thus they were not popular with the Jewish people. Unlike the Pharisees, they denied any resurrection of the dead or an afterlife, believing that the soul perished at death and did not come into judgment.

They did not believe in the existence of a spiritual world at all, being more concerned with politics. The reason they hated Jesus was because they feared that His Messianic claims would bring unwanted attention from Rome to the Jewish nation. This was a threat to the peaceful relations they were striving to maintain with Rome. Consequently they now tried to lay a snare for the Lord that would lead to His disfavor with the people so that they would stop following Him. Their method involved a tricky question about the Law, which they were sure Jesus would be unable to answer, thus shaking His reputation as being wise and knowledgeable.

“Teacher,” they said, Moses wrote to us, ‘If a man’s brother dies, and leaves a wife behind him, and leaves no children, that his brother should take his wife, and raise up offspring for his brother.’

There were seven brothers. The first took a wife, and dying left no offspring. The second took her, and died, leaving no children behind him. The third likewise; and the seven took her and left no children. Last of all the woman also died. In the resurrection, when they rise, whose wife will she be? For the seven had her as a wife.” (Mark 12:19-23)

It was a rhetorical question since the Sadducees didn't even believe in an afterlife, but Jesus answered them anyway. He told them that the people in the world marry and are given in marriage, but those considered worthy of the kingdom neither marry nor are given in marriage. They belong to God and are children of the resurrection, having eternal life and being like the angels. Jesus then gave the Sadducees a theology lesson by adding that in the account of the burning bush, even Moses showed that the dead rise, for he called the Lord ‘the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.’ Since God is not the God of the dead, but of the living, everyone belonging to Him lives forevermore in a spiritual state that is removed from the physical. These statements from Jesus clearly pointed to an afterlife and refuted the Sadducees’ belief system. Some of the teachers of the Law, who stood nearby, heard the Lord’s answer and commended Him, saying, *“Well said, teacher!”*

The Greatest Commandment



The Pharisees heard how Jesus had silenced the Sadducees and they got together and asked Jesus which was the greatest commandment of the Law. Jesus told them that to love God with all one’s heart, soul, and mind was the greatest commandment, and the second was to love one’s neighbor as oneself. He said that all the Law and the Prophets hung on those two commandments.

Whose Son Is the Messiah?

While the Pharisees were still gathered together, Jesus asked them what they thought about the Messiah. *“Whose son is he?”* Jesus asked. *“The son of David,”* they replied. Then Jesus said: *‘ How then does David in the Spirit call him Lord, saying, ‘The Lord said to my Lord, sit on my right hand, until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet?’(Matthew 22:43-44)*

This scripture was taken from Psalm 110 and it clearly revealed that the Messiah was more than David's son. He was David's Lord and Master - God Himself. The passage goes on to say that the Messiah sits at God's right hand and He will triumph over all His enemies and rule over them.

It also says He will be a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek and will crush nations and slay the wicked. Jesus said that David wrote the psalm under the influence of the Holy Spirit so what was written was divinely inspired. The Pharisees could not say a word in reply. Jesus had just revealed that the Messiah was more than human and it puzzled the Pharisees because they had never thought of the Messiah as any more than a prophet. They did not have an understanding of the Trinity within the Godhead so this revelation was most troubling to them. Also, because Jesus often called Himself the Messiah and at the same time claimed equality with the Father, the Pharisees realized that He was not transgressing scripture by doing so. When Jesus had made such claims in the past, they had tried to stone Him, but now the scriptures seemed to be supporting the Lord's assertions. How could they refute what Jesus was saying? How could they accuse Him of heresy now? It must have shaken them to the core because from that day onward, no one dared to ask Him any more questions.

A Warning Against Hypocrisy



After addressing the Pharisees, Jesus focused on the crowds and His disciples, exhorting them to be careful to do everything the Pharisees and teachers of the Law told them to do, but not to follow their actions because they didn't practice what they preached. He accused the Pharisees of placing legalistic burdens upon the people with no intention of helping them to lift them.

All they were interested in was showing off how superior they were to everyone else. They did this by enlarging their phylacteries (a leather box containing Hebrew texts, worn by Jewish men at morning prayer as a reminder to keep the law), and lengthening the tassels on their robes. These drew attention to the fact that they were devoutly religious. They loved the place of honor at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues. It filled them with pride when they were greeted with respect in the marketplaces and called 'Rabbi' by others. Jesus denounced this behavior, saying no one should be called 'Rabbi,' because there was only one Teacher (the Lord) and they were all brothers. They were also not to call anyone on earth 'father,' because they had only one Father in heaven. They were not even to call one another instructors because their only instructor was the Messiah. In other words, Jesus did not want them using titles as a means to establishing hierarchal positions above others. He added that the greatest one among them would be a servant to all because those who exalted themselves would be humbled, and those

who humbled themselves would be exalted.

The Widow's Offering



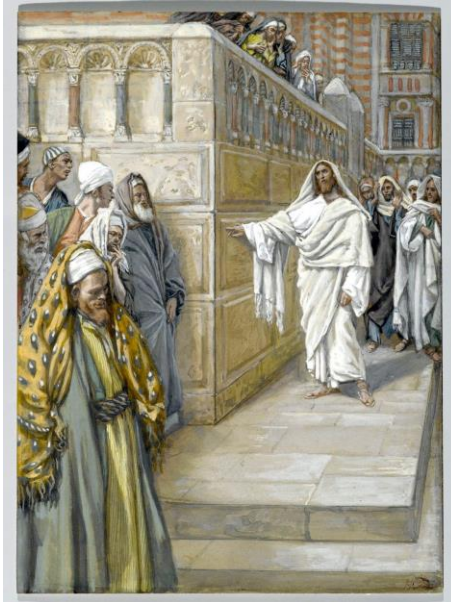
While in the Temple, Jesus looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the Temple treasury. He also saw a poor widow put in two very small copper coins. *“Truly I tell you,”* He said, *“this poor widow put in more than all of them, for all these put in gifts for God from their abundance, but she, out of her poverty, put in all that she had to live on.”* (Luke 21:3-4)

He said this because the others had given out of their wealth, which did not require a big sacrifice, whereas the widow had given out of her poverty.

Jesus obviously evaluated things differently from most people. He saw that the widow's small offering cost her a lot more than the larger amounts offered by the wealthy. The difference was all about proportion. She gave everything - 100% - and therefore her gift was greater than those who offered large sums, which represented much less in percentage value.

CHAPTER 30

End of Age, Interpreting The Times, Coming Of Kingdom, Ten Virgins, Talents, Final Judgment



End of The Age

Some of Jesus' disciples remarked how beautifully the Temple was decorated with costly stones and gifts dedicated to God. But Jesus told them that the time was coming when not one stone would be left on top of another because the Temple would be completely demolished. The disciples immediately wanted to know when it would happen and what sign would be given as an advance warning. The Lord cautioned them not to be deceived by the many who would come professing to be Him and proclaiming that the end was near. They were not to follow them. When they heard of wars and uprisings, they were not to be afraid because these had to happen before the end finally came. Nations and kingdoms would go to war and there would be great earthquakes, famines and plagues in various places. There would even be fearful events and great signs from heaven. Those who followed Christ would be persecuted, imprisoned, and brought to stand before kings and governors in order to testify of Jesus. They were not to worry beforehand how to defend themselves because the Lord would give them words of wisdom to refute their adversaries. They would be betrayed even by parents and relatives and

friends. Some would be executed. Everyone would hate them because they loved Jesus, but 'not a hair of their head would perish'.

This was a strange comment as Jesus had just told them that some of them would be executed, so He obviously wasn't saying that their physical bodies wouldn't be harmed. He was speaking of who they were in their spiritual essence - eternal beings with eternal life. This rendered them indestructible and they were to stand firm in their faith and confidence. Jesus told them that when they saw Jerusalem being surrounded by armies, they were to recognize that its desolation was near. Those in Judea were to flee to the mountains while those in the city were to get out immediately. Those in the country were to stay well away from Jerusalem. It would be particularly terrible for pregnant women and nursing mothers who would not be able to get away easily. Great distress would cover the land and its people would fall by the sword and be taken as prisoners to all the nations.



Th
e Gentiles would trample Jerusalem until the prophecies concerning it were fulfilled. Even the heavens would be in turmoil with strange signs occurring in the sun, moon and stars. The nations on earth would be roiling with anguish and confusion like a storm-tossed sea. People would faint with terror, wondering if the world was coming to an end. At that time they would see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. As soon as they saw these things beginning to happen, they were to be ready in anticipation of their arriving redemption.

"Look at the fig tree and all the trees." Jesus said. "See the fig tree, and all the trees. When they are already budding, you see it and know ... that the summer is already near. Even so you also, when you see these things happening, know that God's Kingdom is near. Most certainly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things are accomplished. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will by no means pass away. (Luke 21:29-33)

It is very clear that Jesus was giving His disciples a clear picture of what was to occur within their lifetimes.

Everything He prophesied would happen within that generation and they were to protect themselves by acting on every word of His instructions.

“So be careful,’ He said, ‘or your hearts will be loaded down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that day will come on you suddenly. For it will come like a snare on all those who dwell on the surface of all the earth. Therefore be watchful all the time, praying that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will happen, and to stand before the Son of Man.”(Luke 21:34-36)

When Jesus used the term ‘face of the whole earth’ He was referring to the world that was then known. The apostle Paul would later use similar terminology.

‘First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, that your faith is proclaimed throughout the whole world’. (Romans 1:8)

... the Good News which you heard, which is being proclaimed in all creation under heaven; of which I, Paul, was made a servant. (Colossians 1:23).

But I say, didn’t they hear? Yes, most certainly, ‘Their sound went out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.’(Romans 10:18)

That evening Jesus left the Temple and spent the night on the hill called the Mount of Olives, but early next morning Jesus returned to the Temple and all the people came to hear Him.

Interpreting The Times

Jesus returned to His earlier theme of the coming judgment on Jerusalem. He accused the crowds of hypocrisy because they could tell what kind of weather was coming by looking at the signs in the sky, yet they couldn’t decipher what was coming in the spiritual realm. He challenged them to be morally discerning and make things right in their lives before they had to face God. Even in worldly terms, it made sense to reconcile with one’s enemy so as to avoid being taken to court and thrown into prison. Just as one wished to avoid being condemned by a human judge for one’s misdemeanors, it was advisable to settle transgressions against God before He came as a heavenly Judge, for He would not allow even one sin to go unpunished.

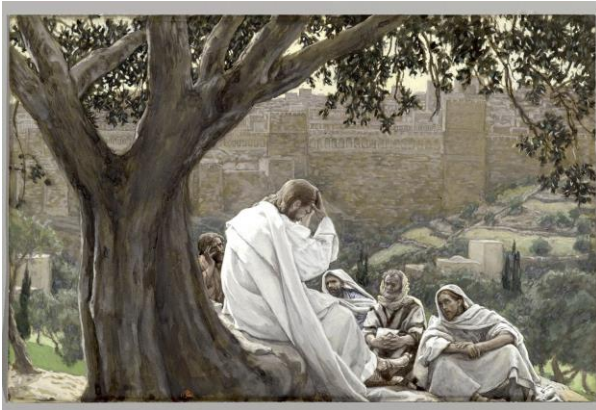
The Coming of the Kingdom of God

One of the Pharisees asked Jesus when the kingdom of God would come and Jesus told him that it’s coming wouldn’t be observed and people wouldn’t be able to point to its location. It was a spiritual kingdom and therefore it would exist invisibly in the

midst of them. He added: 'The days will come, when you will desire to see one of the days of the Son of Man, and you will not see it. They will tell you, 'Look, here!' or 'Look, there!'

Don't follow after them, for as the lightning flashes out of one part under the sky to the other part under the sky; so will the Son of Man be in his day. (Luke 17:22-24)

In other words, Jesus' coming would not be physically visible on the earth but His presence, like lightning, would reach everywhere. However before He returned, He would have to suffer many things, including the rejection of His people, who would carry on their business like usual, never suspecting that their doom was just around the corner.



It would be similar to Noah's time when people were unconcerned about the future - eating, drinking, and marrying right up to the day when the flood came and destroyed everything. It was the same with the people of Sodom. People carried on as usual until fire and sulphur rained down on the city. That's how it would be on the day when the Son of Man would be revealed.

On that day anyone on the housetop should forget about trying to save his possessions and just make a run for it. Anyone in the field shouldn't go back for anything. Lot's wife had paused to look back to Sodom and she had been turned into a pillar of salt. Her hesitation and reluctance to leave Sodom had cost her life, and it would be the same with them. Jesus warned: *'Whoever seeks to save his life loses it, but whoever loses his life preserves it.'* (Luke 17:33) This was His way of saying that those who clung to their earthly existence would lose the chance for a heavenly one, while those who sought an eternal existence would keep it forever. He added that the coming danger would be so imminent and sudden that if two people were in the same spot, one would be 'taken' and the other 'left behind'. There are various views on what Jesus meant by this but since the context deals with sudden destruction, one might conclude that just as a lightning bolt can strike two people, killing one and leaving the other, so it would be with those in Jerusalem. The people asked where this would all take place and the Lord replied: *'Where the body is, there will the vultures also be gathered together.'* (Luke 17:37) He meant that Jerusalem was a city of the spiritually dead and it would draw devouring enemies who would consume its inhabitants like vultures feasting on carrion. This actually did happen in 70AD when the Roman armies surrounded Jerusalem and completely destroyed the city and its populace. This was within the time frame of the current generation Jesus had been addressing. He had prophesied: *'Most certainly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things are accomplished.'* (Luke 21:32)

Future events would prove Jesus to be 100% accurate in all He had foretold!

The Parable of the Ten Virgins

Jesus liked to illustrate His teachings about the kingdom of heaven with parables. He told one about a wedding where ten virgins with lamps went out to meet the bridegroom. This was a common sight in Israel whenever a wedding took place. The bridegroom would dress himself at his house and then proceed with his attendants to his bride's home. Along the way he would be accompanied by the virgins of Israel who would carry their oil lamps to light his way. They would be shouting "*Behold the bridegroom comes, go out to meet him!*" In this way the virgins would escort him to the entrance of the bride's father's house.

The groom would collect his bride and then the procession would go back to the groom's house where a big celebration awaited everyone. Once the guests were inside, the doors would be shut and the revelers would feast and dance all night.



In Jesus' story, there were ten such virgins who waited to escort the bridegroom. However five of them were foolish because they forgot to take along oil for their lamps. The other five virgins were smarter and had oil with them. The bridegroom took a long time in coming so eventually the virgins all fell asleep while waiting for him. Then at midnight a cry rang out that he was coming and all the virgins woke up to trim their lamps.

However the five foolish ones had no oil so they asked the wise ones for some of theirs. The wise ones refused because they didn't think there would be enough for all of them. They told the foolish virgins to buy their own oil from the oil sellers.



While the foolish virgins went to get oil, the bridegroom arrived and the virgins who were ready went with him to the wedding banquet. Then the door was shut and the party began. Later the other virgins came to the house and asked to be admitted, but the bridegroom turned them away saying he didn't know

them.

Jesus ended the story by warning: *'Watch therefore, for you don't know the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming.'* (Matthew 25:13)

In this allegory, Jesus was carrying on His warning to the Jews to be ready when He returned for His Bride (i.e. believers). He would come at an unknown time when they least expected Him. If they were not prepared (without the 'oil' of God's life inside), they would be too late to receive entrance into the kingdom of heaven. Only those who had eternal life, because they had believed in Jesus and taken Him as their Messiah, would live forever with God (i.e. enter the banqueting hall). The rest would be rejected, even though they called themselves the sons of Abraham and thought of themselves as God's people. Jesus said: *'Many will tell me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, didn't we prophesy in your name, in your name cast out demons, and in your name do many mighty works?' Then I will tell them, 'I never knew you. Depart from me, you who work iniquity.'* (Matthew 7:22,23)

The Parable of the Talents (Bags of Gold)

Another of the Lord's parables told the story of a man going on a journey, but before he left he called his servants together and entrusted them with his wealth. Each servant got a different amount according to his management ability. One got five bags of gold, another got two bags, and another one got just one bag. After the man left, the servant with five bags immediately invested it, with the result that he doubled his money. The one with two bags did the same thing and he made an extra two bags. But the man who had received one bag hid his master's money by burying it in the ground. After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. The man who had doubled his five bags of gold to ten was commended by the master. He was pronounced a good and faithful servant because he had been faithful. His reward was to be placed in charge of more money and allowed to share in his master's wealth. The same happened with the second servant. Then the servant who had been given one bag of gold came to his master. He gave his master the original sum, saying: *'Lord, I knew you that you are a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter. I was afraid, and went away and hid your talent in the earth. Behold, you have what is yours.'* (Matthew 25:24-25) His master was very displeased, calling him a wicked, lazy servant and rebuking him for not at least putting the money on deposit at a bank so that there would have been some interest. Then the master took the bag of gold and gave it to the man with ten. Jesus finished the parable by saying: *'For to everyone who has will be given, and he will have abundance, but from him who doesn't have, even that which he has will be taken away. Throw out the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'* (Matthew 25:29-30)

The message of this parable dealt with the truths the Lord was giving to the Jews while He still walked on the earth. One day He would go away, but He would later

return to deal with His servants. Those of the Jews who had 'invested' in the truths (by receiving them by faith) would have spiritual fruit to show for it. They would receive even greater enlightenment and blessing from God.

The ones who did nothing with the Lord's words, burying the truth so that no spiritual fruit resulted, would be judged and condemned. It was a warning to the Jews to act in faith on what Jesus was telling them, before He returned in judgment.

Final Judgment

Jesus told the crowds that when He returned to heaven in His glory with all His angels, He would sit on His glorious throne and the nations would all be gathered before Him. Then He would separate the people as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. The sheep would go on His right and the goats on His left. To the sheep He would say: *'Come, blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry, and you gave me food to eat. I was thirsty, and you gave me drink. I was a stranger, and you took me in. I was naked, and you clothed me. I was sick, and you visited me. I was in prison, and you came to me.'* (Matthew 25:34-36) The righteous ones would ask Him when they had done all this, and He would reply: *'Most certainly I tell you, because you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.'* (Matthew 25:40)

Then He would command those on His left to depart from Him because they had shown no mercy or kindness to His brethren. They would be cursed and cast into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. Jesus added: *'These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.'*

The sheep and the goats referred to the resurrection of all the people from the time of Adam and Eve to just before the Lord's second coming. The sheep would comprise all those who had believed in the Messiah, and the goats would comprise all those who had rejected Him. Currently they were all waiting in Hades, the believers separated by a gulf from the unbelievers.

Jesus' words revealed how closely He identified with His followers. The way in which the nations treated His disciples would signify the Lord's dealings with them. If they persecuted Christian believers, rejected their message, and neglected to care for them, they were heaping judgment on themselves. If they showed favor to believers and received their message, they would be blessed with eternal life in the kingdom. These words were especially applicable to the Jewish nation. If Christ's disciples were treated righteously, the nation would receive God's favor, but if they did otherwise, they would be judged. It would happen soon - within the lifetime of the current generation. The Old Covenant age was already winding down and it would be completely over at the downfall of Jerusalem. The Temple would be torn down and the sacrificial system would end, after which the Jews would be dispersed and the kingdom offered to the Gentiles.

CHAPTER 31

Judas Agrees To Betray Jesus, Last Supper, Foot Washing, Predicted Betrayal, Peter's Denial



Judas Agrees to Betray Jesus

The Passover was 2 days away when the chief priests and the elders of the people gathered together at Caiaphas' palace. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss a scheme to secretly arrest Jesus and kill Him. They didn't want to do it during the festival however, because they feared a riot among the people. That would bring down the wrath of Rome on their heads, which had to be avoided at all costs. However a fortuitous opportunity had just presented itself. One of Jesus' disciples, Judas Iscariot, approached the chief priests and asked them what they would pay him if he delivered Jesus over to them. The chief priests offered him thirty pieces of silver and from then on Judas watched for an opportunity to hand the Lord over to His enemies.

Judas never believed Jesus to be God and never referred to Him as the Messiah. When addressing Jesus, he used the term 'Rabbi' instead. The other disciples at times professed their faith and loyalty but Judas never did. He seems to have had no personal relationship with the Lord. The only dialogue between Judas and Jesus, that is recounted in the scriptures, was when Judas was rebuked by the Lord for scolding Mary because she anointed Jesus with expensive perfume.

In that instance, Judas was annoyed because the perfume hadn't been sold for money and put in the common purse 'for the poor', thus denying him the opportunity to skim off some of the money for himself. In fact, profiting from the collections may have been one of the main reasons he wanted to follow Jesus in the first place. Apparently he also believed the Messiah was going to overthrow the Roman rule over Israel and perhaps he was hoping Jesus would become the new reigning political power. As a friend of Jesus, he would then have a high position of power and wealth. However Jesus often predicted that He would be crucified and this undoubtedly dashed Judas' hopes that Jesus was the Deliverer whom Israel was hoping for.

The Last Supper

On the first day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread, the disciples came to Jesus to ask Him where to make the preparations for the Passover. Jesus told them to go to a place in the city and tell the owner of a certain house that He wanted to celebrate the Passover there. It seems that only Jesus knew about this house and He may have chosen it out of the need for privacy. Crowds were always following Him wherever He went and this made it difficult to find quality time with His disciples. He still had some important instructions to give them. If the Pharisees knew where He was staying, they would probably try to arrest Him before He had time to do that. The disciples found the house and the owner readily agreed to let them have the use of an upper room. The disciples then made all the necessary arrangements and when evening came, Jesus was reclining at the table with His disciples. While they were eating, Jesus suddenly said: *"Most certainly I tell you that one of you will betray me."* (Matthew 26:21) Jesus knew exactly who the betrayer would be. The Old Testament scriptures had prophesied the Lord's betrayal by a close friend, so Jesus knew one of His own disciples would be the culprit.

Yes, my own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, who ate bread with me, has lifted up his heel against me. (Psalm 41:9)

The scriptures had even foretold the exact amount of money the betrayer would receive.

'...So they weighed for my wages thirty pieces of silver. Yahweh said to me, "Throw it to the potter, the handsome price that I was valued at by them!" I took the thirty pieces of silver, and threw them to the potter, in Yahweh's house.' (Zechariah 11:12-13)

When Jesus had chosen Judas as His disciple, He knew that Judas was greedy, avaricious, and disloyal. Jesus was never fooled by anyone because He knew human nature inside out, and was well aware of people's motives.

'But Jesus didn't trust himself to them, because he knew everyone's (heart) (John 2:24)... But there are some of you who don't believe.' For Jesus knew from the

beginning who they were who didn't believe, and who it was who would betray him.'
(John 6:64)

In God's plan, a traitor was needed who would sell Jesus out and expedite the Lord's execution. Therefore Judas was useful to the Lord for that reason. However Judas' wicked actions would doom him to everlasting destruction.

While I was with them in the world, I kept them in your name. Those whom you have given me I have kept. None of them is lost, except the son of destruction, that the Scripture might be fulfilled. (John 17:12)

Judas was 'doomed to destruction' by the choices he made, not because God forced him to act against his will. No one forced him to betray Jesus. Like all of humanity, Judas' human nature was sinful. The Bible says that no one is righteous and no one seeks after God. (Romans 3:10). No one can please Him due to the condition of the sinful heart. (Romans 8:8) Only if the Father teaches a person to understand the truth, is he able to seek after Jesus for salvation. (John 6:37). When God chooses to save someone, it is called election. The elected ones are selected out of fallen humankind, not because they are less sinful or 'better' than anyone else, but because of God's sovereign choice. God's Holy Spirit moves invisibly upon these elected ones to regenerate their hearts, enabling them to have the faith necessary to trust in Jesus Christ. (Ephesians 2:8). This process is the rebirth into a new creature that Jesus talked about with Nicodemus. (John 3:1-21). God is not obligated to do this for anyone, and those who receive the gift of salvation are chosen purely by grace. Human effort, merit, or desire are not involved. (Romans 9:16). God is sovereign in choosing whom He wishes to rescue, and He is not obligated to do it for everyone. If He had chosen not to save anyone, He would have been completely righteous in doing so. This is because all humanity sinned and therefore deserved the death penalty. However God is also a God of love and He desires to show the merciful side of His nature, which He did in sending Jesus to redeem mankind.

After Jesus remarked that one of them would betray Him, the disciples were very sad and began to question one another as to who it could be. *"Surely you don't mean me, Lord?"* they asked one by one. This indicates that each disciple suspected the weakness in his own heart, along with the possibility that he might turn away from the Lord, especially if his own life was threatened. Jesus replied that His betrayer would be one who had dipped his hand into the bowl with Him. He told them that everything written in the scriptures about Him would happen, but woe to the one who betrayed Him. It would be better for that one if he had never been born. Then Judas, who surely knew he was the one referred to, also asked: *"Surely you don't mean me, Rabbi?"* Judas may have asked this question in order to allay the others' suspicion, or maybe he was trying to ascertain if Jesus truly knew his intentions. He had already made a deal with the Pharisees and Sadducees so his question was not sincere. When Jesus replied: *"You have said so,"* Judas would have had no further

doubts that the Lord was well aware of his treachery.

The meal continued and while they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it and gave it to His disciples, saying, *“Take and eat; this is My body.”* Then He took a cup, and when He had given thanks, He gave it to them, saying, *‘All of you drink it, for this is my blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for many for the remission of sins. But I tell you that I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on, until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father’s Kingdom.’* (Matthew 26:27-29)

Jesus had spoken similar words earlier in His ministry, but now He was again reminding His disciples that His body and blood symbolized the New Covenant, which would soon replace the Old. He explained that He would no longer partake of the old wine (the Old Covenant) but would celebrate the New Covenant (new wine) with His disciples when the kingdom of heaven was fully inaugurated. Finishing on that note, Jesus and His disciples all sang a hymn and then went out to the Mount of Olives.

Jesus Washes His Disciples’ Feet

The Passover was getting closer and closer and Jesus knew He would soon leave this world to go to His Father. He only had a short time left with His disciples and His love for them welled up inside as He thought about the coming separation. He knew that His Father had put all things under His power and that He would be returning to God. Nothing was happening that hadn’t been planned from eternity. Still, His heart was concerned for His beloved ones and He wanted to impart one last instruction to them.



He got up from the meal, took off His outer clothing and wrapped a towel around His waist. Then He poured water into a basin and began to wash His disciples’ feet, drying them with the towel. This was a servant’s role and it bothered Peter to see Jesus so humbled. When it was his turn to have his feet washed, Peter protested, but Jesus told him that later he would understand why He was doing this. Peter continued to protest until Jesus told him:

“Unless I wash you, you have no part with Me.” Jesus’ actions symbolized spiritual cleansing and He was telling Peter that he needed that cleansing in order to be saved. Then Peter completely reversed his response by asking to not only have his feet washed, but his hands and head as well. Jesus told him: *“Someone who has bathed only needs to have his feet washed... You are clean, but not all of you.”*

(John 13:10) Jesus’ reference to being ‘cleansed from sin’ may have been referring to their baptism of repentance and their reception of the truth (described as being washed by the Word in Ephesians 5:26), which qualified them for entrance into the

kingdom of heaven. The one who was not cleansed was Judas of course. When Jesus had finished washing their feet, He put on His clothes and returned to His place. Then He asked the disciples if they understood what He had done for them. He told them that they rightfully called Him 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' because that's what He was, but He had just performed a servant's task of washing their feet. He had done this, not to abdicate His role as Master, but to give them an example to follow. He explained that no servant was greater than his master, nor was a messenger greater than the one who sent him. If He, the Master, served His servants, then how much more shouldn't they serve one another. Jesus added that if they served one another in this way, they would be blessed.

Jesus Predicts His Betrayal

Jesus explained that He was telling them what would happen beforehand so that when His death and crucifixion occurred, they would believe that He was who He claimed to be. He also told them that whoever accepted someone He sent would actually be accepting Him; and whoever accepted Him, accepted the One who sent Him. In this way Jesus was revealing the solidarity and unity between Himself, His Father, and all believers. After saying this, Jesus admitted that He was troubled because He was thinking of the one who would shortly betray Him. His disciples stared at one another in perplexity, not understanding whom He was referring to. Peter motioned to John, who was reclining next to Jesus, to ask the Lord whom He meant. John did so and Jesus replied that it was the one to whom He would give a piece of bread after dipping it in the dish. Then, dipping the piece of bread, Jesus gave it to Judas, and at that very moment, Satan entered into him.

Then Jesus told him, *"What you are about to do, do quickly."* The words confused the disciples who thought Jesus was instructing Judas to buy what was needed for the festival, or maybe to give something to the poor. But Judas understood the Lord's meaning, and so did Satan who now possessed him. Immediately Judas went out into the night.

Jesus Predicts Peter's Denial



After Judas left, Jesus said: *'Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself, and he will glorify him immediately .(John 13:31-32)*

Glory' comes from the Hebrew word meaning 'heavy' from which the idea of 'weightiness' comes. It refers to what is honorable and

worthy of respect.

Jesus was telling His disciples that He would reveal God's "weighty" holiness in Himself, and the Son's 'weightiness' or fullness of grace and truth would likewise be revealed in God. Jesus was saying that in the forthcoming events, He and His Father would be revealed in all their magnificence. However, He would return from where He came and His beloved 'children' would be unable to find Him or follow Him. Then Jesus gave them a new command to love one another, saying that in this way everyone would know that they were His disciples.

Peter asked him where He was going, and Jesus replied: *'Where I am going, you can't follow now, but you will follow afterwards.'* Jesus was meaning that Peter would not join Him in His resurrection from the grave, but would be resurrected at a later date. But that answer wasn't quite good enough for Peter and so he asked: *"Lord, why can't I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you."* Then Jesus answered, *'Will you lay down your life for me? Most certainly I tell you, the rooster won't crow until you have denied me three times.'* (John 13:38)

Those must have been shocking words for Peter who was so sure that his love for Jesus was strong and true. He was the impetuous one who had made strong proclamations about the Lord being the Messiah. He had jumped into the sea and walked on water to go to Jesus, and he had forsaken all in order to follow the Lord. He was convinced that his love was greater than that of all the other disciples. He would soon find out how greatly he had overestimated his devotion and loyalty to the Lord. However, Jesus didn't leave Peter without hope. He told him that Satan had asked to sift Peter like wheat (shred his faith), but He had prayed that Peter's faith would not fail. *"When once you have turned again, establish (strengthen) your brothers."* (Luke 22:32)

Jesus had not prayed for Judas' faith because he had none, but Peter was a different matter. Peter belonged to God and was a believer. Therefore he would not be lost, even though his faith would falter.

CHAPTER 32

Jesus Comforts, Jesus Is The Way, Holy Spirit, Vine & Branches, Servant & Master, a



Jesus Comforts His Disciples

Jesus knew it wouldn't be long before Judas returned with the authorities to arrest Him, so He used the remaining time to comfort His disciples. *"Don't let your heart be troubled," He said, ' Believe in God. Believe also in me. In my Father's house are many homes. If it weren't so, I would have told you. I am going to prepare a place for you. If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and will receive you to myself; that where I am, you may be there also. Where I go, you know, and you know the way."*(John 14:1-4) Jesus was telling them not to be anxious because He was going to heaven to prepare their eternal dwelling place. It would have many 'rooms' because God's family would include many people. Some time later He would return for them and take them back to heaven to live with Him forever. Thomas spoke up, saying he didn't know where Jesus was going and didn't know the way. Jesus answered, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father, except through me. *'If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on, you know him, and have seen him."* (John 14:6,7) Philip didn't really get what Jesus was meaning, and he asked Jesus to show them the Father. Jesus then asked: *"Have I been with you such a long time, and do you not know me, Philip? He who has seen me has seen the Father. How do you say, 'Show us the Father?' Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? The words that I tell you, I speak not from myself; but the Father who lives in me does his works.'* (Luke 14:9-10)

Jesus was boldly declaring His divinity, and although this was not the first time He had done so, the words would still have been shocking to hear. No prophet in the Old Testament had ever claimed equality with God. God's Spirit had come upon prophets and kings in the past, to anoint them for special tasks, but it was unheard of that they could be considered one and the same with the Father of heaven. As concerns the Messiah, it was known he would be a prophet and a king, but it was not understood that He would be God Himself! No one had been expecting such a thing! Consequently it is not too difficult to understand how the disciples had a difficult time with this concept. Jesus tried to make it easier for them to believe by referring them to the many miraculous works He had done.

'Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me; or else believe me for the very works' sake. Most certainly I tell you, he who believes in me, the works that I do, he will do also; and he will do greater works than these, because I am going to my Father. Whatever you will ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you will ask anything in my name, I will do it.' (Luke 14: 11-13)

These amazing promises were mind-blowing. Doing greater works than Jesus had done?! The disciples must have thought about the times Jesus walked on water, calmed tumultuous storms, fed thousands on a few fish and loaves of bread, healed a multitude of diseases, restored withered limbs, and raised people from the dead. How could they ever think of accomplishing such amazing feats? However Jesus was not saying that they would do the same exploits as He had done. When He said they would do "greater" works than He, He meant greater in extent. Jesus' earthly ministry had been limited geographically to Israel and its environs, but the Lord's followers would bring God's Kingdom to the farthest reaches of the earth. Jesus would answer their prayers and together with Him they would accomplish unbelievable acts of great impact affecting all the nations of the world. However they would need a Holy Spirit to assist and enable them.

Jesus Promises the Holy Spirit

Jesus told His disciples that He would ask His Father to give them an Advocate (Defender) who would help them and remain with them forever. This Advocate would be the Spirit of truth whom the world was unable to accept because it couldn't see Him. Unbelievers didn't know Him, but the disciples would, because He already lived with them and would later be in them. The disciples had first seen the Holy Spirit when He alighted on Jesus at His baptism. Now Jesus was saying that this same Holy Spirit would not only alight on them, but He would actually indwell them!

'I will not leave you orphans. I will come to you. Yet a little while, and the world will see me no more; but you will see me. Because I live, you will live also. In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. One who has my commandments, and keeps them, that person is one who loves me. One who loves me

will be loved by my Father, and I will love him, and will reveal myself to him.’(Luke 14:18-21)

Jesus was saying that He would depart from the world and wouldn't be seen anymore. However He would return to His followers, who would see Him in spirit. After His resurrection, they would finally understand that their obedience to Jesus' word (which would reflect their love for Him) would unite them spiritually with the Godhead. Living within that divine love relationship would result in Jesus continually revealing Himself to them. This spiritual insight would make Jesus more real to them than seeing the Lord with physical eyes.

Judas, one of the disciples (not Judas Iscariot), asked why Jesus intended to show Himself to them and not to the rest of the world. Jesus told him that it was because the world did not love Him or obey His teaching. However, the disciples did love Him and therefore He and His Father would come to them and make their home with them. Also, the Holy Spirit, sent by the Father in Jesus' name, would teach them everything they needed to know. He would also remind them of everything the Lord had told them. They would receive His peace - not a worldly peace - but one in which they would be completely at rest in their relationship with God, without anything separating them from His love. Sin would no longer be able to condemn them with its promise of eternal judgment. Consequently they were not to fear because the Lord was leaving them. In fact, they should be glad that He was going to the Father because the Father was 'greater' than He. This statement was not a negation of Jesus' equality with His Father, but rather a reference to His humanity, which made Him 'a little lower than the angels' (Hebrews 2:9). His status on earth came with limitations, although He was fully divine. He did not stop being God when He took on humanity. However He voluntarily gave up His right to freely exercise His divine attributes while on earth. The "greatness" Jesus spoke of related to role, not to essence. Jesus told His disciples that He wouldn't say too much more to them because the prince of this world was coming. Satan had no hold on Him of course, but the devil was coming so that the world would witness the love between Jesus and His Father, demonstrated through the Lord's obedience to His Father as He went to the cross.

The Vine and the Branches

Jesus repeatedly stressed the unity between Himself and His disciples, stressing the importance of their dependency on Him. He used the allegory of a vine and branches to illustrate this.

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the farmer. Every branch in me that doesn't bear fruit, he takes away. Every branch that bears fruit, he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. You are already pruned clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. Remain in me, and I in you. As the branch can't bear fruit by itself, unless it remains in the vine, so neither can you, unless you remain in me.”(John 15:1-4)

He told them that apart from Him they could do nothing. Just as a branch cut off

from the vine would shrivel and die and be thrown away, so too would anyone who did not remain in Him.

This was because they would not have independent life in themselves. The life within them would be the Lord's own life and He would be living through them. Those who remained in Him and kept His words in their hearts would be able to ask whatever they wished, and it would be done for them. They were intended to bring glory to the Father and bear much fruit, showing themselves to be His disciples. Jesus added that the love existing between Him and His Father was the same love He felt for them. They were to remain in that love, which they would do if they adhered to His words. This kind of love was evidenced by obedience and brought great joy. Jesus wanted them to fully experience this joy by loving others as He loved them.

Then the Lord said: 'Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends, if you do whatever I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant doesn't know what his lord does. But I have called you friends, for everything that I heard from my Father, I have made known to you. You didn't choose me, but I chose you, and appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain; that whatever you will ask of the Father in my name, he may give it to you. I command these things to you, that you may love one another.' (John 15:13-17)

Servant and Master

Jesus experienced a great deal of opposition during His ministry and He warned the disciples that if the world treated Him that way, they could expect the same treatment. They were to remember that the world hated Him first. In fact it hated anyone who did not belong to its own system. But they had been chosen out of the world and didn't belong to it any longer, just as Jesus did not belong to it.

He added: 'A servant is not greater than his lord. If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will keep yours also. But all these things will they do to you for my name's sake, because they don't know him who sent me. If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have been guilty of sin; but now they have no excuse for their sin.' (John 15:20-22)

Jesus was alluding to the Jews who had heard His teachings and seen His miracles. They were therefore responsible for how they responded. A response of hatred for Jesus signified hatred for the Father because Jesus was one with God. They now had no excuse whatever for their sin. The Lord added that if He hadn't done the works that no one else had done, they would not be guilty of sin. But they had seen the proof that Jesus was the Messiah, and yet they still hated both Jesus and His Father, just as had been written in the Old Testament.

Those who hate me without a cause are more than the hairs of my head. Those who want to cut me off, being my enemies wrongfully, are mighty.....(Psalm 69:4)

The Work of the Holy Spirit

As for the disciples, they would soon receive the Advocate —the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father and who would testify about Jesus. They were to testify of all they had seen and heard that the Lord had done from the beginning. They were to cling to His words so as not to fall away when they were expelled from the synagogues. A time was coming when it would be thought that anyone who killed the Lord's followers was offering a service to God, but their persecution would just prove their oppressors had never known the Father or Jesus. Jesus exhorted them to remember His warnings. He hadn't warned them before, but the situation was more crucial now.

Grief to Joy

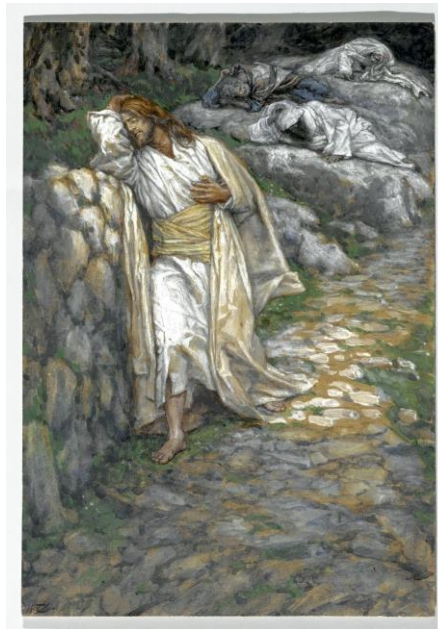
The disciples were still confused about all this talk of the Lord leaving them. They kept asking for more details, so Jesus explained: *"Most certainly I tell you, that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice. You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned into joy." (John 16:20)* Jesus likened this to a woman giving birth to a child. At first she suffers a lot of pain during contractions, but she soon forgets her anguish and is filled with joy when her baby arrives. It would be similar for the disciples. When Jesus returned, their elation would be great. In that day they would have all their questions answered. In the meantime, they were to ask the Father in Jesus' name for whatever they needed because the Father would give them whatever they asked. *"Ask,"* Jesus said, *"and you will receive, and your joy will be complete."*

The Lord admitted that He had been speaking figuratively to them a lot of the time, but a time was coming when He would no longer do so. They would freely petition God for themselves, without first asking Jesus, and because the Father loved them, He would answer all their requests. The disciples thought they finally grasped what Jesus was saying and said: *'Now we know that you know all things, and don't need for anyone to question you. By this we believe that you came from God.'* Jesus was not so sure. *"Do you now believe? Behold, the time is coming, yes, and has now come, that you will be scattered, everyone to his own place, and you will leave me alone. Yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me.'* (Luke 16:30-33)

Jesus then once again promised to give them peace, although the world would give them much trouble. *"But cheer up!"* Jesus comforted. *"I have overcome the world."*

CHAPTER 33

Gethsemane, Prayer for Disciples, Prayer For All Believers, Arrested, Annas, Sanhedrin, Guards Mock Jesus



Purse and Sword

Jesus asked the disciples if they had ever lacked anything when He had commissioned them to spread the news of the kingdom without taking a purse, bag, or sandals with them. They replied that they had wanted for nothing. Jesus told them now it was different. They were to take provisions and if they didn't have a sword, they were to sell their cloaks to buy one. They would be hunted as criminals and Jesus Himself would be numbered with the transgressors, just as had been written of Him. The time for that fulfillment was very near.

'Therefore will I give him a portion with the great, and he will divide the plunder with the strong; because he poured out his soul to death, and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors. (Isaiah 53:12)

Jesus was not speaking literally when He told His disciples to take a purse and a sword with them. He meant that in the next little while He would not be able to offer them the same provision and protection, as before, so they were to look out for themselves.

This was because, once arrested by the authorities, Jesus would not directly use His powers as before. The disciples, however, took Jesus literally and found two swords, which they brought to Him. In response, the Lord simply said: *"That's enough!"* Ultimately Jesus indicated that there was nothing sinful about owning a weapon, which could be useful and even necessary in some contexts. In the present situation, there was a strong likelihood of possible violence coming from the soldiers who were seeking to arrest Jesus. The Lord did not want the disciples to be harmed and so they were permitted to take a few weapons along.

Gethsemane

Jesus went to the Mount of Olives, which was a place He often went to in order to pray, and His disciples followed him. Once there, He exhorted them to pray to not fall into temptation. Then He took Peter, John, and James and went a short distance away to pray privately to the Father. He asked for the cup of suffering to be taken away from Him, but He quickly added that He wanted what God wanted, not His own preferences. As always, Jesus' will was united with His Father's so that there was never any conflict in desire. Nevertheless Jesus was in such great anguish as He earnestly prayed, that He sweat drops of blood, and an angel from heaven was needed to strengthen Him.

Sweating blood is a medical condition that involves the blood vessels around the sweat glands constricting and dilating to the point of rupture. The fact that this was happening reveals that Jesus was obviously under enormous pressure. He knew the grueling details of what would soon follow for He had undoubtedly witnessed many instances of Roman crucifixion during His lifetime. Crucifixion was considered to be the most painful form of torture ever devised. But it wasn't only the excruciating physical pain He would suffer that concerned Him. He would be bearing the weight of the world's sin on the cross, which would temporarily sever His soulful relationship with the Father whom He so dearly loved. This didn't mean that the Godhead would be split apart, but it meant that the human part of Jesus would feel the abandonment and condemnation of a holy and just God who hates sin.

But your iniquities have separated you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear. (Isaiah 59:2)

It is interesting that Jesus entered a garden where His faithfulness to His Father was tested. It was in another garden (the Garden of Eden) that Adam first sinned against God. Adam's choice doomed the entire human race to physical and spiritual death. Jesus' choice would result in the creation of a New Humanity that would transcend physical death and live eternally in heaven with God.



Jesus rose from prayer and went back to the disciples, who were all asleep. They were deeply depressed to the point of exhaustion, overwhelmed by the prospect of Jesus leaving them. Unfortunately they were unable to offer any human comfort or support to the Lord. Jesus told them to get up and pray against the temptations that would soon assail them. They had to be alert, now more than ever before, or the coming trials would devastate them.

Jesus then looked toward heaven and prayed: *“Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may also glorify you; even as you gave him authority over all flesh, he will give eternal life to all whom you have given him. This is eternal life, that they should know you, the only true God, and him whom you sent, Jesus Christ. I glorified you on the earth. I have accomplished the work which you have given me to do. Now, Father, glorify me ... with the glory which I had with you before the world existed.”* (John 17:1-5)

Jesus Prays for His Disciples

Jesus had revealed His Father to those whom God had taken out of the world. This included the eleven disciples as well as all those He called friends. They had belonged to the Father who had given them to Jesus so that He could instruct and protect them. These ones had accepted and obeyed the Lord’s words, believing that He came from God and that He spoke the truth to them. They were God’s beloved ones and that’s why Jesus prayed for them, but He did not pray for the world. Only those whom the Father had given Him were included in His high priestly prayer. They belonged to both the Father and to Jesus, as did everything in heaven and earth. Jesus was magnified through these disciples and now He would have to leave them behind when He returned to heaven. This was part of the reason Jesus agonized in the garden. He was concerned for them and He asked the Father to protect them through His name - the name Jesus shared with His Father as God. This name has tremendous power to protect, heal, and deliver because it is imbued with divine authority and great might.

All believers are sheltered under that name because their hearts are united with God's own Spirit and together they are of one purpose with the Lord. Jesus had protected them and kept them safe by His authority as the Son of God and none were lost, except for Judas, and that only because Judas was doomed to destruction so that Scripture would be fulfilled. Now Jesus would soon be going to His Father and He would not be exercising His divine powers, but He wanted His disciples to be aware that He was praying for them and that they would still be under His Father's protection. This would fill their hearts with joy and the words He had spoken to them would bolster them against the world, which hated them.

In His prayer to His Father, Jesus said: *'I pray not that you would take them from the world, but that you would keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in your truth. Your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, even so I have sent them into the world. For their sakes I sanctify myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth.'* (John 17:15-19)

When Jesus spoke of 'sanctification' He was talking about purification that results from dedication to God. Jesus had dedicated Himself to His Father and He was pure in everything He did and thought. He wanted His disciples to be dedicated to God in the same way, with purified hearts that were as God-centered as His own.

Jesus Prays for All Believers

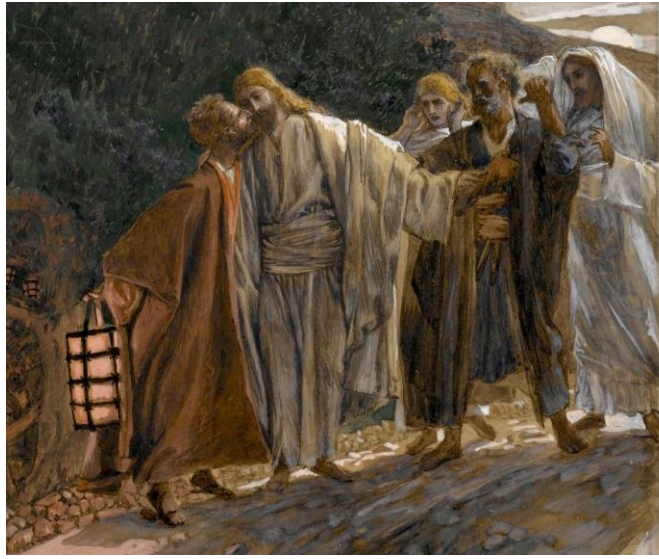
Jesus then extended His prayer to all those who would believe in Him through the gospel. He wanted them all to share the unity He had with His Father, so that just as Jesus was in the Father and the Father was in Him, so they would be in God and He in them. That unity would be a testimony to the world that would cause many others to believe that God had sent Jesus. The world would see that God loves believers as much as He loves His Son.

"Father," Jesus prayed, *'I desire that they whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, that they may see my glory, which you have given me, for you loved me before the foundation of the world. Righteous Father, the world hasn't known you, but I knew you; and these knew that you sent me. I made known to them your name, and will make it known; that the love with which you loved me may be in them, and I in them.'* (John 17:24-26)

The unity Jesus spoke of is the spiritual cohesiveness we have with God because we share the life of Jesus. Before Christ came, all of humanity was dead in spirit and separated from God. But now, through the miracle of new birth, believers are filled with the divine nature of Christ and indwelt by the Holy Spirit. We have been made alive in our minds and hearts and our desires are in sync with God's. We understand Him like never before. Like Jesus, we want only to do and speak what we see and hear the Father doing. Even though we still have the flesh to contend with, as a hangover from our crucified old nature, it has no power to condemn or enslave us. Through our new eternal nature, we have the power to resist sin and temptation and live for God.

Jesus Arrested

When Jesus had finished praying, He and His disciples went across the Kidron Valley to a garden. Judas knew this place because Jesus had often met there with His disciples. Judas probably went first to the house where Jesus and the disciples shared the Passover. He may have gone to several places. Or perhaps the Lord had mentioned the places he would visit that night.



Eventually, Judas went to the garden where Jesus was, guiding a detachment of soldiers and some officials sent by the chief priests and Pharisees. They were carrying torches, lanterns and weapons to light their way as they advanced towards the Lord. Jesus was not surprised. He knew everything that was about to happen and went out to them, asking whom they wanted. Judas approached Jesus to kiss Him in order to identify Him to the soldiers, but Jesus asked him, *Judas, do you betray the Son of Man with a kiss?* Judas' betrayal was bad enough, but his pretense of loving the Lord while doing so was especially abominable.



Jesus asked the soldiers who it was they were looking for. *"Jesus of Nazareth,"* they replied, and Jesus said, *"I am He."* The soldiers were probably shocked at how Jesus fearlessly stood His ground instead of trying to escape. They wouldn't have expected that kind of response. In fact, so much power exuded from the Lord that the soldiers drew back and fell to the ground.

Jesus asked them again: *“Who are you looking for?”* and again they said they wanted Jesus of Nazareth. *“I told you that I am He.”* Jesus replied. *“If you are looking for Me, then let these men go their way.”* The Lord’s aura of power and authority made it impossible for them to disobey. It was as if they had no control over the situation and because Jesus had specifically prayed to the Father that not one of those given to Him would be lost, the soldiers could not lay a hand on the disciples.

However Jesus’ followers were ready for battle and asked: *“Lord, should we strike with our swords?”* Peter, who had a sword, didn’t wait for a reply but struck the high priest’s servant, cutting off his right ear. But Jesus commanded Peter to put his sword away, saying: *“The cup which the Father has given me, shall I not surely drink it?”* Then, even though the servant was one of His enemies, Jesus touched the man’s ear and healed him. Addressing the chief priests, the officers of the temple guard, and the elders, Jesus said: *“Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs? When I was with you in the temple daily, you didn’t stretch out your hands against me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness.”*(Luke 22:52-53) The disciples finally realized that Jesus was going to see this out to the end, so they all deserted Him and fled. Now the Lord was alone.

Taken to Annas



The soldiers who had come to arrest Jesus may have been a Roman detachment sent along with the temple guards to ensure that no riot occurred. Their commander arrested Jesus and had Him bound. They then brought Him to Annas, the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest that year. Two of the disciples, Peter and John, followed at a distance. The high priest knew John so he was allowed into the high priest’s courtyard without arousing any suspicions as to why he was there. However Peter had to wait outside at the door. Later John came back and spoke to the servant girl on duty to allow Peter to come in as well.

But the girl wanted more information and asked Peter if he was one of Jesus’ disciples. Peter must have sensed the danger of admitting association with the Lord, so he immediately replied that he was not. He then joined a group of officials and servants who were warming themselves around a fire in the courtyard.

Meanwhile Annas had gathered the Temple court administrators together and proceeded to question Jesus. Annas was well aware that it was illegal to hold a midnight trial, and no trials were to be held during the Passover, but this wasn’t the first time Annas had acted illegally.

He had been appointed as high priest in 6 AD but had lost his position because he had illegally imposed death sentences without Rome's permission. Nevertheless he still had a lot of influence and he retained control of the priesthood through his leadership in the Sanhedrin. In actuality he was a more powerful figure than his son-in-law, Caiaphas, the current High Priest, so it was not surprising that Annas opened the proceedings against Jesus.

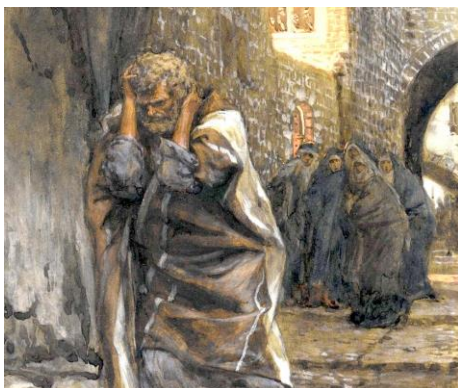
The first thing Annas did was demand that Jesus explain His teachings, but Jesus reasonably pointed out that His teachings had never been a secret so if He had been guilty of anything, it would have been clear to all. *"I have spoken openly to the world,"* He told Annas. *"I always taught in synagogues or at the temple, where all the Jews come together. I said nothing in secret. Why question Me? Ask those who heard Me. Surely they know what I said."* (John 18:20-21)

One of the officers standing nearby felt this response was disrespectful to Annas, and he slapped Jesus in the face, but Jesus did not take this abuse silently. *'If I have spoken evil, testify of the evil,'* He said, *'but if well, why do you beat me?'*

What Jesus said was completely true. He had preached openly and honestly, so there was no point in repeating Himself to Annas and the Temple officials. And by pointing out that He had said nothing deserving of a blow, He not only indicated that He would not be intimidated, but He also shamed the officer for abusing his position. His refusal to be cowed or manipulated by Annas and the court must have greatly frustrated them. Annas finally stopped questioning Jesus and sent Him, still bound, to Caiaphas the high priest, who had the legal authority to lay charges against the Lord.



Back in the courtyard, Peter was standing around the fire when one of those nearby saw him and accused him of being one of Jesus' followers. For the second time, Peter denied it vehemently. Then an hour later another person said: *"Truly this man also was with him, for he is a Galilean!"*



Peter retorted that he didn't know what they were talking about, and at that exact moment, a rooster crowed. Just then Jesus was coming out to the courtyard and He looked straight at Peter. Immediately he remembered the Lord's words: *"Before the rooster crows today, you will disown Me three times."* Heartbroken and ashamed, Peter went outside and wept bitterly.

Before Caiaphas



Caiaphas invited the chief priests and council members, as well as some witnesses, to present evidence against Jesus so that they could put Him to death. Though many testified against Jesus, their statements were in conflict and clearly false. Some accused Jesus of saying He would destroy the Temple made with human hands and in three days build another not made with hands, but even then their testimonies did not agree. Caiaphas grew impatient when Jesus remained silent and gave no answer to the accusations leveled against Him. Finally he asked Jesus point blank: *“Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?”* To this Jesus answered: *“I am. And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of the sky.”* (Mark 14:62)

The high priest knew that Jesus was referring to Daniel 7:13, 14: *“I saw in the night visions, and behold, there came with the clouds of the sky one like a son of man, and he came even to the ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. There was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations, and languages should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed.”*

Caiaphas regarded Jesus’ admission as pure blasphemy and tore his clothes. This was a common practice among the Jews when they wanted to express loss or grief, but the high priest was not allowed to tear his clothes (Leviticus 21:10). The fact that Caiaphas did so would have been a startling act, revealing the high emotions he was feeling. *“Why do we need any more witnesses?”* he demanded. *“You have heard the blasphemy. What do you think?”* The entire council agreed with Caiaphas and came to the decision to condemn Jesus to death.

Before the Sanhedrin

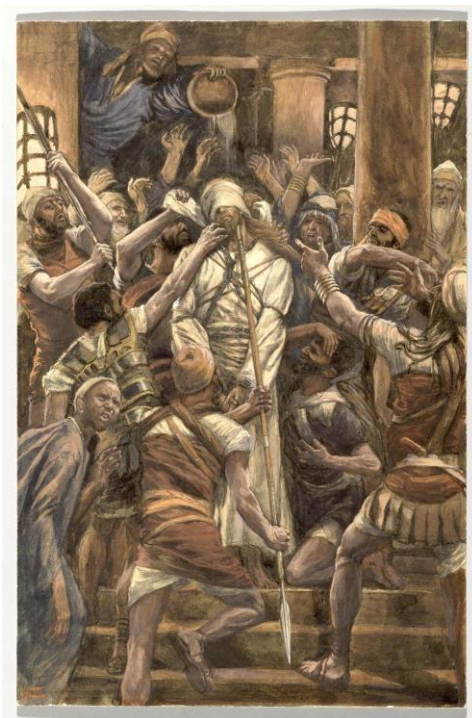


It was now dawn and Annas, Caiaphas, and the council of chief priests and teachers of the Law met together, putting Jesus on trial for the third time. As they discussed together, they realized that to their way of thinking a charge of blasphemy might warrant execution, but it was unlikely that Rome would feel the same way.

Rome didn't care if someone called himself the Son of God. However if Jesus could be accused of declaring Himself a king, then Rome would see that as insurrection against the Emperor, and a death penalty would follow. The council felt confident that by manipulating evidence against Jesus, they would get such a pronouncement.

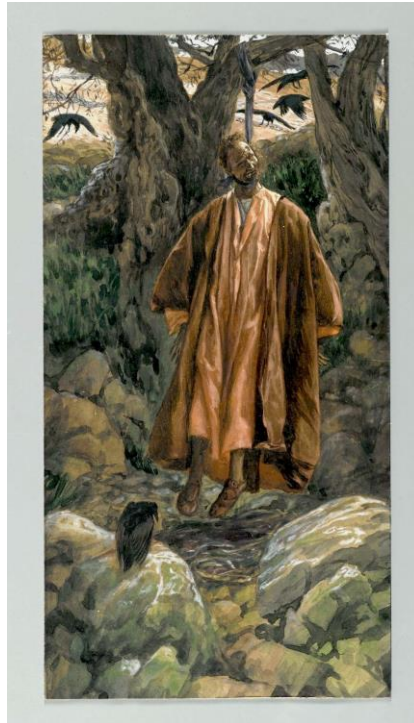
The Guards Mock Jesus

The men who were guarding Jesus began to mock and beat Him. They put a blindfold over His eyes and demanded, *"Prophecy! Who hit you?"* Some spit at Him and said many insulting things to him. Others struck Him with fists. This went on for some time as the guards indulged their cruelty. Jesus did not resist their bullying but suffered in silence.



CHAPTER 34

Judas Hangs Himself, Jesus Before Pilate, Jesus Before Herod, Back to Pilate, Death Sentence, Crucifixion, Jesus Dies

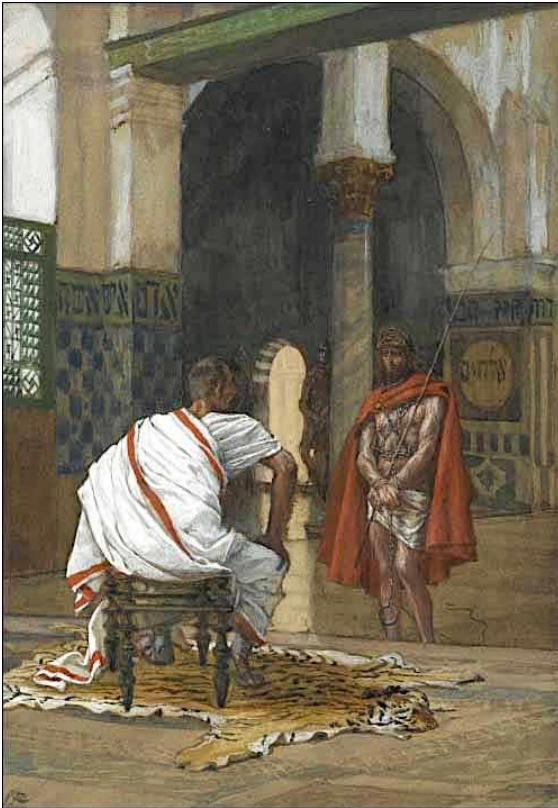


Judas Hangs Himself

When Judas saw that Jesus was condemned, he felt great shame and tried to return the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests. He told them that he had sinned by betraying innocent blood. The chief priests couldn't have cared less. *"That's your responsibility,"* they said. Judas then threw the money into the Temple and went away to a field where he hung himself from a tree. The chief priests picked up the coins and, because it was against the law to put blood money into the treasury, they used it to buy a potter's field as a cemetery for foreigners. It was called the Field of Blood from that time onward. All this was the fulfillment of prophecy: *"Then that which was spoken through Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled, saying, 'They took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him upon whom a price had been set,...and they gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord commanded me.'"*(Matthew 27:9-10)

Some have wondered whether Judas repented or merely felt guilty after betraying Jesus. Because the Lord called Judas 'the son of perdition' (John 17:12) and said he was doomed to hell, it is unlikely that Judas truly repented. The Bible describes godly sorrow as leading to repentance that leads to salvation, whereas worldly sorrow leads to death. (2 Corinthians 7:10) People often feel remorse because they get caught doing something wrong and they feel guilt and shame. Even though remorse can consume a person emotionally, it is often a temporary feeling that does not result in true or lasting change. However godly repentance brings about a change in thought and behavior that results in taking responsibility for sinful actions and seeking God's forgiveness. Judas definitely felt remorse, but it may have arisen from disappointment that his dreams for the future were destroyed. He may have felt shame and guilt for his actions, but he did not actually repent, or he would have sought forgiveness from God instead of ending his life.

Jesus Before Pilate



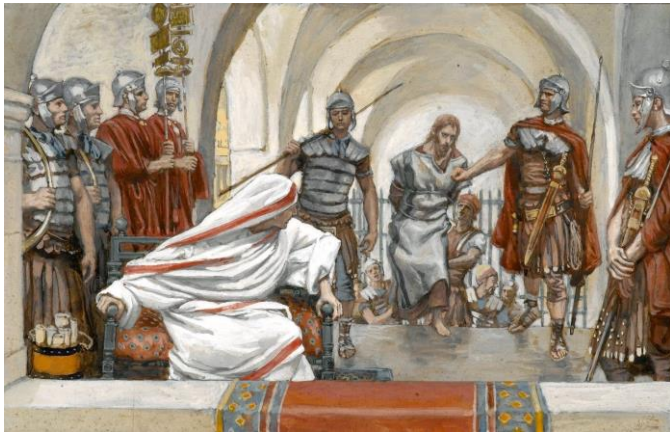
Early in the morning the chief priests and the elders of the people bound Jesus and led Him away to be handed over to Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor. Pilate held office from 26 AD to 36/37 AD and during that time he regularly upset the Jews by disregarding their religious and social customs. However he still had to be careful to keep the peace in Judea or he would be in trouble with Caesar. The chief priests knew this about Pilate and they rightly surmised that he would not condemn Jesus to death unless he saw Him as a national threat to Rome. They therefore told the governor that Jesus was trying to overthrow Roman rule by opposing the payment of taxes to Caesar and by claiming He was a king. This intrigued Pilate and he asked Jesus: *"Are you the king of the Jews?"* The Lord merely replied: *"You have said so."*

After further interrogation, Pilate realized that the Pharisees had religious motives for arresting Jesus and he announced to the chief priests and the crowd that he found no basis for a charge against Jesus. However the Jewish assembly insisted that Jesus was stirring up the people all over Judea by His teaching, all the way from Galilee to Jerusalem. On hearing that Jesus was a Galilean, Pilate saw an opportunity to hand the problem over to King Herod who had jurisdiction over Galilee, and who just happened to be in Jerusalem at the time.

Jesus Before Herod

When Jesus was brought before Herod, the king was delighted. He been wanting to see Him for a long time. He had heard about the miracles and signs Jesus had performed and he wanted to see some for himself. He began asking Jesus a great many questions but Jesus refused to answer him, even though the chief priests and the teachers of the Law were vigorously accusing Him. Herod eventually grew frustrated with the Lord's silence and he and his soldiers began to ridicule and mock Jesus, dressing Him in an elegant robe before sending Him back to Pilate. Pilate seemed to have appreciated the mockery because he and Herod became friends from that time on, although previously they had been enemies.

Jesus Back to Pilate



By now it was early morning, and the chief priests brought Jesus back to Pilate but they would not enter the Praetorium because doing so would make them ceremonially unclean for the Passover. Consequently Pilate came out to them in the courtyard and asked them what charges they were bringing against Jesus.

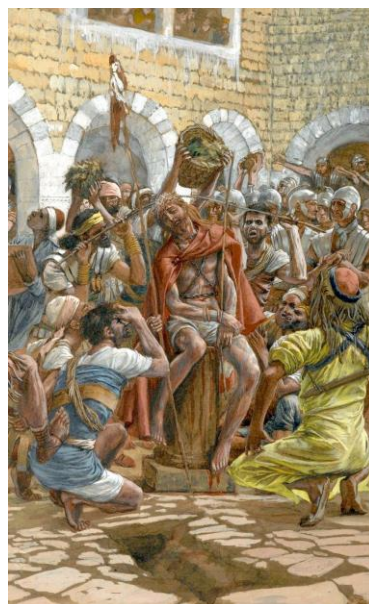
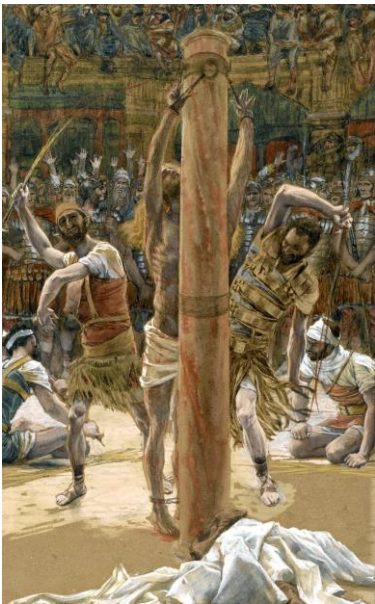
The Jewish leaders responded that He was a criminal or they wouldn't have handed Him over to Pilate in the first place. But because Pilate had rightfully surmised that the whole scenario was religiously based, he told them to judge Jesus by their own law. *"But we have no right to execute anyone,"* they objected. They wanted Jesus to be crucified and that required Roman authorization. Pilate then went back inside the palace and summoned Jesus before him. *"Are you the king of the Jews?"* he asked. *"Do you say this by yourself,"* Jesus replied, *' or did others tell you about me?'* (John 18:34) Pilate scoffed, saying that he wasn't the one who handed Jesus over for execution. It was His own people, the Jews, who wanted Him dead. In response to Pilate's question, Jesus declared that His kingdom was not earthly but from another place. If His kingdom had been of this world, His servants would have fought to prevent His arrest. *"You are a king, then!"* Pilate exclaimed. Jesus admitted that He was. *'For this reason I have been born,'* He said, *' and for this reason I have come into the world, that I should testify to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.'* Pilate was a skeptic at heart and he asked rhetorically *"What is truth?"* believing that there was no such thing.



Meanwhile, as Pilate was sitting on the judge's seat, his wife, Procle, sent him a message saying: *"Don't have anything to do with that innocent man, for I have suffered a great deal today in a dream because of Him."* Tradition states that Procle was a believer in God who later became a Christian, so it would seem that through her dream, God was giving Pilate a chance to avoid the great sin of murdering Jesus.

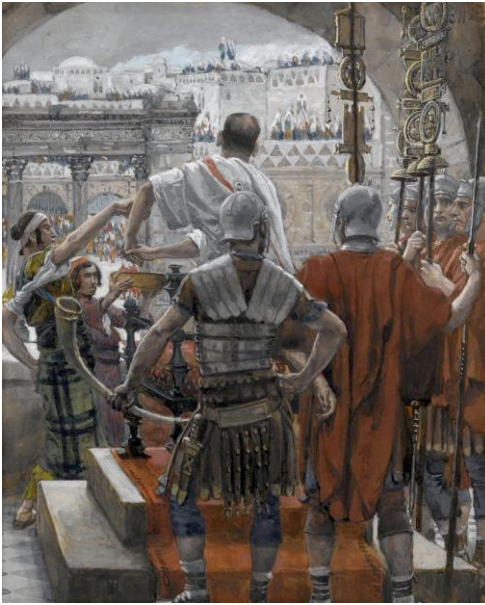
However Pilate didn't feel he could ignore the Jews and their accusations so he went back outside and declared that he definitely found no basis for a charge against Jesus. However, to appease Jesus' accusers, he pointed out that it was the time for the annual custom of releasing a prisoner at Passover and he offered to release the so-called 'king of the Jews'. The other choice was a noted killer and insurrectionist called Barabbas. Pilate was certain that they would never choose a vicious killer over a gentle rabbi, but surprisingly the Jews shouted back, *"No, not Him! Give us Barabbas!"*

Jesus Sentenced to Be Crucified



Pilate still had one other tactic to try. He took Jesus and had him brutally flogged by his soldiers. They also twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head, clothing Him in a purple robe and hailing Him as the king of the Jews. After this ordeal, Pilate brought Jesus out to the Jewish leaders, saying: *"Look, I am bringing Him out to you to let you know that I find no basis for a charge against Him."*

He pointed to Jesus wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe, with a face marred by beatings and pronounced, *"Here is the man!"* Surprisingly the chief priests and their officials were not satisfied with this, and they began shouting, *"Crucify! Crucify!"* Pilate answered, *"Take him yourselves, and crucify him, for I find no basis for a charge against him."*



Then the Jewish leaders explained that according to their Jewish law, Jesus had to die because He claimed to be the Son of God. This made Pilate nervous and he went back inside the palace to get more information. *"Where are you from?"* he asked, but Jesus gave him no answer. *'Aren't you speaking to me?'* Pilate said. *'Don't you know that I have power to release you, and have power to crucify you?'* Jesus replied that Pilate would have no power over Him if it hadn't been given to Him from above. God was the One who gave kings and governors authority over the affairs of men and Pilate had been chosen to deal with Jesus at this time.

'He changes the times and the seasons; he removes kings, and sets up kings..' (Daniel 2:21)

'For there is no authority except from God, and those who exist are ordained by God.' (Romans 13:2)

Jesus said that Pilate would be held responsible for his decisions, but the one who handed Him over to him was guilty of a greater sin. He was referring to the high priest who had instigated the whole plan to murder the Lord and whose actions were illegal and against God's Law. Pilate was unnerved by these words and from then on he tried to set Jesus free, but the Jewish leaders kept shouting, *"If you release this man, you aren't Caesar's friend! Everyone who makes himself a king speaks against Caesar!"* (John 19:12)

This accusation probably angered Pilate because it was a form of manipulation and it was also highly hypocritical. The Jews cared nothing about opposition to Caesar. They felt no loyalty to him whatever. Pilate knew this and decided to do some manipulating of his own. He brought Jesus out and sat down on the judge's seat, once again showing Jesus to the Jews. *"Here is your king,"* he announced to them. This inflamed the Jews who shouted ever more loudly that they wanted Jesus crucified. Pilate then asked mockingly: *"Shall I crucify your king?"* Goaded beyond endurance, the chief priests answered: *"We have no king but Caesar!"* This was an admission that they normally would never have made because they hated Caesar and the Roman occupation of Israel. However their bloodlust was so great that they now chose the hated emperor over Jesus! Pilate, who disdained the Jews, was finally satisfied that he had won over them and he then handed Jesus over to the soldiers to be crucified.



The Crucifixion

The soldiers led Jesus away towards Golgatha (meaning The Skull in Aramaic). Jesus, who had been badly beaten and was bleeding from many wounds, fell to the ground beneath the cross beam He was carrying on His shoulders. It was quite heavy, weighing around 100 pounds, so the soldiers forced a man from Cyrene, named Simon, to carry the beam the rest of the way.



A large number of people followed Jesus, including women who were weeping and wailing for Him. Jesus had always been especially kind and respectful to women whereas Roman and Jewish society often treated them as second-class citizens. To see this kind and gentle man tortured so despicably must have torn their hearts in two.

Jesus turned to the grieving women and said: *“Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for Me; weep for yourselves and for your children.”* He told them that a time was coming when they would consider themselves blessed if they were childless and not pregnant, and a quick death would be seen as preferable to facing the horrors awaiting them.

He added: *For if people do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?*” Jesus was referring to the catastrophe that would shortly come upon the disobedient Jewish nation as a whole in 70 AD. He was figuratively referring to Himself as the ‘green tree’, saying that if a righteous person undeserving of wicked brutality could suffer such evil, imagine how much greater the suffering would be for that wicked generation (dry wood).



Eventually they came to Golgotha and it was there that they crucified Jesus, along with two others — one on each side with Jesus in the middle. On Pilate’s orders, a sign was fastened to the cross that read: Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews. It was written in Aramaic, Latin and Greek, and because the crucifixion site was close to the city, everyone could see it.

The chief priests didn’t like the sign at all and they protested to Pilate that the wording should be changed to: *“this man claimed to be king of the Jews.”* However Pilate retorted, *“What I have written, I have written.”*



Crucifixion was such a vile method of execution that no Roman citizen could be crucified without express permission from the authorities. It was usually reserved for insurrectionists and the worst of criminals with the intent of causing them as much pain and agony as possible. There was also the added humiliation of being stripped naked and hung up high on a 9 foot cross for all the world to see. Sometimes the person being executed was tied to the cross beam but Jesus had nails hammered into His hands and feet which would have added to the excruciating pain of His torture.

It often took hours or even days to die from causes such as heart failure, suffocation, cardiac rupture, and dehydration. Perhaps it was because of the latter that Jesus was offered a drink of sour wine mixed with gall.

The wine would have tasted like vinegar and the gall came from a berry derived from the poppy plant, perhaps having a narcotic effect. The soldiers offered the wine and gall while mocking Jesus, saying: *"If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself."* Jesus tasted the wine but then refused it.

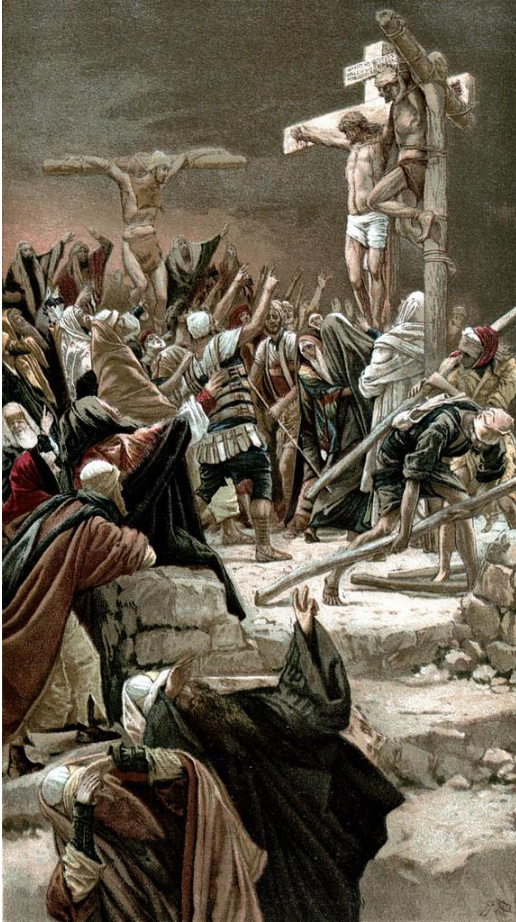


The soldiers had stripped Jesus of all His clothes and now began dividing them into four shares, one for each of them. The undergarment was seamless, having been woven in one piece from top to bottom, so the soldiers decided not to tear it into sections, but to gamble for it instead. This fulfilled the scripture that said, *"They divide My clothes among them; they cast lots for My garment."* (Psalm 22:18) As Jesus watched what was happening, He prayed, *"Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing."*



Jesus' mother, his mother's sister (Mary the wife of Clopas), and Mary Magdalene were all standing near the cross. When Jesus saw His mother beside John, He said to her: *"Woman, here is your son,"* and to John, *"Here is your mother."* Mary was a widow at this point and Jesus was entrusting Mary to His closest friend, John, rather than to her other sons who were not believers. As the oldest son, Jesus had the cultural obligation and responsibility to make such a choice. John obeyed the Lord's command and took Mary into his home from that time on.

Golgotha was a very public place and there were people passing by who hurled insults at Jesus, shaking their heads and saying, *"You who destroy the temple, and build it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross!"* The chief priests and teachers of the Law did likewise, mocking Him by saying: *'He saved others, but he can't save himself. If he is the King of Israel, let him come down from the cross now, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God. Let God deliver him now, if he wants him; for he said, 'I am the Son of God.'* (Matthew 27:41-43)



One of the criminals hanging beside Jesus also mocked the Lord, saying: *"Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us!"* However the other criminal rebuked him. *"Don't you even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong."* (Luke 23:40-41) Then he asked Jesus to remember him when He came into His kingdom. Somehow the thief had heard of Jesus' claims to be the Messiah and he believed them. Jesus replied to the thief, *"Assuredly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise."* The scriptures indicate that there had always been a separation of believers and unbelievers after death (Luke 16:19-31). The righteous went to a place called paradise (Abraham's bosom); the wicked went to hell (Gehenna). These were temporary holding places until the promised day of the Lord came, when He would return in judgment to resurrect all those who believed in Him. Jesus was telling the thief that he would go to the place reserved for believers and that Jesus would

join him there.

The Death of Jesus



A heavy darkness fell over the land from noon until three in the afternoon. This darkness is documented by Matthew, Mark, and Luke and confirmed by three historians - Thallus, Phlegon, and Africanus. About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice: *"My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"* This cry was a fulfillment of Psalm 22:1: *'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me, and from the words of my groaning?'*

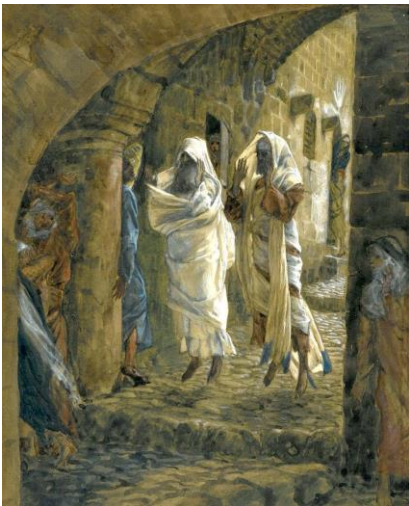
This sense of abandonment is explained by the prophet Isaiah when he prophesied that the Messiah would suffer the curse of the

Law and experience God's wrath against sin.

'Surely he has borne our sickness, and carried our suffering; yet we considered him plagued, struck by God, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. The punishment that brought our peace was on him; and by his wounds we are healed.' (Isaiah 53:4-5).

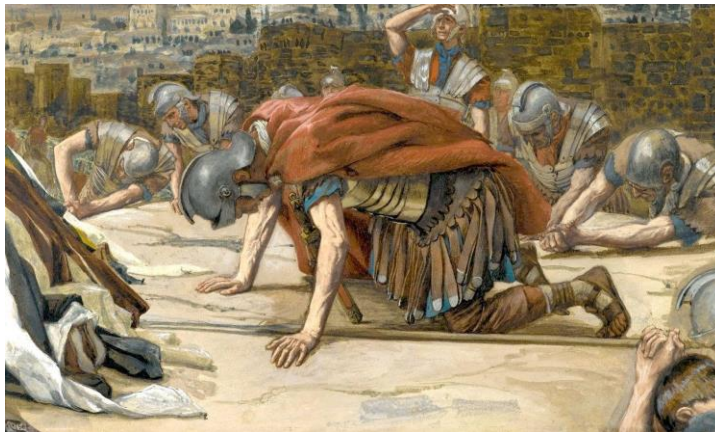
Jesus was made a sin offering, and He died in our place so that He might bring us near to God. That involved being made the recipient of God's hatred of sin and being rejected in a way that greatly intensified His physical sufferings. The One who had always been so close and so comforting had turned His back on Him, leaving Him all alone in His agony.

Some standing nearby heard the Lord's cry, but they thought He was calling Elijah. Later, knowing that everything in Scripture had been fulfilled, Jesus declared, *"It is finished"* and bowing His head, He gave up His spirit. At that moment the curtain of the Temple was torn in two from top to bottom. This was astounding because the curtain was 60 feet long and 4 inches thick, obviously humanly impossible to rip, especially as it was torn from the top down. No one could have reached that high or had that kind of strength. Only God could have done it.



But that wasn't all that happened. The earth shook, rocks split apart, and some tombs broke open. Later, after Jesus' resurrection, it would be discovered that the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life and these went into Jerusalem where they appeared to many people. Their names are not mentioned and it is unclear whether they had physical bodies or not. Neither do we know if they died a second time or were translated like Enoch and Elijah. However it is certain that their appearance in the city caused a great many people to remember the Lord's words about being the resurrection and the life.

When the centurion and those guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that had happened, they were terrified, and exclaimed, *"Surely He was the Son of God!"*



CHAPTER 35

Burial of Jesus, Guard at Tomb, Resurrection, Guards' Report



Burial of Jesus

It was common to leave the bodies of those crucified on the cross until the next day so as to send a warning to other would-be criminals. However, because it was the day of Preparation, and the next day was a Sabbath and the festival of Passover, the Jewish leaders didn't want the bodies left on the crosses. They asked Pilate to have the crucified victims' legs broken so that they would die more quickly. Then the bodies could be taken down that same day. The soldiers broke the legs of the two men crucified on either side of Jesus, but when they came to Jesus, they found He was already dead, so they did not break His legs. This was a fulfillment of Psalm 34:20 about 'the righteous man': "*...he protects all his bones, not one of them will be broken...*" and points to Jesus as being the final Passover Lamb slain on behalf of the people: "*The Lord said to Moses and Aaron, "These are the regulations for the Passover meal: It must be eaten In one house. You shall not carry any of the meat outside of the house. Do not break any of its bones.'* (Exodus 12:43).

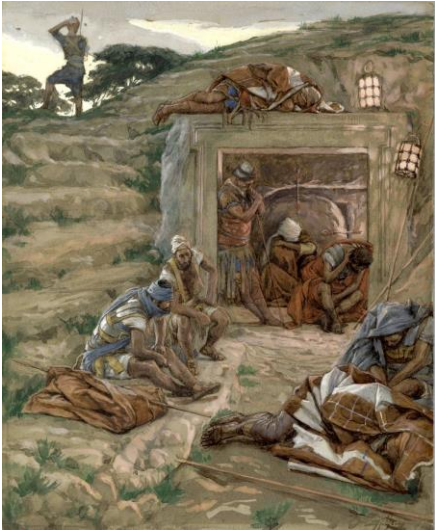
The soldiers wanted to make sure that Jesus was dead so one of them pierced Jesus' side with a spear, causing a sudden flow of blood and water. There was likely a medical reason for this discharge. Jesus had been flogged, receiving 39 lashes or more, from a whip that consisted of leather thongs with metal balls and pieces of sharp bone attached. The pieces of bone cut into the flesh, causing cuts so deep that the underlying veins, sinews, and bowels of the victim were exposed. Often the victim did not survive because of low blood pressure, the kidney shutting down, dehydration, and shock from blood loss. This explains why Jesus collapsed on the way to Golgotha and was unable to carry the crossbeam. During the entire time on the cross Jesus' heart would have been beating very rapidly, causing fluid to gather in the sack around His heart and lungs. When the soldier pierced Jesus' side, that sack was punctured and blood and water flowed out. Many years earlier the prophet Zechariah had written: *"They will look on the one they have pierced," (Zechariah 12:10)* and that is exactly what happened as the people looked up at the Lord's broken body on the cross.

As evening approached, Joseph from Arimathea, a rich man and a secret disciple of Jesus, went to Pilate and requested Jesus' body. At the council, Joseph had not given his consent to Jesus' execution and had not joined in when Jesus was mocked. However he had not spoken out in the Sanhedrin, probably because he feared the chief priests, but now he wanted to honor Jesus by providing a proper burial for Him. Pilate ordered that the Lord's body be given to him and, along with Nicodemus, Joseph wrapped the body in clean linen and placed it in his own new tomb that was cut out of rock. Then they rolled a big stone in front of the entrance to the tomb and went away. Mary Magdalene and Mary, the wife of Clopas, were present when this was being done, so they both saw where Jesus was laid.



The Guard at the Tomb

The next day, the chief priests and the Pharisees went to Pilate because they remembered that while Jesus was still alive He had said He would rise again after 3 days.



becoming unconscious.

They wanted Pilate to make the grave secure until the 3rd day to prevent the disciples from stealing the body and telling people that Jesus had been resurrected. *“This last deception will be worse than the first,”* they said. Pilate told them to take a guard and make the tomb as secure as they wished, which they did by placing a seal on the stone and posting a guard. At dawn on the Sabbath, there was a violent earthquake and an angel came down from heaven and rolled back the stone from the tomb, sitting on it. The angel’s appearance was like lightning and his clothes were white as snow. The guards were so terrified at seeing him that they trembled and fainted,



Meanwhile Mary Magdalene, Jesus’ mother, and Mary the wife of Clopas went to the tomb to finish preparing Jesus’ body. They saw the stone rolled away and the tomb sitting empty. It may be that Mary Magdalene left the other women at this point and did not see the angel sitting there. However the angel spoke to the other women, telling them not to be afraid. *“for I know that you seek Jesus, who has been crucified. He is not here, for he has risen, just like he said. Come, see the place where the Lord was lying’.* The angel told them to quickly go and tell the disciples that the Lord had risen from the dead and that He would meet them in Galilee.



The women hurried away, afraid but also excited, and ran to tell the disciples. Suddenly they were greeted by Jesus Himself and with great joy clasped His feet and worshiped Him. Then Jesus said: *“Do not be afraid. Go and tell My brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see Me.”*

The Guards' Report

While the women were on their way, some of the guards went into the city and reported to the chief priests everything that had happened. They didn't dare go to Pilate because they could have been punished for dereliction of duty. After all, the tomb's seal had been broken and the Nazarene's body was missing. The chief priests and elders immediately conferred together and came up with a plan to bribe the soldiers to say that Jesus' disciples had come during the night and stolen His body while they were asleep. They promised the soldiers that if a report was sent to Pilate, they would make excuses for them and keep them out of trouble. The soldiers took the bribe money and did as they were instructed, circulating the story among the Jews.



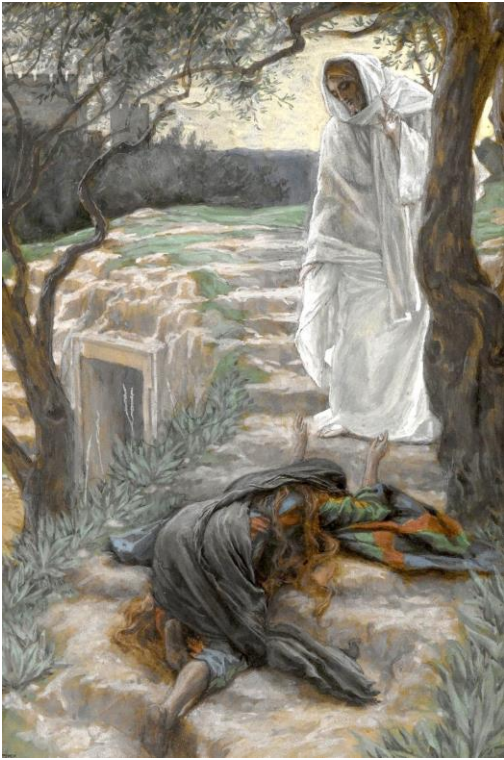
Meanwhile Mary Magdalene seemed to have been the first to tell Peter and John that Jesus' body was missing. She then may have gone back to the tomb, which explains why she was not present when the other women arrived to tell the apostles that they had seen Jesus. The apostles however thought it was all just foolishness or perhaps the result of overwrought nerves. However Peter and John eventually decided to go see for themselves. Both of them began running towards the tomb, with John getting there first. He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. Then Peter came along and went straight into the tomb and also saw the strips of linen and the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus' head.

As both disciples looked at the evidence, they finally believed that Jesus was gone, although they still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.

Resurrection



Mary had gone back to the tomb and was weeping with sorrow when suddenly she saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been. They asked her why she was crying and she replied that 'they' (perhaps meaning the soldiers or gravediggers) had taken Jesus' body away and she didn't know where to find Him. Her grief seems to have been so deep that she was not fully aware of her surroundings or that she was addressing angelic beings.



It could have been that she was in shock after having witnessed the harrowing murder of the Lord and now the disappearance of His body. Sensing someone nearby, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but didn't recognize Him. When Jesus asked her why she was crying and who she was looking for, Mary thought it was the gardener speaking to her. Brokenly she begged: *"Sir, if you have carried Him away, tell me where you have put Him, and I will get Him."* Jesus gently spoke her name: *"Mary"* and immediately she cried out: *'Rabboni!'* meaning 'Teacher' and fell down to worship Him. She clung so desperately to His feet that the Lord had to tell her not to hold on to Him for He still had to ascend to His Father. It's amazing that the Lord made this special appearance to Mary Magdalene and to the other women before going up to heaven.

Undoubtedly Jesus was eager to see His Father, yet because of His great love and concern for these women, He stayed back long enough to comfort them. These women had remained with Him throughout His ordeal on the cross, witnessing His agony and feeling His pain. Very likely they despaired of ever seeing the Lord again and their hearts must have been utterly broken. Now they were privileged to be the first to see Him alive from the dead and to bring that good news to the other disciples. Jesus commissioned Mary, saying: *"Go to My brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to My Father and your Father, to My God and your God.'"* With these happy words ringing in her ears, Mary went to the disciples, exclaiming: *"I have seen the Lord!"* Then she joyously told them everything Jesus had said to her.

CHAPTER 36

Road To Emmaus, Jesus Appears To The Disciples, Thomas, Catch of Fish, Peter, Great Commission, Ascension



Road to Emmaus

That same day two of the Lord's followers were going to the village of Emmaus, and as they walked along, they discussed everything that had happened. While they were talking, Jesus began walking alongside them, but the men didn't recognize Him. Jesus asked them what they were discussing and they stopped, their faces filled with sorrow. One of them, Cleopas, asked Jesus how He could not know about the things that had happened recently. Jesus asked him what he meant and Cleopas explained: *"The things concerning Jesus, the Nazarene, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people; and how the chief priests and our rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death, and crucified him. But we were hoping that it was he who would redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things happened. Also, certain women of our company amazed us, having arrived early at the tomb; and when they didn't find his body, they came saying that they had also seen a vision of angels, who said that he was alive. Some of us went to the tomb, and found it just like the women had said, but they didn't see him."* (Luke 24:19-24)

Jesus reproached the two for their lack of faith and insight. *"Foolish men, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Didn't the Christ have to suffer these things and to enter into his glory?"*

Then He taught them, beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, what the Scriptures said concerning Himself. As they approached Emmaus, Jesus continued on as if He were going farther but the disciples strongly urged Him to stay with them, especially as it was already evening. Jesus consented and as they were eating a meal together, He took bread, gave thanks, broke it, and began to give it to them. Perhaps there was something familiar in His actions, because suddenly their eyes were opened and they finally recognized Him. At that same moment Jesus disappeared from their sight, leaving them totally amazed. They asked each other excitedly: *"Weren't our hearts burning within us, while he spoke to us along the way, and while he opened the Scriptures to us?"* Though it was dark outside, they got up right away and returned to Jerusalem where they found the 'Eleven' and some others assembled with them. *"It is true!"* they exclaimed. *"The Lord has risen and has appeared to us!"* Then they told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when He broke the bread.

Jesus Appears to His Disciples



On the evening of that first day of the week, the disciples were all together behind locked doors because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders. Suddenly Jesus came and stood among them, saying: *"Peace be with you!"* Then He stretched out His hands so that they could all see the holes left from the nails when He was crucified. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw Him and again Jesus said: *"Peace be to you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you."* Then He breathed on them and said, *"Receive the Holy Spirit! If you forgive anyone's sins, they have been forgiven them. If you retain anyone's sins, they have been retained."* (John 20:22-23)

Jesus breathing on the disciples brings to mind the picture in Genesis where God breathed the breath of life into Adam's nostrils (who represented the old creation).

Jesus was now breathing His Life into His disciples in a demonstration of what would occur when they received the Holy Spirit and they became new creatures indwelt by Him. Currently the disciples had the Spirit with them, but they had not yet received the outpouring, or baptism of the Holy Spirit. That would not happen until after Jesus returned to heaven and was no longer with them.

The Spirit of truth, whom the world can't receive; for it doesn't see him, neither knows him. You know him, for he lives with you, and will be in you. (John 14:17)

But he said this about the Spirit, which those believing in him were to receive. For the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus wasn't yet glorified. (John 7:39)

Jesus said, 'I tell you the truth: It is to your advantage that I go away, for if I don't go away, the Counselor won't come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you.' (John 16:7)

Furthermore, when Jesus referred to the forgiving of sins or not forgiving them, He was not giving the disciples authorization to give or withhold salvation. Only God has the authority to do that. Jesus was informing the disciples that the forgiveness of sins would depend on the Holy Spirit reaching out to the world through them by means of the gospel of salvation. They had the message of God's forgiveness and wherever they proclaimed that message in the power of the Holy Spirit, sins would be forgiven when people received it in faith. However if no message went out, salvation could not follow. Jesus had said something similar when He told Peter that He would give him the keys of the kingdom of heaven and whatever he bound on earth would be bound in heaven, and whatever was loosed on earth, would be loosed in heaven. (Matthew 16:18) This is also what He meant when He said: *'As you enter into the household, greet it. If the household is worthy, let your peace come on it, but if it isn't worthy, let your peace return to you. Whoever doesn't receive you, nor hears your words, as you go out of that house or that city, shake off the dust from your feet. Most certainly I tell you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city.'* (Matthew 10: 12-15) The disciples were bringing the message of God's forgiveness to the people. If the people welcomed the message along with the messengers, then they would receive forgiveness of sins and peace with God. However if they rejected the message and refused to listen to the messengers, then their sins would not be forgiven and they would suffer eternal judgment.

Jesus Appears to Thomas

Thomas, one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came to visit them. When the others told Thomas that they had seen the Lord, he didn't believe them, saying: *"Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe."* (John 20:25)

A week later the disciples, including Thomas, were in the house again with all the doors locked tight. In spite of this, Jesus came right into the room amongst them and said: *"Peace be with you!"*



Then He said to Thomas, *“Reach here your finger, and see my hands. Reach here your hand, and put it into my side. Don’t be unbelieving, but believing.”* Thomas was totally in awe and could only exclaim: *“My Lord and my God!”* Then Jesus told him, *“Because you have seen Me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”* Thomas saw the nail-prints on the Lord’s body and believed that Jesus really had risen from the grave and that He was indeed God Himself! But Jesus said that those who believed without seeing the evidence Thomas had seen would be especially blessed. However Thomas’ hesitancy to believe in the Lord’s resurrection is not so difficult to understand when one considers that many Israelites were not sure exactly what happened after death.

Most believed that the spirits of the dead went to a dark place called Sheol, but the Sadducees believed that this was the end of a person’s existence with no resurrection following. The Pharisees did believe in a resurrection but there were only a few scriptures in the Old Testament that spoke of this.

Isaiah 26:19 says: *Your dead shall live. My dead bodies shall arise. Awake and sing, you who dwell in the dust; for your dew is like the dew of herbs, and the earth will cast out the departed spirits.*

Daniel 12:2 says: *Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.*
.”

Even those who believed in a resurrection had no idea what a resurrection body would look like. Would it be flesh and blood? Would it be a spirit form? Jesus’ body was definitely changed after rising from the grave. Initially He wasn’t recognizable to Mary Magdalene or to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. Only when He spoke or acted in a familiar way did they realize it was the Lord. He was also able to walk through locked doors, appear suddenly out of the air, and sit and eat a meal. When He appeared before His disciples, He said: *‘See my hands and my feet, that it is truly me. Touch me and see, for a spirit doesn’t have flesh and bones, as you see that I have.’*(Luke 24:39)

It is important to note that He did not say ‘flesh and blood’, but rather ‘flesh and bones’. The apostle Paul said: *‘Now I say this, brothers, that flesh and blood can’t inherit God’s Kingdom; neither does the perishable inherit imperishable.’*
(1 Corinthians 15:50)

So Jesus' resurrected glorified body was not made of flesh and blood like His previous physical body. Nevertheless Jesus' body did not decay in the grave, and the holes in His hands and feet definitely linked Him to His earlier body, thereby proving that He was not just a disembodied spirit. When Thomas saw the Lord in His new, yet familiar-looking body, all Jesus' claims suddenly fell into place. Jesus was indeed the Messiah. In fact, He could only be God Himself!

Jesus and the Miraculous Catch of Fish



Jesus appeared again to His disciples by the Sea of Galilee when Peter, Thomas, Nathanael, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were fishing. They had been out all night but had caught nothing. Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples didn't know it was the Lord.

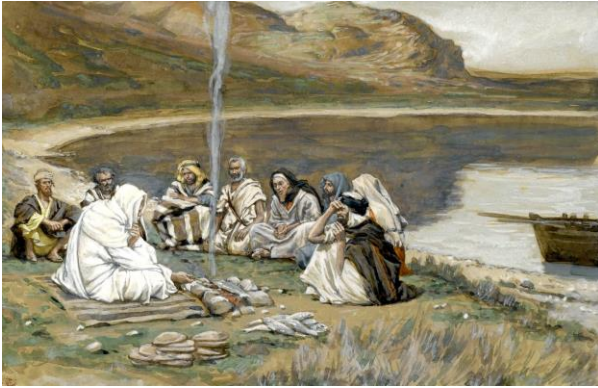
Jesus then called out to them: *"Friends, haven't you any fish?"* They replied that they had caught nothing. Jesus told them to throw their net to the right side of the boat and they would catch some. When they did so, they were unable to haul the net in because it was so full of fish. That's when John probably remembered another time when something similar had happened (Luke 5:1-11) because he told Peter: *"It is the Lord!"*



When Peter heard this, he wrapped his outer garment around his waist and jumped into the water. The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish. When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals and some bread. Jesus told them to bring some of the fish so Peter climbed back into the boat and dragged the net ashore, which had not broken in spite of the many fish.

Jesus then invited them to breakfast and none of the disciples dared to ask Him who He was because they knew He was the Lord. Jesus took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. This was now the third time Jesus appeared to His disciples after He was raised from the dead.

Jesus Reinstates Peter



When they had finished eating, Jesus asked Peter: *“Simon, do you love Me more than these?”* Peter (also called Simon) replied: *“Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.”* Jesus then said, *“Feed my lambs.”* Again Jesus asked Peter if he loved Him, and again Peter replied that he did. Jesus repeated the command: *“Take care of My sheep.”* Yet a third time Jesus asked: *“Simon, do you love me?”*

By this time Peter was hurt because Jesus kept repeating the question as though He doubted Peter’s sincerity. So he replied: *“Lord, you know everything. You know that I have affection for you.”* Again Jesus said, *“Feed my sheep.”*

Jesus asked Peter three times if he loved Him, possibly corresponding to Peter’s three denials of the Lord in the Temple courtyard. He was giving Peter an opportunity to be reinstated to his former position as leading apostle and also impressing upon him the necessity of absolute devotion to the Lord in order to faithfully serve other believers. When Jesus questioned Peter’s love for Him, He used the Greek word *agape*, which refers to unconditional love. Peter responded using the Greek word *phileo*, which refers to friendship. It seems that Peter had realized his commitment to the Lord was not as intense as he had always imagined. Now he was assessing his affection for Jesus more realistically. Two more times Jesus repeated His question, now also using the word *phileo*, and Peter responded: *“Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you,”* also using the word *phileo*. Perhaps, in repeatedly questioning Peter in this way, Jesus was trying to increase Peter’s commitment to a deeper level that surpassed friendship.

Jesus then added: *Most certainly I tell you, when you were young, you dressed yourself, and walked where you wanted to. But when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you, and carry you where you don’t want to go.”*

(John 21:18) He said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. It was a warning that Peter would be called to face persecution and martyrdom - the very things Peter had tried to avoid when denying the Lord. Then Jesus said to him, *“Follow me!”* Peter turned and saw John following them and he asked Jesus what would happen to him. But Jesus said that it didn’t concern him if He should want John to remain alive until He returned. *“You must follow Me.”* Jesus said. As a result of that conversation, a rumor began to spread among the believers that John would not die, but Jesus had only said, *“If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?”* John would later receive a revelation from the Lord when he was on the island of Patmos in 68 or 69 AD about the Lord’s coming judgment of the Jews. One year later, Jerusalem and the temple would be destroyed just as Jesus had foretold. Although early writers did not say how long John lived after that, some think he died between 89 AD to 120 AD, making him the longest living apostle.

The Great Commission

Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. There they worshiped Him, but some doubted. Since they had not yet received the Holy Spirit, their faith still wavered, even though Jesus had spent 40 days encouraging them and preparing them for their mission. He told them: *“All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. Go, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I commanded you. Behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”* (Matthew 28:18-20)

The Ascension of Jesus

Jesus had appeared to Peter and then to the Eleven. After that, He appeared to more than five hundred of His followers, and then again to James and all the apostles. These appearances occurred over a period of forty days and during that time Jesus spoke about the kingdom of God.

On one occasion, while He was eating with them, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem until the Father’s gift of the Holy Spirit was given. *“For John indeed baptized in water, but you will be baptized in the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”* (Acts 1:5) Then they gathered around Jesus and asked Him if he would restore the kingdom to Israel at this time. But Jesus told them: *“It isn’t for you to know times or seasons which the Father has set within his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you. You will be witnesses to me in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the uttermost parts of the earth.”* (Acts 1:7-8)



After 40 days on the earth, Jesus led the disciples out to the vicinity of Bethany. There He lifted up His hands, and while in the act of blessing them, Jesus was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid Him from their sight. As they were looking intently up into the sky as He was departing, two angels dressed in white stood beside them. *“Men of Galilee,”* they said, *“why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who was received up from you into the sky will come back in the same way as you saw him going into the sky.”*

The angels were referring to Jesus coming on clouds. In the Old Testament, clouds are depicted as showing God's majesty.

"Isn't God in the heights of heaven? See the height of the stars, how high they are! ...Thick clouds are a covering to him... He walks on the vault of the sky.'" (Job 22:12-14)

In Psalm 18 God is described as coming to the rescue on clouds with great power and might.

In my distress I called on Yahweh, and cried to my God. He heard my voice out of his temple. My cry before him came into his ears. Then the earth shook and trembled. The foundations also of the mountains quaked and were shaken, because he was angry. ... He bowed the heavens also, and came down. Thick darkness was under his feet. He rode on a cherub, and flew. Yes, he soared on the wings of the wind. He made darkness his hiding place, his pavilion around him, darkness of waters, thick clouds of the skies. At the brightness before him his thick clouds passed, hailstones and coals of fire. Yahweh also thundered in the sky...

Jesus told Caiaphas that he would see Him coming on the clouds of heaven.

'Jesus said to him, "You have said it. Nevertheless, I tell you, after this you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of the sky." The high priest tore his clothes, and said, "What further need have we of witnesses? You have heard the blasphemy'." (Mark 14:63-65)

Caiaphas saw this as blasphemy because he understood that Jesus was claiming to be divine. He was not enraged because Jesus was claiming to literally return on a physical cloud. What incensed him was that the Lord was associating Himself with God. Jesus told His disciples (Matthew 24:30-34) that He would come in the clouds when He brought judgment upon Israel:

And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky. Then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory. He will send out his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together his chosen ones from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other. Now from the fig tree learn this parable. When its branch has now become tender, and produces its leaves, you know that the summer is near. Even so you also, when you see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors. Most certainly I tell you, this generation will not pass away, until all these things are accomplished. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. (Matthew 24:30-35)

The apostle John also warned that coming judgment was right around the corner.

'Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, including those who pierced him. All the tribes of the earth will mourn over him...

This is the Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants the things which must happen soon, which he sent and made known by his angel to his servant, John, who testified to God's word, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, about everything that he saw. Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and keep the things that are written in it, for the time is at hand. (Revelation 1:7 and 1:1-3)

The Jews were well aware that a promised judgment was coming because the prophet Zephaniah had said the same thing 600 years earlier.

That day is a day of wrath, a day of distress and anguish, a day of trouble and ruin, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and blackness, a day of the trumpet and alarm, against the fortified cities, and against the high battlements. I will bring distress on men, that they will walk like blind men, because they have sinned against Yahweh, and their blood will be poured out like dust, and their flesh like dung. (Zephaniah 1:15-17)

This is repeated over and over again in the Old Testament and everyone who heard Jesus give this warning would have understood that He was speaking about God coming in judgment. The High Priest certainly did! Everyone would see the destruction of Jerusalem in 66-70 A.D. and that is what Jesus meant by people seeing Him come in clouds. Coming in clouds was synonymous with the wrath of God. Thankfully God is never eager to bring judgment. He takes no pleasure in seeing people destroyed because of sin.

For I have no pleasure in the death of him who dies, says the Lord Yahweh: therefore turn yourselves, and live. (Ezekiel 18:32)

Jesus came so that we may escape judgment by being born twice (a natural birth plus the new birth), thereby ensuring that we will never die. However a person who is born only once (a natural birth without being born again) will die twice; once in his mortal body and then in the lake of fire.

I saw a great white throne, and him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. There was found no place for them. I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and they opened books. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged out of the things which were written in the books, according to their works. The sea gave up the dead who were in it. Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them. They were judged, each one according to his works. Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. If anyone was not found written in the book of life, he was cast into the lake of fire. (Revelation 20:11-15).

These words are ominous, relating as they do to the life and death decision which we are all called to make regarding our eternal existence.

The Bible reveals that God's Son left His glorious home in heaven to put on humanity in the person of Jesus Christ. He did this so as to rescue us from sin and death, even though it entailed suffering abuses of every kind at human hands, finally culminating in brutal torture and death on a cross. While on earth, God gave warning after warning to His people, the Jews, to turn to Him for salvation so as to escape His judgment. This was a follow-up to the countless warnings He had given Israel through the prophets and patriarchs throughout the Old Testament. Then Jesus came along and gave even greater warnings in the Gospels, accompanied by repeated affirmations of His love and mercy. Those warnings and declarations of love are as applicable to us in the world today, as they were to the Jews in the 1st century. By reading about Jesus' life, we can't help but see how consistent and abounding His love is for each and every one of us. It is overwhelming to consider the depth and height of that love, especially for fallen sinners who often ridicule, ignore, and reject Him. In spite of this, His love remains undiminished and resounds repeatedly through His last words to us in the Bible:

"I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony ... I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star. ...Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city. Come! ... Let the one who is thirsty come; and let the one who wishes, take the free gift of the water of life...."

I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.



Title	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
The Word				1:1-18
Birth of John the Baptist Foretold			1:5-25	
Birth of Jesus Foretold			1:26-38	
Mary Visits Elizabeth			1:39-45	
Mary's Song			1:46-53	
The Birth of John the Baptist			1:57-66	
Zechariah's Song			1:67-80	
Jesus' Genealogy	1:1-17		3:23-38	
Birth of Jesus	1:18-25		2:1-7	
Shepherds and Angels			2:8-20	
Jesus at Temple			2:21-40	
Magi	2:1-12			
Escape to Egypt	2:13-18			
Return to Nazareth	2:19-23			
Boy Jesus at Temple			2:41-52	
John the Baptist Messenger	3:1-12			
Jesus Baptized	3:13-17	1:9-11	3:21-22	
Jesus Temptation	4:1-11	1:12-13	4:1-13	
Jesus Lamb of God				1:20-34
First Disciples Called	4:18-22	1:14-20	5:1-11	1:35-42
Philip and Nathaniel				1:43-51
Water to Wine				2:1-11
Jesus Clears Temple				2:12-25
Nicodemus				3:1-21
Samaritan Woman	4:12			4:1-42
Official's Son				4:46-54
Rejection At Nazareth	13:54-458	6:1-6	4:16-30	
Four Fishermen	4:18-22	1:16-20	5:1-11	
Demonized Man		1:21-28	4:31-37	
Peter's Mother-in-Law	8:14-17	1:29-34	4:38-41	
Leper & Paralytic Healed	9:1-8	2:1-12	5:17-26	
Matthew Called	9:9-13	2:13-17	5:27-32	
Healing at Pool				5:1-18
Fasting	9:14-15	2:18-20	5:33-35	
New Patch on Old Cloth	9:16-17	2:21-22	5:36-39	
Lord of the Sabbath	12:1-8	2:23-28	6:1-5	
Paralyzed Hand	12:9-14	3:1-6	6:6-11	
Chosen Servant	12:15-21			
12 Apostles Called	10:1-4	3:13-19	6:12-16	
Blessed Ones	5:3-12		6:20-26	
Fulfillment of the Law	5:17-20			
Murder	5:21-24			
Adultery	5:27-30			

Title	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
Divorce	5:31-32			
Oaths	5:33-37			
Vengeance	5:38-42			
Love for Enemies	5:43-48		6:29-36	
Giving to Needy	6:1-4			
Lord's Prayer	6:5-15		11:1-4	
Treasures in Heaven	6:19-24			
Light of the Body	5:14-16		11:33-36	
Possessions	6:24-34		12:22-34	
Judging	7:1-6		6:37-42	
Ask, Seek, Knock	7:7-12		11:5-13	
Narrow Gate	7:13-14			
Tree and Fruit	7:15-23		6:43-45	
Wise and Foolish Builders	7:24-29		6:46-49	
Centurion's Servant	8:5-13		7:1-10	
Widow's Son			7:11-17	
Cost of Following Jesus			9:57-62	
Jesus Calms Storm	8:23-27	4:35-41	8:22-25	
Messengers from John	11:2-19		7:18-35	
Women Followers			8:1-3	
Demon Possessed Man	8:28-34	5:1-20	8:26-39	
Jesus and Beelzebub	12:22-32	3:22-30	11:14-23	
Return of Evil Spirit	12:43-45		11:24-28	
Jesus Feeds 5000	14:13-21	6:32-44	9:10-17	6:1-15
Jesus Sends Out 12	10:1-16	6:7-11	9:1-9	
John the Baptist Beheaded	14:1-12	6:14-29	9:7-9	
Warnings, Encouragements	10:17-33		12:1-12	
Not Peace But A Sword	10:34-39			
Not Peace But Division			12:49-53	
Life Through the Son				5:16-30
Testimonies About Jesus				5:31-47
Unrepentant Cities	11:20-24			
Father Revealed in Son	11:25-30			
Jesus' Mother and Brothers	12:46-50	3:20-35	8:19-21	
Sign of Jonah	12:38-42		11:29-32	
Six Woes			11:37-54	
Parable of Sower	13:1-9	4:1-9	8:4-8	
Parable of Weeds	13:24-30	4:26-29		
Weeds Parable Explained	13:36-43			
Mustard Seed and Leaven	13:31-35	4:30-32	13:18-21	
Hidden Treasure and Pearl	13:44-46			
Parable of Net	13:47-52			
New and Old Truths	13:51-53			
Jairus's Daughter, Woman	8:18-26	5:21-43	8:40-56	

Title	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
Two Blind Men	9:27-31			
Mute Man	9:32-34			
72 Sent Out			10:1-12	
Return of 72			10:17-20	
Feeding 4000	15:29-39	8:1-10		
Unclean Things	15:10-20	7:14-23		
Bread of Life				6:25-59
Words of Eternal Life				6:60-71
Woman's Faith	15:21-28	7:24-30		
Yeast of Pharisees	16:5-12	8:14-21		
Bethsaida Blind Man		8:22-26		
Peter Declares Jesus	16:13-20	8:27-30	9:18-20	
Transfiguration	17:1-13	9:2-13	9:28-36	
Demonized Boy	17:14-21	9:14-29	9:37-43	
Temple Tax	17:24-27			
Who Is Greatest?	18:1-5	9:33-37	9:46-48	
Feast of Tabernacles				7:1-13
Jesus Teaches At Feast				7:14-24
Is Jesus the Christ?			7:25-44	
Jesus anointed by Prostitute				7:36-53
Jesus Testimony Valid				8:12-30
Children of Abraham				8:31-41
Children of Devil				8:42-47
Lost Sheep	8:10-14		15:4-7	
Lost Coin			15:8-10	
Prodigal Son			15:11-32	
Shrewd Manager			16:1-15	
Rich Man and Lazarus			16:19-31	
Sin, Faith, Duty			17:1-10	
Ten Healed of Leprosy			17:11-19	
Man Born Blind Healed				9:1-12
Pharisees Investigate Healing				9:13-34
Spiritual Blindness				9:35-41
Pharisee and Tax Collector			18:9-14	
Persistent Widow			18:1-8	
Brother Who Sins Against You	18:15-20			
Unmerciful Servant	18:21-35			
Rich Fool			12:13-21	
Shepherd and Flock				10:1-21
Unbelief of Jews				10:22-42
Repent or Perish			13:1-9	
Crippled Woman Healed			13:10-17	
Jesus at Pharisee's House			14:1-14	

Title	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
Cost of Being Disciple			14:25-35	
Divorce	19:1-12	10:1-12	16:16-18	
Rich Young Man	19:16-30	10:17-31	18:18-30	
Workers in Vineyard				
Good Samaritan			10:25-37	
Mary and Martha			10:38-42	
Festival of Shelters				7:11-24
Is Jesus the Messiah?				7:25-31
Guards sent to arrest Jesus				7:32-36
Life-Giving Water				7:37-39
Division				7:40-44
Woman Caught in Adultery				8:1-11
Death of Lazarus				11:1-16
Resurrection and Life				11:17-37
Jesus Raises Lazarus				11:38-44
Plot to Kill Jesus				11:45-57
Woes to the Pharisees	23:13-36		11:37-54	
Jesus Anointed At Bethany				12:1-11
Watchful Servants			12:35-40	
Faithful or Unfaithful	24:45-51		12:41-50	
Parable of Wedding Feast	22:1-14		14:15-24	
Little Children	19:13-15	10:13-16	18:15-17	
Jesus Predicts His Death				12:20-36
Mother's Request	20:20-28	10:35-45		
Blind Bartemaeus		10:46-52	18:35-43	
Two Blind Men Healed	20:29-34			
Triumphal Entry	21:1-11	11:1-11	19:28-44	12:12-19
Unbelief of Jews				12:37-50
Zachaeus Tax Collector			19:1-10	
Fig Tree Withers	21:18-22	11:12-26		
Jesus at Temple	21:12-17	11:15-19	19:45-48	
Jesus Authority Questioned	21:23-27	11:27-33	20:1-8	
Parable 2 Sons	21:28-32			
Parable Tenants	21:33-46	12:1-12	20:9-19	
Taxes to Caesar	22:15-22	12:13-17	20:20-26	
Marriage at Resurrection	22:23-33	12:18-27	20:27-40	
Greatest Commandment	22:34-40	12:28-34	10:25-28	
Whose Son is the Christ?	22:41-46	12:35-37	12:35-40	
Warning Against Hypocrisy	23:1-12			
Widow's Offering		12:41-44	21:1-4	
End of Age	24:1-35	13:1-31	21:5-38	
Hour Unknown	24:36-51	13:32-37	12:35-40	
Interpreting the Times			12:54-59	

Title	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
Coming of Kingdom			17:20-37	
Parable 10 Virgins	25:1-13			
Parable Talents	25:14-30		19:12-27	
Final Judgment	25:31-46			
Judas Agrees to Betray Jesus	26:1-16	14:1-11	22:1-6	
Lord's Supper	26:17-30	14:12-26	22:7-30	
Foot Washing				13:1-17
Jesus Predicts Betrayal				13:18-30
Jesus Predicts Peter's Denial	26:31-35	14:27-31	22:31-38	13:31-38
Jesus Comforts Disciples				14:1-4
Jesus the Way				14:5-14
Jesus Promises Holy Spirit				14:15-31
Vine and Branches				15:1-17
Master & Servant				15:18-16:4
Work of Holy Spirit				16:5-16
Grief to Joy				16:17-33
Purse and Sword			22:35-38	
Gethsemane	26:36-46	14:32-42	22:39-46	17:1-5
Jesus Prays for Disciples				17:6-19
Jesus Prays for All Believers				17:20-26
Jesus Arrested	26:47-56	14:43-50	22:47-53	18:1-11
Taken to Annas				18:12-24
Before Caiaphas	26:57-66	14:53-64	22:66-71	
Guards Mock Jesus	26:67-68	14:65	22:63-65	
Judas Suicide	27:1-10			
Jesus Before Pilate			23:1-7	
Jesus Before Herod			23:6-12	
Jesus Back to Pilate	27:11-26	15:1-15	23:13-25	18:28-40
Jesus Sentenced to Crucifixion				19:1-16
Crucifixion	27:32-44	15:22-32	23:26-43	19:16-27
Death of Jesus	27:45-56	15:33-41	23:44-49	19:28-37
Burial of Jesus	27:57-61	15:42-47	23:50-56	19:38-42
Guard at Tomb	27:62-66			
Guard's Report	28:11-15			
Resurrection	28:1-15	16:1-20	24:1-10	20:1-18
Road to Emmaus			24:13-35	
Jesus Appears to Disciples			24:36-49	20:19-29
Jesus and Thomas				20:24-31
Catch of Fish				21:1-14
Jesus and Peter				21:15-25
Great Commission	28:16-20	16:14-18		
Ascension		16:19-20	24:50-53	