

Sermons on Mark-Lowell Johnson

LIST OF SERMONS ON MARK BY LOWELL F JOHNSON

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THE MAN WHO INTRODUCED JESUS AS THE MESSIAH Mark 1:1-8

We begin today a study on the Gospel of Mark. By way of introduction, let me share with you some things about the human author, Mark, and about the book itself.

Mark is the oldest and the shortest of the four Gospels. It is also likely that Mark was the youngest of the four human authors who wrote the four Gospels.

Both Matthew and Luke made great use of Mark's writing when they wrote their own Gospel accounts. Between the two of them they reproduced all but a few verses of Mark's. Mark has 661 verses. Matthew makes reference to 606 verses from Mark and reproduced 51 percent of the words used by Mark. Luke reproduced 320 verses of the 661 verses in Mark and uses about 53 percent of Mark's actual words.

Mark is the "Go Gospel." Mark was always in a hurry! He believed in coming straight to the point. He did not like "beating around the bush!" Mark wrote with the Romans in mind. The Romans were people of action and that fact helps us to understand Mark's style and approach to writing his Gospel.

The emphasis in this Gospel is on activity. Mark describes Jesus as He busily moves from place to place and meets the physical and spiritual needs of all kinds of people. One of Mark's favorite words is "straightway," meaning "immediately." He uses it 41 times.

Look at Mark Chapter one and you will see that Mark is high energy. There is an urgency about his story, a breathlessness. This Gospel is action packed.

- Mark 1:9 – "And it came to pass"
- Mark 1:10 – "And straightway"
- Mark 1:12 – "And immediately"
- Mark 1:14 – "Now after that"
- Mark 1:16 – "Now as He walked by the Sea of Galilee"
- Mark 1:18 – "And straightway"
- Mark 1:20 – "And straightway"

- Mark 1:21 – “And they went into Capernaum; and straightway”
- Mark 1:28 – “And immediately”
- Mark 1:29 – “And forthwith”
- Mark 1:31 – “And immediately the fever left her”
- Mark 1:35 – “And in the morning, rising up a great while before day, He went out”
- Mark 1:38 – “And He said unto them, 'Let us go into the next town, that I may preach there also

Then Mark uses the conjunction “and” an unusually frequent number of times in Mark 12-16 that adds to the rush of action. Christ's life is portrayed as super busy.

The key verse in Mark is Mark 10:45: “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.”

John Mark's mother was a rather wealthy lady named Mary. Mark's home was most likely the place where the Lord and His disciples ate the last supper. This home was also the site of the famous prayer meeting to which Peter went after his release from prison (Acts 12:12).

There is an interesting passage that is found only in Mark's Gospel (14:51-52). As I said, it is likely that Jesus and the twelve were in Mark's home eating the Last Supper. Before Jesus and His disciples left the upper room to go to the Garden of Gethsemane, Judas went to get the religious leaders and the soldiers. When Judas came back with the mob to arrest Jesus, they must have gone back to Mark's house, because that was the last place Judas had seen Jesus. Since Jesus was not there, Judas then headed to Gethsemane, for it was the place Jesus had prayed with His disciples before. When John Mark heard what was going on, his curiosity was hard to control, and he silently left the house and went to see for himself the things which were taking place. What he saw, he never forgot.

When Judas pointed Jesus out to the soldiers by kissing Him, and after Peter cut off the servant's ear and Jesus restored it, all the disciples fled. It seems while Jesus was standing bound with the soldiers, John Mark came up to Jesus and maybe took hold of Jesus' arm. John Mark had rushed out of his house with only a loose-fitting linen sleeping garment that he had hastily wrapped around himself. When the soldiers saw Mark lay hold of Jesus, they may have turned to Mark and out of fear he turned to run when someone grabbed his garment and pulled it off and Mark escaped with nothing on. (See Mark 14:51-52.)

This is the same John Mark that went with Paul and Barnabas on the first missionary journey. Barnabas was Mark's uncle. For some reason John Mark left Paul and Barnabas in Pamphilia and returned to Jerusalem.

One other thing by way of introduction: John Mark became the traveling companion of Simon Peter. In I Peter 5:13, Peter calls Mark “my son” and most believe that Peter won John Mark to the Lord. As the companion of Simon Peter, Mark got most of his information for his Gospel from Simon Peter. Some even say that this Gospel is really the Gospel of Peter.

Now let's look at the text:

Mark begins by saying, “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ.”

Other books in the Bible begin with the words, “The beginning” or “In the beginning.”

- Genesis 1:1: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” “In the beginning” of what? Time. Time began when God created the heavens and earth. Before TIME began is known as “Eternity Past.”
- John 1:1-2: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God.” Here, John takes Jesus back to the beginning of Eternity Past. That is, Jesus always was. He had no beginning and He will have no end.
- I John 1:1: “That which was from the beginning.” In the context of verses 1-4, the phrase refers to the beginning of gospel preaching when the readers first heard about Jesus. (See I John 2:7, 24)

“The Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God” is what Mark is going to share. He is going to share with his readers the good news

concerning who Jesus is and what He did while He was here. Mark calls the Lord, "Jesus Christ, the Son of God."

The name "Jesus" comes from the Hebrew word Joshua: "Jehovah is Salvation" and declares His Person.

He is "Christ," the Jewish Messiah, the Anointed One. Christ declares His Position. He is the One who will deliver His people from their enemies.

He is "the Son of God" – who is no ordinary man. The name "Son of God" declares His Power!

1. He is truly human – He has a human name – Jesus.
2. He is truly divine – He is the promised Messiah. He is the Son of God.
3. He is truly unique – He is both humanity and deity in One Person.
4. He is the true source of Good News – Jesus alone is the Source of salvation.

Mark writes about the beginning of the ministry of Jesus as he writes about the man who was sent to prepare the way for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. For a few moments I want us to look at the ministry of John the Baptist.

John and His Mandate Mark 1:2-3

Israel had been without a prophet for 400 years. The sins of the people and especially the religious leaders had brought about a famine of the Word of God. Jewish religion had become nothing more than dead orthodoxy. Legalism and ritual ruled the day. The Jews were in desperate need for spiritual revival.

We are living in a similar day! Churches have abandoned the great doctrines of the Bible to preach either a feel-good message or legalism. People are either never challenged regarding their sins or they are beaten down with the Word of God.

Only twice does Mark quote from the Old Testament in his Gospel and both are here in Chapter one. He refers to John the Baptist as the fulfillment of two Old Testament prophetic promises. John the Baptist was the prophet of God who was sent to prepare the way for His Son, Jesus Christ. And what a great prophet John the Baptist was! Jesus said of him, "Among those born of woman there is no one greater than John" (Luke 7:28).

John's mandate is found in two Old Testament prophecies: Isaiah 40:3 and Malachi 3:1.

In ancient times, kings often sent people ahead of them to prepare the way for their coming. The forerunner had two primary duties:

1. He was to make certain that the roads were passable. There was to be no delays when the king passed through. He was to have a clear, open route through the kingdom.
2. The forerunner was to let the people know that the king was coming. He was to go along the route before the king came through and he was to get ready for the king.

John said, "I am but a voice crying, "Make ready! Prepare! The King is coming!"

John and His Methods Mark 1:4-5

John came Preaching and Baptizing. Look at John's preaching:

1. His Message was a Message of Confrontation.

John did what God's preacher is suppose to do: confront men with their sin! The divine and proper preparation for the gospel – the Good News of Jesus Christ – is preaching about sin. John gave the people a wonderful gift by preaching on sin and judgment. John told the people about judgment of their sin.

Jesus said, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted" (Matthew 5:4). Those who mourn over their sin see their need for grace and for the Savior and are then in a place to receive His salvation and be blessed.

2. His Message was a Message of Change.

How do you change? Repent! Repentance means a change of mind and heart which results in a change of action. The people had sinned and John called on them to change their minds regarding continuing to live in sin. Stop living in sin! Change your mind about living in sin and ask God to forgive you and help you to now say "No" to sin in your life.

"Repentance" would result in the remission of sin; forgiveness and pardon for sin as though they had never happened.

3. His Message was a Message to Clean up their Lives.

John did something else that was unusual in his day, he baptized Jews. When a Gentile became a Jewish convert, that person would baptize themselves as a symbol of their changed life. Baptism was now new, the way John used it was new.

John did not baptize people to make them right with God. The phrase "preached the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins:" does not mean that people were being baptized TO HAVE

their sins forgiven. They were being baptized because their sins had already been forgiven. They went to John and were immersed in the River Jordan to declare publicly that their lives had been changed by the power of God. They were baptized to give glory to God who had forgiven their sins and made them whole. This baptism was about a changed life.

That is still what baptism represents. People are not baptized to be saved; they are baptized because they have been saved.

Notice Mark 1:5. When the unbelieving Jews came to John, he treated them like they were Gentiles. He said that the Jews must repent of their sins just like the Gentiles. That must have shaken them to their core. They were God's covenant people and John was telling them they were no better than the Gentiles. But when they were confronted with their sins, they repented, were forgiven, and John baptized them.

John wanted to make sure they were saved and forgiven of their sins before he baptized them. When some Pharisees and Sadducees came to John, he didn't baptize them but said, "You brood of vipers. Who warned you to flee the wrath to come? Bring forth fruits worthy of repentance."

John and His Manner Mark 1:6-8

John's food and fashion would remind the people of Elijah, whom they expected to come before Messiah.

Look at John's humility and respect for the Messiah in Mark 1:7-8. John was saying, "I am nothing; He is Everything."

I love John's words in John 3:30: "I must decrease, but He must increase." John magnified Jesus so He would shine!

THE BAPTISM OF JESUS Mark 1:9-11

Why did Jesus have to be baptized? He had never sinned. He did not have to repent of His sins. So why did Jesus have to be baptized?

Matthew 3 tells us that when Jesus approached John the Baptist at the Jordan and told him to baptize Him, "John forbade Him" saying, "Oh, no, I am not worthy to baptize You. I need to be baptized by You. You ought to baptize me!" Jesus said, "Suffer it to be so now ... Permit it to be so now ... because it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." In other words, Jesus is saying, "I must be baptized and you must baptize Me, because it is the right thing to do."

Now I want us to look at the theme of baptism:

The Meaning of Baptism

The word "baptize" itself means to submerge, to plunge, or to dip.

In the beginning, the word was not a religious word, but it was a common word in the Greek. It was a word that was used of a man

who would dip a piece of cloth in a dye to change its color, or of a woman who would take her dishes down to the river and baptize her dishes in the water to wash them. That was the meaning of the word. Then the word came to mean something religious.

In the Bible there are different kinds of baptism. In Hebrews 5:1-3 we read, "Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms (plural)..." Take a concordance and you'll find seven different kinds of baptisms or uses of the word baptism.

There is John's baptism in water. This was not Christian baptism. Rather it was a baptism of repentance. This was a one-time act that stated that although the Jews who participated in such a rite were admitting that though members of God's covenant people, they needed to come to God through repentance and faith just like Gentiles.

Jesus' baptism in water was not repentance baptism or Christian baptism. It was unlike any baptism before or after. He was baptized because it was the right thing to do. We'll look at His baptism a little further in a moment.

Jesus' baptism in suffering. The word baptize can mean to be overwhelmed by something or to be covered up by something. In Luke 12:49-50 we read, "I have a baptism to be baptized with,

and how distressed I am till it is accomplished." The baptism of suffering Christ was referring to was His death.

The Jews were baptized in the cloud and in the sea when they came out of Egypt. I Corinthians 10:1-2. Their baptism indicated their oneness or solidarity with Moses as their leader. They were pledging their loyalty and fellowship to Moses. One reason Baptist asks those coming to join the Baptist church from another denomination is to say they are now placing their loyalty and fellowship to Baptist teaching.

Christians are baptized into the Body of Christ, or the Church. I Corinthians 12:13: "For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body." The moment you are saved the Holy Spirit baptizes you into the Body of Christ.

Christians are baptized in the Holy Spirit – Mark 1:8; Acts 1:5. "John baptized with water, but you shall be baptized in the Holy Spirit." This happened at Pentecost.

Then there is the Christian's baptism in water. When we say baptism, that's what most of us think about. Acts 2:38.

The Misconceptions About Baptism

I could deal with a lot of things here, but let me deal with two broad misconceptions about baptism.

A. Some believe baptism is necessary for salvation.

There are some folks who are good folks and they love Jesus, who are convinced that one must be baptized in order to go to heaven. But, no. Baptism is necessary for fruitfulness and blessing, but baptism is not necessary to go to heaven.

What is necessary to go to Heaven? One must repent of their sin and place their faith in Jesus as Savior and Lord. Baptism is an act of obedience.

Here is a man in war. He is pinned down in a fox-hole and he knows he may not live through it. He cries out to God in repentance and faith the best he knows how. He does everything he knows to do and asks God to forgive him of his sins. What do you think God is going to say to that man when he faces Him? "Well, I see you've repented of your sin, but I see no record of your baptism. Sorry, you can't enter in!" Romans 10:13 says, "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." It doesn't say, "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord and is baptized."

We are not saved by works and baptism.

Baptism is works, and we're never saved by works.

Is baptism important? Absolutely – for fruitfulness, obedience, and blessing. Jesus said, "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments."

B. The second misconception is this: If baptism is not necessary for salvation, it really doesn't matter

How or When or If you are baptized.

"Well, you Baptist baptize only believers. We sprinkle little babies. It doesn't matter when you are baptized as long as you do it."

Why did folks start sprinkling anyway?

One reason was for convenience. In the early days many churches didn't have places to baptize in the church. Often the church used ponds and in the winter many of the ponds would freeze over.

The Roman Catholic Church was strong and only the Pope could baptize. They believed you had to be baptized to be saved and go to heaven. But what about a baby that was stillborn or a man who died in war? They would even baptize the dead if they had not been baptized so they could go to heaven.

It was not until the Reformation that folks began to examine baptism again.

Then came a group called Anti-baptist. They baptized twice – as a child and as an adult.

When King James had the Bible translated, when they came to the word for baptize, they knew the word meant to dip or to plunge, but King James didn't like the words "dip" or "plunge," so they transliterated the word "baptize. It was really a good thing, because we could have been known as the "Dippers" or the "Plungers." Then we'd have to decide if we were Big Dippers or Little Dippers!

The simple truth is, scriptural baptism is for believers and it is to be done by immersion.

Let me ask you: Have you been scripturally baptized?

"Well, I've been sprinkled." That's not scriptural baptism. "Well, I was sprinkled as a baby." That's not scriptural baptism. "Well, I joined the church as a child and was baptized and later got saved, but that first time is good enough." That's not scriptural baptism. The sequence is out of order.

What does baptism picture? The death, burial, and resurrection of our Lord. Think about this: To baptize someone before salvation is like burying someone before they die. Baptism is a picture of the death, burial, and resurrection of our Lord. Sequence matters. Order matters.

The Motives For Baptism

Why do folks want to be baptized? For the same reason Jesus wanted to be baptized.

For Obedience. It's the right thing to do.

What if, instead of being baptized after you're saved, the Bible said to run around the church seven times singing Halleluia! I would do it, simply because the Bible said to do it. I'd do it

out of obedience. I'd do it because I want to please Jesus. I wouldn't have to understand it. I'd just do it! But the Bible doesn't say run around the church, it says to be baptized as an act of obedience.

Jesus said, "Why do you call me Lord, Lord, and do not the things I say?"

"Preacher, I can't understand the Bible." Why should God give you more light until you live up to the light He has given you and you obey what you do understand?

For Identification

When we are baptized we identify with Jesus Christ. He was baptized; we identify with Him.

Jesus' baptism involved a commissioning and an empowering. It also involved God's approval and encouragement.

For a Testimony

Baptism allows us to testify: "I am a follower; a believer in Jesus Christ."

Ever heard the phrase, "Profession of Faith?" When does that happen? Well, it can happen many times, but not necessarily just when we walk down the aisle.

Jesus said, "If you confess Me before men, I will confess you before My Father in heaven."

Did you notice what happened when Jesus was baptized? A Voice from Heaven spoke. The Father said, "This is My Beloved Son in Whom I am well pleased." He was accepted, approved, and loved. The same will happen to the one who, like Jesus, is obedient to the Father.

“And immediately the Spirit driveth Him into the wilderness. And He was there in the wilderness forty days, tempted of Satan.”

Jesus had just come from the River Jordan where He experienced the blessing of baptism, the Voice of God, and the Holy Spirit descending on Him like a dove. But then, the same Spirit immediately led Him into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan. That's the devil after the dove.

Sometimes after we experience some of our greatest spiritual victories, we face our greatest challenges. Dr. Adrian Rogers used to say, “Be prepared. As soon as God opens the windows of Heaven to bless us, the devil will open the doors of Hell to blast us.” That's a principle we find throughout the Word of God.

Jesus went all the way from the dove to the devil. First, the blessing, then the battle – that's always the way it is. Right after the moment of blessing is the moment of testing. Heaven had opened; now Hell opened. Satan loves to attack us when we think we are the strongest.

Temptation is not new to man. Ever since Adam, men and women, boys and girls have faced temptation to do evil. It is not a sin to be tempted, but it is a sin to yield to temptation. The songwriter accurately counseled: “Yield not to temptation, for yielding is sin.”

As a true Man, Jesus had to experience temptation just as His human brothers and sisters. The Bible says that Christ was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin” (Hebrews 4:15+). He experienced the same kinds of temptations that you and I do. Consequently, He knows our struggles against sin and He sympathizes with our conflict against evil.

The Tempter

The temptations were all about Jesus doing battle with the devil. Mark is quick to tell us that the “Spirit” of God is the One Who caused Jesus to go into the wilderness.

When temptations to do evil come, they never come from the hand of God (James 1:13+). God never leads people into sin. He is in the business of leading us Away From Evil (1 Corinthians 10:13+). However, He will send us into periods of testing. He does this, not to cause us to fail, but to help us grow in the Lord. He knows that we do our best growing when the pressure is on. God will not send you into a time of temptation to sin, but He will send you into a time of testing to help you grow.

Understand that Satan is real. Some people laugh at the idea of a personal devil. They say the devil is only an impersonal force or depraved influence in the world.

Yet, the devil is a dangerous enemy. The Bible calls Satan “that old serpent.” In the Book of Genesis we are told that the serpent was more subtle or cunning than all of the animals of the field, and this was the animal Satan chose to speak through when he enticed Eve to disobey God (Genesis 3:1+). In the New Testament Paul tells us to beware of the wiles of the devil. Peter describes him as “a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Peter 5:8). Satan is intent on the moral destruction of the human race. He tempts people to do evil and then accuses the offenders in the court of heaven (Revelation 12:10). Satan is a liar and the father of lies and a deceiver.

The Temptations

Three of the four Gospels record our Lord's temptations.

Matthew tells us the time of testing lasted forty days. The number forty in the Bible is used for times of testing, times of probation, and times of preparation. Israel spent forty years in the wilderness. Moses spent forty years on the backside of the desert in training. The spies spent forty days spying out Canaan. The rains were upon the earth forty days and nights during the flood. So, the number forty is a number associated with testing.

Matthew tells us that Jesus fasted those forty days. He spent that time in close communion with His Father. He was preparing Himself spiritually for the showdown that was coming when Satan unleashed his temptations. Jesus was getting ready for battle.

Mark is the only one who tells us that Jesus was with the wild beast. Have you ever heard wild animals in a deserted place at night? Jackals, boars, hyenas, lions. The sound of those wild animals piercing the darkness of the night is enough to stop the heart. So there was the test of fear. But perfect love casts out fear. (1 Jn 4:18+) There was no fear in Jesus because in Him was perfect love.

Mark tells us that “the angels ministered to Him.” Hebrews 1:14+ says that angels are “ministering spirits sent forth to minister to those who will inherit salvation.”

Look at Mark 1:13+ – “He was there.” Jesus was in the wilderness.

- The wild beast were with Him.
- The angels were with Him – Mark's contrast is interesting: “with the wild beast: and the angels.”
- Satan, the Evil one was there. Jesus and Satan would go head-to-head in a daily battle for forty days.

I can think of several reasons Jesus had to be tempted.

- John tells us that Jesus “appeared for this purpose, that He might destroy the works of the devil,” (1 John 3:8).
- Jesus had to endure temptation so He could help us in our temptations (Hebrews 2:18+)
- Jesus had to be tempted so He could show us the way of victory over it. His secret was twofold: He was **filled with the Spirit** and He was **filled with the Scripture**.
- Hebrews 4:15+ says that Jesus was “tempted in all points as we are, yet without sin.” What are those “points” or “areas” of temptation?

1 John 2:15-17+: “The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.”

A. The First Temptation: Appeals to the Lust of the Flesh.

“If you be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread” (Matthew 4:3). In the temptation, Satan questions the Son's relationship with the Father. Jesus had just heard the Father declare His Sonship at His baptism and no doubt Satan heard it too. Satan mocks Jesus and says, “You are the Son of God and you're hungry. Why starve to death? Turn these stones that look like bread into bread. Why shouldn't God's Son use His supernatural ability to meet a legitimate need?” Meet your physical desires.

There is no question that Jesus could have turned the stones into bread. Later Jesus fed 5,000 with a few loaves and some fish. The temptation appeals to the lust of the flesh. If it feels good, do it!

The temptation here is for Jesus to act independently of the Father and the Spirit. The devil wanted Jesus to do His own thing.

Jesus said, “It is written, man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.” (Mt 4:4, Lk 4:4+)

B. The Second Temptation: Appeals to the Pride of Life.

Satan took Jesus to the 450-foot high pinnacle of the Temple. Jesus quoted Scripture to Satan, so now Satan quotes (or misquotes) Scripture to Jesus. Satan misquotes Psalm 91:11-12. He said, “God has promised to take care of You. Jump off the pinnacle. God won't let anything happen to you. And think of the fame You'll have. The crowd will love it. Show them what You can do.”

Jesus said, “It is written again, 'You shall not tempt the Lord your God.'” (Lk 4:12+)

C. The Third Temptation: Appeals to the Lust of the Eye

Satan says, “You can bypass the cross. Bow down to me and I'll give You the world. Just worship me. Take the easy way out.” Jesus said, “Get away from Me Satan. It is written, 'Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve.’” Luke 4:8+).

Luke tells us, “when the devil had ended all the temptation, he departed from Him for a season” (Luke 4:13+).

The Tempted

When Jesus walked into the wilderness and met the devil, He could have said, “As the Son of God from heaven, I command you to be gone and never bother Me again.” But Jesus knew this was His Father's appointed test and **He faced it in His humanity in order to show every man, woman, and child how they, too, can conquer Satan in every temptation.**

I'm convinced we don't have to yield to any temptation as long as we, like Christ, are filled with the Spirit and filled with the Scriptures.

2 Peter 2:9+: “The Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptation.”

1 Corinthians 10:13+: “There hath no temptation taken you but such is common to man, but God is faithful, Who will not suffer you to be tempted above that you are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that you may be able to bear it.”

In Luke 4, the parallel account to Mark's description of Jesus' temptation, we read in verse one that “Jesus, being full of the Holy Ghost, returned from Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness.” Then, after the temptation was over, we read: “Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee” (Luke 4:14+). Jesus faced the prince of demons as a man, but He was full of the Holy Spirit before, during, and after the encounter. His body, soul, and spirit were controlled by the Holy Spirit, and there was no place for

Satan to get a toehold for evil purposes.

Fellow believer, your life can be filled with the Spirit as well. The Bible says, "Greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world" (1 John 4:4+). **If you will yield your life daily and hourly to the control of the Holy Spirit, He will answer when Satan knocks at your soul – and Satan will leave in search of easier victims.**

JESUS CAME ...PREACHING THE GOSPEL OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD Mark 1:14-15

Look at those two words in Mark 1:14: "**Jesus came.**" Well, why did Jesus come? What were the reasons for coming to this earth? Well, we don't have time to look at all of the reasons Jesus came to this earth, but let me just mention four reasons:

1. Mark 10:45 says that Jesus came to serve others and to give His life a ransom for many.
2. 1 John 3:8 says that Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil.
3. John 17:1 says that Jesus came to this earth to glorify the Father.
4. Then, Jesus came to this earth to preach the good news of salvation. Matthew 4:23 gives us the three main aspects of Christ's public ministry; and Matthew puts these in order of importance to Jesus: "And Jesus went about all Galilee, TEACHING in their synagogues, PREACHING the gospel of the kingdom, and HEALING all kinds of sickness and all kinds of diseases among the people." Teaching, preaching, and healing; but His main focus was Teaching!

Jesus Christ was prepared for His earthly ministry in three special ways.

- Spiritually, He was anointed by the Holy Spirit for the work He had been sent to do.
- Emotionally, He received the vocal approval of His heavenly Father when He said, "This is my Beloved Son in whom I am well pleased."
- Physically, He was put to the test in the flesh, as He fasted forty days and faced the devil on the mount of temptation.

Jesus began His public ministry at His baptism, but His public ministry was not as public nor as extensive as it is at this time.

Three things I want you to see from these two verses:

The Framework of His Message Mark 1:14a

In Matthew 3:1 we are told that John the Baptist began his preaching ministry "in the wilderness of Judea, saying, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.'"

In Mark 1:14-15 we are told that Jesus began His preaching ministry in Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, saying, "Repent, and believe the gospel."

They preached the same gospel message, but John the Baptist's ministry was in Judea and Jesus' ministry was in Galilee.

You need to understand that between Mark 1:13 and Mark 1:14 a whole year to fourteen months have passed. This period is called "Thy Year of Obscurity." Matthew, Mark, and Luke tell us nothing of what Jesus said or did during this time. If it were not for the Gospel of John, we would know nothing of what Jesus did.

Here is what we learn from the Gospel of John about what happened in that first year of our Lord's public ministry – that **Year of Obscurity.** (See study by S Lewis Johnson - [The Messiah's Year of Obscurity](#))

- Jesus met Andrew, John, James, and Peter who would later leave all to follow Jesus.
- Jesus went up to Jerusalem for His first Passover with His disciples.

- Jesus cleansed the Temple the first time.
- Our Lord's first miracle would take place in Cana of Galilee when He turned water into wine at a wedding feast.
- Jesus had a conversation with Nicodemus about the New Birth.

John 4:1-3 tells us why Jesus left Judea and went to Galilee. Why now? Why not fully begin his public ministry earlier?

Jesus could not and would not give the appearance of competing with John. If Jesus had begun His ministry in full force before John's ministry had been completed, the loyalty of the people would have been divided. John was sent to prepare the way and the way was not fully prepared until John was removed from the scene.

Believers are not rivals. They are joint servants of the Lord who work together in their respective ministries. They are not to compete against each other. And when the time comes, when a servant's ministry is completed, he is to willingly step aside for the new ministry.

I know I will not always be your pastor, if Jesus tarries His coming. Part of my responsibility as your pastor is to prepare you for the next man of God that will lead you.

In Joshua 1:2 God speaks to Joshua and says, "Moses my servant is dead, now therefore, arise, go over this Jordan, you and all this people, to the land I am giving them." In other words, "Moses is dead, but the work must go on. When the workman dies, none of the work of God dies." Moses had been preparing Joshua to take over when he was gone.

- Take Moses from the people of God and He will give them Joshua.
- Elijah is caught up to heaven, so Elisha will do the work.
- Take John the Baptist away and the Voice of Jesus will be heard. It has been that way throughout the history of the Church.

Notice: "Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came preaching in Galilee." John would remain in prison for a year before he was beheaded by Herod because he preached against his sin of taking his brother Philip's wife.

"When John was put in prison and Jesus came forth preaching" serve as a date to fix the approximate time that Jesus began to minister in Galilee.

The Focus of His Message Mark 1:14b

Here is the focus:

A. Jesus Came Preaching

The word "preaching" means "to herald important news from the King." Because the news was from the King, the herald was to be heeded and respected. His message was to be obeyed without question. Jesus came declaring the Message of God.

B. The Gospel

The word "gospel" means "good news." Jesus came to the people of His day preaching a message of hope and glad tidings.

C. The Kingdom of God

Jesus wasn't just preaching any "good news." He was preaching the "good news" of **the kingdom of God.** The Jews knew from the preaching of the Old Testament prophets that God would one day establish His kingdom in this world. Those ancient preachers told of that day in vivid and glorious terms.

What is that Message of Hope? It is only found in a Person and in Only one Person – Jesus!

- It is found in John 3:16: "For God so loved the world . . ."
- It is found in Matthew 11:28: "Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."
- It is to be found in John 6:37: "All that the Father giveth Me shall come to Me; and him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out."
- It can be found in John 7:37: "If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink."
- It can be found in John 6:47: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that believeth on Me hath everlasting life."

The Force of His Message Mark 1:15

The message our Lord preached was a message of hope, but it was also a message of urgency. There was a “now-ness” about Jesus' message.

A. “The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand.”

The word “**time**” has the idea of “a favorable season of action; a golden opportunity.” Jesus was preaching for immediate life change among His hearers. He was calling them to come to Him right now.

There is still a sense of urgency in the Gospel message. God calls people to come to Him today! The kingdom of God is at hand. Don't delay. Come to Jesus immediately.

What is the **kingdom of God**? Where is the **kingdom of God**? Luke 17:21+ says, “For indeed, the **kingdom of God** is within you” (within your hearts).

What are the conditions of entrance into this kingdom? How can I know Christ as Savior and Lord? How can I go to heaven when I die? The message is: **repent** of your sin, and **believe** in the Lord Jesus Christ. Both repentance and faith (believing). There is no entering the kingdom without repentance and there is no entering the kingdom without faith in the Lord Jesus as God's Son.

B. Repent

Repentance is the missing note in today's church. We want an easy believe-ism. We don't want to admit we are sinners. But you cannot be saved without admitting you are lost and that you are a sinner and then you must turn from your sin and turn to Jesus.

Repentance is not feeling sorry for your sins. Repentance is not turning over a new leaf. Repentance is a change of your mind about sin – your sin! It is a change of mind that leads to a change of your heart which leads to a change of your direction in life. You cannot turn TO the Lord Jesus unless you turn FROM your sin. Repentance is a radical turning from sin that would become manifest in the fruit of righteousness.

C. Believe

The word “**believe**” has the idea of “accepting something as being true.” Believe is a direction word. It means “to move in the direction of.” It involves commitment.

Repentance is a change of Direction: Faith toward the Lord Jesus is a change of Direction.

Have you repented of your sins? Has there been a conscious desire to make a break with your sinful past? Do you trust Jesus and Jesus alone and His finished work on the cross for your soul's salvation? Are you saved?

FOLLOWING CHRIST Mark 1:16-20

If you are a child of God, there is something I know about you: You have received at least two calls from God. One call is the call to salvation; and, if you have responded with a “Yes” to that call, right on the heels of that call is a second call: the call to be a soul-winner.

Jesus said that He “had come to seek and to save that which is lost.” Jesus first says, “Come TO Me!” and after we follow that command, He then says, “Follow AFTER Me.”

When we come to Christ in salvation, He changes us. We become a new creation in Christ Jesus. “Old things are passed away and, behold, all things have become new.” Salvation affects our walk and our talk. It affects our attitude and desires. We want to become more and more like Jesus.

Then, right after our salvation, Jesus says, “Come AFTER Me and I will make you to become fishers of men.” Every person that Jesus calls to come TO Him, He also calls to come AFTER Him.

So, let me ask you, if you are saved; if you have come TO Jesus, are you following AFTER Jesus? Someone put it like this: “If you

aren't fishing, then you aren't following.”

This is by no means the first meeting between Jesus and these two pairs of brothers. Both Andrew and John were at the Jordan when John the Baptist baptized Jesus and heard John say of Jesus, “Behold the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world.” Andrew and John followed Jesus to confirm that Jesus was indeed the Messiah and then, without Jesus telling them at that time to become fishers of men, Andrew went to tell his brother, Peter, about Jesus and John went to tell James about Jesus.

What we are reading in Mark 1:16-20 is our Lord's call to all four of these men to become his permanent disciples.

Peter, the natural born leader, became a follower!

A young lady dreamed of attending a famous college, but she was an average student and her parents thought her hopes of admission were unrealistic. When the selective college accepted her application, her parent thought there was a mistake. They called the Director of Admissions and asked for an explanation. He assured them there was no mistake. Then he commented, “When we asked on the application, 'Are you a leader or a follower?' your daughter wrote, 'I have always been a good follower.' We have received hundreds of applications from leaders, but only one from a follower. We are happy to accept your daughter.”

Jesus is looking for good followers. Are you one? Leadership is a hot topic in Christian circles, but in God's kingdom no one becomes a good leader who doesn't first prove to be a faithful follower

How do we know if we're following Christ? His words to Simon and Andrew imply that our witness to others is the telltale sign: “Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men” (Mark 1:17). Fishing for people is a picture of evangelism. The fishers are the followers of Christ. The net is the gospel. The fish are the spiritually lost people. The sea represents the unsettled, troubled waters of sin that people need to be rescued from. All this teaches that Jesus calls us not just to salvation, but to service. After we enter His kingdom, He sends us back into the world to rescue others.

Sadly, many who claim to be followers of Christ aren't fishing for people. We tend to think that the pastor's greatest problem is getting people in the world to come to church. But I can think of a greater difficulty: getting people from the church out into the world to win others to Christ.

Fishing is a humble work that demands labor, patience, faith, tenacity, and a willingness to work at odd hours. When we apply that to fishing for people, we learn it's not easy winning others to Christ, but the blessing of seeing it happen more than makes up for the hardship involved. Second only to the joy of having Jesus catch me with His gospel “hook” is the joy of holding its line out to others and seeing them grab hold of it for dear life.

When we follow Jesus we want to do what He does. Jesus didn't come primarily to heal. If that had been His focus, He would have established a hospital. He didn't come primarily to teach or else He would have founded a school. He came to seek and to save that which is lost. When we follow Him that will be our passion as well.

Fishing for men means bringing people to Jesus. Do you know why Jesus called Peter, Andrew, James, and John to be fishers of men? Because they were already fishermen. In fact, at least seven of the twelve disciples were fishermen. They knew how to catch fish. When Jesus called Matthew, the tax collector, He didn't tell him to fish for men. But Matthew went fishing anyway. He hosted a dinner so all of his tax-collector buddies could meet Jesus.

Jesus wants you to use whatever you already know to bring people into a relationship with Him.

For instance, here's what He might say to you according to your profession:

Jesus wants you to use what you know to bring people into a relationship with Him. Jesus taught them this truth: “Every life matters to God.”

Notice that all four men responded to our Lord's call immediately – at once – without delay. There was no pause. They left all and followed Jesus. They didn't say, “Let me finish what I'm doing first.” “As soon as I _____, then I'll follow you.” No! It was Amazing Obedience!

Notice Mark 1:16. Peter and Andrew were “casting a net into the sea.” They represent the evangelist. They saw immediate results for their labors.

The other pair, James and John, were “mending their nets” (Mark 1:19). Often the net would get torn or ripped and large holes would be formed in the net.

Peter was casting his net – he was concerned with getting fish into the net. This speaks of catching men for Christ.

John was “mending his net” – he was more concerned with keeping the fish in the net. It would be quite useless if Peter caught the

fish, only to find they escaped through the un-repaired parts of a torn net. John was determined to keep what Peter caught. The tragedy of modern evangelism is that converts are hard to find when the special evangelistic services are over. Peter was the evangelist who caught the fish, but John was the pastor who recognized that evangelism would be useless if the converts were not retained for the Lord. "Mending nets" represent the pastor-teacher. Their work was more tedious and not so spectacularly rewarding. The Church needs both types of leaders.

It is discouraging to see folks respond to the gospel and then don't even stay around long enough to be baptized. How do you explain that? Well, that's another sermon or maybe series of sermons, but let me just leave you with one verse: I John 2:19.

I want to spend the rest of our time together by sharing five fishing tips with you:

A. Good Fishermen Go Where the Fish are Located.

You can't catch fish unless you go out to where the fish are. People without Christ aren't knocking down the doors of our church to get in. We have to go after them.

Here is the sad attitude of many church folks: "Well, they know where the church is. When they want to come, they'll come." No! They won't come unless we go after them. The first two letters in gospel is "G O"!

B. Good Fishermen Understand How Fish Behave.

One of my favorite episodes of the "Andy Griffith Show" was about fishing. Opie was little and Aunt Bee came to visit on a trial basis. She was trying desperately to fit in so Opie would like her. She agreed to go fishing with Andy and Opie. She didn't know much about fishing because she was holding her bait a few feet above the surface of the water. When Opie pointed it out, Andy was quick to give an answer that saved Aunt Bee any embarrassment. He explained to Opie that Aunt Bee was such a good fisherman that she was fishing for "flying fish." That satisfied Opie. It was obvious Aunt Bee didn't understand how fish act.

If we are going to reach people for Christ, we must understand their world.

That means we should intentionally make friends with people who don't know Christ. The sad truth is the longer a person follows Jesus, the fewer friends they have who need Jesus. That's only natural. We want to hang out with other Christians. But Jesus was a friend of sinners. He spent time eating and fellowshipping with the worst of the worst. The Jewish leaders criticized Jesus for eating with sinners. He responded that only sick people need a doctor. The Jewish leaders were sick too; they just didn't realize it.

C. Good Fishermen Use a Variety of Strategies.

There are a lot of different ways to catch fish. You can use a net from a boat, a trout-line, a rod and reel, live bait, artificial bait.

No two people are alike so there is no single approach to personal evangelism that will work. Different people need different approaches. The same strategy won't work for everyone.

That's what Paul meant when he wrote in I Corinthians 9:22, "I have become all things to all men so that by all means I might save some."

D. Good Fishermen Expect to Catch Fish.

One of the funniest stories about fishing was told by the country comedian Jerry Clower. He talked about Claude Ledbetter in Mississippi who was catching a boat load of fish when no body else was bringing any home. A state game warden decided to ride out with Claude to investigate his fishing methods.

After arriving in the middle of the lake, Claude reached under the seat, pulled out a long stick of dynamite, lit it and tossed it into the water. Kaboom! In a few seconds, dead fish floated to the surface all around the boat, and Claude used a dip net to bring them into the boat. The game warden was enraged. He flashed his badge and said, "Bubba, that is illegal, and I'm going to arrest you. You can't fish with dynamite!"

Old Claude didn't say a word. He just lit another stick of dynamite and thrust it into the game warden's hand. While the fuse sizzled Claude said, "Are you gonna TALK or are you gonna FISH?" I don't recommend his method, but Bubba was expecting to catch fish!

Good fishermen always EXPECT to catch fish, even if they don't. There's a measure of faith involved because you usually can't see the fish. You suspect they're there, and you're hoping they will take the hook.

It takes real faith to share your faith with others as well. You're not putting faith in yourself or your skill. You are not putting your faith in the person who needs Jesus. You put your faith in Jesus. You have to believe Jesus can and will help the person.

E. Good Fishermen are Patient if They Don't Catch Fish Immediately.

Good fishermen are patient. If they don't catch fish after the first twenty or thirty minutes, they don't load up and go home. They may move to another spot, or try a different bait, but they are going to keep on fishing.

When you're fishing, patience isn't just a virtue; it's a necessity. Not too many fish are going to jump in your boat. A fish is easily spooked and will try to get away. A person without Jesus may often resist and even resist your attempt to share Christ with them. That's okay. Love them, and keep showing them God's love. Keep praying for them.

I know most of us here have been fishing, but if you've never gone fishing, raise your hand. Now: how many of you who just raised your hand have ever caught a fish? You say, "That's a foolish question. If they have never gone fishing, of course they have never caught a fish." That's my point. If you never try to win someone to Jesus, you won't.

Sometimes you go fishing and you don't catch a thing, but it's still called fishing because you went to where the fish were, and you wet your hook. You tried. God won't ask you how many fish you've caught. He's not interested in how many times you've gone fishing. He judges us on our obedience. Our job is to just share the gospel, whether anyone accepts Christ or not. The results are up to God.

THE AMAZING PREACHING OF JESUS Mark 1:21-22

Mark is in a hurry. He is constantly moving the action along. He uses words like "straightway" (Mark 1:21), "immediately" (Mark 1:28), "forthwith" (Mark 1:29), and "anon" (soon), (Mark 1:30). These are action words. They picture events as happening one right after another. He pictures Jesus as He moves from one divine task to another divine task as He does everything in His power to accomplish His Father's mission for His life.

In fulfilling his purpose, Mark skips over large chunks of the ministry of Jesus.

Between Mark 1:13 and 14 there is a span of over a year. Mark totally leaves out the entire ministry of Jesus in Judea.

Between Mark 1:20 and 21 another span of time is passed over without comment. During the several weeks that are not mentioned by Mark, Jesus was carrying out His ministry in Nazareth, His hometown. It was during this time that He preached the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) and called the rest of the twelve disciples. It was also during this period that Jesus suffered rejection at the hands of the people in His hometown of Nazareth. According to Luke 4:16-20, Jesus preached in the synagogue at Nazareth and proclaimed Himself to be the Messiah Israel had long anticipated. The people rejected His claims and even tried to kill Him. As a result, Jesus and His men left Nazareth and moved their ministry to Capernaum, which would become His base for ministry. It is there that Mark picks up the narrative once again.

As Jesus taught and ministered to the people in Capernaum, they were caught up and carried away with the message of this man named Jesus. The Bible tells us that they were "astonished" (Mark 1:22) and "amazed" (Mark 1:27) by the things they heard and saw.

Our text today focuses in on one day in the life of the Lord Jesus. We are allowed to observe Him as He ministers on one particular Sabbath day and we will see why the people of Capernaum were "astonished" and "amazed" by the word and works of the Lord Jesus.

I want us to see the traits of His preaching that made it so amazing to those who heard Jesus preach.

The Context of His Preaching

Jesus and His men went to the synagogue on the Sabbath Day. It was their custom. None of His men asked Jesus if they were going to the synagogue on the Sabbath Day. The synagogue was much like the local church in those days. Every community of Jesus containing ten families was required by rabbinical law to have a synagogue.

The synagogue system was established during the years of Israel's Babylonian captivity, around 586 B.C. They could not go to the Temple to worship, so they came together in the synagogue to read the Law, teach the Law, and worship God.

The synagogue quickly became the center of every Jewish community. The people met there for worship on Sabbath days, which was Saturday. They would meet again on Monday and then again on Thursday. The building was also used as a schoolhouse and courtroom during the week.

A typical service involved prayer, the reading of the Law, and a sermon by a rabbi or a scribe. These men were entrusted with

protecting the Word of God. They were entrusted to give their lives to learning the Law and sharing it with the people of God. However, the sermons delivered by these scribes were notoriously long, dusty and dry. The scribe would stand and read some portion of Scripture and then he would sit down and begin to quote other rabbis, giving their opinions, but never telling the people what the Law really said or meant. Strangely, the things they talked about the most was about the restrictions of the Sabbath Day – what they could and could not do on the Sabbath.

It was into this atmosphere that Jesus came preaching the Word of God. The people who came that day expected to hear from Dr. Dry-As-Dust. What they got was something different! What they got that day was something different that left them astonished, that left them dumbfounded. When these people heard Jesus preach, it literally left them with their mouths hanging open in amazement.

Jesus taught them it was important to go to the synagogue. Even when He knew the services were going to be dead, dull, and boring, Jesus went. He knew more than all the scribes and teachers of the Law knew; yet, He went. Even though the preacher made mistakes, Jesus went. And He expects us to go to services. Hebrews 10:25

Why should we go to church?

The Character of His Preaching

We are told that Jesus spoke as One who possessed “authority.” That means that Jesus spoke as a man Who knew what He was talking about. He spoke with power and understanding. The scribes could only quote one another, but Jesus didn’t have to quote anyone. He was and is THE Authority.

A quick glance at how the scribes taught against how Jesus taught reveals why the people were so amazed by what they heard Jesus teach.

We are not told exactly what Jesus said that day, but we are told what He said to the people in the Nazareth synagogue. We are told that the people were “astonished at His doctrine.” We can assume the message was much like the one in Nazareth, so let’s take a brief look at the content of His message there:

The word “brokenhearted” speaks of those who are broken in pieces; trampled down and crushed underfoot; who are oppressed by sin and Satan. Jesus offers healing to you.

The word “captives” literally means those held at spear point. The image is of one who has been captured and the enemy holds the spear against their jugular vein. One thrust and the captive would die, his blood would be poured out on the ground and he would be gone.

That’s where Satan has every lost man, because we are all sinners and outside of Christ, we are sinners by Birth, by Nature, by Choice, and by Practice. But Christ can deliver those in that condition. He can forgive and pardon them; and all who come to Him in faith, He will put their sins away from them forever (Psalm 103:12).

Satan blinds the lost man to his lost condition and to the tragic end of one who dies in his sins without Christ in their lives. Jesus opens the lost man’s spiritual eyes and allows them to see themselves as they really are. This is called conviction and it is carried out by the Holy Spirit. Then the Holy Spirit points them to Jesus!

The word “bruised” refers to those who have been battered and bruised by the power and effects of sin. They have already been touched by the devastating consequences of sin.

Sin ruins everything it touches. Sin destroys youth. It robs people of their innocence. It ruins marriages and breaks up homes. It will steal your testimony, rob you of your joy, and drive you away from God. Jesus is the only one who can set you free from sin and its power.

Jesus wants folks to know He can set them free TODAY! The invitation is Now! The door is open Now! This is His message to you Now!

When the people heard Jesus they were Amazed! Astonished! Dumbfounded! He knew what He was talking about. What Jesus said to them two thousand years ago, He says to you today. He offers the same invitation to you – NOW!

THE AMAZING POWER OF JESUS Mark 1:23-28

Before reading the Passage.

As you read the Gospel of Mark, it seems that Mark is always in a hurry – always in a rush – to get to his main section, which is the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. Mark wanted to focus on our Lord's death, burial, and resurrection.

In Mark's rush, he leaves out completely two main areas of our Lord's ministry which covers a little over one year.

Between Mark 1:13 and verse 14 Mark leaves out our Lord's Judean ministry, which last for about a year. The Gospel of John fills in that gap.

Then between Mark 1:20 and verse 21 Mark leaves out the section when Jesus goes back to His hometown of Nazareth for a short time. The people of Nazareth reject Him because He claimed to be the Promised Messiah. They not only rejected Him, they tried to push Him off a cliff and kill Him, but He walked right through the midst of them unharmed.

It was then that Jesus moved down to Capernaum and made that town His new base of operation. It was here that He did most of His miracles.

It is important to know that Mark 1:21 through verse 34 records one day in the life of the Lord Jesus. It is a Sabbath Day and several events take place.

A. Mark 1:21-22 records "The Amazing Preaching of Jesus" in the synagogue.

The word "synagogue" means "to gather together." The Jewish synagogue was developed during the nations' exile when people were in Babylon and could not go to the Temple in Jerusalem.

The synagogue was not a place of sacrifice – that was done at the Temple, which was the main place of worship – but there were hundreds of synagogues where the Jews gathered together to read the Scriptures and then discuss them.

On this Sabbath Day Jesus was asked to preach – AND Preach He DID! Mark said that as Jesus preached the people were astonished and amazed because "He taught them as One having authority, and not as the scribes." His preaching was Plain – simple and easy to understand, Powerful – every one felt the force of truth because He preached the Truth of God in both His manner and material, and He spoke with Passion.

So in Mark 1:21-22 we have the Amazing Preaching of Jesus.

B. Then in Mark 1:23-28, we have the Amazing Power of Jesus.

In the service that day was a man with an unclean spirit. He was demon possessed. This man disrupted Jesus while He was speaking. He challenged Jesus and told Jesus to leave them alone. It was then that Jesus cast out the evil spirit from the man with His Amazing Power.

I want us to look at the Amazing Power of Jesus.

Read the Passage.

Three things I want you to see as we look at "The Amazing Power of Jesus:

Three times in this passage we read the words, "an unclean spirit," (verse 23); "the unclean spirit," (verse 26); "the unclean spirits," (verse 27). What are these "unclean spirits?" They are demon spirits or demonic spirits.

"Preacher, do you believe in demons? Do you believe demons can possess a man or woman or young person?" Let me give you the short answer and then let me deal with the subject of demons for a moment.

"Do I believe in demons?" Yes! Absolutely! Liberal theologians say that what some call demon possession is nothing but mental problems. "Well, can demons cause mental problems?" Yes, but not everyone with mental problems are demon possessed. Other liberal theologians say that demons are nothing but superstitious beliefs and Jesus was just playing along with those who had these superstitious beliefs. That would make Jesus and the Gospel writers liars.

Well, then, if there are demons, where do they come from? Demons were former angelic beings who were kicked out of heaven with Lucifer, or Satan, when he rebelled against God. The Bible indicates that one-third of Heaven's angelic host followed Satan in his rebellion (Revelation 12:3-4).

The dragon is a reference to Satan, the stars of Heaven are a reference to angels, and the Child is a reference to Jesus, Who was under Satan's attack soon after His birth.

Demons were present during the Old Testament days, but they do not seem to be that active UNTIL the birth of Jesus at His first

coming to this earth. While Jesus was on earth, demon influence was intensified. They did all they could to disrupt God's plan of salvation for mankind. After Jesus ascended back to Heaven, the demons did not seem to be as active. The Book of Revelation declares that at the Second Coming of Jesus, demon activity will intensify again.

Demonic spirits crave embodiment into something living – animals (pigs in Jesus' day) and humans, and so demon-possession consist of one or more demons inhabiting a human or even an animal.

Demon possession is an awful, terrible curse on an individual. Demons do not inhabit people to bless them, but to curse them.

When a person is possessed, the demon or demons take control of the personality and body of the person. This evil personality or demon is able to speak through the mouth of the possessed individual, and to answer when addressed. The consequences of such possession can be insanity, fevers, seizures, intensity of evil, and feats of super-human strength. Missionaries in pagan countries, like Africa or China, have shared some hair-raising stories.

The erratic behavior of some criminals and political leaders suggest demon-possession. I have seen the criminal Charles Manson interviewed on television. My immediate conclusion to this interview was, "He is demon-possessed." If you've ever seen him interviewed you might understand why I came to this conclusion. Adolph Hitler is another I believe was demon-possessed.

What about Christians? We know that demons can possess a person who does not know Jesus Christ as their Savior. Can demons indwell a person who is saved? Can demons indwell a person who is saved? Can demons indwell a person who has put their faith in Christ and is indwelt by the Holy Spirit? The Bible provides the answers.

When we examine Scripture, we find no clear example where a demon indwelt or possessed a born again believer in Christ Jesus. There is no where in the New Testament where we find a Christian who had a demon cast out. A demon cannot inhabit the body of a person who is indwelt by the Holy Spirit.

Demons cannot POSSESS Christians, but they may OPPRESS the believer. If we yield to our fleshly, sinful desires; if we become spiritually cold and hard-hearted and rebellious in our heart, we are very capable of doing the vilest of deeds, even though we are Christians.

Remember that the demon spoke through this man while Jesus was teaching with authority. Notice that

the man with the unclean spirit came to the place of worship. That's not unusual. You might think a demon possessed person would want to stay as far away as possible from the Church. Not so! Satan wants to disrupt the truth of God. The evil spirit had this man under his control and command and he compelled him to go to the place of worship and disrupt the worship. Satan does the same today. Satan often plants someone he controls in a church to cause disruption, division, and conflict.

A. "Let us (me) alone" Mark 1:23

Luke 4:33 adds, "He cried out with a loud voice, 'Let us alone.'" The words "cried out" means "to cry from the depth of the throat, describing the shrill cry of a raven." The word "loud" is from the word that we get our word "megaphone," which is used to amplify a person's voice.

The Amplified New Testament translates verses 23 and 24: "Just at that time there was in their synagogue a man who was in the power of an unclean spirit, and now immediately he raised a deep and terrible cry from the depths of his throat saying, 'Leave us alone!'" Suppose

something like that happened in one of our Sunday morning services. I assure you, it would wake up all the sleepers! How would you respond?

"Leave me alone!" That's the response Satan puts in the hearts of folks today. How many times has God spoken to folks in a service like this and we say in our heart and mind, "God, leave me alone! I don't want you to speak to me and I don't want to be disturbed. I'm content and satisfied in my present condition, so leave me alone."

When Jesus was speaking, the demon within the man cried out, "Leave me alone!" This was not a prayer FOR mercy. It was a cry AGAINST mercy! "Don't trouble us with the Gospel. Don't bother us with that God stuff. We have the wretched right to perish in our sins. We have the right to destroy our soul." And the Prince of Darkness makes them hate the Light of God. "Don't talk to us about death or judgment or eternity. Don't talk to us about repentance and faith in Jesus. We're not interested!" "I want nothing to do with your Jesus or His pardon or His salvation and forgiveness or His Heaven."

How sad that people want Jesus to leave them alone when only He can help them. The one that was created is telling the one Who created it, "Leave me alone." Children say to their parents, "Leave me alone."

Thank God Jesus didn't leave him alone and thank God He doesn't leave us alone when we reject Him and tell Him we want nothing to do with Him!

Our nation has said to God, "Leave us alone." "It's none of God's business what I do and how I live. It's my life and I'll do as I please."

B. "What have we to do you You, Jesus of Nazareth?"

The implied answer is, "Nothing." "We want nothing to do you you. We sure don't want our lives changed!"

C. "Have You come to destroy us?"

This evil spirit that controlled this man knew he was doomed; yet, he still wanted nothing to do with Jesus. Most folks really believe God exists and that a day of accountability is coming, but they refuse to submit to God and let Him change them and give them life.

D. "I know Who You are – The Holy One of God."

This is a confession from knowledge and from the lips that Jesus is God. James 2:19 says, "You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe – and tremble!" Head belief is not enough to bring salvation. There must be Heart belief as well. One must commit his life to Christ, submit his life to Christ. He must say, "God, I want everything to do with You. I want You to control my life!"

Notice Mark 1:25-26.

"Jesus rebuked him." He scolded him, reprimanded him and told him to "hold his peace," which means, "Be quite, shut up!" He muzzled him. Christ knew what he said was not of faith and He would have none of it!

"Come out of him." Christ is in the business of cleaning people up and freeing them from the evil that controls their life. He then puts His Spirit within them.

The demon took one last parting shot as Jesus cast him out. The demon threw the man into a violent convulsing spasm. Evil doesn't give up easily. Luke 4:35 adds that when the demon came out, "he did him no harm."

Unclean spirits continue to defile us today. Maybe it's the unclean spirit of bitterness, lust, anger, or an unwillingness to forgive. If Jesus deals with you about some defilement in your life, don't say, "Jesus, leave me alone about that."

Jesus came to cleanse us from defiling attitudes. Which of them do you need to let Jesus deal with?

THE HEALING OF PETER'S MOTHER – IN – LAW Mark 1:29-31

Before Reading the Passage.

There have been some insensitive – even rude – things said about mothers-in-law. In fact, I've even heard a lot of Mother-in-law jokes Now, I want you to know that I would NEVER to that. It's just not my sweet nature to tell Mother-in-law jokes. But there are those who say that the reason that Peter denied the Lord three times is because He healed his Mother-in-law.

Actually, there are two instances in the Bible where mothers-in-law are mentioned by name and both seem to be good and godly women.

Peter was personally associated with eight miracles of our Lord, more than any other disciple.

It was the Sabbath Day. In fact, it is the same Sabbath Day that is recorded in Mark 1:21-31. It is the first Sabbath Day that our Lord preached in the synagogue in Capernaum. As Jesus preached the people were amazed at His authority and knowledge and with the power with which He preached. They said, "We've never heard anything like this before."

Then, as Jesus was speaking, a man filled with an evil spirit disrupted Jesus and Jesus cast the demon out of the man. After the service, Peter invited Jesus, along with Andrew, James, and John, to his house for Sunday (or Sabbath) lunch.

You will remember that, after our Lord began His public ministry, He went back to His hometown of Nazareth to begin His public ministry, but the people there were disrespectful to Him. He declared Himself to be the long waited for Messiah, but they did not believe Him. They rejected Him and asked Him to leave Nazareth, and even tried to kill Him. Jesus left Nazareth and established His new headquarters in Capernaum. Peter had a home in Capernaum and he offered his house to the Lord and the other disciples as a place where they could rest and get away from the crowds. Peter's home became a sanctuary for the Lord.

Our Lord would say that "He had no where to lay His head," but when He came to Capernaum, Peter offered hospitality at his home. That would mean that Jesus already knew Peter's wife and mother-in-law.

Read the Passage.

Jesus had just performed a miracle in His Father's House; now He would perform a miracle in a Friend's House.

Notice that these four men brought Jesus home with them after church. So many today leave Jesus at church.

The purpose of this visit was to share a meal and to have fellowship around the table. It was not a long walk from the synagogue to Peter's house. Capernaum was a small city so Peter's house was only about 150 or 200 feet away.

Do you invite Jesus to be the honored guest in your home? I've known some church members who seem to leave Jesus at church when they go home. Six days a week, they have a different attitude and use a different vocabulary, but on Sunday they dress up and act holy and religious.

Sometimes families can be fussing and fighting with each other in the car on the way to church, and then they pull up in the parking lot and see another church member and they say, "Oh, Good Morning! Praise God isn't this a wonderful day? God bless you!" And for an hour or two they wear their Christian mask, but when they get back home they take their Christian mask off along with their Sunday clothes and say, "Whew, I'm glad that's over for another week!" The Bible has a word for that; it's called hypocrisy.

Peter invited Jesus to his home for lunch. Jewish families have a wonderful tradition at Passover. They set an extra place setting for Elijah. There's silverware, a cup, and a plate, but the chair is empty. They believe that Elijah is going to one day come to announce the Messiah, so they want to have a place for him to sit if he shows up.

We ought to invite Jesus into our home. He will except our offer and it will really make a difference in your home. Jesus says, "Here I am! I am standing at the door knocking. If any man will hear My voice and open the door, I will come in and eat with him and we will have fellowship together," (Revelation 3:20).

By the way, if Peter had a Mother-in-law, that means that he had a wife also. That's a real problem for the Roman Catholic folks who insist that Peter was the first pope and insist that their popes and priest be unmarried.

We don't know much about Peter's wife, but she must have been a wonderful and remarkable woman. It would take a pretty remarkable woman to be Peter's wife.

First Corinthians 9:5 indicates that Peter's wife accompanied him during some of his ministry in the early days of the Church.

Clement of Alexandria and Eusebius wrote that Peter and his wife were martyred together and Peter was made to watch as his wife preceded him to the place of execution. Clement also stated that as she walked to her death, Peter called her by name and said, "Remember our Lord!"

Four things I want to share with you about our Lord's healing of Peter's Mother-in-law:

Luke 4:38 says Peter's Mother-in-law was "taken with a great fever." The word "taken" means "to be gripped." The word "fever" is derived from the Greek word "pur" which means "fire." She was burning up with fever.

Church historians tell us there were three kinds of fever prevalent in Palestine in that day, but the most common was malaria. Swamp lands at both ends of the Sea of Galilee provided excellent breeding grounds for the malarial mosquitoes. This kind of affliction was often accompanied by jaundice and was distressing to those who suffered from it.

The Bible says she had a great fever. It was no trivial sickness. It put her to bed. It came upon her suddenly and progressed quickly in a matter of hours. As soon as they came into the house, they told Jesus about her because they new He cared and could do something about her condition.

Could I just say a good word about Peter here? It says something about the care and character of Peter, having his Mother-in-law living with him.

The Bible gives us a number of reasons why people became ill.

The healing miracles of our Lord are called "miracles of mercy." Miracles of mercy are an active display of love and compassion for someone in need. It is stooping down to meet the need out of compassion.

One of the most visible ways Jesus demonstrated mercy to needy people was when He healed them of sickness and illness.

Often people who asked Jesus for healing would put it in their terms:

Of course the greatest demonstration of His mercy is when He saves us by His grace!

Listen: Jesus doesn't just go to church with us, He makes house calls. Watch how Jesus demonstrated His compassion to Peter's mother-in-law:

"He came" to her. He didn't have to do that. He could have healed her from a distance or without seeing her. He had done it before.

He bent or stooped over her. That is, He humbled Himself before her. It is the posture of one who is concerned and has compassion on someone.

The fever left her ... immediately! If it had been a natural healing, she would have needed time to rest and recover. Have you ever had the flu and when the fever broke, you knew you were on the mend, but you still felt drained and weakened? But her healing was supernatural. Complete. On the spot.

"And she served them." No one asked her to do so. She just did it out of gratitude and thanksgiving. Her response to His mercy in her life was that she got up and ministered to others.

Notice that Jesus had to minister to her before she could minister to Him and to others. That is always true.

She didn't have to tell anyone she was healed. It was obvious by the way she conducted herself. There was no better way this woman could prove her healing than by serving Christ. So it is with our spiritual healing. When the Lord Jesus cleanses our hearts from sin, our service to Him is the best way we can show the world the dynamic difference He has made in our lives. We are saved to serve.

Sadly, many Christians don't know how to spell service. They spell it "Serve us."

Jesus is still performing miracles of mercy to all who will call out to Him in mercy. If you have not received mercy from the Lord, it's simply because you have not called on Him for mercy.

TOUCHING THE UNTOUCHABLE Mark 1:35-45

The Old Testament prophets prophesied that when the Messiah was come, He would be able to do what no one else could do. One of those things was to cleanse the leper.

When John the Baptist was in prison and was about to be beheaded, he began to have some doubts as to whether Jesus was the Messiah. Although He had pointed to Jesus and declared, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world," facing death, he wanted to make sure that Jesus was the long awaited-for Messiah. He sent some of his disciples to Jesus to ask Him to identify Himself. "Are you the Messiah or is He yet to come?" Jesus quotes from Isaiah 35:4-6. (See Matthew 11:2-5)

Jesus had just finished teaching and preaching and the people began to do what we often do when the service is over. We go to the preacher and tell them we enjoyed the service.

That's what happened here. People were all around Jesus when suddenly, someone started toward Jesus. The man began to cry out, "Unclean! Unclean!"

The people knew a leper was approaching. You can almost see the people begin to scatter – everyone but Jesus. He stood still and the leper falls before Jesus with his face to the ground and worships Jesus. Then he says, "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean." Jesus was moved with compassion and he reached down and touched the untouchable and said to him, "I am willing, be cleansed." And he was cleansed.

I want us to watch our Lord as He heals this leper.

Leprosy was the most feared disease that a man could have during the time of Jesus.

Leprosy in that day was a death sentence. There was no cure. To put it in the words of Aaron when he interceded for Miriam, the sister of Moses and Aaron, a leper was "as one dead, of whom the flesh is half consumed" (Numbers 12:12).

But this man didn't just have leprosy, Luke said that he was "full of leprosy" (Luke 5:12) which probably means the disease was in a very advanced stage. The disease had run its course.

I don't know of a more repulsive, sickening disease. Leprosy usually begins with the person feeling a little tired. For no reason he would feel fatigue and his joints began to get sore.

Then one day the man would notice little white spots on his skin. Then those white spots began to harden into nodules that turned from white to brown and became very scaly.

The nodules would begin to ulcerate and then would fill with puss and would begin to ooze and run all over the body. And a foul odor would be discharged from the man because it produced a terrible stench. One could hardly stand the smell.

The nodules would cover his vocal chords and when he breathed there would be a wheezing sound as he breathed, and when he spoke there would be a raspiness in his voice. He would constantly have a foul taste in his mouth as the nodules would ooze down his throat.

Nothing could keep the disease from spreading all over his body. As it did the body became disfigured. Leprosy totally consumes the leper until his body became little more than pool of slime.

All over his body he would have these nodules. His eyebrows would begin to fall out. His hair would turn white. Inch by inch the leper's body began to rot. Fingers and toes would rot or fall off as would his lips, ears, and nose.

As he walked he would leave wet spots where the puss would pour out of his feet.

The leprosy attacked the nervous system in such a way that one would lose all sensation to pain. It acted as an anesthetic.

He could have his hand in the fire and not know it. He could cut himself and not feel it.

Rats were drawn to groups of lepers and they sometimes ate the fingers, toes, and flesh of the leper and he would not be aware of it. Often lepers would carry cats with them to keep the rats away.

The leper was also ostracized. There was a terrible social isolation.

It was unlawful for a leper to approach within 50 feet of a clean person. If it was a windy day, the rule changed to 200 feet.

He had to tear his garments so people could recognize that he was a leper.

Some would throw stones to keep him away.

Notice Leviticus 13:45-46.

What a horrible image! You may be saying, "Preacher, no one here has leprosy. Why do we need to hear this?"

Remember that I told you that in every parable of our Lord there is a miracle in words and in every miracle of our Lord there is a parable in works.

In the Bible, leprosy is far more than a disease. It is also a type of sin. While no one in this room may have leprosy, everyone in this room has problems with sin.

Of all the diseases mentioned in the Bible, none pictures sin any more clearly than does the disease called leprosy.

Leviticus 13 gives us the regulations for dealing with leprosy and I want to use Leviticus 13 to point out a few similarities between leprosy and sin.

Isaiah 64:6: "But we are all as an unclean (leprous) thing, and all our righteousness are a filthy rags (the filthy rags of a leper)."

A. Both leprosy and sin starts **inwardly and expresses itself outwardly.**

Leviticus 13:3; Matthew 15:18-19

Leprosy manifests itself on the skin, but it started much deeper. So does sin.

Jeremiah 17:9 – Sin doesn't begin on the surface. It is a personal matter of the heart.

We are not sinners because we sin; we sin because we are sinners. What's the difference? If a man was a sinner because he sins,

then all he would have to do to stop being a sinner to stop sinning. But if he stopped sinning, he'd still be a sinner. If he stopped cursing, lying, cheating, stealing, he would still have a sin nature which means he would still be a sinner and still need to be born again.

B. Both leprosy and sin **starts out small and then spreads.**

Leviticus 13:7; Isaiah 1:4-6

Leprosy spreads until it covers and controls the whole body. So does sin. Sin invades our minds. It affects the way we think, the way we feel, the way we make decisions, the way we see things.

C. Both leprosy and sin **defiles everything it touches.**

Leviticus 13:44-45

Ask the alcoholic, the druggie, the prostitute. How many relationships and lives have been defiled and destroyed because of sin?

A morally clean Christian young lady was rooming during her college days with an immoral young lady who gave her body to any boy who wanted it. She was constantly trying to get the Christian girl to go out with her to the parties and, as she said, "experience life." One day when she was trying to get the Christian girl to let down her standards and go have a good time, the Christian girl said, "You know, I can become like you any time I want to, but you can never again become like me."

Once we yield to sin, we cannot un-yield to sin.

D. Both leprosy and sin **disfigures.**

Think of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Once they possessed the beauty of innocence. Disobedience took that beauty and made something ugly.

Sometimes you can actually see the ravages of sin on a person's face. The Bible speaks of an inward kind of beauty. That's God's plan for everyone, but sin disfigures inner beauty.

E. Both leprosy and sin **separates.**

Leviticus 13:46

The leper is forced to live alone. He feels alone, despised, and rejected.

He is considered ceremonially unclean. He is excluded from any spiritual blessing or activity.

That's what sin does – Isaiah 59:1-2

F. Leprosy and sin both **lead to death.**

Without Christ, we are walking, breathing, talking dead men.

Ephesians 2:1: "You He has made alive who were dead in trespasses and sin."

Picture the scene: This repulsive leper cast himself at Jesus' feet.

Here is a man who shows us how to come before Jesus. He serves as a good model for us.

A. He comes with an awareness of his need.

He knew his condition. He knew he was hopeless and helpless without Jesus. He knew there was nothing he could do to help himself.

God does not come to the self-sufficient, those who think they have no need or imagine they can make it on their own. He comes to the empty in spirit and those who mourn over their condition.

If you come to Jesus, you must come saying, "Unclean! Unclean!"

I often see two kinds of people:

1. Those who think they don't need Jesus. After all, they are better than most folks, and the things that are wrong, they can fix themselves.

They cannot accept that they are not acceptable.

2. Others think that they are too bad for God to love or forgive. They think they have gone too far in sin and are unworthy.

The very first step in coming to Jesus is to admit your need for Him.

B. He come in humility.

He falls on his face before the Lord – Luke says that he begs Jesus; Matthew says he worships Jesus; Mark says he kneels before Him.

1 Peter 5:5: “God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.”

C. He comes in faith Mark 1:40

He doesn't say, “Lord, if you CAN.” He said, “If you are willing, you can.”

He believed Jesus had the power and he had faith that Jesus was willing. Thousands in Israel had leprosy; yet He didn't heal all. 2 Peter 3:9 – He does want to save all.

Jesus was moved with compassion – something within Him was stirred. His heart was moved.

And Jesus touched him. The word for touch expresses more than a superficial touch. The word means “to lay hold of.” He placed His hand firmly on the leper.

Leprosy had destroyed most of his ability to feel, but I'm convinced he felt the touch of Jesus and it must have felt like nothing he had ever felt before.

It had been so long since he had been touched by anyone.

The crowd must have gasped! “Jesus! What are you doing?”

Jesus could have healed him from a distance. He could have healed him with just a word. Why did He touch him?

Jesus wanted this leper to “FEEL” His Compassion, His Love, His Power, His Willingness to heal and cleanse.

By stretching forth His hand and touching him, Jesus brought healing to his soul as well as cleansing to his body. It showed the leper that He was not only a Healer of the Body, but a Lover of the Soul.

See Jesus bending over the prostrate leper, His holy hand resting on the decaying flesh of the foul-smelling leper, and you see what He did for Him.

See His nail-pierced hand outstretched over us and you can see what He did for us.

Mark uses his favorite word: “Immediately.”

The healing was **complete**. Before his very eyes, his skin was soft and pure, fingers and toes reappeared. Back came his hair and eyebrows.

One moment he was terminally ill and unclean; the next moment he was whole.

Before he had cried, “Unclean! Unclean!” Now, with joy, he says, “I'm clean! I'm clean!”

What a beautiful picture of salvation. One moment we are dead in trespasses and sins, under the wrath of God, and the next moment we are forgiven, cleansed of sin, sons and daughters of God.

Jesus said, “Don't tell anyone ...” He told everyone.

Jesus tells us, “Tell everyone ...” We tell no one.

If Jesus has touched you, you want to tell everyone!

We use to sing a little chorus:

“While I was praying, somebody touched me (3X) ... it must have been the hand of the Lord.”

"It was on a Monday (Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday). (Stand on the day you were saved.) Somebody touched me."

(If you couldn't remember the day of the week.) "Glory hallelujah, Somebody touched me, It must have been the hand of the Lord."

Jesus is still in the business of touching untouchables.

HE CAME ON A COT, BUT LEFT IN A TROT Mark 2:1-12

Before reading the Scripture.

The miracle we are going to study is the miracle of the paralytic who was brought to Jesus on a cot to the house where Jesus was teaching. Four men, one on each corner of the cot, could not get in to see Jesus because of the great crowd of folks, so they went on top of the house, dug through the roof, and lowered the man down before Jesus with ropes and Jesus performed two miracles: He first forgave the man of his sins and then He healed the man's physical condition.

This miracle is found in three of the Gospels: Matthew 9:1-8; Mark 2:1-12; and Luke 5:17-26.

Matthew presents Jesus as the King and shows that He has absolute authority over everything.

Read the Passage.

This man was sick of the palsy. I told you that every miracle is a parable in works.

I told you that leprosy illustrates the defilement and corruption of sin. The palsy illustrates the paralysis that sin produces in life.

Romans 5:6: "When we were yet without strength, Christ died for the ungodly."

The word for "palsy" means "to be loosed on one side." One side of his body was without strength, paralyzed on one side, perhaps from a stroke. He was disabled.

When Adam fell into sin in the Garden, he was left spiritually disabled and spiritually paralyzed and he passed that condition down to each of us.

This man was unable to help himself. So are we, spiritually. The only cure for this was to get to Jesus. Jesus is our only hope for our defiled, disable, disfigured spiritual state.

I want you to see four groups of folks as we study this miracle.

Five times in this passage we are told that this man was sick of the palsy. The word means "to be loosed on one side."

I know from personal experience when I had my stroke, there is no pain involved in the paralyzed area. You know you want to move the parts of your body in that area, but they just will not respond. It's like that area of your body is dead. There is no feeling whatsoever. The members of your body are still there, but they will not respond.

This man's physical paralysis is a picture of spiritual paralysis. The spiritual part of man without Jesus is dead. There is no response to spiritual things. You may want to do right things, but you don't have the ability to do so.

Let me remind you that this miracle took place in a house in Capernaum.

Our Lord's own home town rejected Him early in His ministry, so He moved the base of His ministry from Nazareth to Capernaum. Peter and Andrew's house was in Capernaum and our Lord often stayed there in their home.

Most Bible students believe that the house where Jesus was teaching was Peter's house. Jesus had already performed one miracle in Peter's house – the healing of Peter's mother-in-law. Now He would perform a second miracle there.

These four men were a special breed of men.

I can see them going to the man's house and explaining that Jesus was in the house down the road, and Jesus could heal him and make a difference in his life.

One of them says, "Jesus is so powerful that He gives sight to the blind." His wife says, "But he's not blind, he can't walk." Another says, "Jesus is so powerful that He can feed 5,000 with a boy's lunch." His wife says, "He's not hungry, he can't walk." Another says, "He's so powerful, He cleansed ten lepers at once." She says, "He doesn't have leprosy, he can't walk." Another says, "He's so powerful, He can cast out demons." His wife says, "He doesn't have demons, I told you that his problem is that he can't walk."

No doubt this man had tried doctors, but none could help. He was helpless and discouraged and resigned to his fate that he would always be like this.

But these four men told him of their faith in Jesus and their faith kindled faith in him.

The four men say, "Just let us take him on his cot ... his pallet ... to Jesus. He can help."

Each man grabs a corner of the cot. That means that each man had a responsibility. If one man didn't respond to his responsibility, the man would slide off.

These men just wanted to get their friend to Jesus.

There are some times and some cases when one man is not enough to get a spiritual paralytic to Christ.

It may take four or more. What may be impossible for one may not be impossible for more than one.

These men were real friends. He may have had no funds, but he had at least four friends. True friends are of more value than funds.

If it had not been for these four friends, this man may not have gotten to Jesus. And if it is not for us, some may never get to Jesus.

These caring friends carried him to Jesus!

When they got the man to the house they saw that the house was full and folk standing on the outside as well. There was no way they could get their friend in to see Jesus.

If they had been like most of us, that would have been a good excuse for them to turn around and go back home. But they were not looking for a way out. They knew that the best thing you could do for a friend – or any person – is to bring them to Jesus.

These four men give us four lessons on getting folks to Jesus:

A. There's a lesson on Caring

These four men really loved and cared for their friend and in their compassion, they carried this man to Jesus.

Compassion and caring are great qualities. They cared about this man regardless of his cripple condition.

Cold hearts will not do much for man or Christ. Without the care and compassion of these four men, this man would not have gotten to Jesus.

These four carriers did what they could. They couldn't heal the man, but they could get him to Jesus.

Carrying a corner of a stretcher is a humble task. Some folks feel like they are too big for such a humble task, but unless someone is at all four corners of this stretcher, this man doesn't get to Jesus.

How far are you willing to go to get someone to Jesus? Far enough to pray for them? Far enough to give up an evening of leisure time to befriend someone? Far enough to invite others to church? How far HAVE you gone to get someone to Jesus?

Someone said that folks don't care how much we know until they know how much we care.

B. There's a lesson in Conviction

These men were convinced that Jesus could heal this man ... that he didn't have to stay in his crippled condition. They believed he could be different. They believed that Jesus could and would do something for him.

They believed it so much that it moved them to action.

The doctors couldn't do anything for him; they couldn't either, but they believed that Jesus could and would.

All four of these men could walk and run and lift. They were whole and they wanted their friend to be whole, too. They would not ask Jesus to visit their friend, they brought him to see Jesus.

If you are born again, Jesus has made you whole. He has forgiven us. And yet, we have friends who are spiritually disable that Jesus

can make whole and we must get them to Jesus.

C. There's a lesson in Cooperation

These four men all had the same objective and they became a team who worked together to get this man to Jesus.

If one man had not held his corner up, the man would have slid off; but each did his part.

D. There a lesson in Commitment Mark 2:5

There is no record that these men SAID anything. It does not say, "When Jesus heard about their faith," but "when Jesus SAW their faith.

These four men were putting a shoulder to their faith!

But, now, there were some obstacles that challenged their faith.

It doesn't take much to stop some of us from getting folks to Jesus.

They had to ignore the protest and judgments around them.

If this was Peter's house, what do you think he thought when these four men started tearing the roof off? He was packed in the house with the rest of the folks. He couldn't run out and stop them from tearing the roof off.

I don't think he had home-owner's insurance. Who was going to pay for this? Himself? The cured man? Or did the Lord put His old carpentry skills to use again?

But look at their great faith. Their great faith is:

They couldn't go in so they went up!

Roofs in that day were constructed of timbers laid parallel to each other about two or three feet apart. Then crosswise over the timbers, sticks were laid close to each other, thus forming the basic roof. Upon this was laid reeds, and/or branches, and the whole thing was overlaid with about a foot of earth, and grass grew on the roof. The roof was two to three feet deep. A stairway led from the outside of the house to the roof.

Imagine the scene! The people inside hear the noise, then dust begins to fall, light begins to shine through. It's no longer a roof; it's a sunroof! It had to be big enough to let a man down through. Ropes are tied to the four corners; the pallet reaches eye level. There's a man on it. The man is lying quietly, as if trusting his friends totally. Now the pallet reaches the floor right in front of Jesus.

What Jesus saw impressed Him. The faith of these men excited Jesus. I wonder if He didn't smile with approval as all this was happening.

The real paralytics that day were the Pharisees and teachers of the law.

Notice Mark 2:6a: They just sat there. They should have been directing traffic to Jesus. They could have at least reached up to receive the poor cripple.

Instead of love, they showed indifference. Instead of faith, they showed criticism. When they should have been rejoicing, they were reasoning.

I wonder if the man and his four friends were not disappointed for just a moment when Jesus said, "Your sins are forgiven you." They wanted Jesus to heal him physically.

If Jesus had only forgiven his sins, I believe he would have gone back home rejoicing, singing, possessing joy beyond words.

But at first there was no word of physically healing. Their hopes must have been deflated like a punctured balloon.

But forgiveness is the greatest miracle that Jesus ever performs. It meets the greatest need and cost the greatest price and brings the greatest blessing and has the most lasting results.

Notice Mark 2:8-12.

Note: Not which is easier to DO, but SAY. Well, which is easier to say? It is easier to say, "Your sins are forgiven" because that miracle takes place in the heart and is not seen of men. But to say, "Arise and walk" brought the debate about Jesus being God to the surface, and it would settle the issue once and for all.

Jesus put His reputation on the line. The man would either walk or he wouldn't. If he didn't, Jesus would be exposed as a phony.

Notice Mark 2:12. What a moment! He was both saved and healed! He took up his bed but left his sins behind. He was forgiven.

Not everyone is Diseased – lame, deaf or a leper, but everyone is a sinner.

Not everyone is Demon Possessed, but everyone is a sinner.

Not everyone has Disasters in their life, but everyone is a sinner.

Mark 2:10-11 – If our sins are to be forgiven, they must be forgiven on EARTH.

It will be too late once we are dead, because both character and destiny are fixed at death.

Revelation 22:11

Come ye weary, heavy-laden

Lost and ruined by the fall.

If you tarry til you're better,

You will never come at all.

Let not conscience make you linger

Nor of fitness fondly dream;

All the fitness He requireth

Is to feel your need of Him.

IV. The Haters Mark 2:6-8

Jesus looked with compassion on the man; the Pharisees looked with contempt upon Jesus.

Verse 8 – Don't ever "think to yourself" when you are around Jesus, because when you are around Jesus you are never thinking to yourself.

The greatest lesson from this account is that Jesus went to great lengths to bring forgiveness to the lost.

We should go to great lengths to bring the lost to Jesus!

How far will you go to bring someone to Jesus? Across the street? Next door? Into your child's bedroom?

However far we may go, God will make it worth our while to bring even one person to His Son.

Ezekiel 33:7-9

MATTHEW'S SALVATION PARTY Mark 2:13-17

At this point in Jesus' ministry His popularity was skyrocketing. Jesus is still in the city of Capernaum. He has achieved the status of a celebrity in that town. Everywhere He goes the people flock to Him to witness His miracles and to hear His message. Notice again Mark 2:13.

In this particular passage, Jesus is walking by the Sea of Galilee and the people of Capernaum flock around Him to hear what He will say and to see what He will do. On one level, the ministry of Jesus is doing very well. The common man is excitedly following Jesus as He ministers. But, conflict is beginning to develop between Jesus and the religious leaders.

They are already offended by His actions in Mark 2:5-12 when Jesus identified Himself as God in the flesh when he told the man who was let down from the roof that his sins were forgiven him and then healed his body. Now the Jewish leaders are watching Jesus, trying to find some reason to attack His ministry. They are looking for some fault in Him or in His work that they do not like.

As Jesus is walking along the Sea shore, He passes by a tax booth where Matthew is setting, and He says to him, "Follow Me." The Christian life can be summarized in three commands of Jesus: (1) "Come unto Me," (2) "Follow Me," and (3) "Abide in Me."

Listen as Jesus calls His next man, Matthew, to become His disciple.

We know "Levi" by another name: "Matthew." Levi was his Jewish name and Matthew was his Christian name. Levi means "priest or servant of God." Matthew means "gift of God."

Levi was evidently of the tribe of Levi, the tribe set apart by God to minister to the other tribes in sacred things. By the time of Christ, many of the Levites were the nation's lawyers. It must have been a bitter disappointment to his parents when young Matthew turned his back on the legal profession to get rich quickly by becoming a publican.

The publicans collected taxes for the Roman government, and the Jews regarded them as traitors and extortioners. Levi knew that when he decided to work for the IRS of the Roman government, he would be branded as a thief and a traitor. He was willing to sell out his country, his spiritual privilege as a Levite, his conscience, and his soul, for gold.

He also knew that publicans were barred from public worship. He was barred from being a witness at a trial because publicans were known for their lying. You couldn't trust them. They were considered the 50 spiritual lepers of society, impure and unclean. Their ears were closed to the cries of widows and orphans. They were treated as outcast. No one cared about them and they were so very lonely.

Matthew likely was a customs official with a tax office by the lake; he was responsible for collecting customs duties on the lucrative fishing trade. Levi had probably collected taxes from Peter, James, John, and Andrew.

The Romans came up with a tax quota for each province in the empire. As long as the collectors met their quota, Rome didn't care how much more they collected. Sometimes they would overcharge the people by two or three times what was due, paid Rome and kept the difference for themselves. No wonder they were among the most despised people in Israel. Matthew was perhaps the most disliked person in the City of Capernaum.

Matthew is mentioned only eight times in the New Testament. He is mentioned four times in the four lists of the twelve disciples and the other four times have to do with his conversion, but no event in anyone's life is more important than one's conversion.

A tax office is a most unlikely place to be converted. For one to be converted in a Temple or synagogue would not be surprising, but to be converted in a hated and despised tax office shows the great power of Christ in converting sinners.

When we are told that Jesus "saw" Matthew, it means that He "saw through" Matthew. I'm sure that most people in Capernaum had written Matthew off as a lost cause, but Jesus knew that his life could be salvaged. Jesus loved him in spite of his past and his problems and wanted to deliver Levi from the bondage of his sins and give him a new life. No one is beyond hope. "Whosoever will" can come to Jesus and He has promised to turn no one away who will come to Him (John 6:37).

Jesus saw in him what no one else could see. He saw the hidden potential in his life. It is impossible for US to know what is happening in an individual's heart, but Jesus sees and knows. Matthew had no doubt seen some of the Lord's miracles and heard Him preach and his heart had been touched. He was ready when the Lord called.

Jesus said to Levi, "Follow Me," and Luke tells us that "he left all, rose up, and followed Him." It is a call for Levi to leave his old life behind and to begin a new life of following Jesus. Without a moments hesitation, he began to follow Christ.

Levi gave up more to follow Jesus than did the rest of the disciples. The others could go back to their jobs; Levi made a clean, permanent break with his past. People who yearned to "get rich quick" would be standing in line to take his place. If he applied for a new job, the employer might ask, "Aren't you the guy who used to fleece me for taxes?" So, when Matthew chose to follow Christ, he burned his bridges behind him. He was committed.

This verse paints a strange picture. The Lord Jesus is invited to Levi's house for a dinner. On the one hand you have Jesus and His followers. On the other hand, you have Levi and his friends and associates. The Bible calls them "publicans and sinners." Some of those present were other tax collectors, and some are called "sinners." This word was used to refer to prostitutes and to those who did not observe the strict religious rules of the scribes and Pharisees. These "publicans and sinners" were the friends and associates that Levi knew and worked with. They were the only people who would have anything to do with him. (But that was about to change.)

Matthew arranged to bring ALL of his old friends to meet ALL of his new friends, and especially Jesus. Matthew was probably rich and possibly had a large house, and so he may have had many friends among the lower class. Twice in verse 15 we are told that Matthew had "many" friends.

Most of us have attended functions, such as weddings, at which people from quite opposite social, political, religious, cultural, and moral poles are thrown together at a reception. In such situations, people tend to gravitate toward their own kind. Any cross-

conversation is shallow and forced and entered into only when necessary.

Matthew hosted this party as an opportunity to say farewell to his old life and as an opportunity to introduce his friends and associates to Jesus.

Not everyone was thrilled by our Lord's decision to have dinner with a bunch of sinners. The religious leaders used this as an opportunity to attack the Lord Jesus.

Guess who the hardest person to bring to Christ is. Not the murderer. Not the liar. Not the adulterer. Not the thief. The hardest person to convert is the good person who is self-satisfied and he or she feels insulted when called a sinner.

The Pharisees were like that. They were respected as men of God, biblical scholars, and teachers in the synagogues. They had the furthest to fall by confessing their need of a Savior. When a prostitute admitted, "I'm a sinner," it was an act of coming to her senses. But if a Pharisee said, "I'm a lost sinner; I need Jesus to be my personal Savior," he would have to swallow his pride. And pride is hard to swallow. It's about as easy to swallow as an elephant.

Their idea of a holy man could be summarized in the word separation. A good man would not want to be contaminated by associating himself with publicans and sinners! A holy man's task is to Denounce such people, not to Dine with them.

We are in trouble spiritually when we think we have reached a place where we are better and more righteous than others. The scribes and Pharisees attacked Jesus for spending time with sinners. Their criticism was really a compliment! I thank God Jesus is the Friend of sinners and that He came to seek and to save the lost.

When Jesus heard their criticism, He did not allow them to go unchallenged. In fact, Jesus makes a bold pronouncement that will define His approach to reaching the world.

We must understand the "righteous" people Jesus referred to were the Pharisees who considered themselves righteous. The "sinners" were the outcast such as Matthew and his kind. We can paraphrase Jesus' words in Verse 17 as follows: "It is not those who THINK they are healthy who call for the doctor, but those who KNOW they are sick. My invitation to salvation is not for the self-righteous, but for those who admit they are lost sinners."

With sarcasm in His voice, Jesus was telling the Pharisees, "If you are righteous, I know others who aren't. If you are spiritually healthy, there are still plenty of sick folks around. So if you don't mind, I would like to tend to my patients." Jesus was addressing the Pharisees on their own terms. He admitted that tax collectors, harlots, and drunks were spiritually sick, but that only made them perfect candidates for a doctor, and Jesus was that doctor.

When William Booth, the founder of The Salvation Army, felt the call of the Lord to go into the streets of London and begin ministering to street people, he stood in a Methodist conference meeting and requested permission from the presiding bishop to be released from his church to go into the streets and preach. The bishop heard the request and denied it, telling Booth that they would not waste a man of his education and talent on the people of the streets. Upon hearing this, Booth sat down, resigned to defeat.

His wife was seated in the balcony, because women were not allowed on the first floor. She stood up and leaned over the rail. She called to her husband and told him to listen to God and not to man. She vowed to stand with her husband against every foe. She came down from the balcony. Booth took her by the arm and they left the building to go into the streets to win people to Jesus. He was ready to quit, but his wife, a lady who usually stayed in the background, stepped out of the shadow of her husband to hold up his arms at a critical time in his life!

Many souls were saved and lives changed in England and around the world because William Booth and his wife were willing to cross the line to teach the lost. I praise the Lord that Jesus crossed the line for me! Praise His Name that He loved me enough to die for me on the cross!

NEW WINESKINS Mark 2:18-22

When Jesus came to this earth to die for our sins, He also brought some changes to the way we serve Him and relate to Him. As we look at this passage, let me ask some questions.

Are we made more spiritual by doing more for the Lord?

For example, the Bible instructed the Jews to fast ONE day a year, on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16:29, 31. The words "afflict your souls" means to deny yourself food or fast). But by New Testament times, Jewish religious leaders were fasting twice a week,

trying to impress upon God how spiritual they were. In the Parable of the Pharisee and the Publican, the Pharisee boasted that he fasted twice a week (Luke 18:12). Suffering and pain was intended to show God how much they loved Him. Did it? Does it?

A Christian lady loves to take home-cooked meals to the sick and shut-ins. She once asked her Pastor, "Can this be a ministry when I enjoy it so much?" The Pastor said, "Yes, it's a ministry! God wants you to enjoy serving Him."

In the Old Testament God gave His people some rules, regulations, and special days to observe. Since Jesus came to die for our sins, the old system is obsolete and needs to be replaced with something new and different.

Did He come to IMPROVE the old life or to REPLACE it with a New Life? Does His coming to earth REFORM us or TRANSFORM us? Did He come to Add something or to Bring us something brand new?

Jesus is going to deal with three things in this passage: Parties, Patches, and Wineskins.

We are introduced to some strange bedfellows. The Pharisees, as a group, rejected the ministry of John the Baptist. John, in turn, denounced the Pharisees as "a generation of vipers" (Matthew 3:7). But here the disciples of John and the disciples of the Pharisees, who are at odds about most things, find that they have something in common – fasting. The disciples of John fasted evidently because they thought it to be proof of their repentance; the Pharisees fasted because they considered it part of their religion.

To the surprise of the Pharisees and the followers of John, the disciples of Jesus didn't fast at all. In fact, the disciples of Jesus partied at Matthew's Salvation Party.

Jesus pointed out that the Pharisees were fasting for the wrong reason. They were doing it simply as an outward display of their goodness and to be seen of men. The Pharisees would put limestone dust or ashes on their face and in their hair when they fasted. They wore sackcloth (burlap) and sucked their cheeks so as to appear emacipated or "holy." They "fasted" to show off how good they were and they expected the same kind of behavior from Jesus and His disciples.

Fasting itself is a wonderful spiritual discipline to prepare yourself for some task or trial. Jesus fasted and prayed often, but it wasn't a ritual designed for others to see.

While we are on the subject, let me give you a few thoughts concerning this matter of fasting.

Getting back to Verse 18. Why doesn't the disciples of Jesus fast? Jesus answers the question in Mark 2:19-20.

Jesus is the Bridegroom. Believers are the wedding guest, not funeral mourners. Fasting during a wedding feast would be most inappropriate. The Bridegroom has come. It was a time for laughter, not lamentation; a time to feast, not a time to fast. The Lord of glory has come. It's time to rejoice and be glad.

Psalms 16:11: "In Thy presence is fulness of joy; in Thy right hand there are pleasures forever."

Jesus went on to describe a time when fasting would be fitting for His disciples. "The days will come when the Bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast on that day."

Between our Lord's death and resurrection the disciples were alone. Their Groom had been taken away, and they were filled with grief (John 16:20). That would be a fitting occasion for fasting, but not while He was with them.

How about now? Has Christ been "taken away" from us? Is He absent? Today, He is with us by His Holy Spirit. His last promise in the Gospel of Matthew was, "I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20). Therefore, joy, not sorrow, should be our hallmark.

A young girl said about her Sunday School teacher, "She's always so happy, she must go to heaven every night." "The joy of the Lord is my strength."

Jesus gives us new life, not patchwork on our old life.

Today we have developed all kinds of synthetic fabrics that don't shrink when washed. In Jesus' time, new cloth would always shrink after the first few times it was washed. A person wearing a new garment had to make sure it was a couple of sizes too large so over time, the garment would shrink down to the right size. If you had an old robe with a hole in it, it would be foolish to sew a new patch of cloth on it. Obviously, when it was washed, the new patch would shrink, but the old would stay the same And Then RIP! It would have ruined the new patch and the old garment.

Jesus didn't come to "patch up" the old covenant, what we call the law. He didn't come to Improve the old covenant; He came to Replace it with something totally new.

The Old Age of the Law is replaced with the New Age of Grace – John 1:17.

He has not come to Reform us, but to Transform us. We are new creatures in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17).

We use bottles to put wine in today, but in Jesus' time, wine was most often stored in goatskins. These skins were removed, scraped clean on the inside, then tanned over a fire. Then the skin was stitched back together, with the neck of the goatskin becoming the neck of the wineskin. A fresh wineskin was soft and supple. When new wine (non-fermented) was poured into it, gas was released from the process of fermentation. The new wineskin would stretch to accommodate this expansion.

When the skin stopped expanding it became rigid. If you put more new or non-fermented wine in it, the skin would pop.

The old cannot be blended with the new.

The wine is the Holy Spirit. The wineskin represents the believer. Christ came to make us new, fit vessels for the indwelling Holy Spirit. Thus, all begins now with a New Birth, with a New Man, with New Life in Christ. The Holy Spirit cannot be poured into the Old Life.

God provided us with a new nature capable of handling the baptism, indwelling, filling, and anointing of the mighty Spirit of God.

Beginning with our conversion, the Christian life is all about change. We grow from spiritual infants to spiritual maturity.

The world hates change. Yet, it is the only thing that has brought progress.

Ephesians 4:22-24

Are there some old garments and wineskins the Lord wants you to discard? Some habits and attitudes?

THE DAY JESUS GOT GOOD AND MAD Mark 3:1-12

At the end of Mark 1 Jesus was at the height of His popularity. He had been in His public ministry when we reach Mark 2 for about eighteen months and He was a celebrity! And why not! He was performing one miracle after another! People were amazed at His teaching.

In Mark Chapter 1:

He was amazing!

Until we get to Mark Chapter 2. Remember, we are in the first eighteen months of our Lord's public ministry. Things began to change when Jesus was in a house filled with people. Four men brought their paralyzed friend to Jesus for healing. They could not get into the house so they climbed on top of the house, tore the roof off, and let the man down in front of Jesus. Jesus is going to heal him, but before He does, He says to the man, "Your sins are forgiven you." The religious rulers jump on that and say, "Only God can forgive sins."

From that point, Jesus began to deal heavily with the man-made traditions of the Pharisees and scribes, especially fasting and what you could and could not do on the Sabbath day. God had given His law concerning the Sabbath, but the Jewish rabbis had added 613 written laws in their Torah. Of these, 248 were positive (Thou shall) and 365 were negative (Thou shall not).

Remember that God gave the Sabbath to the Jews only. No other nation or people were given the Sabbath and the Jews were very protective of the Sabbath. God intended for the Sabbath to be a Blessing, but the Jewish rabbis had turned it into a Burden. They had all these detailed rules about what you could and couldn't do on the Sabbath. The word "Sabbath" means REST, but the rabbis turned the Sabbath into WORK, trying to keep all the rules. The scribes made a list of 39 categories of work for the sabbath.

For example:

Now back to the text. It was the Sabbath again and Jesus was back at the synagogue and there was a man there who had a withered hand. Let me point out several things to you:

When you tie the accounts of Matthew, Mark, and Luke together, you discover some interesting things about this cripple. The word "withered" means his hand was "paralyzed." Ancient Christian tradition tells us that this man was a stonemason who had injured his hand on the job in an accident. That is, he was not born with the withered hand. Then, many of the people believed the accident took place because of some sin in his life.

Luke tells us (Luke 6:6) that it was his “right” hand. So, if he were a bricklayer, he would be unable to work.

Many Bible teachers believe that this man was a plant; that he was placed in the congregation by the Pharisees in an effort to trap Jesus. Matthew’s gospel says, “And, BEHOLD, there was a man which had his hand withered. And they (the Pharisees) asked Him (Jesus), saying, ‘Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath day?’ that they might accuse Him.”

The most likely scenario is that they found this man and said something like this: “So, we hear you have injured your hand. Boy, that sure looks painful! Well, come with us to the synagogue. That fellow Jesus will be there today. He can heal you, you know! If you go with us, there is a good chance that He will heal your hand . Wouldn’t you like that? Come on, go with us!”

Either they had planted this man or they had spotted him in the crowd.

“They watched Him” closely to see what He would do. They want to find evidence against Him that He is a Law breaker. They are looking for any excuse to put an end to His ministry and His life.

The problem with these men and with people like them today is that they could have cared less about the needs of this poor, injured man. All they cared about was their rules and their ways and how they could get Jesus.

What is persecution? Most of us think of persecution as being put in jail for our belief in Christ. Or maybe it’s having our head cut off or being burned alive. That is an extreme kind of persecution and most of us won’t suffer that kind of persecution. But listen to Jesus in John 15:20: “If they have persecuted Me, they will persecute you also.” The word “persecute” here means “to continuously hound someone, to stay after them, to ridicule them, to dog them, to watch their every move to try to catch them doing something that you can accuse them for, to not let up on them.”

The word “watched” Him means to spy on Him. The Pharisees followed Jesus around, looking for some way to trap Him, to discredit Him and to destroy His ministry.

Now look at Mark 3:5. Jesus had about had enough. They “watched” Jesus, but here it said that Jesus “looked around them with anger, being grieved by the hardness of their hearts.” The word “hardness” means “to be covered with a callus, to become insensitive, to be hard.”

In this one passage we see two sides of the personality of Jesus. He was good and mad. We all know Jesus is good and we see Him that way as He cared for the sick. But some people are surprised to learn that Jesus also got mad.

Jesus was mad at the hardened hearts of the Pharisees.

Some people think all anger is sinful, and they have a hard time justifying that Jesus got angry, because Jesus was supposed to be sinless. He was. You must understand that the Bible talks about different kinds of anger. Some anger is harmful and destructive. But there is a kind of anger that is holy and just. Let’s look at two different kinds of anger.

A. Thumos

The Greek word “thumos” is best translated “furious rage.” It is harmful anger. It’s the kind of anger that flies off the handle and strikes out and hurts others. Paul said, “Lay aside – get rid of – all bitterness, rage (thumas) and anger, brawling.” You never know what an angry man (a thumos) man is going to do; and neither does the angry man.

You may know a rage-aholic. You may work for a rage-aholic. You may be married to a rageaholic. You may be a rageaholic, but you don’t want to admit it. Most rageaholics are blinded by their own anger. With God’s help, you can control your temper.

B. Orge

There is another word for anger: orge. It means “settled indignation.” The Bible says, “In your anger (orge) do not sin: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry” (Ephesians 4:26). Rage is harmful anger. This is holy anger. Jesus wasn’t a rageaholic. But He got angry. But in His anger He never sinned. He was good and angry.

So how can we get good and angry?

There are some things we ought to be angry about: Pornography, because our nation has changed God’s original definition of marriage.

These men are upset because Jesus dared to heal a man on the Sabbath, but they have no problem plotting murder on that day. That is evidence of the hardness of their hearts. The callus around their hearts had caused them to become calloused toward God and men. That is a dangerous place to be.

The Lord was not intimidated by the religious crowd. Jesus could have suggested to the man that he come to Peter's house once the service was over, or that he came for healing the next day. Rather, the Lord boldly told the man to come forward where everyone could see him.

No doubt the man with the withered hand was on pins and needles by this time, wondering whether Jesus would bow to their rules. After all, this man had not asked Jesus to heal him. All of the initiative was with Jesus. Perhaps he was afraid also to risk the wrath of the Pharisees by breaking their religious taboos. It might even mean his excommunication.

Jesus commanded the man to "step forward." Then Jesus turned to the Pharisees. This wasn't a private healing. It would be a public in-your-face healing for the sake of the Pharisees.

Jesus asked the Pharisees, "Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil?" The Pharisees were quick to judge and slow to love. When confronted by Jesus' question, "they kept silent."

Jesus irritated the Pharisees because He didn't DO anything. He didn't apply oil or touch the man. He just spoke. He said, "Stretch out your hand." And the man trusted the Word of Jesus, and before his very eyes he watched as his fingers stretched out.

There may be someone here with a withered heart. You know it and Jesus sees it. He can heal what-ever problem you have, if you will by faith trust Him.

THE MASTER'S MEN Mark 3:13-19

If I were to ask you to take a sheet of paper and list the Twelve Apostles, could you do it?

Well don't feel bad, most of the guys at seminary couldn't either. It is interesting that the Bible says that the names of the Twelve Apostles are written on the foundation stones of the New Jerusalem, but we don't know their names (Revelation 21:14).

Three times in Scripture all twelve disciples are listed together: Matthew 10:2-4; Mark 3:16-19; Luke 6:12-16. In Acts 1:13 eleven of the twelve are listed. Judas is already dead and is not listed.

In Luke 6:13 three names or titles are given to this select group:

Let me point out a little known fact. Most folks assume that the twelve disciples followed Jesus around for the three years of His public ministry, listening to Him teach and watching Him do miracles, but that was not the case. Actually, only four of the disciples were with him from the beginning of His ministry: Peter, James, John, and Andrew.

The first 18 months of His public ministry focused on His ministry to the crowds. When Jesus knew His death on the cross was less than two years away, there was a turning point in His ministry. The last 18 months He focused on the twelve who would carry on after His death.

Why twelve apostles? Why not eight or ten or twenty?

The twelve tribes of Israel were to be the foundation of Israel, not only as a nation, but in spiritual leadership for the world. They failed.

Now a new covenant would be made. The twelve would be the spiritual foundation of the Church – Jesus Himself being the Chief Cornerstone (Ephesians 2:20). The twelve would receive and deliver divine doctrine (Acts 2:42).

Three things I want you to see about "The Twelve:"

Mark says in 3:13, "And He went up on the mountain and called to Him those He Himself wanted. And they came to Him." Luke 6:12 says that "He went out to the mountain TO PRAY AND CONTINUED ALL NIGHT IN PRAYER TO GOD."

Jesus did nothing without matching His will with the Father's will. Jesus is about to ordain twelve men who will be His spokesmen, His representatives to the people of Israel. This was a big decision and He wanted to be sure that He knew the mind of the Father, so He sought a private place and spent the night in prayer seeking His Father's will.

What a lesson for us! Jesus, God the Son, God in the flesh, felt the need to commune with God the Father before making a big decision. If Jesus made prayer a priority in His life, how much more we need to seek the Lord in prayer.

What did He pray for? I think He wanted these men to have a teachable spirit. He knew they needed to be men of courage,

especially after He was gone from them. He wanted them to be men of wisdom with a unity of spirit so that they would continue to seek the Father's will and guidance for their lives.

It would be a sovereign choice based on His own will.

A. Who would He choose?

Let me tell you who He did not choose: He did not choose a single rabbi or scribe or Pharisee or Sadducee or priest. Not one of the men He chose came from the religious establishment. Jesus had been at war with those who saw themselves as the religious nobility of Israel. They resented Him. They rejected Him and His message. They hated Him.

Rather, our Lord would choose the humble, the lowly, the meek, the weak, so that there would never be a question about the source of their power when their ministry would change the world. These were just ordinary men. That's the kind of men God delights to use.

B. Why would He choose them? Mark 3:14-15

Jesus could have been a one-man show (one-God show). He is the Creator and Sustainer of the entire universe. But rather than going solo, Jesus chose a team and trained them to help Him.

Before we serve Jesus, we must know Him, and before we know Him, we must be with Him. Nothing is as important in your life as time spent with Jesus.

The word "disciple" means "a follower." Disciples must spend time with Jesus, so He can pour His life into them. The primary responsibility of a disciple is not to go out and work for Jesus; it is to get alone with Jesus and spend time with Him. The way we do that today is by spending time in personal prayer and Bible study.

Remember the story of Mary and Martha? Jesus visited in their home and Martha was sweating away in the kitchen. She was angry because Mary was sitting at the feet of Jesus, spending time listening to him. When she complained, Jesus said, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things, but only ONE thing is needed." That one thing was spending time with Jesus (Luke 10:41-42).

Jeremiah 29:13: "And ye shall seek Me, and find Me, when ye shall search for Me with all your heart."

"To act as a herald; to send forth the message of the King; to proclaim." If you are a believer, you have a faith story to tell.

Evang – YOU – lism

C. Who were the Twelve who were chosen?

These two brothers were nicknamed "Boanerges" by the Lord Jesus. This name means "the sons of thunder." This name fits because they had violent tempers, even wanting to pray down fire on a village that refused to receive the Lord Jesus (Luke 9:52—56). They also had a little bit of selfish ambition because they asked Jesus for a place of special prominence in the Kingdom (Mark 10:35-40).

Now, some wonder why Jesus chose a man like Judas. The answer to that question is not totally clear. However, Judas had a role to play and he played it perfectly. His sin, his hypocrisy, and his betrayal were all a part of God's redemptive plan.

Judas does teach us a valuable lesson. He teaches us that it is possible to look saved and act saved and not be saved at all. It is possible to be deceived in your salvation. That is why you need to heed the words of the Bible and "make your calling and election sure" (2 Peter 1:10).

II. They were United Men

All of these men were so different in their backgrounds, temperaments, and personalities. But all of these men had had a common experience of salvation. They all loved and respected Jesus and they all followed Him as their Lord, with the exception of Judas Iscariot.

Jesus prayed in John 17 that they would always be one in spirit, in devotion to Him, and in purpose in life.

III. They were Ignited Men

They would always burn brightly for our Lord, and so should we!

They could have never known what would happen to them when they said "Yes" to Him in following Him. Their faithfulness and

commitment would be tested over and over.

An old legend imagines Jesus arriving in Heaven right after the ascension, welcomed by all the angels. Then the angel Gabriel asks Jesus, "You suffered much, dying for the sins of mankind. Does everyone down on earth know it?"

"Oh, no," replied the Savior. "Just a handful of folks in Jerusalem and Galilee know about it."

"Well, Master," continued Gabriel. "What is Your plan for everyone to know of Your great love?"

The Master replies, "I asked all My apostles to carry the message into all the world. I told them to tell others, who will in turn tell others until the last person in the farthest corner had heard the story."

Gabriel's face clouds, for he spots a flaw in the plan. "What if after a while Peter forgets, and goes back to his fishing on Galilee, also James and John and Andrew. Suppose Matthew returns to his tax booth in Capernaum, and all the others lose their zeal and just don't tell others? What then?"

After a pause comes the calm voice of the Lord Jesus, "Gabriel, I have no other plan."

The apostles did their job well. But the Great Commission has not yet been fulfilled. The words of Jesus still weigh heavily on us today, "As the Father hath sent Me, even so send I you" (John 20:21).

THE UNPARDONABLE SIN Mark 3:22-30

Why did Jesus leave His glorious throne in Heaven to come down to this sin cursed world? He loved man whom He had created and wanted to have fellowship with him.

But there was a problem: Man had sinned. In fact all have sinned and come short of the glory of God and the wages – the result of our sin is death. Dead men can't have fellowship with God, so how is God going to have fellowship with man?

If man could be redeemed and restored and reconciled to God, God could have fellowship with him. But man has no way to redeem himself, so God must forgive him. For God to forgive him, Jesus must pay his sin debt and the only way for that to happen is for Jesus to die in his place and then cover redeemed man in His righteousness.

Jesus' death on the cross paid the price for EVERY sin. You cannot name one sin that Jesus didn't pay redemption price for.

Well, is there a sin that Jesus will not forgive? According to Jesus, there is. The Bible calls it the unpardonable sin. It is THE sin – the ONLY sin God will not forgive. Well, what is that sin?

It is only found in two places in the Bible: Matthew 12:24-32; Mark 3:22-30. In the Mark passage there is a miracle, a parable, and the teaching about the unpardonable sin. Listen as I read this sober and terrifying passage:

Read Mark 3:22-30.

I am going to deal briefly with the miracle and the parable and spend most of our time together with the unpardonable sin.

Most of the time when folks deal with the unpardonable sin, they don't deal with the miracle, but without the miracle you miss the setting for what Jesus said about the unpardonable sin.

The scribes wanted to discredit Jesus and His ministry. No one could deny the reality of the Lord's miracles, for in every town there were people whose lives had been transformed by either His touch or His word. The common people believed sincerely in the existence of demons and lived in daily dread that they themselves might become victims of evil spirits. If somehow they could associate Jesus with the very things they feared, then it might be possible to keep the congregations away from this Man who wished to preach to them.

With this in mind, the scribes and Pharisees told the people that Jesus was in league with the Prince of the devils. They admitted His power true, but they attributed His power to the help given to Him by the powers of darkness. They did their utmost to associate the works and words of Jesus with the evil spirits.

This might be called The Battle of Implications! If they just suggested the possible association between Christ and the Prince of demons, there might be internal discord and dissension and their trust factor for the Lord Jesus would be destroyed.

Jesus said that what the scribes say is silly. Why Would and How Could Satan cast out Satan? He wouldn't divide his own kingdom.

Here is the parable: "Beelzebub" literally means "Lord of the flies" or the "Lord of dung." He is the chief demon. The "strong man" is Satan. His "house" is his worldly kingdom. His "property" is people. The Person who enters Satan's house, binds him and seizes his property is Jesus.

Christ entered Satan's house when He was born in this world. He bound Satan when He won the victory over him during the 40 days of temptation in the wilderness and death on the cross. Salvation is all about plundering Satan's property when He sets people free from sin.

Satan is strong, but Jesus is stronger and one reason Jesus came was to destroy the works of the devil (1 John 3:8).

The sweetest news for a sinner is that God has forgiven him of his sins and that God no longer holds his sins against him.

The worst news in the world is that God will never forgive your sins. It's one thing for MAN to say, "I will never forgive you," but for God to say, "I will never forgive you" – What a verdict! Guilty forever! Under God's wrath without end!

All sin – All sin is unforgivable to those who die in their sins without Christ! They will die in their sins and there is no second chance.

What is the unpardonable sin? Let me tell you what it is NOT. I have heard of the unpardonable sin since I was a little boy, and I've also heard of a list of sins that some have suggested as being the unpardonable sin.

The Catholic Church teaches that suicide is an unforgivable sin because when a person commits suicide they can't repent of that sin because they are dead. You don't find that in the Bible. How many people repent of the last sin they commit before they die? Not many, if any. If that's your attitude, then you don't understand salvation. Once you are a Christian, you don't have to confess every single sin you commit in order to go to heaven. We confess our sins to stay in fellowship with God, but when you surrender your life to Christ, every past sin you've committed and every future sin you will ever commit is covered by the blood of Jesus Christ.

I have met folks who thought they had done something so evil that they thought they had committed the unforgivable sin. They are tormented with the belief they have committed the unpardonable sin and will never make it to heaven. They live with that constant fear of not being able to be saved and Satan uses that fear to keep them from trusting Christ.

Several years ago I was in revival and during the invitation one night, a young man came to me while the Pastor was dealing with someone else. He asked me, "Do you think God can save me? I'm afraid I've done something that God will never forgive me for." Then he told me what he had done. He was dating a girl and got the girl pregnant and talked her into having an abortion. He said, "I helped kill our child. Abortion is murder, isn't it?" It was not merely an academic question. He was terrified and was living with a sense of hopelessness, believing he was forever beyond God's forgiveness and bound for eternal hell with no escape.

My basic rule of thumb in counseling folks who fear they have committed the unpardonable sin is to say to them, "If you are concerned that you have committed the unforgivable sin, the fact that you are burdened about it means you probably haven't." If they had committed the unpardonable sin, they would have no interest or desire for God, repentance, or spiritual things.

Others believe that if they say "No" to Jesus or reject Jesus as their personal Savior, then that is the unpardonable sin. God gives every person at least one opportunity to trust Christ. But, how many of you said "Yes" to Jesus and accepted Him into your heart the first time you heard and understood the gospel and knew He was drawing you to Himself? I dare say that most, if not all of us, had Jesus through the Spirit come to us time and time again before we finally trusted Him. God was gracious to us in calling us time and time again until we say "Yes" to Him.

But I want you to know that if God is gracious enough to come to you more than one time and draw you to Himself, BE CAREFUL! When you say "No" to Him and reject His offer of salvation, two things will happen: (1) Once you say "No" to the Lord, it will be easier to say "No" to Him the next time; (2) The more you say "No" to the Lord, the harder your heart will become and the less sensitive your heart will become to His Voice until the time will come when you will not be able to hear His Voice.

Proverbs 29:1.

When God was dealing with my heart and I kept saying "No," I finally went to talk to my Pastor. He knew God had been dealing with me and here is what he said: "Lowell, if you asked a girl for a date and she said, 'No,' and you asked her the second time and she said, 'No,' and you asked a third time and she said, 'No,' how many more times would you ask her for a date? And how many times has the Lord drawn you to Himself and you've said, 'No.'"

Joseph Alexander wrote *The Hidden Line (The Destiny of Man)*.

There is a time, we know not when,

A point we know not where

That marks the destiny of men

To glory or despair.

There is a line by us unseen,

That crosses every path;

The hidden boundary between

God's patience and His wrath.

To pass that limit is to die.

An answer from the skies is sent

“Ye that from God depart,

While it is called today, repent,

And harden not your heart.”

The unpardonable sin is not even rejecting Christ until you die and have no other opportunity to trust Him, so you die in your sins, without Him. That is a process of life, but Jesus is talking about a sin.

Matthew 12:31-37 says that the unpardonable sin is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. Jesus says that “if you speak blasphemy against the Son, it will be forgiven him, but if one speaks a word of blasphemy” – a hurtful word, an evil word – “if one speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, in this world or in the world to come.” Why?

Notice this: All three persons of the Godhead had a part in our salvation: God the Father Planned it; God the Son Purchased it; but God the Holy Spirit Pursues us.

The Holy Spirit pursues us. It's a love thing. It's like a young man who pursues the love of his life. He goes after his love. He woos her. He devotes himself to her. He gives her his full attention. She is all he cares about and thinks about. He treats her with love and grace. He wants the best for her. That's what the Holy Spirit does in trying to draw us to Christ.

Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is to speak against the Holy Spirit in an evil way for what He is doing. It is to shut Him down in a hateful, evil way.

It is saying to the Holy Spirit what the demons said to Jesus: “Leave me alone! I want nothing to do with you.”

Let me break down the unpardonable sin for you:

It is something an individual does. The Holy Spirit is the faithful witness to Jesus and reveals to men the price He paid for their soul on the cross. He presents the choice to accept Him or reject Him. Saying no to the Holy Spirit in a hurtful way is an insult to Him.

You make a once for all decision to say to the Holy Spirit, “Don't bother me any more. I want nothing more to do with you!”

One speaks against the Holy Spirit intentionally. You cannot commit this sin by accident or in ignorance.

Some say, “Oh, I got mad, I lost my temper, I was hurt and blamed God and I said some ugly things about God, but I didn't mean it.” Then you didn't commit the unpardonable sin. You can't commit this sin accidentally or mistakenly.

It is a final refusal and a fixed attitude against Jesus.

It's a serious thing to hear the Word of God Sunday after Sunday and sense the Holy Spirit leading you to Christ and you shut Him down.

Jesus said that you are either FOR Him or AGAINST Him. Jesus doesn't allow fence straddling. He allows no one to be neutral. You are either for Him or against Him. You choose!

Sin is only forgiven as you repent and trust Jesus as Savior and Lord of your life. Have you?

(Blow out the light, shut the door, tell folks Alice is gone.)

WE ARE FAMILY Mark 3:20-21, 31-35

I want you to get this scene in your mind. Jesus is teaching in the City of Capernaum. He is surrounded by a vast multitude of people. Most of them are there to hear what He has to say because they are fascinated by His message and by His miracles (Verse 20). These people are there to HEAR THE Lord.

Others are there to find fault with Jesus and His words and works (Verse 22). The religious leaders have come to hear Jesus and as they listen to what He has to say, they accuse Him of being in league with Satan. These people are there to HINDER THE Lord.

There is another group in Capernaum that day. They are called the “friends” of Jesus in Verse 21. The word “friends” literally means “kinsmen.” This group is our Lord's family. They have come to rescue Jesus. They have not come to rescue Him from the crowds or from the scribes; they have come to rescue Him from Himself. They think Jesus has lost His mind. They are worried about Him and they have come to take Him back home, so that He can get some rest. They are worried about Him. These people are there to HELP THE Lord, or so they think.

So, some have come to HEAR Him, others have come to HINDER Him, and others have come to HELP Him. These verses focus on Jesus and His earthly family. Jesus uses the arrival of His physical family as an opportunity to teach us about His relationship with His spiritual family.

In 1979, four sisters from Philadelphia, the Sisters Sledge, recorded their only No. 1 hit, “We Are Family.” Well, Jesus is going to teach us the importance of our spiritual family.

Some of our Lord's friends and family thought that He was literally out of His mind or that He might be suffering a nervous or an emotional breakdown. Tongues were buzzing and rumors were flying about Jesus. The rumors had reached Mary and her other children back in Nazareth that Jesus was beside Himself; He was mad or insane.

Why would they think that?

This is often the assessment of folks who are on fire for the Lord. The world honors the man who for fame or wealth overdoes it and risks his health and says that he is diligent; but for the

man who wears himself out preaching or working down at the church, he is foolish. It was our Lord's zeal for the things of God that made them say that He was beside himself.

Mary must have forgotten what Jesus said when He was twelve: “Wist ye not that I must be about My Father's business?”

Then someone saw our Lord's mother and brothers on the outside and they got word to Jesus, “Your mother and brothers are here and they are seeking for you.”

Family came first in those days. The Lord, however, knew what He was doing. He knew why they had come; they thought that He was “beside Himself.” They had come to take Him home. With the best intentions, they had come to take over. They thought He was going too far.

This is a tense scene and the Lord's reaction to His family seems cold on the surface. But His response to them was designed to teach some very important truths.

The Lord's family had their attention focused on earthly, fleshly concerns. Jesus had His attention focused on carrying out the Father's business. To Jesus nothing was more important as doing the will of the Father.

Family is important, but it is not ALL important. There are times when the family can come between the believer and what the Lord wants that believer to do. That was the problem our Lord faced in these verses. The family of Jesus came to stop Him from doing what the Father had sent Him to do. They came to hinder Him and to stand between Him and His Heavenly Father's will for His life and ministry.

When it's time to choose between the Lord and one's family, the believer should always choose the Lord. You never love your family more than when you are totally dedicated to the Lord's will for your life. They may not see it, but it is true nonetheless. While earthly bonds are strong and they are important, they are eclipsed by our spiritual relationships.

Matthew 20:34-39.

There is nothing wrong with loving you family, you should. You must love your family, but family business is never more important than the Lord's business.

There may be times when your commitment to your family and your commitment to the Lord will clash. Jesus is trying to tell us that our responsibility to serve the Lord is superior to our responsibility to our human relations.

You see, every physical relationship in your life will end at death; but the spiritual relationships you have in Jesus are forever! So, when your commitments to earthly relationships are in conflict to your commitments to heavenly relations, your obligations to Heaven are greater! Here is how Jesus put it – Luke 14:25-33.

Instead of trying to ease the tension, Jesus turns it up a notch. Jesus used this moment as an opportunity to teach some eternal truth to those who would receive it.

Jesus makes a hard statement. He looked at those sitting about Him who were drinking in every word and eager for more and said, “Behold my mother and by brethren.” At that moment, He felt closer to those who were willing to give Him a hearing than to those related to Him by the natural ties of birth.

But He didn't leave it at that. He said that anyone could be related to Him in a family tie who does the will of God. All who were willing to accept the yoke of obedience would be kin to Him.

By natural birth, we are “children of disobedience: – children of Adam. To become children of Obedience calls for a new birth, a spiritual birth. The principles of obedience, to do the will of the Father, characterizes the new family.

HOW RECEPTIVE IS YOUR HEART Mark 4:1-20

When we come to Mark Chapter 4, we come to a new section and a new way of ministering by the Lord Jesus. Mark presents Jesus as Servant.

Several changes take place in Marks Gospel beginning in Mark 4:

In Mark 3:9 Jesus “told His disciples to have a little boat in constant readiness for Him because of the crowd, lest they press hard upon Him and crush Him.” The boat became His pulpit. The water had natural acoustical properties so that when Jesus spoke from a boat off-shore to the group on the beach, thousands could listen to Him with little trouble.

The word “parable” means “to place beside or to cast alongside something else as a comparison.” A parable places the known beside the unknown for the purpose of teaching so that we may learn. A parable makes truth better known.

Luke 17:21 says, “For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you;” whereas “the kingdom of heaven” in this dispensation is made up of both saved and lost. Example: The parable of the

wheat and tares found in the Church Age. In this age, both the real Church (saved) and the false Church (lost) are joined together.

The word “mystery” refers to something previously hidden and unknown but revealed in the New Testament. In context, the subject of mystery is the kingdom of heaven, which Jesus communicates in the form of parables. Thus the mystery is revealed to those who believe, yet it remains concealed to those who reject Christ and His gospel.

This parable of the soils is the first parable Jesus told and it is the only parable Jesus explained. Jesus gives some 35 parables in the Gospels and we must rely on the Holy Spirit to give us the correct interpretation to the other 34 parables.

In reading this parable, I have just read about every person in this building. I cannot say that every time I read a passage of Scripture, but I want you to know that God has just called your name.

Every person has been identified in these verses. For you see, in this parable Jesus gives us four responses to the Gospel. There are four heart responses to the Word of God, and there are no more. There are only four. One of these responses represents you.

Have you ever wondered why some people respond to the Gospel message when it is preached and others do not? God has made us so that we can communicate with Him Through Our Heart. It is through man's heart – his intellect, his emotion, and his will – that God speaks to man.

Mark 4 in this passage: Hearing (Verses 12, 15) ... Understand (Verses 12, 13) ... Receive (Verses 16, 20) ... Bear fruit (Verse 20). All of these must come into play or you are not saved.

The climax of every service is the invitation. It is at that time when we respond to what God is doing in our heart.

There are some things you and I can see and some things we cannot see. We cannot see what is going on inside the heart of a man or woman. This parable gives us a picture of what God sees going on in our hearts.

There are three specific parts to this parable:

In Luke 8:11 this same parable is given and Jesus Himself says that the seed represents the Word of God. How is the Word of God like seed?

A. A Seed has Potential

Hebrews 4:12: "For the Word of God is quick and powerful." The word "quick" doesn't mean fast; the word "quick" means alive or living. When you cut your fingernail down in the quick, you get down there where you live!

Take a seed – corn, beans, or peas. It may look dead, but there is life inside that seed. No matter how old the seed is, there is life in it. Just plant it and you will see life spring forth.

God's Word contains life. Go to the library and you'll find thousands of books, but they are just books written by men and women and they have no life in them. But the Bible is God-breathed. It is a living, life-giving Book.

B. A Seed is Powerful.

A seed has power to break through cement and plants can grow in the cracks of the cement.

C. A Seed is Productive Isaiah 55:10-11

A seed can reproduce itself. "An apple is in an orchard and an orchard is in an apple."

I Peter 1:23

D. A Seed must be Planted to grow

Haggai 2:19. The people of Haggai's day were in the midst of famine. The prophet said the reason for the famine was simple. The seed that was still in the barn needed to be planted. Nothing wrong with the seed. It just needs to be planted.

There is nothing wrong with the seed of the Word of God. It will be effective when it is planted in the hearts of men.

The sower can be anyone who shares the Good News and there are so many ways to sow the seed: Preach it, tell it, sing it, write it, hand it out in gospel tracts.

Four things are important if you are going to be a sower:

"A sower went forth to sow" – on purpose. If folks don't hear the word of God, whose fault is it?

The sower was sowing seed everywhere – on the streets, on the rocks, on thorny ground and on cultivated ground. He was scattering the seed everywhere!

Was he careless? No! He was generous and gracious. He was throwing the seed everywhere. He didn't discriminate.

Some planted, some watered, but God gives the increase.

The main point of this parable is not the seed – as important as the seed is, nor is it the sower – as important as the sower is; the main emphasis is on the different soils; the different responses of the heart.

The soil upon which the seed is sown speaks of the condition of men's hearts – not only of the hearts of four different individuals, but of the condition of our own hearts at any given time. When you read this parable, don't think you're automatically always the one who has the good soil and the abundant fruit. On any given day, in any given week, this can change. We don't remain in the same spot. This parable speaks to all of us, depending upon the current condition of our hearts.

I used to think these four soil types were permanent. I thought a hard-hearted person would always be hard-hearted. But I've come to see that on any given day it is possible for each of us to reflect all four types of soil. I've come to see that what our Lord is describing here is not four types of persons, so much, but conditions of our heart at any given moment. Whenever the Word is being taught, people are in one condition or another. We have all been callous at times. We have all been impulsive and shallow at times. We have all been worried about things at times. We have all been open and responsive to the Word. The question is how are we receiving God's Word at this moment?

Here's the sermon in a sentence: The spiritual impact of a Bible Message isn't based solely on the content of the message; it

depends on HOW the Word is Heard and Received. Jesus repeated this phrase many times, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." There is a wrong way and a right way to receive God's Word.

Look at the four heart responses to the Word of God:

A. The Calloused Heart (Closed Heart) Mark 4:15

The wayside soil is hard. The "wayside" speaks of a pathway or road that has been walked on and walked over time and again by both men and animals until the path is so packed that it is as hard as concrete.

When the seed is thrown there, the ground is so hard that the seed makes no impact on it. The seed just bounces off the hard ground and the birds come and feed on the seed.

I do not know man's heart. My business and responsibility is to scatter the seed and leave the seed in the care of the Lord. I'm only accountable for sowing the seed.

It's important to remember that the soil wasn't always hard. At one time it was soft and fertile. So it is with man's heart. At one time the hard-hearted man's heart was soft.

What causes the heart of a man to get hard toward God? The heart of a man gets hard toward God when man refuses to respond to the convicting of the Holy Spirit in his heart.

Another way is for the heart to become hardened to sin.

A man told George W. Truett, "Preachers just don't preach like they use to. I can remember when I was young, I came to hear you preach and I would tremble inside. Now I can hear you preach and I'm not disturbed at all." Truett said, "Sir, it's not that I don't preach like I use to. It's that you don't hear like you use to. Once your heart was tender. Now it's hard."

Notice what he says, "Your heart is hard," the seed doesn't penetrate your heart and Satan comes IMMEDIATELY and takes away the Word that was sown in their hearts. Satan wastes no time in taking away God's Word from the hard heart because he knows that seed of divine truth can pierce even hearts of steel if given a chance.

How does Satan take the seed away? By distractions! And you allow your minds to wonder. Maybe a baby cries or someone gets up and walks to get some water or go to the restroom and you go on a mental journey. Maybe you're playing with your phone or someone talks to you or punches you. Or you start thinking about lunch or the game or what time it is and when is he ever going to get through! That's for the birds and the birds will take it away!

B. The Casual Heart (Shallow Heart) Mark 4:16-17

Much of Palestine is limestone and bedrock and is covered with a thin layer of soil. If you take your finger and begin to burrow down into the soil, you won't go but about half a joint and you hit rock. The seed begins to work its way down, but there is no moisture and no depth for the roots and when the sun comes up it's scorched and dies.

They receive the Word with joy and gladness, but they are not rooted in the Word and hard times come and you don't see them any more.

Perhaps they are in an emotional service and they get caught up in the moment and they rush down the aisle to make a profession of faith. They make a decision, but they don't make a commitment. They go up like a rocket and come down like a rock.

Their emotions are stirred; they come down the aisle, crying buckets of crocodile tears and folks say, "Man, that guy has had an experience. He's right with God. He's really on fire for God." About three weeks later, his flame is out and he's gone.

We often say these kinds of folks are "backsliders" or "carnal Christians." Sometimes when I meet with a family in preparation for a funeral, they admit that the person who died has not been following Christ for years. "But when he was a boy, he accepted Christ," they add. "He never followed up on it, but he did ask Jesus into his heart." Then they look to me to reassure them that he is in heaven.

I can't do that. Of course, God alone is his judge but Jesus says in this passage temporary faith does not result in eternal life.

Are these folks saved? No! How do I know? There is no fruit. I John 2:19

C. The Crowded Heart (Cluttered Heart) Mark 4:18-19

These are the folks who make a half-hearted kind of commitment. They want the best of both worlds. They want one foot in heaven and one foot on the earth. But no man can serve two masters. You can't have your sin and have Christ too.

There has never been a conscious break from the old life of sin, so the old thorns of the old life choke out anything of the new life. Like Demas, they still love this present world.

Are they saved? No! How do you know? There's no fruit of salvation in their lives.

D. The Converted Heart (Cultivated Heart) Mark 4:20

They Hear the Word. They Receive the Word. They Bear Fruit! The only difference between these types of soil was Fruit!

So what kind of fruit does good soil produce?

Colossians 1:10: "Bearing fruit in every good work."

Hebrews 13:15: "The fruit of the lips that give thanks to His Name."

Galatians 5:22-23: "The fruit of the spirit ... "

Prepare your heart to produce fruit.

One man said, "I feel like a sponge, because I soak in every Bible study, sermon, prayer meeting, and worship service I can."

I take notes when someone is preaching or teaching. Studies have shown that we retain less than 10 percent of what we hear, but we retain up to 40 percent of what we write down.

In Verse 10 Jesus says, "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear." The Lord is letting us know that we are responsible for what we hear.

Can you see fruit in your life? Can others? Can God?

FAITH IN THE MIDST OF THE STORM Mark 4:35-41

This is one of the few times the Gospel writers give us a complete day in the life of the Lord Jesus. Mark 3:19-5:20 represents one busy day in the life of Jesus.

Jesus had just chosen the rest of the Twelve disciples who would be with Him. Peter, James, John, and Andrew had been with Him from the beginning of His public ministry; now, about eighteen months later, He chooses eight other men to be His disciples. Most of the time we think of all Twelve of the disciples being with Him for three years, but not so.

On this one day in the life of Jesus that Mark focuses on, the scribes want to discredit Jesus so they say, "Yes, Jesus does the miracles that you have heard about Him doing, but He doesn't do them in His own power. He does the miracles in the power of Beelzebub, the Prince of Demons or Satan himself." Jesus says to them that they are not far from committing the unpardonable sin.

Then Jesus declares Himself to be the Son of God and our Lord's own family and some friends come to "rescue Him," they say, "for His own good," because He is "beside Himself." His own half-brothers thought He had gone crazy.

Then on that same day Jesus began to teach the people in parables and He gives them seven parables concerning the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus begins to teach in parables so He can Reveal Truth to true believers and so that He can conceal truth from those who were not true believers. Jesus interprets and explains the first parable to them – the parable of the soils.

Then in the late afternoon, Jesus gets into a little ship and pushes a little way off the shore of the Sea of Galilee, and uses the boat as a pulpit and the water as a sounding board to teach the great multitude that had gathered to hear Him.

When Jesus finishes His teaching and the disciples send the people away, while they are still in the boat, Jesus says to His disciples, "Men, let us cross over to the other side of the lake." Both Jesus and His disciples are tired and weary from the long, stressful day, The disciples anticipate it will take about an hour-and-a-half to get to the other side. Jesus is so tired that He goes to the hinder part of the boat, finds a pillow, and goes to sleep while the disciples maneuvered the boat to the other side of the lake. A cool gust of wind slaps the sails and wave after wave gently rock the boat until soon Jesus is asleep.

It was not long before a great storm from the mountains came down upon them and the waves of water began to fill the boat with water. The disciples were bailing the water out as fast as they could, but by now the boat was full of water and about to sink. The disciples are afraid, wake Jesus, and He calms the storm.

I would like for us to climb into the boat with these men as they cross the Sea of Galilee.

There is a sense in which we are all sailing toward an unseen port called Heaven. As we sail, storms will arise and toss our vessel. Like the disciples, we often think these storms are going to destroy us. I want you to know that storms are not sent in our lives to DESTROY us, but to DEVELOP us. Let me make some observations as to How we are to face the storms that come into our lives.

Mark doesn't tell us which sea Jesus is on, but Luke tells us that the winds "came down on the lake." So it had to be the Sea of Galilee. The Sea of Galilee is actually a fresh water lake. It is a relatively small lake. It is 14 miles long, seven miles wide, about 150 feet deep and the shoreline is 680 feet below sea level. It is shaped like a harp. The Sea is surrounded by mountains gouged with deep ravines. There is a valley called the Arbel that acts like a wind tunnel that funnels great whirling winds down onto the lake without notice. Matthew uses the word that means "earthquake" to describe the storm. It was as though the lake was being shaken, for it came with enormous force.

Most of the storms on the Sea came suddenly. At one moment it might be peaceful and the next minute a storm would suddenly arise, with driving rain and gale-force winds. Many boats at the bottom of the Sea of Galilee bear testimony to the power of a raging storm. The water stirs into violent 20-foot waves. Boats look like small bobbing corks on the stormy water.

That's the way it is with life too! Things can be fine one moment and the next, the bottom falls out. One minute you can be enjoying fair weather and the next, you find yourself in the middle of a terrible storm. One phone call, one 24-hour period of time, one doctor visit, one tick of the clock, and there you are, in the storm of your life.

Nobody has a life of all sunshine and no pain. Into every life some rain must fall, and I might add, thunder and lightening often comes with it.

In Verse 35 Jesus said, "Men, let's cross over to the other side of the Sea." There was no argument from His disciples. They were tired too. They needed to rest as well. Don't miss the little phrase in Verse 36, "they took Him EVEN AS HE WAS in the ship." We see here the dual nature of the Lord Jesus – the God-man. He is 100 percent God and 100 percent man. Not half God and half man; but 100 percent God and 100 percent man. As man He was totally exhausted after His busy day. He was weary and worn both mentally and physically; fatigued from His labors. He threw Himself on a pillow and fell into a deep sleep.

But as God, He would "rebuke the wind and speak to the sea" to be calm, and both the wind and the sea obeyed Him.

What does it mean when it said that "they took Him as He was"? Weary, worn, exhausted – yes, but they also took Him as quickly as possible and without any preparation for the sail; without food and other needed supplies.

Whose idea was it to get in the boat and sail to the other side in the first place. Wasn't it Jesus Himself who said, "Let us go across to the other side."?

We need to learn something here: obedience and service to Christ does not exempt His servants from storms. If we are true Christians, we must not expect everything smooth in our journey to Heaven. We must not think it a strange thing if we have to endure sickness, losses, bereavements and disappointments, just like other men.

He never promised us we would have no affliction. He loves us too much to promise us that. By affliction He teaches us many lessons, which without them we could never learn. Affliction teaches us our weakness, it draws us to the throne of God, it purifies us, it weans us from the world, and it makes us long for heaven. One day we will thank God for every storm.

Mark tells us two things: It was "a great storm of wind" and the waves of water were so high that they beat upon the boat and filled the boat with water.

The crew was distressed! They panicked! They were fearful that they were going to perish.

Where do storms come from?

This is the only place in the Bible which speaks of Christ sleeping.

Fear often brings doubts. The disciples doubted our Lord's:

A. Concern For Them.

When the disciples finally woke Jesus up, they asked Him a question that we have all asked in moments of desperation: "Do You not care that we are perishing?"

"Lord Jesus, don't you care that: My child is sick? My marriage is falling apart? I have no money? I feel so alone? I want to give up?"

Never question God's concern for you. He loves you just as much in the storm as He does in the sunshine. You don't doubt Him in the sunlight; don't doubt Him in the storm.

B. (The disciples doubted our Lord's) Commitment To Them – “we perish”

The Lord Jesus is absolutely committed to you.

Isaiah 49:14-16

Why does the Lord permit storms to come in our lives? Does God have a purpose in permitting storms to come our way? Yes, He does!

This may be the supreme reason. When He had stilled the storm, He gently rebuked them, saying, “Where is your faith?” God sends trials to see if we will react in faith to Him.

God wants to show us His power. He may not calm the storm as soon as we want Him to, but He is an on-time God!

If He doesn't calm the storm Around us, He will calm the storm Within us!

I said a moment ago that I believed this storm was from Satan and the reason is that He spoke to the storm and rebuked the storm just as he spoke and rebuked demons.

Notice: “Jesus Rebuked the wind and Spoke (said) to the sea.”

Jesus Rebuked the winds because the wind is what stirred up the waves, but He Spoke “peace” to the waves. Behind the waves was the wind, but behind the wind was the Evil One himself, the “prince of the power of the air.”

The word “peace” means “to be silent” or “hush;” the words translated “be still” means “to muzzle” or “to make speechless.”

A miracle took place. Two things happened: The miracle was done in time and the miracle was done instantly. There was instant calm. Normally, even after the wind dies down the sea can take hours to calm down. But here the sea became calm instantly.

There are two words for the word “fear.” The word “fearful” in Verse 40 speaks of being harmed or being a coward. The word “feared” in Verse 41 speaks of being full of awe and reverence.

Are you in a storm now? Jesus wants to calm you heart. He whispers, “Peace, be still!”

THE DAY DEMONS PERFORMED A SWINE DIVE OR THE TOMBSTONE TERRORIST Mark 5:1-

20

This is one of those stories in the Bible that the first time you read it or hear it, you tend to remember it for the rest of your life.

It's like the story of Noah and the Ark. God told Noah to build an ark because it was going to rain for 40 days and 40 nights. Take a male and a female of every animal and put it in the ark. After the judgment of God fell by water, only Noah and his family and the animals were saved. We remember that story.

We remember the story of Job who lost everything and suffered so greatly and, yet, never lost his faith in God.

We remember the story of young David who killed Goliath with one smooth rock in his sling. Little David kills a nine-foot, nine-inch giant because he trusted God to deliver him from the giant.

And then there is this story. Jesus and His disciples get out of a boat. The boat landed where there were mountain cliffs of rocks and the cliff was full of burial places. It was a large cemetery. Suddenly, a naked wild man begins to run toward Jesus. Parts of chains are still on his wrist and feet where people had tried to chain him so they could control him, but he snapped the chains like they were sewing thread.

His hair and beard are long and matted. He was screaming with a mournful howl and a high-pitched, shrieking cry. His body is bleeding from self-inflicted wounds he made with sharp rocks with which he had cut himself. He is vicious and his eyes are wild. He is out of his mind and living among the tombs. Everyone is afraid of him. He is demon-possessed and the demons are tormenting him! He has – not one, but 6,000 demons in him.

He comes running before Jesus and he falls down at Jesus' feet. Jesus is going to cast all 6,000 demons out of him. There are

2,000 pigs on a cliff overlooking the sea and they beg Jesus to cast them into the pigs because they crave living beings, even if they are pigs.

Jesus cast the demons into the pigs and creates the first devil's ham. The pigs go hog wild and take a swine dive into the lake and commit soo-ey-cide. And you'll be glad to know that that is all the pig jokes I have.

Four things I want you to see from this passage:

You will remember that in Mark 4:35-41 our Lord instructed His disciples to cross over the Sea of Galilee at night. Jesus was so tired from the long day that He found a pillow and fell into a deep sleep in the stern of the boat. It was while Jesus was asleep in the boat that a great storm came up. The storm was so great that the disciples thought they were going to perish. They woke Jesus and He calmed the storm.

There is every indication that the source and origin of the storm came from Satan, and I think for two reasons: (1) Satan wanted to kill Jesus, even before He got to the cross, and (2) Satan wanted to stop Jesus from going to Gardara.

Gardara is the region of the Gadarenes on the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee. This is Gentile territory, the region called Decapolis, which means "ten cities." This is the only record we have of Jesus going into this Gentile territory. But this demon-possessed man was Satan's prize exhibit of a demon-possessed, tormented man who was driven by a vast number of 6,000 fearful, evil spirits. Jesus was on a mission to cast the demons out and to make the cleansed man a missionary to the Gentiles.

These verses shows us what Satan will do with a life and then we will see what Jesus can do with a life.

What a miserable soul this demon-possessed man is. These verses tell us how sin degrades a person. Few Scripture passages point to what sin will do to a person more graphically than this one. This man was Bound by sin, Possessed by sin, and Ruined by sin. He had reached one of the lowest stages of sin.

This man lived among the dead. Two words describe his existence: cemeteries and chains. He was a sad, lonely, hurting, unloved and unwanted individual. His was a tragic existence! Others had tried to intervene in his life, but to no avail. He was totally out of control.

In those days people were not usually buried IN the ground. Tombs were carved into the hillside and the bodies were placed there. Because of his demons this man lived with bones and the decaying corpses of the dead. Day and night he would cry out and cut himself with sharp rocks. He needed someone to rescue him. He needed someone to do for him that which he could not do for himself.

This is a picture of a lost person who is out of control and under the strong influence of sin. Though people may care and try to intervene in their lives, it does no good, but only creates resentment and rebellion in the life of the person they are trying to help.

The demon cries out to Jesus, "Do not torment me." Matthew and Luke adds some important words. Luke 8:31 adds, "Do not command me to go into the deep (the Abyss, the pit of eternal torment for evil spirits)." Matthew 8:29 adds, "before the time."

Demons know that Jesus will one day in the future, judge them and condemn them, and cast them into the pain and torment of the bottomless pit. "But don't do it before it's time!"

As Jesus cast the demons out, He asked, "What is your name?" We don't know if Jesus asked the man or the demons for their name, but the demon answered (maybe through the mouth of the man), "My name is Legion, for we are many." The word "legion" refers to a Roman military unit of 6,000 men.

They said, "Please, send us into the pigs." The actual miracle itself happened quickly. At the command of Jesus, the demons leave this man, he regains his sanity, the demons enter the pigs, and the pigs rush down the steep bank into the water where they drown.

Now we come to several perplexing questions:

The point of the miracle is not to destroy the demons, but to deliver the demonized man from their power and authority.

By sending the demons into the pigs, Jesus was providing proof positive that the demons had left the man.

This man who once belonged to the devil now belongs to Jesus. George Whitefield used to say, "Jesus will take in the Devil's castaways."

We note five significant changes made in the man who had the demons cast out of him.

"Sitting" is a new posture and is a great contrast to roaming about the tombs day and night. Jesus gave him rest.

He was sitting at the feet of Jesus. Before his deliverance, the man wanted nothing to do with Jesus. Now he sits in reverence and respect before Jesus.

Before his deliverance he wore no clothes; now he is clothed.

He is now in his right mind.

Being in his right mind speaks of controlling one's actions. He now has self-control.

Look at this man's desire in Mark 5:18-20.

What a change Jesus makes in the lives of those who come to Jesus in salvation. He will take what you give Him and He will give you something much more precious in return.

You give Jesus your crab apple; He'll give you back a golden delicious.

You give Jesus your thorn; He'll give you back an American rose.

You give Jesus your acorn; He'll give you back a mighty oak.

Give Jesus your Jacob, the schemer; He'll give you back an Israel, a prince with God.

Give Jesus your Simon, the cursing fisherman; He'll give you back Simon Peter, a mighty preacher.

You give Jesus your Saul, persecutor of the Church; He'll give you back Paul, the missionary apostle.

You give yourself to Jesus; you'll be amazed at what He'll do with you.

It's amazing what Jesus can do when a life is placed in His hands. 2 Corinthians 5:17!

A TOUCH OF FAITH Mark 5:21-34

The first 20 verses of Mark 5 tell us that Jesus confronted a man who lived among the tombs. People were not buried IN the ground in those days, but ON TOP of the ground and placed in tombs. So this man lived among dead men's bones that were placed in caves or tombs. Some of the tombs could contain rotting and decaying flesh.

This man was a big, strong man who was demon possessed and everyone feared him. No one could control him. They tried to bind him with chains and he would snap the chains like a piece of thread. He would run naked through the tombs and have sharp rocks and cut himself with the rocks. It was a frightening sight.

The Bible says that he was possessed with 6,000 demons. Then Jesus came on the scene. As He was about to cast the demons out of the man, there was a herd of 2,000 pigs near by and they begged Jesus to cast them into the pigs. When Jesus did so, the pigs ran off a cliff and into the sea and drowned.

It was then that the town's people asked Jesus to leave their town. Jesus is a perfect Gentleman. He does not go or stay where He is not wanted. He gets into a boat and goes back across the Sea to Capernaum.

When Jesus and His disciples near the shore, they are met by a large crowd of folks. In that crowd was Jarius, one of the rulers of the synagogue who came running to Jesus and fell on his face before Jesus. He asked Jesus to please come to his house and heal his twelve year old daughter, for she was at the point of death. Without saying a word, Jesus began to walk toward Jarius' house.

Many of the streets in the Holy Land are narrow and crowded. In some places it seems that you can almost reach out and touch the buildings on both sides of the street. The Bible puts it like this: "As Jesus went with Jarius, much people followed Him and thronged Him and came in the press behind Him."

The word "press" means "to smother", "to crush, like the crushing of grapes", "to leave no breathing room." Someone explained it as being much like watching the Pope walk through a crowd of people and the people pressing in around Him. Everyone wanted to touch Him and everyone wanted a piece of Him. That's the way it was with Jesus!

The scene must have been chaotic and confusing: Jarius on one side of Jesus tugging at His sleeve, saying, "Hurry, Lord, my daughter is dying." The disciples trying to move the Lord through the crowds and hundreds of eager people pushing, shouting, and stretching out their arms to touch Him as He passed by.

Meanwhile, totally unnoticed, a frail, stooped, sickly woman pushes her way through the throng to reach Jesus. Her face is partially covered so no one will recognize her. Her arms are thin and her hands

shake as she stretches them toward Jesus. Now she is only a few feet away. Now He passes right by her. No one notices as she reaches out to touch the blue and white tassel on the corner of His cloak.

This woman had had an issue of blood or a hemorrhage for twelve years. She tries to touch the hem of His garment, hoping that by just touching His garment, she would be healed. And she was! She touched Jesus secretly, but Jesus draws her out of the crowd and she confesses that she touched Him, hoping to be healed.

What we have here is a miracle within a miracle. This miracle takes place within the context of Jesus going to raise Jarius' daughter from the dead.

There is a tremendous truth I want you to see about God: God is attracted to weakness. He can't resist those who humbly and honestly admit how desperately they need Him.

I want us to focus in on this woman who, by faith, touched His garment and was healed.

Someone had told this woman about Jesus. Why was it? When was it? How was it done? Never underestimate the power of an unconscious witness.

For twelve years this woman had had this disease. For twelve years she suffered embarrassment, pain, disappointment, and financial ruin. I think it is interesting to note that she had suffered twelve years of despair with the disease while Jarius had enjoyed twelve years of Delight with his daughter.

A. The Diagnosis

The Bible says that she had "an issue of blood" or a hemorrhaging in her body. In that day there was no cure for that condition.

But that was not the worst of it. Whatever the source of her bleeding, it was a condition that literally ruined her life. Under the Law (Leviticus 15:19, 25-27) this woman was considered unclean. Anything or anyone that she touched was also considered unclean.

Her disease affected her physically, emotionally, socially, and spiritually.

Physically, the steady loss of blood for twelve years had taken its toll. There was constant pain.

She was anemic, pale, and tired. She felt drained all of the time.

Emotionally, there were tears, loneliness, and heartbreaks. She had to be careful to try to keep her condition a secret. She felt worthless and unaccepted.

Socially, she was cut off from society. She could not mingle with people in public. She could not work around others because of the danger of defilement. She could not be married because she would defile her husband. If she had ever been married, her husband would have been forced to divorce her.

Spiritually, she was excommunicated from the Temple. She could not go to public worship.

B. The Duration

She had been plagued with this condition for twelve years. Since her condition probably began just after puberty, for most or all of her adult life she had been in this sad shape.

Twelve YEARS is a long time to suffer with a disease. Twelve DAYS is a long time to suffer with some diseases. Twelve HOURS is a long time to suffer if you have an abscessed tooth. That will bring a man to his knees.

Not only had she been fighting the disease for twelve years, she was losing the fight. She was getting worse; not better.

C. The Discomfort

"She suffered many things of many physicians." The remedies were often worse than the disease. Now she is bleeding, broken, and bankrupt. All hope is gone! That is, without a miracle.

This lady decided on a very different course of action than did Jarius. Jarius came very openly and publicly. He stretched himself out before Jesus, with his face on the ground. He began to plead or beg earnestly for Jesus to heal his daughter. He came before Jesus humbly and didn't care that people saw his humility. He begged for Jesus' help. He was not ashamed to beg openly.

But this woman's disease made her feel ashamed to ask Jesus to heal her sickness. She was too modest to tell Jesus her problem and then to ask Him to heal her. For one thing she didn't know how Jesus would react when He found out her problem. She was afraid that if she asked Him to heal her, He might have replied, "Don't touch Me! Get away! You're defiled!" That's how everyone else treated her. No doubt that's why she touched Him from behind. And it took courage as well as faith!

She thought she could be healed without Jesus knowing it. She hoped to touch His garment secretly, steal her cure, and disappear back into the crowd. She thought Jesus wouldn't know – But He Did!

What made her think of touching His garment to receive healing? Was it superstition that made her act in this way? Had she heard that sometimes the garments of holy men, or even their shadow, could bring healing (Elijah and Paul)? Did she think she had nothing to lose in touching His cloak? Or did she do this because she thought herself an outcast? Or did she think, "Who am I to stop the Lord when He's on His way to Jarius' home?"

Or did she just have little faith? Remember this: A little faith is faith. A weak faith can lay hold of a strong Christ.

No one sees this poor woman off to the side; no one noticed as she elbows her way to the center; no one pays attention as she reaches out her hand; no one speaks to her and she speaks to no one. Here comes Jesus! Even He does not notice this woman. As He passes by, her hand takes hold of the hem of His garment.

The word for "touched" literally means "to grab hold of." The word that is used doesn't mean to lightly touch something; it means to grasp it with all your might. She reached out and grabbed Jesus' robe with a grip of steel; like a drowning person would grab on to a life-jacket. In a moment the infusion of a mighty power reached her. In that instant she knew she was healed. For the first time in a dozen years, her bleeding stopped. Her weary arteries, her diseased organs, her withered muscles, her shattered nerves were filled with health and life and strength. The decay of twelve years was instantly halted and then reversed. She is well again! Healthy again! Whole again!

Notice Mark 5:29. It was a miracle and she knew it! She could feel it! What many doctors had not been able to do, the Great Physician had done!

She turns to go – not because she is ungrateful, but she is respectful of the greater work Jesus must do concerning Jarius' daughter. With a smile on her face, she turns to go home.

But just at that moment, Jesus stops, turns, and examines the crowd. He knew that His garment had been touched by the hand of faith.

Jesus asked: "Who touched My clothes?" Only one person in that crowd knew why He asked that, and she was frozen in her tracks. Her heart stood still. He knew who it was, but what He was after now was a public confession.

Well, everyone was touching Him. There were so many people around it could have been anyone. Besides, what difference does it make. A touch is a touch.

But that is not true. There are different kinds of touches. There is the touch of hostility, like when Jesus was beaten at His trial. There is the touch of curiosity. Then there is the touch of faith.

This woman had touched Him in faith. The disciples couldn't tell the difference, but Jesus could. Jesus knew the difference between the touch of faith and the touch which simply made physical contact with Him. Some had touched Him with the touch of faith, and Jesus knew it.

Jesus still knows the difference today. You are in church today. He promised to be present whenever two or three gather in His name. There will be many people who will casually touch Jesus with their prayers, and songs of praise, but I wonder if there is anyone here today who is desperate enough to grab hold of Jesus in faith like you are grabbing on to a life-jacket?

Many people come to services but they only seek Jesus in a half-hearted way. They come as a part of weekly routine and go away totally unchanged. They get very little out of the services and here is why:

God says, "You will seek Me AND find Me, when you seek Me with ALL your heart" (Jeremiah 29:13).

In the crowd that day there were two kinds of people: spectators and seekers. Jarius and this sick woman were desperately seeking Jesus; the others were just there as spectators. They wanted to see what would happen. The odds are there were many other people there who had a physical need, but only this woman was willing to grab onto the healing power of Jesus. In this crowd today, how many of you are here as spectators? But if there are some of you who are willing to reach out with a hand of faith, you can find God's power.

The truth is, every one of us need a touch from God! Every one of us needs what Jesus wants to give us. Do you need salvation? Jesus can give you that. Do you need refreshing? Jesus can give you that. Do you need the filling of the Spirit? Jesus can give you that. Need forgiveness and cleansing from sin? Jesus can give you that.

How did Jesus know that this woman had touched Him in faith?

Look at Mark 5:30: "Immediately knowing in Himself that virtue (power) had gone out of Him." He may not have felt the touch of His garment, but He knew that His power had been directed to someone for their transformation.

Power had gone out of Him and He was conscious of it. Now, just because power went out from Him

does not mean that He was any less powerful. Power went out from Him, but He remained All-Powerful. Think of all the power it took to create this universe in six days, and yet, God lost none of His power. He was still All-Powerful at the end of the six days. He didn't have to recharge His batteries!

He put something of Himself in what He gave her.

Jesus didn't ask, "Who touched Me" for His benefit. He knew before He asked who had touched Him. After all, He is the Son of God! He asked not for His sake, but for the woman's sake and for the sake of the crowd.

Amazingly, when He asked, "Who touched Me?" not one admitted touching Him. They were all pressing Him, but no one admitted doing so. They were like little children. Afraid of getting into trouble if they admitted it.

Jesus asked the question, not because He wanted her to reveal herself to Him, but HE wanted to reveal Himself to her.

Jesus had healed her, but He wanted to raise her level of faith. The Lord corrected her view of healing. It wasn't the garment or the touch or some kind of magic that healed her, but her faith in Him. It wasn't faith in the HEM, but faith in HIM that made her whole.

By the way, it is not walking down some church aisle or putting your hand in some preacher's hand, or going through the waters of baptism that saves you, but it is your personal faith and trust in Christ that saves you.

Notice Mark 5:32-34. This woman fell before the feet of Jesus and "told Him all the truth." She kept nothing back.

That's what we must do. Oh, it's hard sometimes, but we must tell it all to the one who knows everything anyway. First John 1:9.

How did Jesus respond? There was no rebuke. Instead, He calls her "Daughter." This is the only time in Scripture Jesus calls someone by that title.

Some even translate "Daughter" as "Sweetheart."

"Your faith has made you whole; go in My peace."

Have you experienced His peace? Has He made you whole?

- If you're a banker or investment adviser He might say, "Follow Me and you can tell people about the best eternal investment they'll ever make.
- If you're an educator, He might say, "Follow Me and you'll teach eternal truth."
- If you're a CPA He might say, "Follow Me and I'll show you how to help people balance their lives."
- If you're a physician, "Follow Me and I'll show you how to practice spiritual healing."
- If you're in sales, "Follow Me and you can sell the world's greatest product – eternal life."
- If you're a builder, "Follow Me and you'll show people how to build stable lives."

1. We ought to go to church because we love the Lord and we desire to gather with His saints to worship and praise Him.
2. We ought to go to church because it is a testimony to our friends and neighbors.
3. We ought to go to church because we will miss something if we don't. Thomas missed seeing and meeting with the Living Lord when he missed church – John 20:19-29.
4. We ought to go to church because it is the right thing to do and it honors the Lord.
5. We ought to go to church because an absence from church is a vote to close the doors.

1. The scribes majored on trivial things. They elevated the traditions of men above the Word of God. They were worried about things like tithing mint leaves and how far a man could walk on the Sabbath (Matthew 23:23). Jesus, on the other hand, spoke of weighty matters such as life and death, Heaven and Hell and eternity.
2. The scribes rambled on and on, quoting one another and never saying anything of any importance. They tried to impress folks with their knowledge. I heard someone describe a preacher like this: "He's so smart, I didn't understand a thing he said." Jesus taught systematically, using vivid illustrations and crystal clear pictures to excite interest in His teaching. Someone said, "Preachers ought to put the cookies on the bottom shelf so both the giraffe and the child can reach them."
3. The scribes didn't care about the people to whom they were preaching. They used the people for their own advantage and profit (Mark 12:40). Jesus spoke as a lover of men's souls. He cared about every person He spoke to and pointed them to the love of the Father.
4. The scribes taught nothing of eternal value. They were dry and shallow and it did not bring about life change in the people who heard them. When Jesus preached, He used the Word of God as a sharp sword that pierced hearts. Souls were saved and lives were eternally altered.

The Content of His Preaching

1. "He Preached the Gospel to the Poor"

Jesus is referring to the spiritual condition of those who do not know the Lord; to those who are lowly, needy, lacking and helpless. He came to save souls and change lives! He came to offer hope to the hopeless; help to the helpless and life to the lifeless. He came with the good news that there was love, hope, forgiveness, and salvation.

2. "To Heal the Brokenhearted"
3. "To Preach Deliverance to the Captives"
4. "Recovering of Sight to the Blind"
5. "To Set at Liberty Them that are Bruised"
6. "To Preach the Acceptable Year of the Lord"

The Disturbance By the Demon Mark 1:23-24

The Denouncement of the Demon Mark 1:23-26

The Deliverance of the Demon Mark 1:25-26

- In the Old Testament we are told of Naomi; the mother-in-law of Ruth. The fragrance of Naomi's character permeates the Book of Ruth.
- In the New Testament we are told of Peter's mother-in-law who was the subject of one of our Lord's miracles.

The Condition of Peter's Mother-in-law

1. One purpose for sickness is to bring glory to God. In John 11:4 Jesus said that the sickness of Lazarus was for the glory of God. As difficult as that may be to understand, at times God is glorified through sickness, suffering, and even death. Often Jesus would heal someone so that others might believe in Him. When our Lord healed the man born blind, the result was the conversion of that man. When Jesus healed the nobleman's son, his entire household was saved. How many people have

been inspired and encouraged by the way Job endured his suffering?

2. Another reason for sickness is the activity of demons. Demons can inflict both mental and physical disorders.
3. Sometimes sickness comes because of some specific sin in the life of a believer. Some members of the Church at Corinth were "weak and sickly" because of their behavior at the Lord's supper table.
4. One can become ill because of over work. Philippians 2:25-30 tells us that Epaproditus nearly died because he worked so strenuously.
5. Some are sick because we are fallen men and women. When sin entered the world, so did sickness, suffering, and death.

The Compassion of Jesus Mark 1:31

- Mark 5:19. When Jesus healed the Gadarene (demon possessed man), the man begged Jesus to let him be with Him and follow Him always, but Jesus told him to "go home and report what the Lord has done for you and how He had mercy on him."
- Mark 19:47. Blind Bartimaeus cried out, "Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me."
- Matthew 15:22. The Syrophenician woman said, "Have mercy on me and heal my daughter."
- Matthew 17:15. The father of the epileptic boy who often fell into the water and into the fire said, "Have mercy on my son."

1. Through His Presence Mark 1:31

2. "He stood over her" Luke 4:39

3. "He rebuked the fever" Luke 4:39

It is the same word that is used when Jesus rebuked the demon and cast him out and when He rebuked the wind and stopped it from blowing.

4. "He touched her hand" Matthew 8:15

This is a display of tender compassion. It is like when your child has a fever and you touch the child's cheek with your cheek to check for fever. There's something about a personal touch that says, "I care." Later Jesus would touch the eyes of a blind man and touch a leper and touch the ear of Malchus.

5. "He took her by the hand and lifted her up" Mark 1:31

The Cure of Peter's Mother-in-law Mark 1:31

The Contribution of Peter's Mother-in-law Mark 1:31

The Condition of the Leper Mark 1:40

- He was to dress as a mourner going to a funeral service: his own funeral service.
- He had to wear a cloth over his upper lip so he wouldn't spread the contamination and every time he saw people coming, the leper was required to cry from a distance, "Unclean! Unclean!", and that would warn people that a leper was near.

The Cry of the Leper Mark 1:40

The Compassion of Jesus Mark 1:41-42

The Cleansing of the Leper Mark 1:42

- He has *Authority* over Diseases – the cripple, the blind, the deaf, the leper.
- He has *Authority* over Disaster – storms, winds, waves.
- He has *Authority* over Demons – He could cast demons out of men.
- He has *Authority* over Death – three times in Scripture He raised the dead.
- Now we see that He has power and *Authority* over the Doomed. He would not only heal, but forgive sins.

The Hurting Mark 2:1-3

- The word indicates that this man was not born that way; nor was it caused by an accident. It was most likely the result of a stroke that left him paralyzed.
- There was some malfunction in the motor area of the brain or spinal cord. His nerves had collapsed and his muscles were incapacitated.

The Helpers

1. Inconvenience

This man was helpless and had to be carried to Jesus. It would take a great deal of time and effort and energy to get this man to Jesus.

1. And when they got to the house they couldn't get in. They had to make their way to the roof – another inconvenience, but it didn't stop them.

3. Criticism

When they started tearing the roof off the house, you can almost hear the criticism: "Who would dare disturb our Bible study? Who do they think they are?"

4. Cost

Somebody is going to have to pay for repairing the roof. Somebody is responsible for the damage.

1. Persistent

None of them said when they couldn't get through the door, "The crowd is too big. I guess it just wasn't God's will for this man to be healed or God would have made a way."

2. Creative

If you had been there that day you would have seen temporary vandalism!

2. 3. Sacrifice

Again, someone would have to repair the roof which would call for time, labor, and expense.

These men are an example to us, but they are more than an example. They are a rebuke to us who could bring folks to Jesus but don't.

This is how it was and is with God, too. John 3:16 – God dug, so to speak, through the roof of the world and lowered His Son down so Jesus could die for our sins!

The Healer Mark 2:5-12

1. Sin is universal – Romans 3:23
2. Sin is our greatest problem – It separates us from God. Isaiah 59:2
No sickness ever separates you from God.
3. Forgiveness is our greatest need.
 - The word “forgiveness” means “to send away.”
 - I know a lot of folks who would like to send their sins away, but they can't. I know a lot of folks who would like to send their anger away or their jealousy or their spirit of lust or their drunkenness or their gambling away.
 - Only Jesus has the power to forgive sin. Faith is the key that unlocks God's power in your life.

Jesus and the Publican Mark 2:14

Jesus and the Party Mark 2:15

Jesus and the Problem Mark 2:16

Jesus and the Pronouncement Mark 2:17

Parties Mark 2:18-20

1. Fasting is nowhere commanded in the Bible. But, it is not forbidden either.
2. Fasting is taking time that would normally be spent eating, sleeping, or enjoying some other physical pleasure, and using that time for prayer, Bible study, and meditation.
3. Fasting does not impress God and it does not persuade God.
4. Fasting only has merit if it is being used to seek God's face for a time or personal spiritual growth.

Patchwork Mark 2:21

- Wineskins Mark 2:22
 - Jesus had chosen His first four disciples, Peter, James, John, and Andrew.
 - He had taught things in the synagogue that amazed the people.
 - A man with an unclean spirit – a demon possessed man – interrupted the service and Jesus cast the demon out of the man.
 - He healed Peter's mother-in-law of a high fever.
 - He cleansed a leper.
 - You couldn't carry a burden on the Sabbath. Well, how heavy is a burden? The scribes said that anything weighing more than two figs qualified. A TV remote control weighs more than that. I'd be in big trouble if that two-fig law were still in force today.
 - You couldn't throw something with one hand and catch it with the other on the Sabbath.
 - A woman couldn't look in a mirror on the Sabbath, for they might see a gray hair and pull it out and that would be work.

The Cripple Mark 3:1

The Criticism Mark 3:2

1. Righteous anger never attacks a person. Jesus didn't attack the Pharisees. He was angered by their stubborn attitudes.
2. Jesus healed the man's right hand, but look at how angry the Pharisees were that Jesus healed this man on the Sabbath day.

Notice Mark 3:6: "Then the Pharisees went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus." The Pharisees and the Herodians didn't get along. The Pharisees were ultraconservatives and the Herodians were the liberal friends of the Romans. It would be like the KKK and the NAACP joining forces. That shows how much they wanted to kill Jesus

The Command Mark 3:3-4

The Cure Mark 3:5

- Disciples: means learners or students
- The Twelve
- Apostles: Means messengers or sent ones. Actually they were ambassadors, which is an office or authority and, as such, were the spokesmen for Christ.

They were Invited Men Mark 3:13-15

1. "That they might be with Him."
 2. "That He might send them out to preach."
 3. To engage in spiritual warfare in Jesus' name.
- **Simon** – This is his Hebrew name. It means "a rock or stone." Jesus changes his name to **Peter**." This is a Greek name and it also means "Rock or stone." Peter was the leader of the group. He was a fisherman with a family. He was outspoken and opinionated. He failed the Lord in a very public manner, but he humbled himself and was restored. He was used of the Lord in a mighty way in the early church.
 - **James** – He was a fisherman. He was a member of the Lord's inner circle. James, Peter, and John were singled out for a special time of ministry three times: when the daughter of Jarius was raised from the dead; when Jesus was transfigured; and when Jesus went a little farther into Gethsemane to pray. James was a great leader in the early church, serving as its first Pastor. He was the first of the Apostles to be put to death for his faith in the Lord.
 - **John** – He was the brother of James, also a member of that inner circle. John was known as the "Beloved Disciple." He was a mighty influence in the early church, writing five books of the New Testament. John was the only Apostle not put to death for his faith, but he was persecuted, imprisoned and banished to a desert island.
 - **Andrew** – He was the brother of Peter. He had been a fisherman before he came to Christ and every time he appears in the Gospel record, he is bringing someone to Jesus. Andrew was a powerful witness for the Lord Who saved him.
 - **Philip** – Not much is known about Philip. Jesus calls him in John 1:43. Immediately Philip goes to tell Nathaniel (Bartholomew) about Jesus (John 1:44-45).
 - **Bartholomew** – He is also known as Nathaniel. He seems to have been a man with some issues with prejudice (John 1:45-46). He was also a man of honesty and deep religious conviction (John 1:47).
 - **Matthew** – Matthew was a Jew named Levi. He had been a tax collector for Rome. He was a controversial choice and was no doubt despised by many of the people (Mark 2:14). But, the Lord called him, saved him, and changed his life. Matthew would write the Gospel that bears his name.
 - **Thomas** – This man is sometimes condemned as a doubter. We do know that he was loyal to Jesus, even to the point of being willing to die with Him (John 11:16). He was the only disciple not cowering in fear in the upper room on the day Jesus rose from the dead (John 20:25). He was a doubter of the unseen, but he was willing to accept the truth when it was revealed to him (John 20:28).

- **James the son of Alphaeus** – Nothing is known about this man. We do know that his mother was at the cross when Jesus was crucified (John 19:25).
- **Thaddaeus** – Nothing is known about this disciple.
- **Simon the Canaanite** – The word “Canaanite” translates as a word that means “zealous.” Simon was a revolutionary. He was a Jew sworn to the overthrow of the Roman government. He was probably idealistic, proud, radical, outspoken, fiery, and fearless.
- **Judas Iscariot** – Judas was the only disciple to come from Judea. He was the treasurer of the group, but he was a thief and a miser (John 12:5-6). Judas was never truly saved and would eventually betray Jesus into the hands of the Jews for thirty pieces of silver (Matthew 26:7-15). He died lost and went to Hell.
- Murder? Moses and David committed murder, but God forgave them and redeemed them.
- Stealing? Onesimus stole from his master, Philemon, but God forgave and redeemed him and Paul asked Philemon to forgive him as well.
- Adultery? David committed adultery but God forgave him.
- Blasphemy? In I Timothy 1:13 Paul said that he was a blasphemer, but he obtained mercy from God because he did it ignorantly in unbelief.

The Overlooked Miracle Mark 3:22

The Obvious Mistake Mark 3:23-27

The Ominous Message Mark 3:28-30

1. It is a Personal Sin.
2. It is a Willful Sin.
3. It is a Deliberate Sin.
4. It is a Predetermined attempt to dishonor, hurt, or insult the Holy Spirit.

It was a Tense Moment Mark 3:20-21

- He was working so hard that He was forced to skip meals and do without rest, so they had to try to put Him under some kind of restraint.
 - Then, some of the things He said made them wonder if He was beside Himself. He claimed to be the Son of God. He claimed to be the Messiah. He said, “Before Abraham was, I AM!”
 - Then, the religious leaders and Jesus were always in conflict. You would think the religious professionals would be right, but they weren't!
1. Spiritual business takes priority over earthly business.
 2. Spiritual relationships take priority over human relationships.

A Teaching Moment Mark 3:33-35

- In Mark 1-3 we see the Servant's WORKS, His Miracles.
- In Mark 4-5 we see the Servant's WORDS, His Parables.
- In Mark 6 we see the unfolding of unbelief in Jesus' Acquaintances.
- In Mark 10 Jesus employs a method of teaching called the Paradox, teaching which sounds wrong or even impossible when you first hear it, but when it is explained, it proves to be right. Example: Mark 10:31: “But many that are first shall be last; and the last first.”

1. Until we come to Mark 4, the ministry of the Lord had been confined almost exclusively to the synagogues of the nation. From here on out in His ministry, He moves to the seaside. There are two reasons for this: (1) The rulers of the

synagogues were no longer friendly to Jesus; (2) The ministry and miracles of Jesus were attracting such large audiences that no building could accommodate all who wished to hear Him.

2. Parables was a way of communicating that Concealed the truth to unbeliever while Revealing truth to believers. With parables you have to “think” about what is being said.
3. There may be several truths in one parable, but there in only ONE main truth that the Lord wants us to get from each parable. You get into trouble when you try to dig more than one main truth from the parable.
4. The parables are given to teach us “the mystery of the kingdom of God” or as Matthew calls them, “the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven,” which may be a better title for us.

The Seed

The Sower

1. A Definite Purpose
2. A Great Vision
3. A Compassionate Heart Psalm 126:5-6
4. A Cooperative Spirit

The Soils

The Prelude to the Storm Mark 4:35-36

The Power of the Storm Mark 4:37

- Some come from nature or our own foolishness. It's our own fault!
- Sometimes storms come from God. God sends them to discipline us or to draw us closer to Him.
- Sometimes storms are satanic in origin. Satan will whip up a storm in your life to defeat you away from the Lord. I believe Satan was behind this storm and I'll tell you why in a moment.

The Panic in the Storm Mark 4:38

The Purpose of the Storm

1. He wants to Develop our faith.
2. He wants to Reveal His Power.
3. He wants to Prove His love to us.

The Peace in the Storm Mark 4:39

I. Our Lord's Mission

Our Lord's Meeting with the Man Mark 5:1-7

Our Lord's Might Mark 5:8-13

1. Why did the demons ask to be sent into the pigs? The text doesn't answer this, but there are several possibilities: (a) So they wouldn't be sent to the Abyss, (b) So they would have a bodily home for their evil activity, (3) Because they knew destroying the pigs would stir up trouble for Jesus.
2. The greater question is why Jesus agreed to the plan. After all, doesn't this involve destruction of someone's personal property? The text doesn't tell us everything we would like to know.

Our Lord's Majesty Mark 5:14-17

1. Resting
2. Reverent

3. Robed

4. Rational

5. Ruled

Her Condition Mark 5:25-26

Her Cure Mark 5:27-29

Her Confession Mark 5:30-34

YOU CAN'T GO HOME AGAIN

Mark 6:1-6

Thomas Wolfe wrote a novel entitled *You Can't Go Home Again.* The book is about a man named George Webber. He is an author who wrote a book about his hometown and the people of his hometown. It was a very successful book and now he wants to go back to his hometown and show his appreciation to those who made such an impact on his life. He was expecting to receive a hero's welcome when he returned home, but instead he is driven out of town by his own family and friends. They felt betrayed by what he had written about them and their town. Webber was so shaken by their reaction to his work that he does leave his hometown; never to return again.

Our text finds Jesus returning to His hometown of Nazareth. This was not the first time Jesus returned to His hometown, but it will be the last time He goes back there.

As a rule there is a sense of anticipation about going back home, especially if you have been away for a while. There is every indication that Jesus had a happy childhood in Nazareth.

Home is a place where one is loved, known, and accepted at face value. It is a place where one can take off one's shoes and snoop around, looking for something to eat. Home is a place of a thousand memories and where one walks down the street and sees old friends and old familiar sights and greets old neighbors and acquaintances at every turn. As a child growing up there, everything looked so big, but now as an adult we are amazed by how small it all seems to have become.

Jesus has become something of a celebrity by this time. The citizens of Nazareth could not have been unaware of the miraculous nature of the Lord's ministry. He was the talk of every town in that part of the world. He has been going around the countryside preaching, teaching, healing the sick, casting out demons, raising the dead, and controlling the forces of nature. He has proven that there is something very special and very different about Him.

But you do remember, do you not, that Jesus went back to His hometown of Nazareth shortly after He began His public ministry. That time He went back alone and things didn't go well for Him. He was invited to preach in the synagogue and He preached from Isaiah 61, a Messianic passage, and he proclaimed that the passage was talking about Him, and that He Himself was the long awaited for Jewish Messiah. The people of Nazareth rejected His message and even tried to kill Him by throwing Him over a cliff (Luke 4:16-30). He left Nazareth and preached in other places in Galilee. He then makes His headquarters in Capernaum.

About a year after coming to Capernaum, some of His family and friends hear that Jesus has been so busy teaching and preaching that He didn't even take time to eat or sleep and they went to "rescue" Him because they said He was out of His mind.

About a year after this Jesus returns to the very place in Nazareth where He was so cruelly rejected. (That's where our text for today fits in.) He wants to give His family, His friends, and His neighbors another chance to receive Him and His message. That is grace!

Sadly, the people reject Him again. The Bible says that the people marveled at Jesus and Jesus marveled at them. Note the words in Mark 6:2, "and many hearing Him were Astonished ..." and Verse 3, "and were Offended at Him" (took offense or stirred up a scandal) ..., Verse 6, "and He Marveled because of their unbelief."

See John 1:11. Notice the people's response to the teaching of Jesus in the synagogue:

The People Were Shocked by His Preaching Mark 6:2

When Jesus began to speak, the people were "Astonished." The word "astonished" means "to strike a blow", "to be stricken with a startling and sudden alarm", "to be seized with panic."

They remembered Him as a local boy. Many of the older people could remember His childhood. Many of them had been His customers when He worked in the carpenter shop. He had made plows to turn their soil and yokes for their oxen. He had made their beds and chairs.

Where did He get His wisdom? His insight? His understanding? His ability to speak? And what about the miracles He performed?

When Jesus preached, He did so with such grace. His words were filled with divine authority. He spoke with the sense that He knew what He was talking about. He left no doubt in the minds and hearts of those who heard Him that they must either accept or reject His words. He left His hearers with no wiggle room.

His words were filled with truth. He declared old truths in new ways. He taught them spiritual truth by using common everyday things around them. His wisdom left them shaking their heads in disbelief.

The people of Nazareth couldn't believe WHAT they were hearing and WHO they were hearing it from. They heard what Jesus had to say and they were left with their mouth hanging open. He spoke to their heart!

Jesus should have been the object of their Adoration, but instead He was the target of their Accusations.

The People Stumbled Over His Person Mark 6:3

These folks rejected Jesus and His message because they THOUGHT they knew all there was to know about Him. They knew that He had never been to the divinity schools. They knew He had no formal

training. He was just another boy from Nazareth. He did not deserve their respect. They saw Him as a common man.

The people asked six questions and all six were intended to ridicule Him.

1. "Where did this man get these things?" (Verse 2) He has no formal training.
2. "Where did He get His wisdom?" (Verse 2)
3. "Where did He get the Power to do miracles?" (Verse 2)
4. "Is this not the carpenter?" (Verse 3) "He's just a simple craftsman; a common laborer like us! Why should we listen to Him? He's no better than we are!"
5. "Isn't He the son of Mary?" (Verse 3) This was a slur; a slap in the face. The people referred to Jesus as "the son of Mary" but not "the son of Joseph." Joseph might have been dead by this time, but even when a man's father was deceased, it was considered improper in the first century to refer to him as the son of his mother. Therefore, when these people did that to Jesus, they were deliberately insulting Him. They were saying, "We know that Jesus' mother is Mary, but the identity of His father is anybody's guess." They suggested that our Lord had been born illegitimately.
6. "Doesn't He have four brothers and at least two sisters?" None of His brothers and sisters are out of the ordinary. How did He come to be so different?

"And they were offended at Him." "They were scandalized at Him." And they rejected Him!

The People Were Shunned by His Power Mark 6:4-6

The proverb Jesus told them simply means "familiarity breeds contempt."

The hardest place for a preacher to preach is usually his home church.

They rejected Him and look at the result in Mark 6:5.

Their unbelief tied the hands of the all-powerful God. They shackled omnipotence.

Why? Without faith, it is impossible to please God: for he that cometh to God, must believe that He

is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him(Hebrews 11:6).

It doesn't say that He "could not" do mighty works there, but that He "would not" do mighty works there.

There is no limit to what God WANTS to do and CAN do in a congregation of believers.

Jesus couldn't believe their unbelief.

Only twice in the Bible does it say that Jesus was amazed. Here, Jesus was amazed at their unbelief. In Luke 7:1-10 a centurion had a servant who was ready to die, so he asked Jesus to heal him. Then he said, "Lord, I'm not worthy for You to come under my roof. Just say the word because I know You can heal him at a distance." And Jesus was amazed at his faith; marveled at his faith, and He said, "I say to you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel."

I want Jesus to be amazed – not at my lack of faith, but my great faith in Him! Don't you?!

SENT OUT TWO BY TWO

Mark 6:7-13, 30-31

John 1:11 says that Jesus "came unto His own and His own received Him not." So often folks rejected Christ – even as they do today.

Jesus went to the Gentile towns called Decapolis and there cast 6,000 demons out of one poor man. He cast the demons into a herd of pigs and they ran over a cliff and drown in the Sea. The towns people saw the 2,000 pits floating – dead in the water – and the townsmen asked Him to depart from their borders.

Then Jesus went to His hometown of Nazareth and when He taught in their synagogue, they scandalized Him. They wanted to know where He got His wisdom. They asked how He was able to do miracles. They accused Him of being illegitimate. They said, "We know Mary is His mother, but who knows who His father is." And they were offended at Him. And He left there to go about in the village towns. How heavy His heart must have been as He left Nazareth.

Now Jesus calls His disciples together and sends them out two by two to preach the Gospel, and He gives them His power to teach, to heal, and to cast out demons.

Three things I would point out to you:

The Commission Mark 6:7

It is worthy of note that Mark alone mentions this commissioning. Luke records how, *After these things, the Lord appointed other seventy also and sent them two-by-two before His face into every city and place whither He Himself would come*" (Luke 10:1).

Obviously this became the Lord's strategic plan of operation. The Lord would multiply Himself by sending out the Twelve, armed with might and miracle, to blanket the entire land with the good news of the Gospel. It was a good and wise plan to send the disciples out in pairs. "Two are better than one," said the wise man Solomon of old (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12), and so they are.

Up to this time, the disciples had stayed close to their Master. Jesus had solved their problems and satisfied their every need. They had been like young birds fed by a devoted parent. The time had come when they should spread their wings and fly into the wide, open skies of opportunity. Jesus would not always be with them in Person; they would have to manage on their own. So calling them unto Himself, He commissioned them and sent them out, two by two, to further the cause of God's kingdom.

They could encourage one another and support each other's testimony.

The entire world would like to know how Jesus paired them up. Who did He pair up with Simon Peter? Whom did He send with Simon the Zealot? Who went with Judas?

And since this sending them out two by two, did He send the same two together all the time? Surely He matched them according to their strengths and weaknesses and their relative dispositions, abilities, and faith. In any case, He made no mistakes, we can be sure of that. Maybe the Lord deliberately veiled His choices in secrecy, so that today we might look for greatness in everyone whom He places at our side.

When the Lord sent out those six evangelistic couples, He realized that six times as many villages would be reached than would have been reached had they all gone together.

He gave them power over unclean spirits. That was the particular fact that caught Mark's interest. It seems that there was an unusually high amount of demonic activity joined together to disrupt His Kingdom. The disciples were empowered to confront all the power of the enemy with His Almighty Power. And so they did.

The Commands Mark 6:8-11

Do you know someone who tends to over pack for a trip? Jesus didn't tell them to just pack light, He said pack NOTHING! Jesus didn't want them to over pack their personal suitcases because we love our precious staff.

Why did Jesus tell them not to take a lot of stuff with them? He would never teach us to go into His service unprepared. Jesus knew that countless homes would be opened to them and hundreds of people would contribute to their material needs. All they needed was power over the enemy – and that He would give them in full.

In every place – rich or poor – someone would be waiting for them, glad for the opportunity of extending hospitality to them. They were not to change their lodgings, even if they felt they were being a burden to someone or because some more affluent or influential citizen offered them more comfortable accommodations.

It was a system that gave the disciples an opportunity to develop their faith and that gave others an opportunity to have practical fellowship with the Lord's servants. It was to be an enriching experience for both groups of people.

The followers of Jesus were to be Dependent on Him and Devoted to the task.

And don't become discouraged by those who will not listen or by those who would not accept them or their message. Just keep on keeping on. Look at Mark 6:11.

Not everyone would receive them with open arms; not everyone is glad to hear the gospel or appreciate its ministers. If that happens, don't argue, don't pester, don't belittle, and don't condemn. Be Christian in your attitude and actions.

It is a serious matter, however, to reject the Lord's ambassadors who are doing God's will, more serious in God's sight than the heinous sins of Sodom. The people of Sodom made this mistake when the two "men" passed through their gates and they sought to abuse them.

Notice what God says in Psalm 105:15.

Jesus said, *And whosoever will not receive you nor hear you, when you depart from there, shake off the dust under your feet as a testimony against them* (Verse 11).

The Jews were very strict in their laws and practices concerning shaking off unclean dust. It was a symbolic act that signified complete renunciation of further fellowship with those who rejected them. Paul and Barnabas did this when expelled from Antioch (Acts 13:51).

The Campaign Mark 6:12-13

The first great work of the Holy Spirit in the human heart is to produce conviction of sin. It is conviction of sin, a sense of guilt and shame that leads to repentance. Jesus sent the disciples out to tell men they must repent of their sins.

Notice that the disciples reported back to Jesus – Mark 6:30-31.

"They told Jesus ALL things that they had done and taught." I wonder what was in their reports! I'm sure there were many victory reports and I think they were filled with joy and rejoicing.

At the end of the day, every Christian should ask, "Lord, what have I done for you today? Were You pleased and satisfied with my efforts? Could I have accomplished more had I tried harder?"

It's wise to remember that true joy doesn't necessarily rest upon Successful service. We will not be successful all the time. But we should consider it our highest and greatest privilege just for the chance to do something for Him Who did so much for us.

Now, come apart for a while and rest in Jesus!

THE MIRACLE OF THE MINNOWS AND MUFFINS

Mark 6:30-44

Before Reading the Passage:

Let's play Final Jeopardy! The category for this Final Jeopardy is the Bible. The Answer is: "Other than Jesus' resurrection, this is the only miracle mentioned in all four Gospels." You have thirty seconds – Good Luck.

If you said, "What is the feeding of the five thousand?" then, congratulations, you're correct.

Jesus performed dozens of miracles, but the feeding of the five thousand is the only one that appears in all four Gospel accounts. I believe that's because God wants us to pay particular attention to the lesson of this miracle.

I'm calling it the "Miracle of the Minnows and Muffins" because we've heard of it as the "Miracle of the Five Loaves and Two Fish." Don't make the mistake of visualizing five loaves of Wonder Bread and two nice-sized Tilapias. The language used to describe the unknown lad's lunch indicates that the bread was what we'd call mini-muffins. And the fish were tiny, like sardines. They could be spread on the bread to give it a little fishy taste. You might think of it as an Israeli Happy Meal – just enough for one little boy. But we are going to see Jesus super-size it.

Read the Passage.

Before we come to this passage, there are two opposite emotions experienced in Mark 6. Jesus had sent His twelve men out two-by-two and given them His power to teach, to heal, and to cast out demons. When they return, they are all excited. With joy and excitement they tell Jesus about the great things they were able to accomplish.

But Jesus was hurting. He heard that His cousin, John the Baptist, had been beheaded. Jesus was grieved. John the Baptist was only six months older than Jesus. That means that John was only 31 or 32 when he was beheaded. Herod Antipas, the man Jesus would later call "that fox," is the one who had John put to death.

Jesus knew the disciples were tired and He was tired as well, so He wanted to get away from the crowd and go to a place where the crowds would not disturb them. So they could rest. He told the disciples to get into a little boat and go across the Sea of Galilee. It was only about four miles across the Sea by boat, but the people saw where they were going and they began to walk or run around the tip of the lake, which was about eight miles. By the time Jesus and His disciples got to shore, many were waiting for Him. It was Passover time and Jews from surrounding towns joined the crowd, until they ended up with five thousand men, along with women and children. Most Bible teachers believe there were between ten and fifteen thousand who made their way where Jesus and His disciples were.

They ended up in a deserted place where there was plenty of grass, but nothing else. No homes. No stores. No towns. Nothing.

Four things I want to share with you from this passage:

Our Lord's Compassion Mark 6:31-34

In a sense Jesus is a Victim of His own success. He is a celebrity now. The people loved to hear Him teach and they wanted to see Him work more miracles. They were intrigued by Him.

Many modern celebrities would have been angry with the crowd if they had tried to slip away from the crowd and the crowd found them. Modern celebrities would have said to them, "Go away, I've given you enough. Leave me alone. I deserve this time for myself."

Not Jesus. Look how He responded: He welcomed them. He saw their deep need. He felt compassion for them. He taught them many things. He healed those who needed healing.

Most importantly, He didn't turn them away. He had compassion on them. Don't miss seeing the heart of Jesus. As the True Shepherd, Jesus felt compassion for the sheep, for they were like sheep not having a Shepherd. They were lost and wandering and hurting and they need a word from Him to set their lives and hearts in order.

Our Lord's Challenge Mark 6:35-37

It was starting to get late in the afternoon and the disciples made a suggestion: "Send them away!" You see, it was a custom in that day that when supper time came, if you had company, you were supposed to invite them for supper.

Remember that most of the people had not eaten since early morning and they were hungry. The disciples realized that something had to be done, and so did Jesus.

The disciples make a very practical suggestion: send them away and let them find food. That's logical. The suggestion is not made from bad motives. In themselves the disciples had no resources to meet this enormous need. They had no food and no money. What else could they do? Answer: They could do nothing! But Jesus has other ideas. Their suggestion was practical but it was also shortsighted. They assumed that if they lacked the resources, then no one else could help these hungry people. They didn't just see five thousand people, they saw five thousand problems they couldn't solve.

Most of us would have said the same thing. We're quick to see what we can't do and quick to talk about what we don't have. Somehow they forgot the Son of God was standing right there with them.

The disciples said, "Let's get rid of the problem by getting rid of the people. Send the people away. Let them find food on their own. It's not our problem. Let them fend for themselves."

Now, here is our Lord's challenge: "You give them something to eat" (Verse 37). "Lord, You want us to feed this crowd? You've gotta be kidding!"

Phillip must have been the Deacon of Finance because he said 200 denarii, which is about eight month's wages for a common man, wouldn't even be enough to give five thousand folks even a snack.

Peter Lord used to say there are three kinds of people in every church whenever there is a crisis or a challenge.

1. There are the Feelers.

They go by how they feel. Do you let your feelings be your guide? Are you someone who goes by your gut feeling? Do you judge every situation by whether it feels right or wrong. Be careful, because your feelings can mislead you.

2. There are the Figurers.

Phillip was the CPA in the group. Don't get me wrong; I thank God for CPAs. I couldn't live without one. "Lord, the numbers don't lie. It would take a man working eight months to feed the crowd." Phillip had it figured out. That's the way a lot of people approach any challenge or crisis: "What's it gonna cost me?"

3. Then, thank God, there are the Faithers.

"I faith (I believe) that God wants us to do the impossible." They say, "We don't have enough resources, but our God is bigger than any challenge. He owns the cattle on a thousand hills and all the silver, all the gold, and all the oil below. If God wants us to do this, it will be done. Where God guides, He provides." "My God shall provide all your needs according to His riches in Christ Jesus."

Andrew said, "Lord, there is a lad here with five muffins and two minnows, but that's not much." Jesus said, "Bring the lunch to me." Do you know what Jesus is saying? He's saying, "I'm enough! I'm enough! I'm adequate! I'm sufficient! You don't have to send the people away – I'm enough!"

Our Lord's Command

Matthew tells us that Andrew brings the lad and his lunch to Jesus. Someone said that the first miracle is that the lad hadn't already eaten the lunch.

I can see Andrew as he says to the lad, "Would you give your lunch to Jesus?" The boy replies as he looks into the face of Jesus, "Oh, I would give all that I have to Jesus," and the lad extends his small, weak hand with his lunch in it to the All-Powerful hand of Jesus Who created this universe.

What we offer to Jesus may seem small, but little is much when God is in it. Anything you give Jesus is a wise investment. He makes the most of our little when we give it all to Him!

The key to God using the lad and his lunch is his availability. Our availability is far more important than our ability. We never know what can happen when we bring all that we are and have to Jesus.

Our Lord's Commencement Mark 6:39-44

Jesus is going to allow His disciples to be a part of the miracle.

1. He Took It Mark 6:41

I hear Jesus say to the lad: "Will you give Me ALL of your lunch?" Not part of it. All of it. Everything you have. That's scary isn't it? Jesus never asks us to give what we do not have, but He does demand that we give Him all there is of us.

2. He Blessed It Mark 6:41

As the people waited and watched quietly, Jesus stood and looked toward heaven. Every eye must have focused on Him and every ear listened to His voice. The crowd overheard Him speaking to His Father, thanking Him for meeting the physical needs of the people.

How embarrassing it would have been to thank God for multiplying the lunch if it had remained only five loaves and two fish.

Why did Jesus bless the lunch? In blessing it, something was put into the lunch that had not been there before. When the boy TRANSFERRED his lunch to Jesus, it was TRANSFORMED by Jesus.

Little will remain little unless we give it all to Jesus.

3. He Broke It. Mark 6:41

Like the little lunch, we often need to be broken before we're useable to God. Broken of our pride, our haughty spirit, and our stubborn will.

4. He Used It. Mark 6:41

Jesus would break the lunch and hand it out; break the lunch and hand it out; break the lunch and hand it out. Not one crumb or morsel was passed to the people that was not first received from Jesus.

Everyone was not only fed, but filled as well.

I think the lad was standing with a grin on his face and his thumbs in his suspenders and rocking back on his heels.

Imagine the wonderful joy and contentment that boy felt when he saw what Jesus did with his lunch. There is no way he could have known what Jesus would do with his simple offering. Likewise, you and I cannot imagine what will come from our lives as we surrender to the will and purpose of God.

What if that little boy had not given his lunch to Jesus that day. He was to be a blessing or a curse by what he did with his all that day.

When the boy got home I wonder if he didn't say, "Mom, you should have seen it. I gave Him all of my lunch and He just kept making more and more out of it. I wonder if it would be that way with everything I give Him?"

You know the answer, don't you? Want to see a miracle? Give Him ALL that you are!

WHAT IS OVER YOUR HEAD IS UNDER HIS FEET

Mark 6:45-52

Twice we are told in the Gospels that a storm came up while the disciples were in a boat on the Sea of Galilee. In Mark 4 Jesus was asleep in the bottom of the ship when the storm came up and the disciples actually had to wake Jesus up because they were afraid. Jesus calmed the storm.

Here in Mark 6 the disciples were on the Sea of Galilee and another storm came up. Jesus was not with them this time when the storm came up. Again the disciples are afraid. This time Jesus comes walking to them on the water and calms the Sea. They were afraid of the wind and the water, but when Jesus came walking to them on the water to calm the Sea, they were the more afraid.

Jesus taught them that what was over their heads was under His feet. He had everything under control.

Fear is a terrible emotion. One of my favorite stories is about the country preacher who used to visit a widow in his church named Mrs. Jones. He liked to visit her around lunchtime because she had a vegetable garden and she loved to cook fresh vegetables for her pastor. One day the preacher arrived at lunch and knocked on Mrs. Jones' door, but she didn't answer. So he walked through her garden calling, "Mrs. Jones, Mrs. Jones." He was perplexed because the back door was open and he could see food cooking on the stove, but he didn't see Mrs. Jones. Knowing her sense of humor, he left his card on her door with this note: "Dear Mrs. Jones, Read Revelation 3:20." That verse says, *Behold I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in unto him and eat with him and he with me.*

What he didn't realize was that about the time he showed up, Mrs. Jones was getting out of the bathtub, and she was too embarrassed to answer the door, so she hid behind the door until he left. After reading the pastor's card, she wrote him a note and left it on his desk the next Sunday. It said, "Dear Pastor, I got your card. Read Genesis 3:10." *I heard your voice in the garden and I was afraid for I was naked; so I hid myself.*

Great story and it give us the first reference to fear in the Bible.

It had been a busy day for Jesus and His disciples. They had ministered to the crowds all day long and Jesus had taught them the Word of God. When late afternoon came, Jesus manifested His power and glory by feeding five thousand men, plus women and children, or about ten or fifteen thousand. Now, Jesus wants to send the crowd away. Why?

1. According to John 6:15, the people were so excited by the miracle of the bread and fish that they tried to take Jesus and make Him their king. Jesus knew the timing was not right and His time had not come (John 6:15, 26), so He sent His twelve men away along with the crowd.
2. He wanted to spend some time alone with His Father. He knew that the miracles and His popularity with the people would bring Him into direct conflict with the religious leaders. He needed to seek His Father in prayer.
3. Sending the disciples away had to do with the disciples themselves. They had seen what Jesus had done, but they were still filled with doubts and unbelief.

As you tie Matthew, Mark, and John's account together, you begin to see that it is not just one miracle. There are at least five miracles in this miracle. The miracles include:

Christ walking on the water.

1. Peter walking on the water (Matthew is the only Gospel that records Peter's walking on the water).
2. Christ saving Peter from drowning.
3. Christ stopping the storm instantly.
4. Christ causing the boat with the disciples in it to move instantly to its land destination from the midst of the Sea.

Jesus did several things in this passage in relation to the disciples

Jesus Sends Them Out Mark 6:45

It's obvious that the disciples did not want to get into the boat and leave. Let me give you the ways our Lord's command to the disciples is translated:

"Immediately He constrained His men to get in the ship;"

- "He forced them;"
- "He pushed them into the boat and made them leave;"
- "Jesus commanded them;"
- "Jesus instructed them;"
- "Jesus sent them."

Why? John 6:15 tells us: The crowd wanted to make Him king and the crowd wanted to come and take Him by force to make Him king. Jesus knew this would not be a good influence on His disciples. Jesus knew His disciples would be susceptible to falling in with the crowd in trying to make Him king. That was not His plan.

Did Jesus know a storm was coming? Of course! In fact, I suspect that He might have planned it just for this occasion.

Jesus Saw Them

The disciples were meant to go through the top part of the Sea, but the wind was so strong until it blew them way off course. Jesus saw them in the “midst” of the Sea.

The multitude has departed, made their way back home, and are probably in bed asleep at this time. The disciples are still crossing the Sea in a boat and are about four or five miles out, “in the midst of the Sea.”

The Bible also tells us that it was “about the fourth watch of the night.”

Where is Jesus? The Bible tells us that *after bidding the disciples to depart He went up into a mountain to pray* (Mark 6:46).

Jesus is getting instructions from His Father, but the Bible says that He is also watching His disciples. He sees them straining at the oars (Mark 6:48). They are about four miles from Jesus, but from His vantage point, He sees them clearly.

Darkness. Distance. Danger. But Jesus sees all that is going on with them. And He is praying. The disciples may not have known that Jesus had His eyes upon them, but He did. They couldn't see Him, but He could see them. He never took His eyes off of them. There on that mountain, Jesus was interceding for them.

Jesus knew where they were, AND He knows where we ARE! He never takes His eyes off of us. “His eyes are on the sparrow, and I know He watches me.” Jesus is watching over you and praying for you.

God sees us and understands. He saw their misery, their frustration, and the loneliness in their hearts – and He understands.

The fourth watch of the night was between 3:00 and 6:00 AM. These men had been toiling for hours. Why did Jesus wait so long to come to them?

I don't know. But I do know that He came at the right time. Our time is seldom His time. We want Jesus to act now, but He's more patient than we are. He sees the big picture better than we do, so He often delays.

Jesus Came to Them Mark 6:48

Did you notice: He comes walking on the water, the very thing that was their problem. Why did He walk on the water? It was not theatrics, I can assure you. He wanted to teach them, and us, that whatever is over their head is already under His feet.

And Jesus didn't show up like the disciples would have expected Him. They expected Him to come to them in another boat. But He's the Master of the Sea. The other time He STILLED the water; this time He STROLLS on the water!

They needed to know He would come to them – and He did! I want you to know that He'll come to us also!

Jesus Speaks to Them Mark 6:49-50

Their terror of the storm was swallowed up by an even greater terror. They thought they had seen a ghost.

Notice this: When the disciples saw Jesus, they were terrified. They knew Him, but they were afraid of Him. They had spent time with Him, but now they are frightened by Him.

They tried to explain away His presence: It's a ghost!

Sometimes, we get scared when He shows up. We want His presence and then we become frightened of His presence. We want Him to make Himself known, and then we tremble in fear when He does.

Then, along with his Presence, He gives His Peace. He said, “Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid (Verse 50). He had their attention now.

- “Be of good cheer!” – a word to their emotions.

- “It is I” – a word to their mind.
- “Be not afraid” – a word to their wills.

Courage can be commanded. Terror can be overcome. His nearness makes the difference.

Jesus Sits With Them

When Jesus sat in the boat with the disciples, Mark tells us “the wind ceased: (Verse 51) and John tells us that “immediately the boat was at the land where they were going” (Mark 6:51).

This miracle reminds us that God uses our storms for our own good.

Scripture says that as Jesus walked on the water towards them, He made like He would pass them by. And they cried out to Him for help and then He stepped into the boat with them.

Are you in a storm? If there's not one Around you, is there one Inside you? Cry out to Christ for help and He will step into the boat with you and calm your storm. He is not far away from you!

THE WOMAN WHO WOULDN'T TAKE “NO” FOR AN ANSWER

Mark 7:21-28

Before Reading the Passage

This is a strange and difficult passage because so much of what our Lord says to this woman seems out of character for Him. Some say that Jesus is hard and calloused and cold and insensitive and even indifferent to this woman. For example, this woman keeps asking Jesus to cast a demon out of her young daughter, and Jesus won't even respond to her. Matthew's account of this incident (Matthew 15:21-28) says that Jesus “answered her not a word.” Then, because she is a Gentile, Jesus calls her a “dog.”

Jesus seems to be harsh and uncaring toward her. Some Bible students have even gone so far as to say that they wished this passage of Scripture were not in the Bible.

But I want to set the record straight today. Jesus has not ceased to be the compassionate Savior. I want you to know that Jesus is in complete control of this situation.

If you and I read something about Jesus in the Scriptures that seems to contradict the character of Jesus, be assured that the problem is with US and not with HIM. Somehow WE have misunderstood something in the text.

This account is given twice in the Gospels; once here and the other time in Matthew 15:21-28 and I want to read both accounts:

This is the ONLY time in our Lord's public ministry that Jesus ever left the Holy Land. For a Jew to leave the Holy Land and go into Phoenicia would be to contaminate himself. Phoenicia was considered by the Jews to be an unclean territory. They were the enemies of the Jews and no respectable Jew would set foot in Phoenicia. But Jesus carried His disciples there.

Why? Because there was a woman there who needed Jesus. Four things I want you to see about this woman:

Her Request Mark 7:24-28

Now, I want to tell you, I like this woman for her quick mind and her quick wit. She responded to Jesus' statement with a sharp reply. I admire this woman not only for WHAT she said, but for how quickly she took the statement of Jesus and turned it into a profession of faith. I've always admired people who are quick on their feet.

Like the college guy who was working at a grocery store. He was in the produce section and a little old lady came up to him and said, “Sonny, I see heads of lettuce here, but can I buy just half a head of lettuce?” He said, “Ma'am, I don't know, but I'll go ask the manager.”

So the guy went up one aisle and down the other and found the manager at the back corner of the store. He walked up and said, “Sir, there's an idiot over there who wants to buy a half a head of lettuce.” What he didn't realize was that this little old lady was fast and she followed him step for step. Just as he was talking to the manager, he caught a glimpse of her in his peripheral vision and so he said, “Sir, there's an idiot over there who wants to buy half a head of lettuce ... and this dear lady wants to buy the other half.”

So they took care of the lady, and the manager picked up on what the guy had done. He said, "Son, you're pretty sharp. Where are you from?" He said, "I'm from Minneapolis, Minnesota; home of the world's ugliest women and the greatest football players." The manager frowned and said, "Son, my wife is from Minneapolis." Without missing a beat he said, "Really, what team does she play for?"

Like that boy, this Gentile woman had a quick wit. But Jesus didn't just admire this woman's wit – He admired her faith.

She didn't ask for something for herself, but for her daughter. Matthew tells us she was "grievously vexed with a demon." That is, she was demonized or taken over by an unclean spirit.

We are not told how this unclean spirit affected the little girl, but we do know from the Gospel of Mark how demons affected some people.

- In Mark 1:26 the unclean spirit caused a man to "cry out" and have convulsions.
- In Mark 5:5 the man from Gersa "cried out and gashed himself with stones."
- In Mark 9:18 the unclean spirit made a young man "mute" (could not speak). It also "seized him, dashed him to the ground and he would foam at the mouth and grind his teeth and stiffen out."

We don't know how the unclean spirit affected this woman's daughter, but it was serious.

Each day this mother's heart ached as she watched her daughter and knew no doctor had the ability to help her. There seemed to be no hope. She just watched her little girl suffer.

When she heard that Jesus was in the region, she approached Him and made her request known. She had nothing to lose. If Jesus refused to help or even if He could not help, she still had nothing to lose.

When she comes to Jesus to make her request, it was not what we might expect. Matthew tells us she said, "Lord, have mercy on ME," instead of my daughter. She had made her daughter's burden her very own. You know, as I do, that when our children hurt, we as parents hurt as much if not more than they do.

Her Rejection

She kept asking – over and over – and here's the difficulty of the passage: Jesus remained silent. He answered her not a word. He didn't even look at her. He ignored her.

It's not like Jesus to turn a deaf ear or to give a cold shoulder to someone asking for mercy and help. Is this the same loving, caring Jesus we know and worship? What caused Him to be so seemingly unkind and cruel?

Now, let's stay with Matthew's account and you can see what is being said more clearly. Jesus is actually playing a role to teach the disciples a lesson. Jesus was not expressing His own heart and spirit in saying this. His heart is seen in John 3:16. Jesus was assuming the role here of the Pharisees who had confronted Him a few days before this. Jesus is saying that God loved everyone. The Pharisees believed that anyone who didn't follow the tradition of the elders was unclean and outside God's mercy and grace. Jesus wanted to show His disciples how cruel, unloving, and unkind the traditions of the elders were.

Sadly, the attitude of the disciples toward the Gentiles was the same as the Pharisees. Gentiles needed the Lord's grace and mercy just like the Jews did, but they didn't care. They were indifferent and silent toward the Gentiles as well.

Notice Matthew 15:22-23. She said, "Have mercy on me." Jesus remained silent. Then the disciples spoke up and said, "Send her away." They were saying, "Lord, do what she asked" – not because they cared about the daughter's healing, but to shut her up and get rid of her.

Now the Lord delivers a hard blow in Matthew 15:24-27. Was the Lord calling her a dog? Again, when Jesus called her a dog, He was not expressing the attitude of His own heart, but the attitude of the Pharisees (and the disciples' attitude toward Gentiles).

I want you to notice something very important. Up to this point, Jesus had been talking to the disciples; not the woman, but she heard what Jesus said to His disciples.

- Notice Matthew 15:24: "But He answered and said," – speaking to the disciples.
- Notice Verse 26: "But He answered and said," – speaking to the disciples.

- But notice Verse 28: “THEN Jesus answered and said TO HER.” This is the first time Jesus speaks directly to the woman. Notice that no matter what she heard Jesus say, she kept asking for mercy for her daughter. She never let up.

Her Response Matthew 15:24-27

Although Jesus was talking to His disciples and not to the woman, she understood what Jesus was saying. She understood that she was a Gentile and had no claim to the promises of God. She had no claim to the covenants of God. She was not a descendant of Abraham.

She had a choice to make. She could be resentful and bitter, or she could be persistent even in the face of an insult.

She could have said, “I’m not a dog. I’m a woman and a mother who cares very deeply for her suffering daughter. How dare you insult me when I ask you for help!”

Let me give you an insight here: There are two Greek words for dog. One means scavengers that attack people in the street and eats garbage. The other word means a little household pet, a lap dog, a puppy. That’s the word used here.

In humility she said, “Lord, I realize I’m not one of the children at the table. I’m not a Jew. I’m not asking you to treat me like one of the children who received a full meal, but the little lap dogs freely receive the crumbs from the table.”

Let me give you another insight. In that day the people didn’t eat with knives and forks; they ate with their hands. They would wipe their hands on chunks of bread, which were then thrown to the waiting animals.

She said, “True, Lord, I’m a dog; a little puppy. Puppies aren’t very useful, but they are much loved.” She wasn’t very valuable to anyone else, but she hoped He could find a place in His affection for even a worthless Gentile. Just a crumb of His mercy and power would be enough to heal her daughter.

Notice Verse 27: He called her a little puppy dog; she called Him Lord.

Her Reward Matthew 15:28

Jesus must have smiled at her persistent faith. Her faith delighted Jesus! Look again at our Lord’s Divine compliment to her: “O woman, great is your faith!” Her faith pleased God! *Without faith it is impossible to please God.* (Hebrews 11:6).

We may be complimented for many things, but the greatest compliment we should desire is the Divine compliment about our faith.

Three times she called Him Lord. She affirmed His deity. She worshiped Him. She confessed Him to be the Jewish Messiah when she addressed Him as the Son of David. She believed He could heal her daughter.

This woman didn’t give up in her faith toward Him and she received the desire of her heart.

She must have ran all the way home, and when she went into the girl’s bedroom, the child was sleeping peacefully. I wonder if she woke her up. Tears began to slide off her cheek as she realized her girl was completely healed. Something had truly happened. Innocence shown in the child’s eyes.

I think she must have sung, “Heaven came down and Glory fills my soul.”

Her testimony was, “I came to Jesus as I was, weary and worn and sad: I found in Him a resting place, and He has made me glad.”

EMPTY STOMACHS – BLIND EYES – DULL HEARTS

Mark 8:1-21

A truck driver was taking his load to a new destination. As he drove, he was intently watching the signs leading to his exit. In his effort to find the right exit, he missed the signs warning him of a low overpass ahead.

To his astonishment, his truck became stuck under the overpass. He could not go forward and he could not back up. Traffic began to back up and tempers began to flare. He got out of his truck and noticed that along side the road where he was stuck was a large building with a fence around it that said he got stuck right next to a mental health facility. On the fence were signs warning: “Don’t talk to inmates.”

Well, all he knew to do was to call the police department who in turn called the water and light department and the city engineers.

They couldn't figure out how to get the truck unstuck, but they called for wreckers, tow trucks, grease, pulleys, wedges and anything else anyone suggested. Nothing worked. The hours passed and the truck remained just as stuck as ever.

By this time a considerable crowd had gathered to watch the workers in their attempts to free the truck. Then came a voice behind the gate of the mental health fence. The inmates had all gathered at the fence to watch the show.

One of the inmates called out to a policeman, "Hey, Mr. Policeman, I know how to get that truck out from under that bridge." The policeman heard the inmate, but ignored him. The inmate, wanting to help, cried out louder, "Hey, I know how to get that truck from under that bridge."

With a hint of irritation in his voice, the police officer said, "Okay, young man, tell me how." Without a pause, the young man said, "Let some of the air out of the tires." That's what they did and the truck was able to pull free.

Now, I don't know if that story is true or not, but the story does teach a couple of important truths. First, it's easy to overlook the obvious, even when it is staring you right in the face. Second, wise people learn to pay attention to all the evidence.

It's interesting how many commentaries on the Gospel of Mark just leave out the first 21 verses of Mark 8. Or if they don't just leave these verses out altogether, just give a token word or two is given and they then go on to the next "important" section of Scripture. But this is the Word of God. It is all important, and I'm just convinced that God wants to say something to our hearts from this passage.

Jesus has three encounters with three different groups in a single day. First, He deals with 4,000 hungry Gentiles – I call it Empty Stomachs. Then He confronts some skeptical Jewish Pharisees – I call it Blind Eyes. Finally, He has to deal with the Spiritual dullness of His disciples – I call it Dull Hearts.

Empty Stomachs: A Revelation of the Savior Mark 8:1-10

You may be a little confused thinking, "Wait, Preacher, didn't we just study in Mark 6 that Jesus fed 5,000 with a lad's lunch and now He feeds 4,000?"

Throughout the centuries, critics of the Bible have affirmed that the accounts of the feeding of the thousands were in conflict; that one of the evangelist must have been wrong, for Jesus claimed 5,000 were fed (John 6:10) while Mark says here the number was 4,000. Maybe they never discovered that the Lord fed the multitudes on two separate occasions. Maybe He did similar things many times, for John wrote, *And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself, could not contain the books that should be written* (John 21:25). It is an old and wise maxim that judgment should never be passed until all the evidence has been considered.

Critics of the Bible claim that there is fault in the Biblical records; that the two miracles were actually only one event but were reported twice and they got their facts and figures wrong.

But there were two separate miracles with some very distinct differences; the differences are:

1. The number fed: 5,000 in one miracle and 4,000 in another.
2. The locations: One on the northeast side of the Sea of Galilee, Jewish land, and the other in Decapolis further down the east coast of the Sea in Gentile land.
3. The occurrence of the miracles after different events: One followed the murder of John the Baptist, but the other the casting out of the demon of the Syrophenician girl.
4. The difference in food supplies on hand: One had five loaves and two fish while the other had seven loaves and an unnumbered amount of fish.
5. The condition of the site: Green grass in one and just ground in the other.
6. The different number of baskets of fragments picked up: twelve in one; seven in the other.

7. The different baskets used to pick up the fragments: A hand basket used by a Jewish traveler, usually hung around the neck and shaped like a vase (5,000) and the other a plaited basket or hamper with two handles, large enough for a man to be placed in it, as in Acts 9:25 where they put Paul in one of these baskets and let him down by the wall.

8. The key is that Jesus Himself refers to two different miracles – Mark 8:16-21.

Why the two miracles?

The feeding of the 5,000 was for the Jews; here in feeding the 4,000 we see our Lord providing for the Gentiles. This is symbolic of the greater issues of evangelism. The Gentiles as well as the Jews are invited to feed on the Bread of Life.

The lesson Jesus wanted to remind the disciples of was His sympathy and compassion for ALL people – Jew and Gentile alike.

Back in Mark 6, the Jews had been with Jesus one day, from early morning until late evening, and they were physically hungry. And He fed them.

These Gentiles were hungry both physically and spiritually. According to Mark 8:2, these folks had been with Him for three days. This crowd obviously did not want to miss anything that this Messiah said or did. They were willing to stay even though they had nothing to eat.

In these empty stomachs, we see a revelation of the Savior in terms of His character and His ministry. In this miracle we see in Jesus a Tender Ministry. He was concerned about the people's physical and spiritual needs.

This tells us what kind of God we serve. God is a God who gives to our needs. He wants us to know that man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord. And, when He provides, there is always more than enough. He will more than meet our needs!

Blind Eyes: A Rejection of the Skeptic Mark 8:11-13

When Jesus finished feeding the 4,000, He sailed back to Capernaum. Scripture says, *And the Pharisees came forth*, which suggest they had been awaiting their chance to pit their wits against His. This was their opportunity!

They must have smiled as they asked of Him some "sign from heaven." They wanted something spectacular from the skies. His old enemies are back, demanding a sign, as though He had not already given them signs enough on earth. This sounds very much like a repeat of Satan's temptation of Christ in the wilderness when he tried to get Jesus to do something stupendous, saying if He would do so he would give Christ the kingdoms of the world (Matthew 4:8-9).

They wanted a sign from heaven, but these were not honest seekers, desiring to see God work in their lives. Verse 11 tells us they began to argue with Him. They just wanted to "test" Him or to trap Him.

If He had yielded to their request, they would have asked for additional evidence. People who demand signs are rarely satisfied when they get one; they want more. When the rich man in hell asked God to send Lazarus back to his five brothers that he might testify to them, the reply was, "They have Moses and the prophets, let them hear them."

Jesus refused their request. Rather, He sighed in His Spirit. Their's were blind eyes that would not be healed.

Jesus said, *"No sign would be given"* and Matthew added, *"except the sign of the prophet Jonah who was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish."* He was speaking of our Lord's resurrection.

Notice Verse 13, *"And He left them."* It's as if Jesus turned on His heels and walked away. What a tragic thing, to be rejected by God!

Dull Hearts: A Rebuke of the Self-Reliant Mark 8:14-21

Now Jesus and His disciples get into a ship and start to the other side of the Sea. Jesus is sitting there, thinking of the hard hearts and the blind eyes of the Pharisees and He says, *"Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of Herod."*

The disciples' hearts are so dull of spiritual things that they thought of physical bread. When they realized they only had one loaf of

bread with them, they thought when Jesus mentioned leaven, He was thinking about physical bread, and they began to blame each other for not bringing more bread along. Jesus could have created more in the boat for them!

Jesus was beside Himself. Jesus said, “How is it that you don’t understand what I’m referring to when I speak of bread and the leaven of the Pharisees?”

Leaven in the Bible is a picture of evil or sin. The leaven of the Pharisees is hypocrisy. The Pharisees were all outward show. They trained the outside to do right and live right, but it was all outward show. There was no life on the inside. The inside was dead. They obeyed the Law on the outside, but there was no love or life on the inside. It was all formalism. They had a form of godliness, but no inward power.

The leaven of Herod and the Sadducees speaks of materialism – the love of the world.

Jesus wanted His disciples to have a Heart salvation. He wanted them to live with His compassion, love, and care for others.

Do you have a Heart Salvation?

I SEE MEN LIKE TREES, WALKING

Mark 8:22-26

In his book on The Gospel of Mark, Ray Steadman shares this interesting illustration. He said that jazz pianist George Shearing was blind from birth, but he composed more than three hundred pieces. Shearing toured continually throughout his long career. He would often walk down busy downtown areas and navigate crowded sidewalks with his dark glasses and white cane.

One day he was standing at a busy intersection at rush hour and was just about to tap someone on the shoulder and ask them if they would mind helping a blind man cross the street. Instead, at that very moment, someone tapped him on the shoulder and said, “Excuse me, Sir,” the stranger said to him, “would you mind helping a blind man cross the street?”

Shearing said he had a little devilment about him and instead of telling the man that he, too, was blind, he thought, “Why not?!” So Shearing said, “I’d be glad to. Here, take my arm.” The two men took off across the street together, the blind leading the blind. Shearing said that he heard many sounds as they crossed the street together – tires squealing, horns blowing, angry voices – but they made it safely to the far curb. Later, Shearing said, “I’ll never do that again, but I’m glad I did it once. It was the biggest thrill of my life.”

There are a number of unusual facts about this miracle:

1. It is recorded only in Mark.
2. It is the only miracle where Jesus healed someone in stages.
3. It is the only time Jesus actually spit on anyone.

I have told you before that every miracle is also a parable. Giving that man sight was a miracle, but it was also a parable. In the Bible, moving from darkness to light is a symbol of conversion. First Peter 2:9 says, “*God has called us out of darkness into His wonderful light.*” Let’s learn a couple of important lessons about conversion.

This miracle is actually a double miracle. This blind man was touched by Jesus, but he couldn’t see clearly, so Jesus touched him again. Actually, Jesus touched him three different times, and these three touches teach us how God wants to deal with each of us. Let’s examine each touch.

In Mark 6, 7 and 8, Jesus performed a cluster of miracles that hint rather strongly that our Lord was disappointed and disheartened with His disciples because they were slow to understand and perceive the spiritual lessons He was trying to teach them. To help them understand His disappointment in them, our Lord performs a cluster of miracles similar to a miracle He had performed before.

In Mark 6:32-44, Jesus again performed two very similar miracles to help His disciples to see that they were very slow to understand spiritual truths.

In both miracles, friends brought the men to Jesus for Him to heal and Jesus took both men away from their friends to a private place to heal them. In both cases Jesus used His spit as an aid to healing. In healing the deaf and mute man, Jesus used His own form of

sign language to offer hope to the man who needed healing.

Because the man could not hear, Jesus put His own fingers in His own ears to show the man that he was going to heal his ears. Then He spat and touched His own tongue to show the man what He was about to do to heal his tongue. Then He did to the man what He had done to Himself to demonstrate what the man could expect Jesus to do to him in order to heal him.

Jesus is going to spit in the man's eyes to reveal to the disciples the way God opens eyes of the spiritually blind eyes and how God is able to take someone who cannot understand spiritual truth and how He brings them to the place of full comprehension.

Let's examine each of the three touches of Jesus:

1. 1. 1. 1. 1. I. The First Touch of Conviction Mark 8:22-23a

Look back at Mark 8:18. It is possible to have eyes and have no vision. It is possible to have eyes and not see. That is why the friends of this man brought this blind man to Jesus.

Every man who is lost is blind spiritually. That's why Jesus told Nicodemus in John 3:3, "*Unless you are born again, you cannot SEE (understand) the kingdom of God (the truths of God).*" A lost person is blind to God and to God's ways. He is also blind to his lost condition until God turns the light on for him to see his lost condition. The Bible says that Satan "*has blinded the lost man's spiritual eyes that he might not see the light of the Gospel of Christ*" (2 Corinthians 4:4).

But these friends brought this man to Jesus to open his eyes. And look what Jesus did: "*He took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village.*"

Now, why did Jesus do that? Remember that they are in Bethsaida, a city of great unbelief. As you travel to the Holy Land you will notice something unusual. Many of the cities that existed during the ministry of Jesus are still thriving cities – Tiberius, Cana, Jericho, and Bethlehem are all large cities. But there are two particular cities that are nothing but a bunch of ruins now. Those two cities are Capernaum and Bethsaida. Why is that?

The answer is because these were cities of unbelief. Listen to what Jesus said in Luke 10:13, "*Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.*" The next verse says the same thing about Capernaum. These cities rejected Jesus and now they lie in ruins. It's dangerous for a person or a city to reject Jesus.

Jesus wants to lead the spiritually blind man away from unbelief so He can be alone with him and turn on the Gospel light so He can show the man some things. What things? The spiritually blind man needs to see that he is lost without Jesus, and horribly sinful, and headed to Hell without Jesus. He also needs to see that Jesus totally loves him and desires to forgive him and has paid his sin debt on the

cross and that Jesus reaches out to him in love and grace and mercy. The sinner needs Jesus and no one can come to Him unless the Father draws him. That's conviction.

The first thing Jesus did was to take this man by the hand and lead him away from unbelief into a place where He could deal with him personally. That's the first touch of conviction.

1. 1. 1. 1. 1. II. The Second Touch of Conversion Mark 8:23b-24

One moment, this man was living in darkness and the next moment, he was in the light. His eyes were open, but his vision was still blurry. For each of us who do not have natural 20/20 vision, you can relate to this state. How do things look when you take off your glasses or remove your contacts? Some of us can relate to this man.

Giving this man sight was a miracle, but it was also a parable. In the Bible, moving from darkness to light is a symbol of conversion. "*God has called us out of darkness into His wonderful light.*" (1 Peter 2:9).

This is regeneration or being born again and it happens instantly.

There's a great deal of misunderstanding concerning regeneration or being born again, but to explain this truth simply, I'm going to draw an imaginary line on the platform. Everyone on this side of the line is lost without Jesus Christ. We were all here at one time. And when you step over the line, you move from darkness to light. The Bible calls this passing from death to life.

The word "salvation" refers to the entire work of God in your life. I'm talking about a point of conversion – the point of regeneration.

Being born again is an instantaneous experience. Hopefully you grow from that point, but there is a point where you move from death to life and from darkness to light.

Like physical birth, regeneration happens instantly, and it only happens once. And just as you can't go back and undo your biological birth, you can't undo your spiritual birth.

God uses a variety of methods to lead us from death to life. God is a God of variety. God seldom saves two people the same way. Some people come to Christ in a dramatic way with tears and anguish. Others are so full of joy they laugh and rejoice at the point of regeneration. Others just quietly place their faith in Jesus. God saved the Apostle Paul by shining a bright light from heaven that knocked him off his feet. There's not another similar conversion experience like this in the Bible.

We may see someone else's salvation experience and want one just like it, but remember that God is a God of variety.

Jesus healed three blind men differently. Vance Havner used to say if the three blind men compared notes, they would have disagreed about the right way to be healed from blindness. One man said, "I was blind and Jesus touched me once, and I was healed. That's the way Jesus works." The second man says, "No. I was blind and Jesus touched me once, and I saw men as trees walking. Then He spit on my eyes and touched me again. That's the way Jesus works. A third man would say, "You're both wrong. I was blind and Jesus spit in the dirt and made clay and put it on my eyes and told me to wash it off in the Pool of Siloam. That's the way Jesus works."

Vance Havner said if those three men were here today we'd have three new church denominations within a week: The One-touched Church, The Mud-in-your-eye Church, and The Spit-in-the-eye Church.

The first touch is Conviction. The second touch is Conversion.

1. 1. 1. 1. 1. III. The Third Touch of Correction Mark 8:25-26

So why did Jesus touch him again? That question is easier to answer in the negative:

- It was not because of any lack in Jesus, as if He didn't have the power to heal him at once.
- It was not that this man's blindness was a particularly hard case.
- It was not because Jesus tried and failed the first time.

I really think Jesus performed a two-part miracle to teach us a couple of lessons.

A. There is so much more to the Christian life than conversion.

The tragedy is there are multitudes of Christians who have stepped over the line from darkness to light, who have their ticket to heaven punched, but they have never grown in their salvation.

The main reason God saved you and me was not so we could go to heaven when we die. Now that's one of the benefits. God saved us so we can grow spiritually until we are conformed to the image of Christ.

B. God wants to continue to touch our lives and to correct our faulty sight until we see things the way Jesus sees them.

Sometimes we see things the wrong way and Jesus has to correct our spiritual vision. Jack Eckerd inherited a chain of drugstores from his father and expanded the business until there were almost 3,000 Eckerd drugstores. Today Eckerd's has been bought out by CVS and RiteWay.

Jack Eckerd was a hard-driving businessman and only a nominal Christian until he attended a men's retreat with his church in Clearwater, Florida. On this retreat, God did a new work in Jack's life. God touched his heart and Jack started seeing things differently.

On Monday he walked into one of his stores and noticed for the first time they sold adult magazines with nude pictures. It disturbed him. Being a businessman, he called his CFO and told him he wanted to get rid of all those magazines from all his stores. He asked his CFO how much money they would lose. The CFO called him back and said they would be losing \$500,000 a year. Jack said, "I don't care. Get rid of them."

What happened? He started seeing things differently. He had clear eyes and a full heart.

There's the first touch of Conviction. Do you realize that you need Jesus? There's the second touch of Conversion. Have you been born again? Have you passed from death to life? God isn't finished with you. There's the third and fourth and tenth and hundredth touch of Correction until we are made into the image of Christ.

IS THAT YOUR FINAL ANSWER?

Mark 8:27-30

Vince Lombardi, the famous head coach of the Green Bay Packers, once watched his team suffer a humiliating defeat to an underdog opponent. The next day before practice he held up an object to his players, including some pro-bowl veterans, and said, "Gentlemen, this is a football." Coach Lombardi figured it was time to call his team back to basics.

After living with His disciples for almost two years, Jesus paused to ask them this basic question: "Who do you say that I am?"

In fact, in this passage, Jesus asked two questions that are eternal in nature. The first has to do with what others say about Jesus. Their opinions of Him reveal the condition of their hearts. Their answer to His first question demonstrates whether those they talked to were saved or not.

The second question has to do with your personal opinion of who Jesus is. Your answer to this question will determine where you spend eternity. So, it is of vital importance that you carefully consider how you answer this question.

Let's look at this conversation between Jesus and His disciples because these two questions continue to be of the utmost importance in the world today. So, I want to borrow a line from a popular game show and ask you my own question: "Is That Your Final Answer?"

1. 1. 1. 1. 1. I. It Is A Preliminary Question Mark 8:27

This was a set-up question. "*Who do men*" – the average man on the street – "*Who do men say I am?*"

Jesus and His disciples are in the "cities of Caesarea Philippi" which was a predominately Gentile area located some 25 miles north of Bethsaida where Jesus had just healed the blind man. This was a beautiful area, but it was steeped in pagan religion. This is a very important question because what we believe about Jesus will lead us to life-changing decisions. It's a question that, sooner or later, every person will have to answer.

Some questions you can ignore or avoid. Some questions are not even worthy of an answer, but this question will determine your destiny. It will determine where you will spend eternity – in Heaven or Hell!

If someone else went around asking folks, "Who do you say I am?", we'd think he or she were insecure. But Jesus asked this question for the sake of our security. Jesus told the crowds in John 8:24, *unless you believe that I am God, you will die in your sins.*"

Romans 10:9 promises: *"If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is your Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved."*

Jesus is Lord! I have accepted Him as my personal Lord and Savior. Jesus asked His disciples, "*Who do men say I am?*"

In answering this question, the disciples didn't tell the whole story. They passed over some of the ugly criticism they had heard. Some had accused Him of being a winebibber and a glutton, as well as a friend of publicans and sinners. Instead, they told Him only the complimentary things that they had heard.

1. Some said that He was John the Baptist, come back to life.

Jesus certainly resembled John the Baptist in his preaching. Both men preached a message of repentance and righteousness. But this theory probably came from Herod Antipas who put John to death.

2. Others said that He was Elijah, returned from Heaven.

Both Jesus and Elijah had ministries marked by clear, convicting preaching and convincing miracles. Elijah raised a dead boy to life and caused the food supply for a widow and her son to continue for many days.

3. Still others said that He was Jeremiah or one of the prophets.

Like Jeremiah, Jesus carried out a ministry marked by compassion and brokenness.

Like Moses, Jesus declared the Law of God.

Like Isaiah, Jesus preached about sacrifice and holiness.

Like Daniel, the message of Jesus was a prophetic message of a coming King and His kingdom.

Like Hosea, Jesus loved the unlovable and was willing to redeem lost, wretched sinners.

That's what the people were saying, but other voices were also expressing their opinions about Jesus that day.

- The Pharisees and other religious folks said, *"He has a devil, and is mad; Why do you listen to Him?"*(John 10:20).
- The scribes, who were viewed as great teachers of the Law, said, *"He cast out devils by Beelzebub, the prince of devils."* (Mark 3:22).
- The Sanhedrin, the ruling body of the Jewish religion, said, *"He speaks blasphemy and He is guilty unto death. And they spat in His face and beat Him with the palms of their hands."* Matthew 26:65-68).
- His own family said, *"He is beside Himself"* (Mark 3:21).
- While He was on the cross, the chief priest mocked Him saying, *"He saved others; Himself He cannot save."*(Mark 15:31-32).
- Some of the saddest words in the gospels are found in John 1:11: *"And He came unto His own but His own received Him not."*

1. 1. 1. 1. 1. II. It Is A Probing, Personal Question Mark 8:29

After Jesus heard Public opinion, now He wants to hear their Personal opinion. "Speak for yourself. Who do YOU say that I am?"

This is the moment of truth! Everything Jesus has taught them and shown them has been leading up to this moment in time. Every miracle was leading to this one moment in time. Every word of truth Jesus spoke was leading His men to this great spiritual crossroad. Their response to this question would let Jesus know how effective His personal ministry to these men had been.

These men had been with Him constantly. They had seen Him in solitude, in the midst of crowds, when He prayed, when He preached, when He worked miracles. The question was intensely personal! Jesus didn't want to know what others thought of Him, but what His disciples thought of Him.

I heard about an ordination council testing a young seminary graduate. They fired all kinds of theological questions at him. They asked him what he believed about the inspiration and authority of Scripture, about the Person of Christ, about the Holy Spirit, about the nature of the Church and a host of other issues. With each question he replied, "Dr. Strong says ...". He was quoting Augustus Strong, who wrote a classic text on systematic theology.

The council was pleased with all his answers and voted to grant him his ordination. After the meeting, the chairman complimented the pastor-to-be: "Your beliefs are as straight as an arrow, as solid as they come."

The young man replied, "I don't believe any of those things. I was only quoting Dr. Strong, because I knew that's what you wanted to hear." To say the least, the ordination council was heartsick to hear that.

In like matter, Jesus has no desire to hear us talk secondhand about what our parents, or our pastor, or our Church believes. He wants us to forge our own personal faith in Him. In the literal Greek text, Jesus' question emphasizes the word "you" by stating it twice. It literally reads, *"But you, who do you say I am?"* Jesus was implying, "Are you willing to stand alone in your belief about Me? Do you dare to go against the tide of public opinion and hold a personal conviction?"

Peter answered for all of the disciples. *"You are THE Christ, THE Son of THE Living God."* Not one among many. You are Beyond and Above ALL others.

I Peter 3:15: *"Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who ask you to give the reason for the hope that is in you."*

This was not a question just for our Lord's disciples. It is a question we must all one day answer.

I'm glad we are confronted with that question! For my part, I'm ready with my answer! Are you ready with yours?

Jesus is so precious to me. I say with Paul, "For me, living is Christ and dying is just more of Christ, for I will be with Him." I love Him with all of my being and as best I can, I am committed to Him. He is my Savior and my Lord!

I agree with an old black preacher as he spoke these words in a sermon in Detroit in 1976: "That's My King."

"That's My King"

(The late Dr. S. M. Lockeridge, a pastor from San Diego, CA, said these words

in a sermon in Detroit in 1976.)

My King was born King. The Bible says He's a Seven Way King. He's the King of the Jews – that's an Ethnic King. He's the King of Israel – that's a National King. He's the King of the ages. He's the King of Heaven. He's the King of glory. He's the King of kings and He is the Lord of lords. Now that's my King.

Well, I wonder if you know Him. Do you know Him? Don't try to mislead me. Do you know my King? David said the Heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament shows His handiwork. My King is the only one of whom there are no means of measure

that can define His limitless love. No far seeing telescope can bring into visibility the coastline of the shore of His supplies. No barriers can hinder Him from pouring out His blessing.

He's enduringly strong. He's entirely sincere. He's eternally steadfast. He's immortally graceful. He's imperially powerful. He's impartially merciful. That's my King. He's God's Son. He's the sinner's Savior. He's the centerpiece of civilization. He stands alone in Himself. He's honest. He's unique. He's unparalleled. He's unprecedented. He's supreme. He's pre-eminent. He's the grandest idea in literature. He's the highest personality in philosophy. He's the supreme problem in higher criticism. He's the fundamental doctrine of historic theology. He's the carnal necessity of spiritual religion.

That's my King.

He's the miracle of the age. He's the superlative of everything good that you choose to call Him. He's the only one able to supply all our needs simultaneously. He supplies strength for the weak. He's available for the tempted and the tired. He sympathizes and He saves. He's the Almighty God who guides and keeps all his people. He heals the sick. He cleanses the lepers. He forgives sinners. He discharged debtors. He delivers the captives. He defends the feeble. He blesses the young. He serves the unfortunate.

He regards the aged. He rewards the diligent and He beautifies the meek. That's my King.

Do you know Him? Well, my King is a King of knowledge. He's the wellspring of wisdom. He's the doorway of deliverance. He's the pathway of peace. He's the roadway of righteousness. He's the highway of holiness. He's the gateway of glory.

He's the master of the mighty. He's the captain of the conquerors. He's the head of the heroes. He's the leader of the legislatures. He's the overseer of the overcomers.

He's the governor of governors. He's the prince of princes. He's the King of kings and He's the Lord of lords. That's my King.

His office is manifold. His promise is sure. His light is matchless. His goodness is limitless. His mercy is everlasting. His love never changes. His Word is enough.

His reign is righteous. His yoke is easy and His burden is light. I wish I could describe Him to you ... but He's indescribable. That's my King. He's incomprehensible,

He's invincible, and He is irresistible.

I'm coming to tell you this, that the heavens of heavens can't contain Him, let alone some man explain Him. You can't get Him out of

your mind. You can't get Him off your hands. You can't outlive Him and you can't live without Him. The Pharisees couldn't stand Him, but they found out they couldn't stop Him. Pilate couldn't find any fault in Him. The witnesses couldn't get their testimonies to agree about Him. Herod couldn't kill Him. Death couldn't handle Him and the grave couldn't hold Him.

That's my King.

He always has been and He always will be. I'm talking about the fact that He had no predecessor and He'll have no successor. There's nobody before Him and there'll be nobody after Him. You can't impeach Him and He's not going to resign. That's my King!

That's my King!

THE MISSION OF THE MESSIAH

Mark 8:31-33

In Mark 8:22-26 Jesus healed a blind man, but He did not heal this blind man the way He normally healed folks. Normally it would take one touch or one word to heal a person, but when He healed this blind man, Jesus touched him twice before he could see clearly. It was not that Jesus couldn't heal the man with one touch, but He healed this man the way He did because the disciples were slow to understand some lessons He was trying to teach them, so it was because of the disciples' slowness to learn spiritual truths that Jesus touched the man twice.

After Jesus healed the blind man by touching him twice, Jesus asked His disciples two important questions: (1) "Who do men say that I am?" and (2) "Who do YOU say I am?" Peter speaks for all of the disciples, "You are the Christ (the Messiah), the Son of the Living God!" Jesus congratulates Peter on his answer: "You are right, Peter. I am the Messiah."

But Jesus knew Peter was shortsighted and was not ready to deal with all that it meant for Jesus to be the Messiah. Peter only saw that Jesus was going to be King of His kingdom and that the disciples were going to play an important part in His kingdom. Peter saw the Crown, but he did not see the Cross, and Jesus is about to teach Peter that truth. Peter is going to require a second touch, like the blind man. Peter saw some things about Jesus' Messiahship, but he did not see clearly what being the Messiah meant. Jesus destroys their misconceptions regarding who the Messiah is and what the Messiah is supposed to do.

Three things I want us to see as Jesus reveals The Mission of the Messiah.

1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1. I. His Mission is Revealed Mark 8:31-32a

This is really a preview of things to come for Jesus the Messiah. Up until this time, Jesus had spoken in veiled speech about what His mission was. He spoke to His disciples about His mission in riddles or parables.

For example, He had told them, "*Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up,*" "*... but He spake of the temple of His body.*" (John 2:19, 21). The disciples didn't understand at this point what He meant by that.

Jesus had said, "*And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life,*" but the disciples didn't know He was talking about Himself.

The disciples of John the Baptist came to Jesus and asked, "*Why do we and the Pharisees fast oft, but your disciples do not fast?*" And Jesus said to them, "*Can the children of the bridegroom mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them*" but the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken from then, and then they shall fast" (Matthew 9:14-15). This is another veiled reference to His death.

But after Peter's confession that Jesus was the Anointed Christ and Messiah, Jesus began to speak of His approaching death in a perfectly direct and unmistakable way.

"*He began to teach them*" (Mark 8:31); "*He spoke this word openly*" (Mark 8:32).

There is a connection between Peter's confession and this first announcement of the cross. If our Lord had allowed His death to come upon Him without a word of warning to His disciples, it would have shattered their faith completely. Even after telling them that He must die, it was still somewhat of a shock when it happened.

Jesus gave His disciples a preview of what was to come for Him as the Messiah: He would suffer many things. He would be rejected by men. He would be killed – crucified on Calvary. He would be raised from the dead on the third day.

On the other hand, if Jesus had announced too quickly what His mission was to His disciples, if He had told them from the start, they would have refused to believe He was the Messiah and would not have followed Him. The Jews had been bred to believe that the Messiah's end would be a Throne, and Jesus spoke of a Cross.

After Peter's confession, Jesus continued to give His disciples a preview of what was to come. In the Upper Room, "*While they were eating, Jesus took some bread, and after blessing it, He broke it and gave it to His disciples and said, 'Take, eat; this is My body.' And He took the cup and gave thanks and gave it to them saying, 'Drink from it, all of you; for this is My blood of the covenant, which is to be shed on behalf of many for the forgiveness of sins.'*" (Matthew 26:26-28).

In this preview, Jesus spoke of:

A. His Submission Mark 8:31

Although Jesus knew what would happen to Him in Jerusalem, He continued onward.

"He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem"(Luke 9:51).

B. His Suffering Mark 8:31

Jesus told them that His body would be beaten; that His hands and feet would be nailed to the cross..

C. His Substitution Mark 8:31

Romans 5:8: *"But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."*

1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1. II. His Message is Rebuked Mark 8:32

When His disciples hear Jesus speaking like this, they are dumbfounded. His words go against everything they have ever been taught about Who the Messiah would be and What He would do for Israel. The concept that the Messiah, the Christ, would actually die was more than they could comprehend!

Someone needed to do something! Someone needed to speak up! Someone needed to talk some sense into Jesus. And, Peter is just the man for the job!

Now go back to Verse 31. *"And He began to teach them that the Son of Man MUST..."* The word "must" means "a divine necessity," "a divine Appointment that must be Experienced or Endured and Submitted to. It must be kept."

The word "Must" fills the life of Jesus:

- At twelve years of age Jesus told Mary and Joseph, *"I MUST be about my Father's business"*
Luke 2:49.
- Jesus told Nicodemus in John 3:7, *"You MUST be born again."*
- John 3:14: *"And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so MUST the Son of Man be lifted up."*
- John 4:4: *"And He MUST needs go through Samaria."* He would meet a woman at a well who needed to be saved.

Now He tells His disciples in Mark 8:31 that He "MUST suffer many things" and that He "MUST be rejected by the elders and chief priest," and that He "MUST be killed" and "after three days He MUST rise again." He is the Lamb slain from before the foundation of the world; His blood sacrifice would atone for man's sin.

"Then Peter took Him aside." While the rest of the disciples stood there amazed by what they have just heard Him say, Peter "took Him."

This phrase carries the idea of one person leading another person away to talk to them. Peter walks up to Jesus, puts his arm around the Lord's shoulder and leads Him away from the group. Then Peter began to rebuke and admonish Him.

Maybe Peter says something like, "Now, Lord, You need to watch what you say! We know Who You are! You are the Christ! Don't be talking about dying, suffering, and rejection! You should be talking about Victory; not some discouraging sermon about death!"

Or he could have said, *"Be it far from Thee, Lord: this shall not be unto Thee."*(Matthew 16:22). Peter is saying, "Heaven forbid! This

will never happen to you, Lord!”

I think it was stronger than that! I think Peter said something like, “Over my dead body!” Peter was rebuking and correcting the Lord. Peter just couldn't see a cross in the Lord's future!

1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1. III. His Men are Reprimanded Mark 8:33

The same man who was applauded a few moments ago by Jesus and told he was speaking by inspiration of God when he said that Jesus was the Christ, the Messiah, is now denounced by Jesus as the mouthpiece of Satan.

His name was Simon. Jesus changed his name to Peter – a rock, a stone. Now Jesus said to Peter in Matthew 16, “*You are an offense to Me.*” The word “offense” means “a stone of stumbling.” “You are Peter, a stone; you are an offense, a stumbling stone.”

Don't be too hard on Peter. He loved the Lord and wanted the best for Him. And I think the rest of the disciples were probably nodding in agreement with Peter. Peter just wasn't seeing clearly and needed a second touch!

Peter rebuked the Lord and now the Lord rebuked Peter! Our Lord's rebuke to Peter was harsh. He turned His back to Peter and looked at the rest of the disciples and said, “Get thee behind Me, Satan!” Literally, “Get out of my sight you false accuser! You only care for fleshly things and not the things of the Lord!”

But when Jesus said, “Get thee behind Me, Satan,” was He addressing Peter or Satan? When Peter tried to talk Jesus out of going to the cross to die, Jesus heard the voice of another speaking. He heard in Peter's words the voice of Satan. To Peter, what he said made sense. To Jesus, the things Peter said revealed that Satan was using Peter to attack the Lord.

How cunning Satan is! When Jesus was on the Mount of Temptation, Satan came to Him and tried to get Jesus to claim the glory of the kingdom without the agony of the cross. Jesus rebuked the devil then and He rebukes the devil now.

If Satan couldn't trip Jesus up himself on the Mount of Temptation and he couldn't trip Him up through the hypocritical Pharisees, he'd try to mislead Him through His closest disciple. What a warning to us to be on the lookout for Satan to work even through people who love us and want the best for us.

Sometimes our best friends will try to get us to do something or to go somewhere that we know we should not. Remember this: When even your best friends try to get you to do something wrong, it is Satan who is using them as his tool to try to get you to compromise and to consider Satan's suggestions.

Simon Peter would have been shocked had someone suggested he had become the instrument of evil against Jesus. We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but the evil forces of darkness.

So many of us have our “Peter moments.” Sometimes we unknowingly lead someone into evil or maybe someone leads us into evil. We all have our “Peter moments,” but that doesn't mean that our usefulness and effectiveness are at an end. It simply means that we need to pick up all the pieces and move on for the glory of God.

Thank God Jesus did fulfill His “MUST” appointment. He did suffer many things. He was rejected. He did die on the cross. He did rise on the third day. And He did it all for US – you and me.

Satan will suggest, “Don't come to Jesus” or “Come to Jesus, just don't do it now. Wait a while!”

Don't listen to the voice of Satan; listen to the Voice of the Holy Spirit!

THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP

Mark 8:34-35

Someone has well said that the first question we have to answer is “Heaven or Hell?” Which will it be? Once that question is settled, we are faced with the second question: “Heaven or Earth?” Again, which world is it to be?

Jesus calls His disciples to come around Him. He also calls the crowds to gather near where they can hear. Then Jesus begins to speak.

As He does, Jesus tells the gathered crowd that there is a high price attached to being His follower. The words of Jesus in these verses strike a death blow to the cheap, easy, feel-good religion that is being passed off as Christianity in these days.

Many believe they can have Jesus and the world too. Many believe they can claim to be followers of Christ while they live their lives as they please. Jesus lets us know in no uncertain terms that such notions are utterly false. If a person is going to be a follower of Jesus Christ, there is a very high price to pay.

Understand that these words of our Lord is not on the theme of how to become a Christian. Jesus did not say, “Whoever will come TO Me” – that’s Salvation; that’s Justification; that’s Redemption. No, these folks are already saved.

Jesus said, “Whosoever will come AFTER Me” – that’s Sanctification. That’s growing in the Lord. That is conforming to the image of Christ. That kind of living separates the men from the boys spiritually. Most Christians have come To Christ for salvation, but they have not come AFTER Christ to grow in His likeness.

Someone has described these kind of Christians as “wasp Christians.” A wasp is as big as he’s going to be when he comes from the nest.

I heard about a little boy who fell out of bed. His mother asked him why he thought he fell out of bed. He said, “Well, I guess I fell asleep too close to where I got in.” That’s the problem with too many Christians. They get into the kingdom of God and then just go to sleep spiritually.

Let me show you what Jesus did say and what He did not say. Jesus said, “Whosoever will come after Me ... and take up HIS cross ...” We have a cross to bear and Jesus had a cross to bear. They are two different crosses.

There is a sense in which our Lord’s cross is solitary and unshared. In its redemptive aspect Christ’s cross stands alone. Nothing we can possibly do can add to the atoning work of Christ. Christ’s sacrifice does not need completing. It is complete. His sacrifice on the cross is a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice. Nothing remains to be done. “It is finished.” As a redeeming sacrifice the cross of Christ remains for ever unshared.

Now, Jesus shares three things with us in these verses.

1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1. I. Jesus Shares a Pattern Mark 8:34

Let me remind you that not everyone who claims to be a Christian can truly be called a disciple of Jesus; a learner of Jesus. Jesus’ followers have four requirements that they must meet in this life if they are to be His disciple. Let me share them with you today.

A. Come After Me

Being born again, getting saved, or whatever you want to call it, is far more than praying a prayer at an altar. A lot of people come to an altar, pray a prayer, and profess to know Christ as Savior. But there is no change; no difference in their life.

You see, you can pray the sinner’s prayer all day and not get saved. You can walk the Roman Road and take a Journey through John and not be saved. You only get saved when the Holy Spirit convicts you of your sin and the Father draws you to Himself and you repent of your sin and totally commit yourself to Christ and you leave the old life behind to follow Christ into a new and different life. You become a new creation in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17).

True salvation is not some form of “easy believing” that leaves you unchanged. True salvation will cause you to act differently, talk differently, and think differently. Your desires and habits will change. Your interest and commitment will change. You will want to follow Jesus.

So let me ask you: Are you saved?

B. Deny Himself

The world says, “Pamper yourself. Indulge yourself. Put yourself first.” Jesus said to deny yourself.

Denying self is not the same thing as self-denial. Some folks deny themselves certain things and think that’s self-denial. Some think you ought to deny yourself a mate – stay single. Some believe women should deny themselves make-up and jewelry.

Denying self is far more intense than that. Denying self implies that I stop listening to my own desires and wants and listen to His desires for me. When I truly deny myself, I have no will but His will. I have no plans but His plans. I give up all my rights and I relinquish all control of my life to the Lord Jesus Christ.

First Corinthians 6:19-20.

C. Take Up His Cross

This phrase had much meaning for the people in Jesus' day. Historians estimate that over 30,000 people were crucified by the Romans during Jesus' lifetime. In that day, a cross was not a piece of jewelry or a decoration on a church building. A cross was an instrument of shame, humiliation, suffering, torture, and death.

When a man took up his cross, he carried the instrument of his own death on his shoulders. When he reached his destination, he was laid down on the cross he had carried; he was nailed to it; he suffered and died on it.

Some people think that the burdens of life are a cross they must bear. Some think an abusive spouse or a wayward child or some illness or physical handicap is their cross.

No, Jesus is calling on us to die to our self. He is calling us to willingly bear the shame, the reproach, the humility, the suffering, the hatred, and even the death that may come to those who are associated with Him.

We take up our cross when we are willing to suffer any attack for Jesus' sake.

D. "Follow Me."

The true disciple of Jesus turns his back on his self and his old life. A true disciple of Christ takes up his cross and is willing to lay down everything for the glory of God. He follows Jesus wherever He leads in total obedience and submission to the Lord Jesus Christ.

The phrase suggest ongoing action. Jesus is calling His people to be constant followers.

1. 1. 1. 1. 1. II. Jesus Shares a Paradox Mark 8:35-37

The way to save your life is to lose it. A paradox is a statement that seems contradictory, but is still true.

Jesus says that you have a choice. You can live your life as you see fit. You can refuse to come to Christ for salvation. You can call all the shots. You can be your own boss. You can do as your please, live your life on your own terms, but in the end you will lose it all and find there is nothing but an eternity in Hell waiting for you.

On the other hand, you can commit your life to Jesus, deny your own will, give up all your rights, surrender to His Lordship and follow Him faithfully, and at the end of your way, the door of Heaven will be opened to you.

1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1. III. Jesus Speaks of a Penalty Mark 8:38

Jesus has a word here for those who reject His message; to those who are ashamed of Him and His words.

In Revelation 21:8 and 27 John gives us the Roll-call of the Damned. Verse 8 begins with the "fearful."

There is a price to pay to commit yourself to Christ and not everyone is willing to pay the price. There is the price of confession.

Some refuse to pay the price of admitting they are sinners. They will not pay the price of humbling themselves before God. They will not pay the price of repenting and forsaking their sins and their evil life style. They love their sin too much. Some refuse to pay the price of total commitment to only Christ.

These will face the judgment when Jesus comes. For those who refuse to acknowledge Him, He will refuse to acknowledge them before the Father. He will hear those awful words, "Depart from Me. I never knew you."

Which ending would you prefer: "Depart from Me. I never knew you" or, "Well done, good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of your Lord!" ?

Are you a disciple of Christ? Well, let me help you to decide.

Look at Galatians 2:20. Now draw a sketch of a man and draw a large circle around the heart area. Draw a throne where the heart would be. Write two words in the circle: "God" and "self."

If you place God on the throne and self off the throne, then God controls your life. But if self is on the throne and you are living according to his desires and wishes, then Christ is not in control of your life.

Now be honest: Who is on the throne of your life? Christ or self?

WHAT IS YOUR SOUL WORTH?

Mark 8:36-38

The emphasis here is placed upon the worth of the human soul. What is man's soul anyway?

It is that moral, spiritual, never-dying part of man that connects him to God. Your soul is the real you. It is that part of man which loves, hopes, prays, believes, trusts, and responds in faith. Take the soul from man and what do you have left? Nothing but an animal. Nothing but that which turns back to dust. But with a soul, man is an ever-living, never-dying being. No wonder David said that we are "wonderfully and fearfully made."

Jesus always put the greatest emphasis upon the soul of man: Matthew 10:28; Matthew 5:29-30.

Jesus says that the wise man always considers the great worth of his soul. Satan has done a good job in getting us to think more about our body than we do our soul. That is not to say that the body is not of great importance. It is; but the soul is of greater worth.

Here is a boy who is in love with a girl and wants her to marry him, but he is shy and tries to think of some special way to ask her to marry him. So he gets her a beautiful diamond ring, wraps the box that it came in in beautiful paper. At the end of the evening he pulls from his pocket a beautiful box and inside the box is a large diamond ring. He gives her the box and asks her not to open it until she is in her room.

The next day he notices she is not wearing the ring, so he asked about the gift. She says that it's up in her room. He says, "Would you go get it?" She brings back the box and talks about its beauty. He says, "But what about the ring?" She says, "Oh, that piece of glass with wire wrapped around it. I threw it away. But isn't the box beautiful!?" (Now, girls you would think she has room to rent upstairs, unfurnished.)

We are like that. We save the box, shower the box, feed the box, exercise the box ... but do little for the jewel inside – the soul.

1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1. I. The Value of the Soul Mark 8:36-37

How much is your soul worth? The highest test to determine the value of something is to see what has been done for it.

Because of sin, Satan has a claim on the soul of every person who is born on this earth. How much was it worth to God to reclaim your soul and mine for Himself? What would it cost Him?

A. The Supreme appraisal of the value of man's soul is the death of God's Son on the cross.

Your soul is priceless to God. You have nothing else of equal value. In fact everything in this world is not equal to the value of your soul. There is only one other thing that is priceless and only one other thing that is suitable to redeem your soul and mine – the blood of Jesus.

If there had been any other way for the Heavenly Father to ransom our souls except through the death of His Son, He would surely have chosen that way. If God could have purchased us out of sin with silver and gold, He would have done it. He owns all the wealth in the world, but even that could not buy us back from sin. Why? Because our souls are priceless.

The only other priceless thing in the universe is Christ's blood. Do you know how precious you are? Precious enough for the Son of God to leave His heavenly throne and stoop all the way to Bethlehem's manger. Precious enough for Jesus to shed His blood on a rugged cross. Precious enough for Him to endure God's wrath for you. Only that offering would suffice when it came to rescuing your lost soul and mine.

B. The Sinner's condemnation proves the worth of a man's soul.

Have you ever thought that the endless punishment in hell was too stiff a penalty for a lifetime of sin? Why doesn't God punish someone with seventy years in hell for seventy years of rebellion on earth?

The reason hell lasts forever is that lost people have sold a priceless soul. No amount of time can compensate for its loss.

1. 1. 1. 1. 1. II. The Vanity of the World Mark 8:36-37

What does Jesus mean when He says, "What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his own soul?" What is the

world that He's talking about?

It may be the world of Pleasure ... or Power ... or Popularity ... or Possessions.

A man begins to sell out when his attitude is, "I'd rather have the world than Jesus. I don't need a Savior from my sin. My joy and goal is the things of the world apart from God."

There are some things a man ought to consider if he's thinking about choosing the world over Christ.

1. No one can gain the whole world. No one ever has!
2. What you gain, you can't keep.

All the world offers is temporary – 2 Peter 3:12.

Alexander the Great's casket had holes on either side with hands out and palms turned up to show folks that, although he had gained an empire, he took nothing with him.

If you want to see what you're worth, add up everything you have that money cannot buy and that death cannot take away.

3. If you could gain the whole world and keep it, it wouldn't satisfy.

There is no satisfaction apart from Jesus.

1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1. III. The Vastness of the Loss

There are two and only two possible states for the soul – saved or lost.

It is not possible to gain the whole world, but it is possible to lose your soul. A lost soul is simply someone who does not know Jesus as his/her personal Lord and Savior. Let me give you four characteristics of a lost soul:

1. A lost soul is Deserted.

If you are apart from Christ you are utterly alone. You may think you have plenty of company and that you can face God together, but on the judgment day you will have no one to defend you when you answer for your sins. All will desert you – abandoned by God and man if you remain in that condition.

The French theist Voltaire uttered these frightening words just before he died: "I am abandoned by God and man. I shall go to hell. Oh Christ, Oh Jesus Christ!"

2. A lost soul is Defenseless.

A lost soul is defenseless against ultimate condemnation. There is nothing he can do to save himself. The best thing for a lost soul to do is plead guilty now, confess his sins, humble himself before God, and pray for God's grace to rescue him from eternal loss.

3. A lost soul is Desperate.

I cannot think of a more desperate condition than that of a person who is on his way to hell. He is like a man trying to swim against a current that is too strong for him and will soon wash him down a waterfall he cannot possibly survive.

When a lost person dies, all hope vanishes forever. From that point on his eternal destiny is fixed.

4. A lost soul is Doomed.

The Bible speaks of hell as a place in which people are tormented forever ... a place of outer darkness where men will weep and gnash their teeth and where the devouring worm never dies.

H. G. Wells said on his deathbed: "Don't bother me. Don't you see I'm busy dying." I've seen folks busy dying – neglecting God and their soul – giving their time and energy to things that really don't matter.

You can lose some things and replace them – things you lost in a flood or fire – but if you die lost, that lost soul is irreplaceable. You have just one life to invest. Where/how are you investing it?

Jesus asked two questions: "What shall a man profit if he gains the whole world and lose his own soul?" then, "What shall a man GIVE in exchange for his soul?"

Notice Jesus did not ask, "What would a man TAKE in exchange for his soul?" Men will take so little for their soul – a few dollars, a moment's pleasure, a kiss, an embrace.

Jesus asked, "What will a man give in exchange for his soul?" – his soul after it has been scarred with sin; after he has sold his soul and betrayed himself.

What can he give to get his soul back – and saved? Christ alone can give what it takes to get a man's soul back. On the cross He paid the supreme price – the only price that could be paid to redeem man's soul.

What can a man who comes to God give to get his soul back? Tears? Remorse? Repentance? Prayer?

One drop of blood shed by Christ on the cross can cleanse his sin.

"What can wash away my sin? Nothing but the blood of Jesus."

A GLIMPSE OF HIS GLORY

Mark 9:1-13

If I could choose one episode to be a part of in the life of Christ, it would be this episode that we are about to read about. Jesus takes three of His disciples and they start walking up a mountain; probably Mount Hermon, which rises some 9,200 feet above sea level. It is a beautiful mountain and, even in the hottest months, the top of this high mountain is wrapped in bands of snow.

It takes most of a day to get to the top of this mountain. Jesus takes three of His disciples with Him – Peter, James, and John – and leaves the other nine disciples at the foot of the mountain. These three – Peter, James, and John – form the inner circle of the Lord Jesus. They got to experience things the other disciples do not get to experience with Jesus.

The first time Jesus singled these three men out was when He raised the daughter of Jairus from the dead. Then Jesus singles them out again here at our Lord's transfiguration. Jesus would also take these men "a little deeper" with Him in the Garden of Gethsemane the night before He went to the cross (Mark 5:37; 14:33).

We all know that God is no respecter of persons (Romans 2:11). That is, God doesn't play favorites among His people. He doesn't love you more than He loves me and He doesn't love me more than He loves you. But, as Vance Havner so wisely said, "God does not have favorites, but He does have intimates."

He may not love one of His children any more than any other of His children, but some are simply closer to Him than others are. And those who are closer to Him will see more of His glory and more of His power than those who stay farther away.

We are as close to God as we desire to be. James 4:8 says, "*Draw near to God and He will grow near to you.*"

When the four of them got to the top of the mountain, the Lord Jesus began praying to His Father and His three disciples went to sleep. Apparently our Lord's prayer meeting lasted for a while, because His disciples fell asleep. While they were asleep, suddenly Jesus changes. His face changes, (Luke 9:29). His garments change, (Mark 9:3). He is transfigured and His glory shines forth. When Jesus was born in Bethlehem, His humanity covered His deity. But at His transfiguration there was no hiding the glory of Christ. John would later say, "*God is light, and in Him there is no darkness at all*" (1 John 1:5).

Those three disciples never got over what they saw.

- John 1:14 says, "*And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and WE BEHELD HIS GLORY, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.*"
- 2 Peter 1:16 says, "*We were eyewitnesses of His majesty.*"

Listen as I read the account.

Mark 9:1 has caused some problems for some folks. In talking to all of His disciples, Jesus said that some of them “would not taste death until they saw the kingdom of God come with power.” Some believe that Jesus was saying that some would not taste death until the Second Coming. But that could not be what He was referring to because all of the disciples are now dead and the Second Coming of Christ has not taken place. No, He was saying that some would not taste death until they saw Him in His glory, for the transfiguration was to be a preview of His glory that they would see in Heaven.

1. 1. 1. 1. I. The Disclosure That Was Made Mark 9:2-3

Luke’s Gospel tells us that it was while Jesus was praying and after the three disciples fell asleep that Jesus was transfigured, and that He was still transfigured when they awoke.

The word “transfigured” comes from the Greek word that we get our English word “metamorphosis” from. It means a change from the inside that can be seen on the outside. It was not as if a spotlight shone on Jesus. Rather, this light came from inside Him.

The disciples are now seeing the glory of God being revealed in Jesus. For the first time, the evidence of the incarnation, the fact that God has come to live as a man among men, is being disclosed. They are witnessing the fact that Jesus is no ordinary man. They are catching a glimpse of His glory.

They are seeing the HeavenlyOne. He had possessed unmatched glory in heaven. He had laid it aside to come to earth and dwell in a body of flesh. Now, for this brief time, His eternal glory is shinning through.

They were seeing the HolyOne. When the glory shone through Jesus, they saw purity.

When I was in Junior High and High school, my Dad raised laying chickens – 5,000 layers. But the eggs we got from our laying hens were not for eating. They were for producing more chickens. Now, some folks did raise chickens who laid eggs for eating. Since our eggs were to be used for hatching baby chicks, they had to be clean, but not perfectly clean.

Other folks raised laying hens and their eggs were sold in the market for eating. Those eggs had to be gathered from the hen house, inspected, graded, and packed for market.

To inspect their eggs, they had to “candle” them. They would roll along a conveyer and pass over a very bright light. The light would cause the eggs to glow and appear as if it were transparent. If there was an imperfection or crack in the egg, you could see it. That egg would be put aside.

As the disciples saw Jesus shining brighter than the sun, if there had been any spot or stains on the soul of Jesus, those men would have seen it. There was none.

Let me give you two examples of metamorphosis. You can see metamorphosis take place when an ugly caterpillar changes into a beautiful butterfly. That beautiful butterfly was in that caterpillar all the time., but a change had to take place within that caterpillar before you could see the butterfly.

The second example: Some of you have watched the Incredible Hulk. Inside that normal looking man who is huge and fierce man who only appears when he gets angry. That’s metamorphosis.

1. 1. 1. 1. II. The Discussion They Heard Mark 9:4

When Peter, James, and John awoke, they discovered Jesus had not only been transfigured, but He had been joined by two others. They immediately knew who those two were who had joined Jesus. They did not have to be introduced. The disciples realized these men were Moses and Elijah.

Some lessons were learned when the disciples saw and knew who Moses and Elijah were:

- They knew for sure that there is life beyond the grave. Moses the man who died, and Elijah the man who had been caught up into the clouds without tasting death were present with the Lord in glory. This was a type of that other great event described by Paul in I Thessalonians 4:16-17.
- There is intelligent life beyond the grave. We will know folks in heaven; even those we have never met on earth.
- There is glorious life beyond the grave. It is true that Moses had died and had been buried by God (Deuteronomy 34:6), but on the Mount of Transfiguration he appeared in glory; that is, his mortal had put on the garments of immortality.

- There is useful life beyond the grave. Moses and Elijah were ministering to the Lord.

Luke 9:31 tells us what Moses and Elijah were talking to the Lord Jesus about. They were talking with Him about His “decease,” His “exodus,” His “way out,” His “departure,” His “death.” These men came to Encourage the Lamb of God as He drew closer to Calvary.

Try to imagine what that conversation might have sounded like. In Jesus' greatest hour of glory on earth, the subject of conversation was His deepest humiliation. While our Lord was glorified between two Old Testament heroes, they spoke of the day He would die between two thieves. While Jesus' head was shining like the sun, Moses and Elijah talked of how it would bleed from a crown of thorns. While Jesus' face flashed like lightening, they reminded Him that it would be spit upon. While His clothes glistened, they talked of how His clothes would be stripped off Him and divided up among His murderers.

Sounds like quite a contrast, doesn't it? But that's the point – Jesus' humiliation at Calvary brought Him His highest glory.

They were talking with Jesus about the cross and His death that would soon take place on Calvary. They were discussing His sacrifice for the sins of the world. That was the subject of the discussion the disciples overheard.

Jesus, Moses, and Elijah discussed the death, burial, resurrection and ascension of Jesus. They discussed the very purpose Jesus had come – to die that we might be saved.

If the cross was so important that Elijah and Moses talked about it, it seems to me the cross is so important that we ought to talk about it.

Moses represented the Law and Elijah represented the Prophets.

Moses and Elijah also represent the two ways a man may go to glory. Like Moses, many have and many will die. Like Elijah, some will be taken up alive into Heaven to meet God.

1. 1. 1. 1. 1. III. The Directive They Were Given Mark 9:5-8

Moses was a demonstration of the promise of the resurrection. Moses had died hundreds of years before, and yet there he was with Jesus.

Elijah was a demonstration of the promise of the rapture. Elijah had been snatched up.

Moses and Elijah with Jesus was a promise of the reunion that is to come.

Poor impetuous Peter. He didn't know what to say ... so he said something ... and it was the wrong thing. Note Mark 9:5-6.

By the way, there are people who have something to say and people who just have to say something. The first group is worth listening to. The second group will get you in trouble.

Whatever Peter's motives may have been one thing is sure, God did not like what Peter had to say. It was at that moment that a directive came from Heaven. All of a sudden Jesus and the other five men on the mountain are overshadowed by a cloud. Out of the cloud booms the very Voice of God Almighty. God declares the supremacy of Jesus over the Law and the Prophets. God does not tolerate Peter placing Jesus on the same level as Moses and Elijah.

God speaks and immediately the cloud is gone, Moses and Elijah are gone, and the disciples are alone with Jesus again. Verse 7 says that “Jesus only” is there with the disciples and God says, “Hear Jesus ONLY!” “Listen to Jesus ONLY!” That's still good advice.

1. 1. 1. 1. 1. IV. The Descent That Was Commanded Mark 9:10

“Don't tell what you have experienced on the Mount.” Why?

1. If they had told the other nine disciples about the Transfiguration, they would have felt envious of the three and perhaps even bitter toward Jesus for not letting them witness it.
2. What they had witnessed was so unbelievable that, had they broadcasted the news of what had transpired on the Mountain, their hearers would have considered them insane. Rather than enhancing the message, they would have invited criticism and brought discredit upon the work.
3. The silence was only temporary: “ ... until the Son of Man should rise from the dead.”

Our Lord wants us to be transfigured and transformed.

WHEN THE DISCIPLES FAILED OR AND THEY COULD NOT Mark 9:14-29

Thomas Aquinas was a Roman Catholic scholar who lived between 1225 and 1274. He was a brilliant thinker who left an indelible imprint on the fabric of his time.

One day as he was visiting the Vatican the Pope is said to have looked at Thomas Aquinas and said, "Behold, Master Thomas, the Church can no longer say, as St. Peter, silver and gold have I none!"

Aquinas was quick to reply, "Alas, neither can we say what follows, ' ... but such as I have give I thee: In the Name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk.'"

Thomas Aquinas understood a truth that many people never grasp. The real measure of success for a church or a ministry is not how fine its buildings are, nor how large its offerings are, nor how great its crowds are. The real measure of success for a church or a ministry is in whether or not it operates in the power of God.

We are living in a day of ministerial success. Every church wants to be the largest, the richest, the most influential. Success is measured these days in dollars, attendees, and fame.

The sad truth is that God has a very different standard for determining what constitutes a successful ministry.

In this passage, the Lord Jesus teaches us about the most important ingredient of a successful ministry. The disciples lacked that ingredient and they failed miserably.

We are told in Verse 18 of this text that the disciples of Jesus failed in their attempt to cast out a demon from a little boy. The boy's father summed up their efforts by saying " ... and they could not."

He was right! He came to these men hoping to find some help for his family, but he found that these men had no help to offer. They could not. Why did they fail? They failed because they lacked spiritual power. They lacked spiritual power because they were missing the one ingredient that assures spiritual power.

I want us to look into these verses today because we need the message they teach us. We are trying to carry out the Lord's business in these dark, sinful days, and too many times people walk away from our churches saying " ... and they could not." We, like they, lack the necessary ingredient required for spiritual success.

Three things I want to point out.

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- I. The Lack of Spiritual Power Mark 9:14-19

Jesus has just come down with His three disciples from the Mount of Transfiguration and when they come down from the mountain, they find the other nine disciples engaged in an argument with some scribes. It seems that a distraught father had brought his demon-possessed son to Jesus for healing. Jesus was gone up on the mountain when he arrived, so he asked the disciples to heal his son. They could not cast out the demon and the scribes are mocking them for their lack of power.

Jesus walks up to this scene and asks for an explanation. The father, in agonizing detail, describes the pitiful condition of his son. Every verb the father uses in Verse 18 is in the present tense. The father's language describes a horrible, ongoing situation of demonic torment.

When Jesus hears the sad details, He voices His own dismay over all that He has heard.

The word "O" in Verse 19 is a word of deep anguish. It was usually reserved for a time of burdened prayer. People would come before God and cry out of their hearts and lift their "O's" to the Lord.

Jesus is expressing His displeasure toward everyone assembled there that day. No one there seemed to have faith: not the religious leaders, not the disciples, not even the father of the boy. When He sees this lack of faith, Jesus cries out, "How much longer am I going to have to put up with you?"

The saddest aspect of this whole scene is not the condition of the boy; the saddest part of this whole account is the powerlessness of the disciples. These men had seen Jesus perform countless amazing miracles and they themselves had performed miracles, but now it is said of them, "... and they could not."

In many ways these nine disciples are a picture of the modern Church. Like them we have the reputation that we have power, but we lack the power to make a difference and the crowd mocks them for their lack of power and ability.

The modern Church seems to have everything it needs to exist: nice facilities, skilled people preaching, church organization, money, but most churches lack what they need most: The Power of God.

Our church is making a promise to every person who passes by it. This building tells every person who passes by it that this is the place God meets with His people. We promise a needy world that they can find help when they come here. We say, "If you need God, we can help you get to Him. If your life is broken, we can show you how God can fix it. If your family is coming apart, we can show you how God can put it back together again. If you are lost, we can show you how to be saved."

Our church sign says it all:

NEW HOPE: We can give you new hope through the Lord Jesus. We represent the place Jesus shed

His blood on the cross to save sinners. There's new hope here!

BAPTIST: That name doesn't mean what it once did. In my mind it stands for something. It

means we are committed to true, conservative preaching. We are committed to the sovereignty of God and biblical separation from sin and worldliness. We

follow after personal holiness.

CHURCH: We are a called out fellowship and we are different from the world. We seek to

worship and honor the Lord Jesus. We are not a social club or an entertainment

center. His Word guides us in our daily lives.

May it never be said of us "... and they could not."

1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1. II. The Lord of Spiritual Power Mark 9:19-27

When the boy is brought to Jesus, the demon in the child recognizes Jesus and attacks the boy again. The child is gripped by convulsions, and he wallows on the ground, foaming at the mouth.

The father explains the true condition of his son. Then, the father bears the true condition of his faith. He looks at Jesus and says, "but IF thou canst do anything, have compassion on us and help us."

This father had trusted that Jesus' disciples could heal his son, and when they failed, his faith in Jesus was shattered as well. So he says, "If you can do anything."

When Jesus hears this man's words, He responds immediately. Our Lord's words in Verse 23 actually say, "What do you mean, 'if you can' ? Believe! All things are possible to him that believes!"

Jesus rebukes the father for his doubt and commands him to place his faith in Jesus for the healing his son desperately needs. When the father hears this, he makes one of the most honest and transparent prayers in the entire Bible. He looks at Jesus and says, "Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief." He is saying, "Lord, I do believe in You and in Your power. But, my faith is weak! Help me to grow in my faith."

Then Jesus commands the spirit to leave the boy and to never return. The demon attacks the child one more time and comes out. The child becomes so quiet and so still that the on-lookers assume that he is dead. So Jesus does what He does best. He takes the child by the hand and He lifts him up. The child rises and he is free.

There are some spiritual lessons we need to glean before we move to our final thought. Let me share them with you.

1. A powerless Church portrays Jesus Christ in a bad light. Because the disciples lacked power, the father assumed Jesus lacked power as well. When a lost world walks into a church building and sees deadness, coldness, and apathy, the lost world

assumes that Jesus is just as lifeless and powerless.

2. Weak faith is better than no faith. This father was filled with doubt, but there was still a kernel of faith in his heart. As a result, he got what he desired from the Lord. God is not put off by our doubt, but total unbelief slams the door on God's power in our lives.
3. Jesus is still in the lifting-up business. Just as Jesus took this poor boy's hand and lifted him up to new life, He can do the same for all who come to Him in faith.
4. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1. The Lessons of Spiritual Power Mark 9:28-29

When this episode is over and the disciples are alone with Jesus, the nine who failed to deliver the child asked Jesus why they failed. These men were concerned about their spiritual failure and they should have been.

The answer Jesus gave them is both simple and telling. His answer is that these men failed because they lacked spiritual discipline in their lives.

Prayer is a state of close communion with the Lord. Fasting speaks of a lifestyle of total submission and surrender to the Lord.

The disciples did not fail because they did not believe! They believed all right, or they would not have tried to cast the demon from this child. Their faith was in the wrong things. Their faith was in what they had done before. Their faith was in themselves. These men failed because they were not leaning on the Lord Jesus for the power they needed.

We need to pray. I mean the kind of prayer that seeks the face and the will of God. We are commanded to pray and He has promised to hear our prayers.

We must be separated from the world and surrendered to God. And we need to become totally dependent on the Lord for everything.

"And they could no." What a tragic statement! When folks come to our church, can they say, "The Presence and power of the Lord is in this place? Do you find love and acceptance here? Can you find hope and fellowship here?"

I want this to be A Friendly Church Where Jesus Is Real !!

WHO'S THE GREATEST? **Mark 9:30-41**

In Mark 9 we have seen Jesus transfigured on Mount Hermon. Jesus takes three of His disciples with Him – Peter, James, and John – and leaves the other nine disciples at the base of the mountain. Two Old Testament saints join Jesus and His three disciples on the mountain and Jesus is transfigured before Moses, Elijah, Peter, James, and John. Moses and Elijah are there to encourage the Lord Jesus concerning His up-coming death on the cross.

When they come down the mountain, Jesus sees the nine disciples arguing with the scribes. A father had brought his demon-possessed son to have Jesus cast the demon out of him, but because Jesus was not with them, he asked the disciples to cast the demon out – But They Could Not! The scribes were mocking the disciples because they lacked the power to do so.

When Jesus showed up, He cast the demon out of the son. Jesus and His disciples depart there and head toward Capernaum. As they are walking to Capernaum, probably to Simon Peter's house, Jesus tells them again about His soon-coming death. He tells them that he will be betrayed into the hands of wicked men and put to death, but He would rise on the third day. But the disciples were afraid to ask Him about His death, so they continued to walk toward Capernaum.

Then the conversation among our Lord's men changed. Instead of discussing our Lord's death and resurrection, the disciples begin to discuss who was the greatest in the Kingdom of God. As we look at these verses on who is the greatest, I want you to see A Debate, A Demonstration, and A Declaration.

1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1. I. A Debate Mark 9:33-34

Some of the disciples had seen the unforgettable Transfiguration of Jesus, all of them had seen a marvelous healing episode at the foot of the Mount, and now, while on the road, they heard Jesus' ominous words regarding His death. This was hardly the time for an argument. Nevertheless, they were engaged in a heated debate about, of all things, who among them was the greatest!

The Gospels do not record their exact words, but undoubtedly some, such as Peter, James, argued that THEY were “the greatest” because of their privileged relationship with Christ. THEY were the inner circle. THEY only had witnessed the Transfiguration. THEY had heard teachings which the others had not.

There is something comical about the ego of men. They all want to feel like they are THE man. They are the best; they are the toughest; they are the fastest; they are the smartest.

Three-time heavyweight boxing champion Muhammad Ali use to tell the world, “I’m the greatest!” One day he was on an airplane and the stewardess was trying to get him to put on his seat belt. He said, “Superman don’t need no seat belt.” The stewardess said, “Superman don’t need no plane and we’re not flying until you buckle that seat belt!” I think about Ali now with all his health problems. He’s not the greatest now. Someone has to do almost everything for him now.

When they got to the house, Jesus asked all of His disciples, “What was it that you all were disputing about or arguing among yourselves about along the way?” The tense of the verb is, “He kept on asking them what they were debating about because they were reluctant to tell Him; they were embarrassed to tell Him.” Then we are told that they “kept on holding their peace” or “they kept on being quiet” because now they were ashamed of themselves.”

In one short sentence, Jesus turned their whole scale of values upside down. Look at Mark 9:35. Jesus sat down, called the twelve together, and said, “If anyone desires to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all.”

Jesus rebukes His disciples for magnifying themselves. They were debating about who was the greatest and nothing could be more contrary to the two great lessons of Christ’s kingdom, which are humility and love.

In Philippians 2:3 Paul says, *“Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.”*

1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1. II. A Demonstration Mark 9:35-37

In order to correct the immature and foolish thinking of His disciples, Jesus sat down to teach them His truth. When Jesus sat down, His men knew they needed to listen up.

When Jesus begins to teach, He speaks of a great paradox. He tells them that the way to greatness is through serving others. The word “servant” in Verse 35 is the same word translated “deacon” elsewhere in the New Testament. The word refers “to those who are servants waiting tables.”

Jesus is teaching His men that true greatness is achieved through humbly serving others. That is a lesson that has been lost in our day. Some people think they deserve respect and preferential treatment just because they occupy certain positions. There are some men who walk around like little peacocks, waiting for others to tell them how great they are.

If you want others to respect you, serve them. Put them before yourself and meet their needs, forgetting about your own needs. Give the first seat, without wanting anything in return. When we humble ourselves, the Lord will exalt us in due time.

Now Jesus uses a wonderful illustration. He takes a child. Why does He use a child?

- Children in that society were at the bottom of the social ladder. They were viewed as mere property and largely ignored by most adults.
- Jesus uses a child to teach His disciples about service because they take constant care. Children need to be served.

But Jesus also uses children to teach about salvation. Jesus actually made a child the model for those who would enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

- A child has a teachable spirit.
- A child is so trusting. He believes and accepts what you say.
- A child has a helpless dependence about him.
- Children are quick to forgive.

I saw the Dean of Students at New Orleans Seminary, Dr. Ray Rust, present a living example of a servant. It was a cold, rainy day and it was one of the busiest times of the day for seminary students. It was lunch time and there was only a small amount of time if you had a child in the child-care to feed them and yourself and to get them back to the center and to get yourself to class on time.

A third year student had gotten his son from the day care, fed him, and was about to take him back in the rain to the center, when Dr. Ray Rust stopped the dad, knelt down and tied the little boy's shoes so he would not trip on the laces, all the time talking so tenderly to the boy – just like Jesus would have done. I don't remember what my teacher in my next class talked about, but I do remember Dr. Rust living out love and servanthood that day.

There are no "Big I's" and "Little you's" in this church. We are all equal. Better than that: We serve one another and we esteem others better than ourselves.

1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1. III. A Declaration Mark 9:38-41

When John hears the words of Jesus, he brings up an incident that had occurred sometime earlier. Apparently, the disciples had encountered a fellow who was casting out demons in the Name of Jesus. This fellow was successful, but because he "followed" not Jesus and His men, the disciples rebuked him and told him to stop what he was doing.

John is saying, "Jesus, we saw a fellow who was using Your Name to cast out devils. But we set him straight! He wasn't doing it like we do it and we let him know that our way is the only right way that it can be done. He's out of business!"

Jesus responds by telling them to leave people like that alone. If they are doing good works in the Name of Jesus, they are not against Him, but they are working for Him.

There are several lessons here for the modern Church, if we are willing to receive them. If a church or ministry doesn't do everything just like we do, we are quick to judge them or condemn them. Here are a few truths we have forgotten!

- No church, no preacher, and no ministry has an exclusive lock on the truth. In other words, God didn't choose us as the final determiner of who is and who isn't serving the Lord.
- When it come to churches, one size does not fit all. Not everyone responds to the way we do things here at New Hope. This church isn't for every believer!

As much as it may irk us at times, God does use folks who do things differently than we do.

There are things that go on in other churches that I can't stomach. I have a hard time with the way some present the gospel and some of the "songs" they use. (I just tell them to enjoy them down here because they won't hear them in Heaven!)

Well, who is the greatest person in this church? Of course, THE greatest Person is Jesus! But the greatest person in this church is the person who serves selflessly, with no thought for what they might receive in return. The greatest person in this church is the person who is willing to take the last place so that others can be first. The greatest person is the person who seeks to serve those who can never give anything back in return.

Does that describe you?

WARNINGS FROM JESUS

Mark 9:42-50

Jesus is on His way to Jerusalem to die on the cross and His twelve men are a long way from being ready for His death and departure back to Heaven.

Earlier in this passage, they were actually fighting among themselves over who was the greatest (Verse 34). Jesus used their argument to teach them a very important truth. He taught them that greatness comes through service to others (Verses 35-37). The way to become great in the Kingdom of God is by serving the least (Verse 41). The path to the top leads through humble service to those who cannot serve us back. That was a lesson the disciples needed. It is a lesson that we also need in our day. Far too many want to occupy the chief seat and far too few have a servant's heart.

On the heels of this event, Jesus issues a series of stern warnings to His disciples. These verses use harsh, straight to the point language that cautions us to be careful how we live our lives.

Mark's Gospel begins to use teachings from Jesus that move us out of our comfort zone. Mark's Gospel begins to confront the

afflicted, while also afflicting the comfortable.

Like the disciples, the modern church has become far too comfortable in this world. Jesus knew that His men needed to be shocked into becoming the men He saved them to be. He knows the same thing about us.

Left to ourselves, we will amount to nothing. Therefore, the Lord has to come along every now and then and shake us up to get our attention. That's what these verses are designed to do.

I want us to see three warning our Lord gives us.

1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1. I. A Warning about Saints Mark 9:42

Jesus had used a child to illustrate the kind of people we are to serve in this world (Verses 36-37). We are to serve those who are neglected and rejected by others. We are to serve those who cannot serve us in return. In other words, we are not to serve others so that we can be promoted. We are to willingly take the place of a slave in the Kingdom of God, serving Christ by humbly serving our fellowman.

In this verse, Jesus uses that same child to teach us another important principle. No only are we to serve the least among us willingly; we are also commanded to protect the least among us from sin.

The word "offend" means "to become a stumbling block." It has the idea "of leading someone else into sin." Jesus says that it is a very serious matter when we cause one of God's children to fall into sin.

Jesus says that you would be better off having a "millstone" tied around your neck and being cast into the sea than to cause one of God's children to fall into sin. He is referring to a large stone used to grind grain that was so heavy a donkey was tied to it to turn it.

If such a stone were tied around the neck of an individual and that person was thrown into the sea, that person would be pulled to the bottom and they would drown. When Jesus used this image, His listeners were very familiar with what He said. On more than one occasion the Romans had carried out executions by tying heavy stones around the necks of their victims and throwing them into rivers and lakes. The image is very graphic! Jesus is describing a death as horrible as any that can be imagined. Yet, He says it would be preferable for a person to die this way than for them to cause one of His little ones to fall into sin.

Jesus says that this is a grievous sin! In fact, the person who harms one of His children is actually harming the Lord Himself. Zachariah 2:8 say, "*for he that toucheth you (one of My children) toucheth the apple of His eye.*" This verse is also graphic. The person who reaches out his foot and causes one of God's children to stumble is sticking his finger in God's eye!

How do believers cause others to stumble? There are many ways. Let me share a few:

1. By directly tempting others to sin. This kind of behavior is seen throughout the Bible.

– Eve ate of the forbidden fruit and then invited Adam to do the same.

– Aaron made a golden calf that became an idol for the people of God to dance around and worship.

– Balaam taught Balak how to get God to curse His people. Teach the Moabite women to seduce the men of Israel and to commit sexual immortality and God will have to judge Israel when they intermarried with those of a different race.

– It could be that a Christian man seduces a Christian woman or vice-a-verse to become unfaithful.

2. People can be led to sin indirectly. We can spark an angry reaction in people by mistreating them or by causing them to become angry and then react in anger. For example, someone cuts someone off in their car and road rage results.

3. People can be led into sin by a wicked example. I Timothy 4:12

A pastor friend and I were playing tennis on a hot day. A lady from his church drove by, saw him in tennis shorts and it got back to him that she was offended at him for wearing shorts in public. First Corinthians 6:12 says, "*All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient.*" She was a weaker sister and because he did not want her to be offended at him, he wore long pants from then on when we played tennis.

4. People can be led astray through false doctrine. When someone teaches false doctrine, they are committing a two-fold sin. Take the false teaching of legalism for example. They sin because they follow false religion, and they sin because they lead those who follow them away from the truth.

I am a man, but I am also a parent. I can forgive a slight against me pretty easily, but you touch my son or one of my grandchildren and I will have a harder time in the forgiving department. But I'm in good company! God says that the person who offends one of His little ones is in big trouble!

1. 1. 1. 1. 1. II. A Warning About Sin Mark 9:43-48

These verses are very graphic in nature and they offer a stern warning to both saint and sinner.

Jesus refers to the "hand", the "foot", and the "eye." These are our three problem areas when it comes to dealing with sin. The "hands" refer to the things we do. The "foot" refers to the places we go. The "eye" refers to the things we see or desire to have. These three words describe all the areas where we humans are tempted to sin, 1 John 2:16.

Jesus says that if the hand, the foot, or the eye causes us to sin, we are to take drastic action and amputate that body part, so that we will not give in to its desires. Understand that Jesus is speaking figuratively here. He is using hyperbole. Jesus is using exaggeration to emphasize the horrible nature of sin. He is not commanding us to mutilate our bodies.

In the early days of the Church some men took these words literally. One of the more notable examples was Origen of Alexandria. He had such a problem with sexual lust that he had himself castrated to get rid of that temptation.

What Origen discovered is what you and I need to know today. No amount of surgery on the outside will cure the problem on the inside. Man doesn't need a change on the outside; man needs a change of heart. He needs to be born again. All sin precedes from the heart.

What Jesus is talking about in these verses is how we are to deal with our sins. When tempted to sin, we must deal with it immediately, harshly, ruthlessly, consistently, and decisively.

If a relationship is leading you into temptation and sin, you need to sever that relationship. If some activity is leading you into sin and temptation, you need to cut that out of your life immediately.

Jesus warned His disciples that nothing in this world is so valuable that it is worth going to Hell over. Yes, Jesus believed in Hell! His references to Hell are very graphic. Let's examine what Jesus said.

1. Hell is an Actual Place.

Most people today make light of Hell. They use "Hell" as a curse word or when telling a joke, but may I tell you, Hell is no joke. It is a literal place. It is a literal place. There are residents in Hell this very day. Who are they? Every soul who has died without trusting Jesus Christ as their personal Savior.

2. Hell is an Awful Place.

Jesus characterized Hell for us:

- a. Hell is awful because of the damnation.

What will be the most awful part about Hell? The fire? The pain? No. I believe the most awful part about Hell is eternal separation from God. 2 Thessalonians 1:9-10.

Being separated from God means to be separated from God's love, His grace, His glory, and His hope. Being separated from God means to be separated from everything that is good for all eternity with no hope of escape.

There will be pleading in Hell, but God will not respond or answer.

(1) The Bible says Hell is a place of outer-darkness, but there will be no light in Hell, because The Light of the world, Jesus, will not be there. Refuse the Light and you have only darkness.

Revelation 20:11-15 says the lost sinner will be "cast" into the lake of fire. The word "cast" means "to throw something without caring

where it falls.” The lost sinner will be bound hand and foot and cast into the lake of fire. Darkness! Unable to see! Bound hand and foot. Falling! Falling! Falling! All into the unknown!

Unable to see anyone else!

(2) There will be Remorse in Hell but no Release of Memory

Two words the rich man in Hell heard spoken in Luke 16 – “Son remember.”

Remember how many opportunities you had to say “Yes” to Jesus, but you said, “No.” Remember the goodness and patience of God, but you refused His offer. Remember the times you heard how Jesus died on the cross for your sin. He was beaten, slapped, whipped, nailed to a cross for you, but you didn't care.

b. Hell will be an Awful Place because of it's Duration

Some think sinners will be cast into Hell and that they will burn up quickly and be gone, like a broom sage field. No so! Listen to what Jesus says:

“Where the worm dieth not” speaks not only of the soul that will never die, but of a non-consumable body that Hell will seek to consume for eternity. The lost man in Hell will have an ever living, never-dying soul and body to suffer the torments of Hell throughout eternity. The internal torments of the soul's agonies when the lost man refused Christ will gnaw on him forever and regrets will never cease.

“And the fire is not quenched.” These are the physical agonies of Hell. Intense,

unsatisfied thirst will be there for all in Hell because they rejected the Living Water, the Lord Jesus. Unquenchable fire!

3. Hell is an Avoidable Place.

If it's your hand that causes you to sin, cut it off. If it's your foot that causes you to sin, cut it off. If it's your eye that causes you to sin, pluck it out. Literally? No! The problem is not the hand or the foot or the eye. It's the Heart! Jesus is not talking about amputation or self-mutilation. The hand only does what the heart OK's. The foot only goes where the heart allows. The eyes only look at what the heart permits. The problem is really with the heart.

The solution is to get the heart right first. When Jesus enters a life, He fixes the heart. He changes the heart. When He changes your heart, He changes your destiny. When He changes your destiny, you are no longer headed to Hell, but to Heaven.

1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1. IV. A Warning About Service Mark 9:49-50

Salt purifies and preserves. It also gives taste and flavor. Jesus says, “Have salt in yourself ... Be Real! Act and live like children of God.”

GOD'S DEFINITION OF MARRIAGE

Mark 10:1-12

When you preach through books of the Bible verse by verse one of the great blessings is that, sooner or later, you will preach on every subject imaginable. But, one of the disadvantages is that, sooner or later, you will preach on every subject imaginable. Those who preach topical messages can play “leap-frog” with the Bible and jump over subjects that are difficult or subjects that they don't want to deal with, but I believe Pastors should preach expository messages, through the books of the Bible, and give God's people the whole counsel of God. Because I preach expository messages, I am forced to face topics such as the one before us today.

The Pharisees came to Jesus seeking His opinion on one of the most hotly debated issues of that day. They approached Him on the hot button issue of divorce. They really didn't care about the Lord's opinion, they were actually trying to catch Him in a trap (Verse 2). The way the Pharisees had it figured, Jesus would incriminate Himself with any answer He gave.

There were two basic schools of thought on the topic of divorce in Israel at that time. Two rather famous rabbis had handed down their teaching on the matter and most people in Israel followed one of these two rabbis. Both rabbis agreed that divorce was permissible. Their disagreement focused on the grounds for divorce.

One of these rabbis was a man named Shammai. He taught that the only lawful reason a divorce could be granted was for adultery. The Law commanded that adulterers were to be put to death by stoning (Leviticus 20:10). By the New Testament time period, however, stoning for that reason had been outlawed, and divorce became the remedy for adultery in the marriage. Only the man was allowed to seek a divorce; women could not divorce their husbands regardless of their reasons. The teaching of Shammai were followed by a small minority of the population and the religious leaders.

The other rabbi was a man named Hillel. Hillel held a very liberal view of divorce. He taught that a man could divorce his wife for any reason at all. If she took down her hair in public; if she was seen talking to another man; if she ruined a meal by burning the food, or by putting too much salt into it; if she spoke evil of her mother-in-law; if she was infertile; even if her husband saw a woman he thought was prettier, she could be divorced. As you might imagine, this was the most popular view of divorce among the male leaders of Israel. Most of the Pharisees followed the teachings of Hillel. Matthew's account in Matthew 19:3 put it this way, *"Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?"*

Again, the Pharisees were testing Jesus; setting a trap for Him. The way they figured it, Jesus would incriminate Himself with whatever answer He gave.

If He said divorce was wrong, they could leak the news back to King Herod and his wife Herodias. Both of them had divorced their spouses to marry each other, and they had beheaded John the Baptist

But, if Jesus spoke out against divorce, the Pharisees could accuse Him of contradicting the Law of Moses. So either way Jesus answered, He was going to get Himself in trouble. Or so the Pharisees thought.

Not only was divorce a problem and a hot button issue in that day, it is a problem in our day as well. And no matter what your opinion on divorce, you are going to upset someone.

The truth is, happy marriages are rare. Marriage has been described as "the joining of two otherwise normal people going their opposite ways in the same direction."

Less than forty percent of married couples in America reach their twenty-fifth wedding anniversary. Many of the worshipers in any evangelical church have been divorced, while others are unhappily married and considering divorce.

That being said, we are living in a day when nearly every family has been touched by the cold hand of divorce. So, I approach this subject with fear and trembling.

I realize that I am preaching to people who have been through divorce. You know the pain, the shame, and the turmoil it brings with it. Nothing is more painful than rejected love. Because a married couple becomes one flesh, any divorce is like an amputation because divorce breaks that one-flesh bond. Marital unfaithfulness is like a death because it breaks the one-flesh covenant and can spell the end of a marriage.

My job today is not to hurt you any more than you have already been hurt. It would be impossible to answer all your questions about divorce. My job today is to try and preach what Jesus said about this issue in as loving a way as possible.

Let me tell you before I get into the heart of the message: God knows what it's like to be divorced. While Malachi 2:16 says that "God hates divorce" – notice: He loves the divorcee, but hates divorce because of what it does to people. God Himself is divorced. Israel's spiritual adulteries caused Him to divorce Israel and send her away into exile. Notice Isaiah 50:1 and Jeremiah 3:8 (the Northern Kingdom).

So, how did Jesus answer the Pharisee's question about divorce? Jesus refused to be drawn into their trap. Notice Mark 10:3: *"What did Moses write?"*

The Pharisees knew their Bible, so they reported that in Deuteronomy 24, Moses had said a man must give a certificate of divorce to his wife before he sent her away. But Jesus didn't want to go back just to Moses. He chose to go back to the very beginning, to the very first marriage of Adam and Eve. Notice Mark 10:4-9.

Using this passage as our background, I want to make two observations about marriage.

1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1. I. God's Original Design for Marriage:

One Man and One Woman United Until Death

God holds the patent on marriage because He invented it. His original design was and always will be one man and one woman for

life. Notice again Mark 10:6-9. There are at least two reasons why God originally designed marriage:

1. God Designed Marriage for Companionship and Intimacy

God saw that Adam was alone and God said that wasn't good, so He put Adam to sleep, took a "spare rib" from him and turned it into a "prime rib": A woman. When Adam woke up and saw Eve, he said, "Wow, hot diggity dog! This is it!" That's not exactly what the Hebrew says, but it's close! And God performed the first wedding there in the Garden.

2. God Designed Marriage to Populate the Planet

God said to them, "Now be fruitful and multiply."

1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1. II. Humanity's Corruption of God's Design

Read the first few chapters of Genesis and you will see all kinds of evil and wickedness and much of it had to do with God's plan for one woman and one man. So God destroyed the world with a flood. Let me mention three ways sinful humanity has corrupted God's perfect design for marriage.

A. Humanity has Corrupted Marriage through the Practice of Polygamy

Read the Old Testament and you will see that some men had multiple wives. God's intent was one man and one woman for life. You only have to go to Genesis 4 (4:19) to find the first man who had more than one wife: *Lamech TOOK two wives.*" God didn't give him two; he TOOK two for himself.

B. Humanity has Corrupted Marriage through the Practice of No-fault Divorce

I think the term "no-fault divorce" is a classic oxymoron. An oxymoron occurs when words cancel each other out, like jumbo shrimp, or cruel jokes. Divorce is always someone's fault; it's usually both parties' fault. But there is no such thing as a no-fault divorce.

Jesus said that Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorcement because of the hardness or sinfulness of the human heart.

No-fault divorce has sabotaged God's perfect design for marriage. Up until the 1970's it was rather difficult to get a divorce in the United States. A party had to show "cause" for divorce, like abuse or adultery. In 1960 the divorce rate in the U.S. was about nine percent. Since the advent of no-fault divorce laws, the divorce rate spiked in the 1980's at 24 percent and is now at 19 percent. That lower number is because more and more couples are living together without getting married, so divorces aren't reported in these relationships. That's why it is almost impossible to tell what the divorce rate is today.

The no-fault divorce laws made it possible for married couples to divorce without any previously required "cause." Now a couple can petition for divorce for the simple reason of "incompatibility."

C. Humanity has Corrupted Marriage through the Practice of Same-Sex Marriage

Homosexual behavior is nothing new. It was practiced in Sodom and Gomorrah. It was practiced in the Greek and Roman cultures. Emperor Nero married two different men.

It's interesting to note how public opinion in America has changed concerning same-sex marriage over the past 20 years. A chart tracing public opinion reveals that in the 1990's about 75 percent of Americans opposed gay marriage and only about 12 percent approved it. Today those numbers have changed to the point where about 60 percent of Americans approve it and about 35 percent oppose it. In fact, when Senator Barack Obama was running for President in 2008 he said, "I believe marriage is between a man and a woman. I am not in favor of gay marriage." I guess he changed his mind.

When asked about this in 1999 Hillary Clinton was even stronger. She said, "Marriage has historic, religious, and moral content that goes back to the beginning of time, and I think a marriage is as a marriage has always been, between a man and a woman." What an example of relative truth. What was true for them ten or twenty years ago is no longer truth. It's amazing how many have sold their souls out to "political correctness."

Jimmy Carter served one term as President in the 1970s. I confess I voted for him because he claimed to be a born-again Christian. But he has some strange beliefs. In an interview with the Huffington Post, July 7, 2015, he said, "I believe Jesus would approve gay marriage, but that's just my own personal belief. I think Jesus would encourage any love affair if it was honest and sincere and was

not damaging to anyone else.” Well, it’s my personal belief that Jimmy Carter should have stuck to peanut farming!

God declares loudly and clearly that same-sex behavior is sinful. America doesn’t have a homosexual problem; we have a human sexual problem that results from a wicked and deceitful heart. If you consider yourself a Christian, God expects all of us to practice sexual purity. I Thessalonians 4:3-5.

I agree with Franklin Graham who recently wrote: “Long before our government came into existence, marriage was created by the One who created man and woman. The court did not define marriage, and therefore it is not entitled to re-define it. Our government has made a choice that directly contradicts God’s laws and standards. The only solution is a change in human hearts. There is no hope for this nation from any political party. The only hope for America is God.”

We cannot shake our puny fist in the face of God and defy Him and expect Him to bless America. God will be true to His nature. He will chasten America; and I believe it will be soon!

Some of this material was taken from Dr. David O. Dykes “The ReMARKable Power of Jesus”, Part 36 in the series.

DON'T HINDER THE CHILDREN

Mark 10:13-16

Children have always been interested in God. One Christian schoolteacher asked her young students to write some letters to God. I hope they make you smile.

- Dear God, Thank you for the baby brother, but what I prayed for was a puppy. – Joyce
- Dear God, If you give me a genie lamp like Aladdin, I will give you anything you want except my money or my chess set. – Larry
- Dear God, I want to be just like my Daddy when I get big, but not with so much hair all over. – Sam
- Dear God, We read Thomas Edison make light. But in Sunday School they said You did it. So I bet he stole Your idea. – Donna
- And my personal favorite: Dear God, I don't think anybody could be a better God. Well, I just want you to know, but I am not just saying that because You are God. – Charles

Parents are suppose to teach kids, but kids teach their parents a lot too. I read a blog by a young mother who wrote about the things her young son taught her. “I’ve learned that you shouldn’t toss baseballs up inside when the ceiling fan is on. I’ve learned that the double-paned glass in the window will not stop a baseball that was hit by a ceiling fan. I’ve learned that the motor on the ceiling fan isn’t strong enough to rotate a 42-pound boy wearing a Superman cape, hanging by a dog leash. I’ve learned that when you hear the toilet flush, followed by the words, ‘Un Oh’, it’s already too late. My son has taught me that the spin cycle on a washing machine can make a cat very dizzy. I also learned that a dizzy cat can throw up two or three times its body weight. Mostly my son has taught me that you can only survive parenthood with a sense of humor.”

One of the most beautiful pictures in the New Testament is where Jesus takes little children in His arms and blesses them.

In this passage, Jesus has just finished teaching about the very serious matter of marriage and divorce. As soon as that discussion is finished, Jesus turns His attention to some little children that are being brought to Him by their parents.

It was a Jewish tradition to bring small children to a great rabbi so that he could bless them and pray for them. This is much the same thing that we still do today when we dedicate a child and parents to the Lord. Psalm 127:3 says, “*Lo, children are an heritage of the Lord; and the fruit of the womb is His reward.*” We are blessed by all the little ones around here!

But these parents are severely rebuked by the Lord’s disciples. Apparently, they felt that the Master’s time was too valuable to spend on small children. Jesus, in turn, rebuked the disciples for their attitude regarding these children. He told the disciples in no uncertain terms that little children were what the Kingdom of Heaven was all about.

Jesus has a special place in His heart and in His plans for the children. Jesus gives us three lessons about not hindering the children.

1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1. I. A Lesson About Service

Both the parents and the Church have certain responsibilities toward our children. Fulfilling these responsibilities is a form of service

to our children.

A. We Serve our Children by Evangelizing Them

This passage nowhere implies that Jesus was saving these children. He was merely praying for them and pronouncing a blessing on their young lives. This scene teaches us that these parents cared enough about the spiritual condition of their children to bring them to Jesus so that they might be blessed through His praying and His touch.

Parents should do everything in their power to ensure that their children are exposed to the Gospel. That means bringing them to church on a consistent basis. It means giving them the opportunity to be in Sunday School and Vacation Bible School. It means praying for them and with them and opening the Bible with them at home. It means being consistent in your own life as a believer. It means teaching them that nothing in this world is more important than the Lord and His business.

It also means being open with your children about your personal faith in Jesus. My parents always went to church and carried us kids with them. We had family devotions every night. My Mother always prayed out loud and I heard her call my name in prayer many time, even after I had gone to bed. But after I was saved, I was not content until I asked both of them to share their personal testimony with me; and they both did. I want my son and my wife to know that I have had a personal salvation experience with Jesus.

B. We Serve our Children by Educating Them

By bringing their children to Jesus, these parents were telling their children that they saw something special in Jesus. It also taught them that they were special in the sight of Jesus.

Ephesians 6:4 says that parents are to bring their children up in the *“nurture and admonition of the Lord.”* This calls for systematic discipline and instruction, which brings children to respect the commands of the Lord as the foundation of all of life.

C. We Serve our Children by Encouraging Them

The word “admonition” in Ephesians 6:4 has the idea of encouraging our children to seek the things of God. Encouragement has a positive and a negative aspect. Encourage them in the things of the Lord – yes – warn them about the things of the world – drinking, drugs, sexual immorality, etc.

There is no greater blessing than for a child to be saved early and for them to live their whole lives for Jesus. Sometimes in youth conferences they will ask someone to speak who was saved out of a lifestyle of drugs, sexual immorality, and jail time and they will have a dynamic testimony of what all God has saved them from. Sometimes church kids who were saved early think, “Boy, I wish I had a dynamic testimony like that. My life has been so dull compared to theirs. I’ve never experienced all those sinful things.”

How blessed you are! If you’ve never had to experience the shame and pain and deceitfulness of sin, you are blessed! D. L. Moody once returned home from a meeting and reported to his wife that there were two and a half conversions in the meeting. His wife said, “Two adults and a child, I suppose.” “No,” said Moody, “two children and an adult. The children gave their whole lives to Jesus. The adult had only half of his life left to give.”

1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1. II. A Lesson About Salvation

What is implied here is that children are invited to come to Jesus because children need a Savior. While children possess a kind of innocence, they still stand in need of salvation. That’s why parents and other concerned adults must do all they can to bring children face-to-face with the claims of the Gospel. It is not our duty to save them – only God can do that – but it is our duty to expose them to the Word of God.

Let me just go ahead and share my heart: Children’s Church is a great thing, UNLESS it is carried beyond what it is intended for. If a child is so young that they disturb others from hearing from God, they need to be taken to the Nursery. But what sometimes happens is that the child is kept too long away from the preaching and worship of “Big Church.” Children are much sharper than we give them credit for. They understand far more than we think. When children reach that time in their life that they can sense God speaking to their hearts, they need to be in the service where God can speak to them and where they can respond to God.

Folks always mention “the age of accountability” and for a lot of folks that “age” is twelve. They think when a child reaches the age of twelve, it’s time for them to get saved, join the church and be baptized.

It surprises some people when they find out that the Bible does not mention a specific “age of accountability.” A child becomes accountable for his or her sins when they come to the place where then can understand the difference between right and wrong and when they are able to choose between right and wrong. It is that age when the child is able to make moral choices.

The term “age of decision” might be better than the “age of accountability.” When a person reaches a level of mental understanding regarding the nature of sin and its consequences and are able to make a decision for or against Jesus Christ, they have reached the “age of decision.”

So, when is that age? Well, it is different for every child. I have a Pastor friend who was saved at age six. I have known other people who did not come to a realization of their condition until they were well into their teens. Some people, such as those with severe mental handicaps, may never come to that place.

When children come to you talking about salvation, you should never put them off. Take the time to ask them some pointed questions like:

- What does it mean to be saved?
- Why do you feel that you need to be saved?
- Can you explain to me what sin is?

There are many other questions, but you get the idea. If they do not understand, keep praying for them and talking to them about Jesus. They will come back when they are ready.

When they are ready to receive Jesus, be careful that you point them to Jesus and allow them to come to Him in faith. In other words, do not put words into their mouths. You can talk a child into most anything. Zealous people who are bent on seeing children saved and push them to do so, may be hurting them more than helping. Pushing a child to make a decision, join the church, and be baptized when they are not really saved, may turn them against the things of Christ because they will assume there is nothing real about salvation; because nothing happened in their heart, so they think there is nothing to it and they may shut their heart's door forever. What I am saying is, be extremely careful when you deal with a child concerning salvation.

On the other side of that, I have known children who told their Mom or Dad that they wanted to be saved, and what they heard was, “Be quiet. You are too young. You don't know what you are doing.” I have known parents who have so quenched the Spirit in their child's life until they never respond to Christ.

What about children who die before they reach the “age of decision?” What happens to them? When David lost his infant son in 2 Samuel 12, he was convinced that his son had gone to be with the Lord (2 Samuel 12:23). Children and others who cannot choose for themselves are not saved, but they are SAFE in Jesus Christ. The saving power of the atoning work of Jesus is applied to them. When they die in that safe condition, they are regenerated and taken to Heaven!

1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1. III. A Lesson About the Savior

This passage shows us the heart of our Master. His Heart and His Hands went out to these children. When the disciples rebuked the parents, Jesus was much displeased with them.

“Yes, Jesus loves the little children;

All the children of the world.”

Don't hinder one of them from coming to Jesus!

THE RICH YOUNG RULER: A FATAL REFUSAL

Mark 10:17-31

The account of the Rich Young Ruler is one of the tragedies of the Bible. It must have been quite a scene that day. Jesus was headed to Jerusalem to die, when suddenly, this young man came running toward Jesus, all excited, and knelt before Him.

We don't know the young man's name and we don't know why he was in a hurry, but he ran and flung himself at Jesus' feet. Evidently, he had been greatly moved by something that Jesus had said or done.

“Good Master!”, he began. The Greek word he used was more than “Teacher;” it was a term of honor which in our modern day would mean “Doctor.” Great Doctor Teacher” was how he addressed Jesus and doubtless he was sincere. The goodness of Jesus was self-evident to all who had eyes with which to see and ears with which to hear. It was probably in this very area of goodness that this young man sensed his own lack.

Three of the Gospels gives us the account of this young man. One account tells us that Jesus not only looked at him, but “beheld” him. That is, Jesus looked within him and saw in him such potential and promise. He seemed to have everything in his favor, and Scripture tells us that Jesus loved him.

There was so much right about him. For instance:

- He came at the right time. There is no better time for people to come to Jesus than when they are young.
- He came to the right Person, the Lord Jesus. Jesus could do for him what no one else could do.
- He asked the right question, a question about the eternal destiny of his soul. This young man was searching for something millions of people are searching for and they really can't even put their finger on what it is they are searching for.
- He received the right answer. Jesus told him how to go to heaven.

He came at the right time; he came to the right Person; he asked the right question; he got the right answer – yet, tragedy of tragedies, he did the wrong thing.

He came so close to finding what he was searching for; he came so close to being saved; yet, he turned and walked away. He threw away his opportunity to be saved forever. Though he came to Jesus he turned his back on Jesus and went away – sad and sorrowful.

When some folks come to Jesus, they leave Glad – like the man in Acts 3 who was sitting at the Gate Beautiful.

When some folks come to Jesus, they leave Mad – like Cain when God confronted him in Genesis 4.

When some folks come to Jesus, they leave Bad – like the Pharisee in Luke 18 where we read the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican.

When some folks come to Jesus, they leave Sad – when men turn their backs on Jesus and say “No” to Him, they will always leave Sad.

You can leave this service Sad, Bad, Mad, or Glad. Someone said this young man had one foot in Heaven, and then turned away from Jesus and walked into Hell.

What a contrast. This young man came running, smiling, full of hope, but he walked away full of sorrow, dragging his feet. His only hope now was in his wealth, which would not last long.

Three things I would point out:

1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1. I. The Man Mark 10:17

From every outward appearance, this young man was riding high on the pinnacle of success. He was everything a mother or father could want their child to be. If you looked at his life, you might think that he had it all. But, appearances can be deceiving.

In spite of everything he had going for him, this young man had one mighty big skeleton in his closet! He had much, but with his much, he had an itch he could not scratch!

His money left him unsatisfied. His morality, clean living and religious activity had not been able to satisfy the deepest longing of his soul. Something was missing in his life.

To his credit, he went searching for that which was missing in his life. He knows he had a need and he had a desire to do something about it. He was not ashamed to admit that he had a spiritual need.

He comes to Jesus with thoughts of Heaven on his mind. Eternal life was on his mind.

You don't find many people who are thinking about eternity! Most people are so wrapped up in themselves and their lives that they have no time for thoughts of God, Heaven, Hell, or where they will go when they die. The sad fact is, most people don't even care to know.

Death is coming. One day real soon you will leave this world forever. When you do, you will go either to Heaven or you will go to Hell.

Listen to Ecclesiastes 12:1: *“Remember NOW your creator in the days of your youth.”* Most of us know the first part of this verse, but the last part means, ‘lest we waste our lives and later look back and say, ‘Oh, if only I had lived for God The truth is that it is

dangerous not to come to Christ while you are yet young and tender, and sensitive to the Voice of God.

This young man's error is revealed in what he said: "What shall I Do that I man Inherit eternal life?" A person does not DO anything to inherit something. An inheritance is something that we receive as a transfer of a benefit from someone else. It is an act of grace on the part of someone else.

1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1. II. The Master Mark 10:18-21

Notice that Jesus stopped the man in his tracks in Verse 18. "What do you mean when you call Me good?" Jesus asked. "Are you talking about Relative goodness (as compared to other "good" men), or are you talking about Absolute goodness, the kind of goodness that is found only in God Himself?" In other words, was this man prepared to stake everything on the absolute goodness of the Lord Jesus, a goodness that recognized Him to be totally apart from all ordinary men and made Him equal with God?

If he was speaking of practical human goodness, then the place to go was to the Law (see Mark 10:19). Jesus quoted the second table of the Ten Commandments, six of the Commandments about how we relate to one another. But He intentionally omitted one of them. Which one did Jesus leave off intentionally?

Well, let's go through them and see; check them off. He said, "Do not murder." Check. "Don't commit adultery." Check. "Don't steal." Check. "Don't bear false witness or defraud." Check. "Honor your father and mother." Check. Which one did Jesus leave off intentionally? "Do not covet." "Don't desire to have more and more stuff."

Jesus knew his problem. The young man said, "I have kept all these since I was a boy." Jesus said, "There's one thing you lack." You see, the man had a god in his life. His god was gold and his creed was greed. And there is room for ONE GOD on the throne of your life.

Jesus will probe your heart to expose any competing gods. Jesus kept probing until the young man saw the problem himself. That's what the Holy Spirit does. He keeps probing to show us where we have other gods in our life.

Jesus said, "There is one thing – one thing, one thing – you lack. Sell all you have, give it to the poor, and come follow Me." No one can serve two masters.

1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1. III. The Mistake Mark 10:22

The young man looks down as he ponders the most important decision he would ever make. Give away his money and follow Jesus. But he has so much! And at that moment he sadly shakes his head and says, "No. The price is too high." And he walks away. Not all stories end, "and they lived happily ever after."

Someone wrote, "The saddest words of tongue and pen, are these four words, "What might have been."

Notice Mark 10:23-27.

Have you heard the one about the camel? Stop me if you've heard it. Jesus employed hyperbole and humor to teach a powerful point. Jewish humor was based on ridiculous, impossible images.

The disciples would have easily understood this reference. Jesus is not referring to a literal needle, but to a small door that is fixed in the main door of a walled city. It was there for the convenience of people who wanted access to the city after the big door was closed; there could be no hope of getting that door opened once it was bolted and barred for the night. A traveler arriving late with a loaded camel would have a problem. The camel with its load would be too big to get through even the smaller door, which was referred to as "the eye of the needle." The owner of the camel would have to unload the beast and the camel would have to get on its knees if there was any hope of squeezing through the small opening.

Some insist that Jesus is talking about a camel going through the eye of a literal needle. The point is the same. Either way, it is impossible for a rich man – or any other man – to be saved without the grace, mercy, and love of God.

It is decision time for the young man. What would he do? Then comes his decision. He went away. He went away. That short sentence contains the tragedy of a soul.

This rich young man had been concerned to keep the Commandments ; but he was even more concerned to keep his money. He had bent the knee; but he would not bend his will. He had bowed his head, but not his heart. He wanted heavenly treasures, but he would not give up earthly possessions.

The startling thing about the end of this story is that Jesus let the ruler walk away. We almost expect Jesus to run after the young man and say, "Not so fast! With your money, leadership and influence, you would make a great disciple. I'll bargain with you! I'll require less of you. Let's see if we can meet halfway. I'm willing to compromise!"

But Jesus didn't do that. Our Lord will not lower His standards. Jesus let him go.

Strange. Some folks say Jesus failed, because He did not win this young man. It was not Jesus who failed; it was that young man!

WHAT'S IN IT FOR ME?

Mark 10:27-45

Some time ago in Texas a large group of young adults began wearing t-shirts with the letters WIIFM on them. Folks began to ask each other what "WIIFM" stood for. One man pulled out his i-phone and goggled it. It stands for "What's in it for me?" It's a popular question people ask in our self-centered culture. Whether or not you've asked that question out loud, experts say this is what drives many of your decisions. What's in it for me? Some of you come to church with the attitude, "What's in it for me?"

There's nothing new about this attitude. Jesus spent three years leading and teaching twelve disciples, and even up until the end they were asking the question, "What's in it for me?"

We are in Chapter 10 of Mark and we have come to the point where Jesus is on His way to Jerusalem to die. Mark has 16 chapters. So that means that over a third of the book is devoted to the last week in the earthly life of Jesus.

I call your attention to two things in these verses.

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- I. The Itinerary of Jesus Mark 10:32-34

This is the third time in three chapters in Mark that Jesus predicted His death. The first two announcements had been very brief because that was all the disciples could take at the time. The leaders of the Jewish religious and governing establishment would kill Him, and He would rise again. Now He adds half a dozen more details, each one more horrifying than the one before.

Notice the steady beat of – "And! And! And!" Each individual suffering is marked out for emphasis, right on through death, without a pause in the beat, to resurrection! Men would do their worst. Then God would act. The resurrection of Christ was as sure as His death.

You do not know where, when, or how you will die, if the Lord tarries. But Jesus was God in the flesh; and He knew exactly where, when, how, and why He was going to die. He made eight amazing predictions about His death. He said:

1. "I am going up to Jerusalem
2. The chief priest and the scribes will condemn Me to death
3. They will hand Me over to the Roman Gentiles
4. They will mock Me
5. They will flog me
6. They will spit on Me
7. They will crucify (kill) Me
8. On the third day I will rise again."

Jesus knew His journey to Jerusalem would be a roadway to suffering. All His earthly life, Jesus knew He would be nailed to a Roman cross.

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- II. The Inquiry of Jesus Mark 10:35-45

I once heard the story of a rice farmer who saved an entire village from destruction. From his hilltop farm he felt the earth quake and saw the distant ocean swiftly withdraw from the shoreline. He knew that a tidal wave was coming.

In the valley below, he saw his neighbors working low fields that would soon be flooded. They must all run quickly to his hilltop or they would all die. His rice barns were dry as tender.

So with a torch he set fire to his barns and soon the fire gong started ringing. His neighbors saw the smoke and rushed up hill to help him. Then from their safe perch they saw the tidal wave wash over the fields they had just left.

In a flash they knew not only who had saved them, but what their salvation had cost their benefactor. They later erected a monument to his memory bearing this motto: "He gave us all he had, and he gave gladly."

There are not many people in our world like that farmer. He willingly sacrificed himself that others might succeed. Most folks do everything they can to better themselves, and think nothing of the people they step on behind them as they climb to the top of the heap.

I think it is clear from reading the Gospels that our Lord's disciples were anything but humble men. They were always in the business of trying to promote themselves.

A. Their Request Mark 10:35-37

Did you notice that James and John called Jesus "Teacher." Why not Lord? Because they were trying to get Jesus to submit to their will, and you don't ask a Lord to do that. A Lord is someone to whom you submit your will. James and John may as well have given Jesus a blank check and said, "Please sign at the bottom, then we'll fill in the amount."

Remember Herod? He was foolish enough to do that. He told his step-daughter, "Ask for whatever you want and I'll give it to you." But Herod paid dearly for that, for she demanded that he cut off the head of John the Baptist.

James and John should have asked Jesus, "What do you want US to do for You?" At the least they should have told Jesus exactly what they wanted and then left the decision up to Him. But they didn't. They tried to get Him to submit to their will.

What made them think they could ask for such things?

1. They based their request on their relationship to Jesus. Salome, their mother, made the request first (Matthew 20:2-21). Salome was Mary's sister. Thus, she was the aunt of Jesus, and James and John were His first cousins.

2. They were merely claiming the promises they had been made (Matthew 19:28).

These men had been promised thrones, power, and position in the Kingdom and they were making their claim on that promise.

3. They were members of the inner circle, so they thought they were entitled.

But what bothers me about their request is the timing of it. Jesus had just finished telling these men that He is going to Jerusalem, to be betrayed, rejected, and killed. Yet, all these men can think of is climbing to the top of the pile. "What's in it for me?"

It's a cold-hearted, self-centered, unsympathetic request. They didn't seem to be concerned with the glory of God at all. When they asked for their two "reserved seats" they were trying to edge Peter out!

B. The Response Mark 10:38-39a

Jesus told them they didn't know what they were asking. They wanted the crown without the cross.

When Jesus asked if they could drink of the "cup that He drank of," He was talking about "a life experience."

When He used the word "baptism" He is referring to being "submerged or immersed" in that experience. The "cup" spoke of His inward sufferings; the "baptism" spoke of His outward sufferings.

Theirs was the answer of ignorance. They said, "We can." But these men had no understanding of what awaited Jesus. He was about to go to the cross, have all the sins of humanity placed on Him, become sin for us and experience the undiluted wrath of Almighty God against sin and sinners.

C. The Revelation Mark 10:39b-40

Jesus tells them that they will experience His anguish to a degree. They will die for their faith. James will be the first to die when his head is cut off with a sword (Acts 12:1-2). John was the last to die; having survived being boiled in oil, he was banished to the Isle of Patmos where he died an old man.

Mark 10:45 is the theme of the Book of Mark. But let me tie two verses together – Verse 44 and Verse 31.

God's Kingdom is an upside-down version of our world. In God's Kingdom, the servants are considered great. Jesus said, "*The first shall be last and the last shall be first.*" It is our nature to push to the front of the line or the top of the heap. But in God's Kingdom,

greatness is seen in someone who says, “No please. You go first.”

The truth, “The first shall be last and the last first” doesn't make sense in human terms. Let me illustrate this. Let's imagine we advertised we were going to give away 500 free HD televisions on a given day and time. We park an 18-wheeler full of the new televisions in our church parking lot. Can you imagine how early folks would start lining up? Like Black Friday, people would get here before the sun came up to get a place near the front of the line.

Finally the day and time arrives and there is a line of people all the way around to the Fellowship Hall. I step up on the back of the truck with a bullhorn and say, “Who wants a free HD TV?” The crowd is cheering. Then I say, “There is one thing I need you to do, everybody turn around and face the opposite direction.” Then we drive the truck to the end of the line, right in front of the last person in line, and start giving out the TVs to those who were last in line. Now they are first.

What do you think would happen? I would be the most hated person in Tupelo. Those who stood in line near the front would be screaming and pushing to get the TV they think they deserve. But that's just is. The TVs were a free gift, and nothing was said about who lined up first. They just assumed since they were first, they would get a TV.

That's like grace. Grace isn't fair. We don't deserve it; it's a gift God gives. I believe one day

when we line up in Heaven to receive our rewards, our idea of who should be first in line may be different than God's. We may think celebrity Christians, or global evangelists will be first in line. But God may say, “About face!” And that faithful woman who taught children in Sunday School for 30 years is now the first to hear Jesus say, “Well done, good and faithful servant.”

What Do You Want Jesus To Do For You?

Mark 10:46-52

Jesus healed many different diseases and sicknesses, but the New Testament records that He healed more men from blindness than any other disease.

In Jesus' day, Eastern countries had a high incidence of blindness. The condition was aggravated by sand and sun glare. It was not unusual to see the blind in their pitiful condition with flies covering their matter-encrusted eyes.

Matthew, Mark, and Luke all tell us of Bartimaeus, but only Mark gives us his name.

Really, even Mark didn't give us his name; he only gave us his father's name. “Bar” means “son of” – he was the son of Timaeus. It's like when Jesus said to Peter, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood did not reveal this to you.” Simon Peter was the son of Jonas.

So, what his own name was, if he had one, no one knew or cared.

I want us to read about this blind man here in Mark 10.

I. The Condition of the Man Mark 10:46

Blindness has always evoked a degree of pity, and so it was for Bartimaeus.

In Jesus' day there were no schools for the blind to teach them how to get along in society; no seeing-eye dogs to lead them. Braille had not yet been invented; no disability or welfare was available. To make matters worse, many believed that blindness was punishment from God for some secret sin.

Folks in that day considered the blind to be a parasite – since they couldn't work, they had to live off the work of others. They were considered used up, throw-away people – just a bit of human wreckage – among the discards of life.

Beggars turn folks off. We try to avoid them. We tend to look down on them.

They were compelled to live on charity. Morale had been destroyed.

Blindness and poverty went together. The blind were often hungry. They were lonely. They longed for someone to speak a kind word to them, to reach out and touch them, to engage in conversation with them.

Bartimaeus was never privileged to witness the miracle of a sunrise or a sunset. He never saw the blue of the sky or looked into the face of a child.

I wonder how many times he asked folks to describe something for him ... to explain what the color blue or green looked like.

Every day he sat in his same spot, wondering if there would be good or bad luck that day. Every footstep he heard made him ask himself one question, "What can I get from this one?"

Imagine losing your sight; living in total darkness. Those of us who have sight are too busy or lazy to see a sunrise or examine a flower.

Let me remind you that there is more than one kind of blindness. There is physical blindness but there is also intellectual blindness. And then there is spiritual blindness.

Second Corinthians 4:4 says Satan blinds the mind and heart to the horror of sin. The lost man who is spiritually blind cannot see where sin is leading him or what sin will do to him. He is unable to see the wrath of God to come. Nor is he able to see the beauty and loveliness of Jesus.

Someone once bluntly asked blind and deaf Helen Keller, "Isn't it terrible to be blind?" To which she responded, "Better to be blind and see with your heart, than to have too good eyes and see nothing."

Satan will blind your eyes by keeping you in the dark about your need for forgiveness and salvation. He will blind you to God's power that is available to every sinner and blind to the fact that Jesus has made provision to meet our needs.

Satan will make the sinner believe his lies that the Christian life is the most miserable thing anyone can experience.

I remember hearing a story not long ago about two boys from the country who were riding on a train for the very first time. As they sat in their seats, and looked out of the windows, they were filled with amazement. The train was zooming and the scenery was flashing past their eyes as they gazed in wonder.

Eventually a porter came through the car selling bananas. Each boy bought one and about the time the first boy took a bite of his banana, the train went into a deep, dark, long tunnel. As the two boys sat in stunned silence, one said to the other, "John have you eaten your banana yet?" "No, why?" his friend responded. "Well, don't do it, cause if you do, it'll make you blind as a bat!"

We can laugh at this ridiculous story, but the lies of the devil make just as little sense. He wants to blind us to peace, joy, and forgiveness that gives us abundant, everlasting life.

There is only one thing worse than being blind spiritually and that's being spiritually blind and not knowing it. Many are blind to their sin, their destiny, their hopelessness. They are spiritually out of touch. Titus 1:15.

Bartimaeus sits by the side of the road, living in his own separate place, just a crumpled-up man on the side of the road, crying, "Alms. Alms for the poor. Pity the blind man!" He takes what comes his way: a coin in his cup, a slap on the hand, a blessing, a curse.

All of a sudden Bartimaeus heard a crowd stirring. He couldn't see but he had trained his ears to hear what others didn't take time to hear. He heard the shrill voices of children. People were in a hurry to see someone. Excitement was in the air. He reached out and grabbed the skirt of a passerby and asked, "What's going on? What's all the excitement? Where are all the people going?"

He is told that it is Jesus! He has heard much about Jesus – His teaching, His miracles, His testimony – "I am the way, the truth, the life ... I have come down from heaven to do my Father's will."

Bartimaeus doesn't have sight, but he has insight. He believes Jesus is the Messiah ... and the Messiah can open blinded eyes according to the prophet Isaiah.

Don't forget that person who told Bartimaeus that it was Jesus who was coming. If he had not told him, he might never have known that Jesus was passing by.

Notice this: Bartimaeus couldn't go to Jesus, so Jesus came to him.

II. The Cry for Mercy Mark 10:47-48

Blindness is not easy to cure! In all the Old Testament there is no account of any blind person receiving his or her sight. But the Old Testament did predict that opening the eyes of the blind would be a function of the Messiah when He came. Jesus had already healed three blind men. Perhaps someone had told Bartimaeus that these men had received their sight, so there was hope for him.

Isaiah said that when the Messiah came He would open the eyes of the blind, the lame would walk, the lepers would be cleansed, the deaf would hear.

The streets were overly crowded that day and he heard the name Jesus used repeatedly and he says to himself, "I must find Him. I must talk to Jesus." And he shouts from the roadside, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me."

He had been crying out for money; now he cries out for mercy ... and our Lord is rich in mercy (Ephesians 2:4) ... He has plenty of mercy to give.

It's humbling to beg for money, but Bartimaeus had given up his dignity a long time ago. He spent years pleading for money, so he can easily plead for mercy.

As Bartimaeus cried out for mercy, the crowd tried to shut him up – but he cried out the more, "Have mercy on me!"

The onlookers could afford to be quiet, but for Bartimaeus, his sight was at stake. This was the last time Jesus would pass through Jericho.

Did you notice who was trying to quiet Bartimaeus down? It was those who were following Jesus to Jerusalem!

I think when they were trying to hush Bartimaeus, they thought they were being kind to Jesus. After all, He had cares and concerns of His own. But they were cruel to Bartimaeus in their effort to be kind to Jesus. We are never kind to Jesus if we are harsh and stern to those who are lost.

Have you ever helped someone to Christ? Have you ever hindered anyone from coming to Christ?

III. The Cure From the Master Mark 10:49-52

A. Jesus Called the Man Mark 10:49-50

"Jesus stood still." He was on His way to the cross, but Jesus stopped His mission for this man who asked for mercy.

On the one hand, nothing could stop Him from His mission of going to the cross – no opposition, no pleading from loving but ignorant friends, no protest of Peter. But the humble cry for mercy from a blind man stopped Him.

Jesus gave the command to bring the man to Him.

As soon as Jesus called for the man, the very people who moments before were telling him to shut up, go out of their way to show him attention.

"Arise, He's calling for you." He didn't need a second invitation! Can you imagine the thrill of Bartimaeus? This is the first time anyone ever called for him. All he ever heard was, "Get out of my way ..." "Get away from me."

Throwing off his garment speaks of throwing off anything that would hinder him from getting to Jesus, throwing everything of the old life away!

B. Jesus Confronted the Man Mark 10:51

"What do you want Me to do for you?" That sounds like a dumb question, but Jesus never asks dumb questions.

Many don't receive the help they need because they lack the courage and humility to admit their need.

Why did Jesus ask him that question?

1. Many are content and comfortable with their problems and sins. They don't really want Jesus to disturb them.

If Jesus gives him his sight, things will be different in his life. He will have to work for a living; no more handouts. He will have to take responsibility for his life.

2. I think Jesus asked him that question to strengthen his faith. Did this man really believe that Jesus had the power to give him his sight?

3. Jesus wanted this man to confess his need.

4. Jesus wanted him to make a public profession of his faith.

Bartimaeus said, "Lord, I want to receive my sight" – to see, to get off the roadside, to walk the streets without running into walls, to find my way to the synagogue, to use my hands for something beside feeling my way in the dark, to fix my own meals, to read, to look into the eyes of a friend, to see the face of a child.

C. Jesus Cured the Man Mark 10:52

Here is a blind man standing before the King of Heaven; the one who gave light to the sun, moon and stars. But His response is not one of a King, but a lowly servant asking, "What do you want me to do for you? What is your bidding?"

"And immediately he received his sight." No surgery; no bandages; no glasses. Boom! Sight!

And the first thing he sees is the face of Jesus with His eyes of tenderness and love.

Mark 10:52 says, He "followed Him on the road" – to Jerusalem? I wonder if he followed Jesus all the way to Jerusalem. Did he see Jesus crucified? If He did, I wonder if he wished he were blind again so he wouldn't have to witness his Savior's death.

Are you blind, spiritually?

Some may need to have spiritually lost eyes open.

But how many of us have spiritually dim eyes? Jesus asks us, "What do you want Me to do for you?"

"Lord, that I might have a kind and Christian tongue."

"Lord, that I might be able to hold my temper."

"Lord, that I might be cleansed from impure thoughts and imaginations."

"Lord, that I might have victory over a besetting sin."

"Lord, that I might have a heart for those on the roadside of life; those who lie crumpled and cast aside; those forgotten and ignored."

"Lord, that I might be able to comfort someone, to listen and encourage and meet the needs of others."

A Parade for Jesus

Mark 11:1-11

You may remember the spirited little song, "I Love a Parade:"

I love a parade, the tramp of feet, I love every beat I hear of a drum. I love a parade, when I hear a band I just want to stand and cheer as they come. That rat-a-tat-tat, a bright uniform; The sight of a drill will give me a thrill, I thrill at the skill of everything military. I love a parade, a handful of vets, A line of cadets or any brigade, For I love a parade.

A parade means celebration, lightheartedness, excitement, bands, and spectators.

Today we're going to talk about a Passover Parade. When Jesus entered Jerusalem on what we call Palm Sunday, the roads leading to Jerusalem were filled with spectators watching the thousands of visitors who came to Jerusalem. Every Jewish man and his family was expected to attend the Passover festival. So every spring, Jews from all over the world flocked to Jerusalem. But Jesus didn't come to Jerusalem to commemorate the Passover lamb that was to be slain, for this year He was entering Jerusalem to become the Passover Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.

The Romans often conducted a census so they could collect the right amount of taxes. We know from Roman records that Jerusalem had a population of about 30,000, but during Passover, many thousands of people flocked to Jerusalem.

Josephus, a Jewish historian who became a Roman sympathizer, said that during the time of the Emperor Nero, the high priest was ordered to count the actual number of lambs that were sacrificed at Passover in the year A.D. 65. The high priest gave him a figure of 256,600 lambs that were offered for sacrifice. So it is possible there were over 750,000 who came to Jerusalem for Passover.

The Jews who came for Passover stayed for eight full days. Jesus would be crucified five days after He rode into Jerusalem, so most of these could have witnessed this bold crucifixion of Christ.

I. The Prediction of Our Lord's Entrance into Jerusalem

This was no haphazard event. Jesus understood the prophetic revelation which had been given concerning the entry of the Messiah into the gates of Jerusalem. His life was directed by these prophetic revelations. It was no coincidence. 184 One of those prophetic revelations is found in Zechariah 9:9. In this passage and prophecy, Jesus received direction for what He was doing in preparation for coming into Jerusalem. It was a purposeful preparation. Four elements in this verse describe Messiah's character. (1) He is King;

(2) He is just; (3) He brings salvation; (4) He is humble.

Jesus timed His entry into Jerusalem precisely. Almost 500 years earlier the angel Gabriel appeared to the Prophet Daniel, and told him that God had marked out a certain amount of time for the fulfillment of certain events concerning Israel. The beginning of this time would be when the Persian king, Artaxerxes, issued his edict for the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem, which he did in Nehemiah 2.

When Artaxerxes issued that edict, he unknowingly set in motion God's clock for the Jewish nation. Daniel was told that 490 years would run their course before the fulfillment of all of God's dealings with Israel. Four hundred eighty-three of those years would end with the arrival of the Messiah in Jerusalem, riding upon a donkey's colt. The seven years left in the prophecy when God will again deal with Israel will be the Seven Years of Tribulation.

The exact date Artaxerxes issued his decree to rebuild the wall of Jerusalem was March 28, 445 B.C. A Jewish prophetic calendar for a year is 360 days instead of 365 days. Making the necessary corrections for errors in the calendar determined that King Jesus would ride into Jerusalem on the ninth of Nisan, A.D., or April 6, A.D. 32. Our Lord entered Jerusalem, riding a donkey on that very day. The day was prophesied 400 years before this day and it took place on the exact day.

God's Word is inspired, inerrant, and infallible. It is true, dependable, and trustworthy, because the Scriptures are God-given.

II. The Preparation for Our Lord's Entrance into Jerusalem Mark 11:2-7

Some Bible students believe that Jesus pre-arranged for the donkey and its colt to be tied in a certain place and told the owner of the animals to question anyone who untied the animals as to why they were untying them. If they said that "the Master had need of them," they would let them go on their way.

That may be the way it was, but it could be that Jesus is All-knowing and He knew where the animals were and that someone would ask why they were being untied.

An interesting fact about this colt was that no one had ever ridden him; it was an unbroken colt. Why would Scripture point this out?

The Law would say that when something was first noted in God's service, it must be new, unused, because it was sacred, holy unto God's use in service.

By the way, it's interesting to note that Jesus' life was marked with other events like these.

At Jesus' birth, He came into the world through an unused woman, a virgin. Upon His death, He was put in an unused tomb. Here, the Messiah rode into Jerusalem on an unused colt. 185 But why the colt of a donkey? It was not merely to fulfill prophecy that Jesus did this, though that would have been sufficient.

1. He did so to show that He was the Sovereign Lord and the Creator God and that He was in complete control. If you and I tried to ride an unbroken colt, we would be lying on the ground in a matter of seconds. By the way, this is the first and only time we are told that the Lord rode any animal.

Another interesting thing is found in Mark 11:3 – "The Lord will send the donkey right back as soon as He is finished with him.

2. But more than that, by coming into Jerusalem riding on a donkey, He was showing that He was not coming as a conquering king; He was coming as the Savior of Peace, the Savior of all men. He was coming to show men that God is a God of love and reconciliation.

The people thought that the Messiah was coming as a mighty man of war who would overthrow Rome. The people must change their concept of the Messiah.

In ancient days the colt was a noble animal. It was used as a beast of service to carry the burdens of men. It was used by kings and their emissaries. When they entered a city in peace, they rode a colt to symbolize their peaceful intentions.

Jesus comes to us in humility and gentleness. God chooses to speak to us, not in thunderous tones, but often in a still, small voice. Jesus comes to us in peace and love, not war. Jesus came to change lives, not a political situation.

III. The Procession of Our Lord as He Enters Jerusalem

"There He is!" someone yells. Some take off part of their garments and throw them on the donkey to make Him a saddle.

Luke 19 fills in some details that Mark doesn't give us. Before this time Jesus told the folks, "Don't tell what I've done for you," but here Jesus doesn't try to shut them up. They begin to praise the Lord. In fact, the crowd showers Jesus with praise.

“Blessed is the King Who comes in the Name of the Lord.” “Peace in heaven and glory in the highest.”

Without prompting, the crowd in a moment of spontaneous worship begin to praise Him. But what was spontaneous and expressive for some is offensive for others. Some hearts are filled with Joy, the hearts of the Pharisees are filled with Judgment. Luke tells us that the Pharisees tell Jesus to rebuke them and tell them to stop praising Him. Jesus says, “If these people stop praising Me, the rocks will cry out to Me in praise.”

The people used two things to exhort our Lord as He rode before them: Praise and Palm Branches.

186 Praise: shouts of “Hosanna” or “Save us! Save us now!”

Palm Branches were symbolic of the Jewish desire for deliverance.

The waving of Palm branches started about 200 years earlier. Antiochus Euphianes had desecrated the Jewish Temple altar by slaying a pig on the altar, throwing its blood everywhere, and even drinking some of its blood. Antiochus Euphianes had brought shame on the Jewish Temple with his Syrian army.

It was then that Judas Maccabees, known as the Hammer, and the other Maccabees came in and drove out the Syrian army. In celebration the Jews waved Palm branches before Judas Maccabees for overthrowing their oppressors.

Now the Jews were oppressed by the Romans. They expected Jesus to overthrow the Romans. When they realized He was not going to do that, the crowd that shouted “Hail Him” on Sunday would shout “Nail Him” on Friday!

John tells us that as the road descended into a shallow valley, in a moment in time, the entire city burst into view and it was a spectacular view. But as Jesus saw the city He also knew that the people's praise was empty praise.

Jesus saw that they would reject Him and that the Roman legions under Titus would invade Jerusalem with 80,000 men. After many assaults, Titus was determined to starve them out. Those who tried to smuggle food into Jerusalem were captured and ordered to be crucified. About 500 were crucified every day. Every tree in the area was cut down for wood, including those on the Mount of Olives.

Bodies were everywhere. When the Jews no longer had the strength to bury their dead, they threw them over the wall. Finally, the city fell in August of A.D. 70 and the city and the Temple were destroyed. When Jesus saw this in His mind's eye, He wept over the city. This really wasn't the Triumphal Entry, but a Tearful Entry.

IV. The Prophecy Concerning the Lord's Real Triumphal Entry Revelation 19:11-16

What a contrast between our Lord's first and second entry into Jerusalem.

The first entry was on a meek and mild donkey – a symbol of gentleness and peace, but the second entry will be on the white stallion of a Warrior.

The first entry was to make atonement for our sins, but at His second He will come to judge and to make war, and to tread the wine press of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.

When He came that first time into the city, they announced Him as Jesus, the prophet from the humble town of Nazareth of Galilee, but when He comes the second time, He will be called by the Name “The Word of God,” and will bear the title “King of Kings and Lord of Lords.”

FALSE ADVERTISING

Mark 11:12-14, 20-26

FALSE ADVERTISING OR WHAT YOU SEE MAY NOT BE WHAT YOU GET

We're studying the last week of the earthly life of Christ. Each day Jesus and His disciples walked from Bethany, where the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus was located, about a mile from Jerusalem.

The Triumphal Entry took place on Sunday and after our Lord rode into Jerusalem on the colt of a donkey, Jesus and His disciples took the donkey and its colt back to its owner and most likely went to the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. He not only visited with His three friends, but He also enjoyed a supper at the home of Simon the Leper, and it was there that Mary anointed the head and feet with a costly perfume and wiped His feet with her hair.

Early Monday morning Jesus and His disciples walked the mile back to Jerusalem and Jesus became hungry. He saw a fig tree afar off, covered with leaves, which meant there was probably figs on it, but when He got to the tree, He found there were no figs on the tree and Jesus placed a curse on the tree. Jesus went on to Jerusalem and to the Temple area. He saw the corruption and deception that was going on in the Temple, but because the hour was late, He and His disciples started back toward Bethany.

Jesus and His disciples probably spent the night out under the stars near the Mount of Olives, where He spent the night in prayer to His Father receiving strength for His trials and His crucifixion.

The next day was Tuesday (remember He was crucified on Friday) and we are told Jesus did two things on Tuesday: He cleansed the Temple and explained about the dead fig tree.

Now, let's focus on the fig tree.

As Jesus and His disciples approached Jerusalem, the Lord caught sight of a fig tree whose abundant, lush, green foliage was visible a long way off.

Figs were plentiful in Israel. Figs were eaten both fresh and dried as well as being made into cakes. Two and sometimes three crops of figs could be harvested each year. The fruit appeared at the same time as the leaves, and sometimes even before.

The normal season for figs was in June, more than a month away, but the abundance of leaves on this tree held out a promise that there would be figs on this tree. Finding nothing but leaves on the tree, the Lord announced a death sentence on that tree. Immediately it began to die, and by the next morning when the disciples passed that way again, it had dried up from the roots.

188 All of His life, Jesus went about doing good. He healed the sick. He fed the hungry. He raised the dead. But here He performs a miracle that is seemingly destructive – and it is the only time in Scripture we see Him doing so. Was this act out of sync with the rest of His life and teaching? Did Jesus place a curse on this tree in a fit of hungry rage? No! On the contrary, Jesus' seemingly destructive cursing of the fig tree was an act of great mercy. Jesus is going to use this act to teach us some important spiritual lessons.

I. The Lord's Desire Mark 11:12

Notice the phrase, "He was hungry." The One who made all things became dependent on the things He made. The fact that He was hungry is a clear evidence of His humanity. When Jesus was born into this world, He remained fully God, but He became full man. He experienced hunger, thirst, weariness, pain, rejection, loneliness, and poverty. He endured all that He did so that He might identify with us.

Jesus walks to the fig tree hoping to find some fruit to satisfy His hunger and finds nothing but leaves.

Fig trees were and are very common in Israel. The common fig, which is mentioned over 60 times in the Bible, is one of the most important trees in the Word of God.

The first mention of figs or fig trees is in Genesis 3:7, when Adam and Eve used its broad leaves to make for themselves aprons to cover their nakedness.

Figs were a vital part of the middle Eastern diet because it was sweet to the taste (Judges 9:11).

Fig trees were valued for the shade they provided. It was a sign of peace and prosperity to sit in the shade of a fig tree.

It was under a fig tree that Jesus first saw Nathanael (John 1:48).

Good figs were used as a picture of obedient believers; while rotten figs were used to picture wicked men (Jeremiah 24:2-8).

The fig tree was used as a symbol of the nation of Israel (Jeremiah 8, Nahum 3, and Hosea 9). So in the original context of this story, the Jews were meant to see themselves as this tree. God had sown many spiritual seeds in their lives. He had performed miracles for them, sent them prophets, given them the Scriptures, and revealed to them their promised Messiah.

After all that, God had a right to expect a harvest of spiritual fruit from the Jews. This fruit would show itself in a faith that changed their lives, a love of others, and a welcome of Jesus Christ as their Messiah.

II. The Lord's Disappointment

189 The leaves on this tree gave the promise of figs, but it was an empty promise. Remember that the figs usually appeared at the same time the leaves appeared. This fig tree was guilty of false advertising. The tree said something: "I have leaves; therefore, I have fruit." That's why in Mark 11:14 we read, "Jesus said to it" (the tree). The leaves said to Jesus ... and Jesus said to the tree.

There was show, but no fruit. That's the point of this whole passage.

That's why I entitled the message, "False Advertising." A sub-title might be, "What You See Is Not What You Always Get."

Jesus did not curse the fig tree because it had no fruit. He cursed the fig tree because it was hypocritical. Jesus was just evaluating the tree. It said it had fruit, but it had no fruit. It was just outward show.

A fig leaf represents self-righteousness. When Adam and Eve sinned and they realized they were naked, they tried to cover their shame with fig leaves. That was the best they could do. Fig leaves are what they came up with to cover their transgression. But that covering wasn't adequate, so God covered them with animal skins.

Leaves represent religious appearance and activity. Many professing Christians have an abundance of leaves, but no fruit. What is fruit? Fruit is the outward expression of an inner nature.

Hypocrites are people who pretend to be what they are not. The problem with this tree was not that it had no figs, but that it pretended to have them and did not. For this tree to show "nothing but leaves" meant it was giving off nothing but lies and deception.

What about in your individual life? Are you all leaves – all show – or do you have any real fruit in your life? Fruit is always the evidence of genuine salvation.

Have you made a profession of faith in Christ? Do you profess to be a Christian? When a person is saved by God's grace, they bear fruit for His glory. Not everyone bears the same amount of fruit, but everyone who is saved bears some fruit (John 15:1-8).

What kind of fruit will a saved person bear?

1. A Changed Life – 2 Corinthians 5:17.

You cannot be truly saved without being changed because God gives you His nature at the moment you are saved.

2. A Vibrant Witness.

You will want to tell someone what Jesus did for you.

3. The Evidence of Inward Life – Galatians 5:19-23

Jesus is the Vine and we are the branches and because we are joined to Him, we will produce His nature and character of love, joy, peace, kindness, patience, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. So, do people see Jesus in you? 190 Jesus says that Israel is like this fig tree. They had all the signs of spiritual life, but they had no fruit. They were keeping the letter of the Law. They were carrying out the Temple ceremonies. They were religious in every detail, but they had no spiritual fruit.

III. The Lord's Dismay Mark 11:14, 20-21

Our Lord made the Observation and then gave the Offense!

There is a truth here that I don't want you to miss. In our day we have a tendency to ignore every suggestion of our Lord's sternness. We emphasize the kind, loving, gracious aspects of our Lord's character. We delight to remember that Jesus came to seek and to save the lost.

But there is another aspect of our Lord's character. He is not only Savior, He is also Judge. Romans 11:22 says, "Behold, then, the goodness and the severity of the Lord." There can be no goodness of the Lord without the severity of the Lord.

Jesus would have us to know that barrenness is a sin. What was wrong with the fig tree? What was it doing that would cause our Lord to proclaim a curse upon it? The leaves were doing no harm, but the reason for the tree's existence was to bear fruit and because it was not bearing fruit, it was condemned.

We commonly understand the word "sinner" to mean someone who has committed a glaring, gross, and open offense; someone who has done a shameful and wicked thing. But if we turn to a story like this, its first and most obvious lesson is that barrenness is a sin. A man doesn't have to do anything openly wicked in order to come under the condemnation of the Lord. If he does nothing and is barren, he is useless.

James 4:17

When we read the instances of judgment given to us in the Gospels, in nearly every case, men are not condemned because of any positive harm they had done, but like the fig tree, they had done nothing.

In Matthew 25:41 Jesus pronounced this terrible judgment, "Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire." What awful wickedness

had they done to merit a doom like that? Nothing. It was not what they had done; it was what they had not done. There were hungry people at their door to be fed, naked people to be clothed, thirsty people to be refreshed, sick people to be visited and comforted – and they did nothing. “In as much as you did it not ... depart from Me, you cursed.”

In Matthew 25:30 the householder pronounced this sentence, “cast the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” What great sin did he commit? He did not defraud his lord or rob him of his money. He hid the one talent in the ground and did nothing with it.

A barren life is bad enough, but worse still is the man who says he belongs to Christ and promises to be something, but is barren. The greatest obstacle to Christianity is not the man who does not claim to be a Christian, but the man who professes to be a Christ but bear no fruit.

How do we correct our spiritual fruitlessness?

191 Mark 11:22-26. The opposites of hypocrisy are Faith, Fellowship, and Forgiveness. This is the way to avoid the barrenness of hypocrisy and bear the tree fruit of the Spirit of God.

WHEN GOD CLEANS HOUSE

Mark 11:15-19, 27-33

This is the second time in Jesus' public ministry that He cleansed the Temple. The first time Jesus cleansed the Temple was at the beginning of our Lord's public ministry. He had just performed His first miracle of turning the water into wine at the wedding feast. It was a Passover season and Jesus went up to the Temple to worship. There was corruption in the Temple from those who sold oxen, sheep, and doves, and He made a whip of cords and He used the whip to drive out those who sold the animals and overturned the tables of the money changers.

What a disturbance! Jesus single-handedly turned over all the tables of the money changers. Coins were rolling on the ground, doves were let out of their cages, sheep and oxen were turned loose. People were running from the Temple area.

Somebody said, “Jesus lost it! He lost His temper and became destructive!” Not so! Read John 2:13-17. What Jesus expressed was righteous indignation. Jesus would not tolerate irreverence toward God the Father.

They asked Jesus, “What sign of authority can you show us that gives you authority to do what you have done?” Jesus said, “Destroy this Temple and in three days I will raise it upraise it up.’ The Jews said, ‘It took forty-six years to build this Temple and He is going to raise it up in three days?’ But Jesus spoke of the Temple of His body.” (John 2:19-21)

Jesus' lesson didn't last long because three years later the corruption was back and Jesus had to clean house again.

Two words will help us to understand what happened there.

A. Examination Mark 11:11, 15-16

The Triumphal Entry took place on Sunday. Jesus went into the Temple and saw some- thing He didn't like, but the hour was late, so He decided to wait until the next day to deal with the problem.

To get the true picture here, you need to understand something of the Temple. When Scripture says that Jesus entered the Temple, it does not mean the sacred sanctuary where the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies are. 193 There are three area courts before you get to the sanctuary.

The Temple itself sat on about thirty acres. The first court you came to was the Court of the Gentiles. This area was about 14 acres or about the size of 13 football fields. The second court was the Court of the Women and the third court was the Court of Jewish Males and then the sanctuary.

Jesus went only to this first court, the Court of the Gentiles. During Passover time, Jews came from everywhere. When the Jewish worshippers came to Jerusalem to worship at the Feast of Passover, they worshiped by doing two things:

1. They would bring and offer a sacrifice to the Lord.

They might offer an oxen or a sheep or, if they were poor like Mary and Joseph and could not afford a sheep or oxen, they would offer doves.

Since many Jews who came to Passover lived many miles from Jerusalem it was difficult for them to bring an animal sacrifice on a long trip. Therefore they would have to buy a sacrificial animal after arriving in Jerusalem for the Passover.

In Deuteronomy 14:24-26 God wanted to make it more convenient for His worshipers. So the Lord recommended a service be provided for those who traveled long distances so they could buy an animal at the outer court. God intended it as a blessing for His people.

2. The second reason for Jewish worshipers to come to Jerusalem at this time was to pay the Temple tax.

This offering which had to be paid was a half shekel, which was about one-and-a-half days wage. This money was used to pay for the daily sacrifices and operating expenses for the Temple year round.

Because it was given to the Lord, no foreign money was allowed because it was considered unclean. No image of an alien king was allowed to pollute the Temple because God was the Master to be worshiped and honored. Therefore, there was a need for money changers to change the foreign coins into Jewish coins. The changers were allowed to exchange the money for a four percent fee.

But here is what was happening. The Law required a perfect sacrifice be brought to offer to God. Sometimes families would bring their own animal to be sacrificed. No matter how perfect the animal was, the inspectors would "find" something wrong with the animal, take the animal as a "trade-in" animal, sell them a Temple animal for 30 times the normal cost of an animal and then take the rejected animal to a pen and later sell it for a perfect animal.

In paying the Temple Tax, they would use the Jewish coins over and over and stockpile the foreign coins. The priests would make about the equivalent of 300,000 dollars a year in money change alone.

194 B. The Extraction Mark 11:15-16

You say, "Now, Preacher, what does that have to do with me? I don't go to Jerusalem for Passover once a year. That's Old Testament."

Listen: In the Old Testament God had a Temple for His people. Today, the crucified, risen Lord has a people for His Temple. Those of us who are saved are the Temple of God today.

– I Corinthians 3:16-17 – 2 Corinthians 6:16b-17

– 1 Corinthians 6:19-20

I. The Purpose of God's Temple Today

Let me ask you a question: Where does God live today? Well, of course, we know God is omnipresent. That means He is everywhere. But the Bible teaches that throughout history, the Shekinah glory of God's presence has resided in several houses or temples. God will not live in a dirty house, so throughout history, God has moved into a house, the house got dirty, and God moved out. Let's do a quick tour of the different houses God has occupied.

The first Temple God moved into was the Jewish Tabernacle Moses constructed while the Jews were making their way from Egypt to the Promised Land. The Shekinah glory of God was present there in the Holy of Holies (1437 B.C. until 957 B.C.).

The second house was Solomon's Temple built in 957 B.C. until the Babylonians ransacked Jerusalem and destroyed the Temple in 586 B. C.

When the Jews returned to Jerusalem they rebuilt the Temple in 516 B.C. This second Temple was rather drab compared to Solomon's Temple, but about 45 years before Jesus was born, Herod the Great undertook an extreme makeover of the Temple. Because Jesus wasn't a Jewish priest, He never entered the Holy Place of the Temple.

Of course, Jesus was the perfect Temple of God and in Him all the fullness of God dwelt bodily. Jesus knew He was God's Temple because He said, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days" (John 2:19).

But all that is history. Where does God live today? God's collective address is His Church and His individual address is each believer. God lives in me and in you if you are saved. Let me say it again: In the Old Testament God had a Temple for His people; today He has a people for His Temple.

God WITH me in comforting. God FOR me is encouraging. But God living IN me is transforming.

So, what is the Purpose of God's Temple: His Church and each individual believer? What does God expect from His Temple?

195 A. It is to be a Place of Prayer

“My house is to be called a house of Prayer.” What does that mean? It means that everything we do is to have the aroma of prayer about it.

– Luke 18:1: “Men ought always to pray, and not to faint.” – I Thessalonians 5:17: “Pray without ceasing.” – James 4:2: “You have not because you ask not.” – Jeremiah 33:3: “Call unto Me, and I will answer, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know.”

The best barometer to gauge your spiritual health is your prayer life. When people talk about you do they ever say, “He is a real prayer warrior!” or “She is a real prayer warrior!” ?

The most important thing about you is your prayer life. Why? Because it speaks of your total dependence on God.

I need Thee every hour, most gracious Lord No tender voice like Thine can peace afford.

I need Thee every hour, stay Thou near by; Temptations lose their power when Thou art nigh.

I need Thee every hour, Teach me Thy will; Thy promises so rich in me fulfill.

I need Thee every hour, most Holy One Make me Thine in deed, Thou blessed Son.

I need Thee, O I need Thee; Every hour I need Thee! O bless me now, my Savior, I come to Thee.

B. It is to be a Place of Proclamation Romans 1:16

Tell me the story of Jesus, write on my heart every word. Tell me the story most precious, sweetest that ever was heard.

C. It is to be a Place of Praise Psalm 103:1

D. It is to be a Place of Peace

E. It is to be a Place where we Practice the Presence of the Lord.

II. The Pollution of the Temple

196 Does our Temple ever get defiled? Does our Temple ever need to be cleansed? If the Bible teaches anything about where God lives, it teaches that God will not live in a dirty house. You may live in a dirty house, but God won't. He is holy and He can't abide with the presence of sin.

I heard about a group of college guys who lived in dirty dorm room. They were the keepers of the school's mascot, a goat. They asked the dean if they could move the goat into their dorm room during the cold weather. The dean said, “Well, what about the smell?” The college guys said, “Oh, he'll just get use to it.” College guys might live in a dirty room, but God won't.

God has been moving in and out of houses throughout history. We saw where God lived in the Tabernacle and then the two Temples. But the Temple in Jerusalem was desecrated by sin and God had already moved out when Jesus arrived. The Jews were worshiping there during the life of Jesus and even 40 years after Jesus ascended into heaven, but God wasn't there. It was only empty religion. That's why Jesus told them “their house was left unto them desolate (Matthew 23:28).

Now let's come to God's current address. If you're a Christian, you are His Temple. So what comes to your mind when I say “God won't live in a dirty house?” I mean it! I'm warning all Christians, God won't live in a dirty house!

Are you feeling thoroughly guilty now? God won't live in a dirty house, that's right. So the truth that can change your life is: You're not a dirty house. If you're a child of God, you might occasionally have a dirty thought, but you're not a dirty house. You may even commit an occasional dirty deed, but that doesn't mean you are a dirty house. Being clean is a state of grace, not based on your behavior.

God is no longer moving in and out of houses. He has come to take up permanent residence in believers. Jesus said when the Holy Spirit comes, “He will be IN you ... and He will be WITH you forever” (John 14:16). So some of you are thinking, “Are you saying to me that when I come to Christ, the Holy Spirit came to live in me, and even when I sin God doesn't forsake me?” That's right. If you're thinking, “That sounds too good to be true, you're exactly right. Grace always sounds too good to be true.

But if this truth makes you think about how you can go out and sin all you want to, then, my friend, you have some kind of spirit in you, but it isn't the Holy Spirit. If you're thinking about how much sin you can get away with and still make it to heaven, I doubt you know Jesus. No, if Jesus lives in you, He will keep His Temple clean.

III. The Purging of the Temple

How did Jesus purge the Temple?

With the whip of chastisement. With disruption of their plans.

Does God need to drive something out of your Temple? Some habit? Some sin? Some attitude? Some coldness? Let the whip of God's Holy Spirit drive it far from your heart.

197 When Augustine was tempted to sin, he would say to himself, "O, Augustine, knowest thou not thou are carrying around God with thee wherever thou goest?"

PRACTICAL PRAYING: 101

Mark 11:22-26

Let me ask you a question: Does prayer change anything? Is prayer important? There are those who say that prayer doesn't change anything; it only changes the pray-er.

Genuine, biblical faith is a miracle! Faith in God is something we do not possess naturally. Ephesians 2:8 tells us that faith is "the gift of God." Romans 12:3 tells us that God gives every believer some "measure of faith."

The outworking of faith in God's people has allowed them to see demonstrations of God's power that boggle the mind. It has allowed them to receive answers to prayer for things that appear impossible. Consider the following:

Joshua 10:12-15. Joshua commanded the sun to stand still so Israel could defeat the Amorites. God stopped the sun and the moon in its place so victory would come.

Isaiah 38:1-6. King Hezekiah was told by the prophet of God to set his house in order because he was going to die. He prayed to the Lord God and God added 15 years to his life.

Genesis 22:1-14. Abraham was told to sacrifice his son Isaac, who was the son of promise. He obeyed by faith and God spared Isaac, providing a ram in his place.

Joshua 14:6-16. Eighty-five year old Caleb believed God for the power to defeat a mountain infested with giants. God gave him that mountain.

1 Samuel 17. A teenage boy named David believed God for the power to defeat a giant named Goliath. God gave him the victory.

Daniel 3. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego believed God to keep them from the power of a pagan king and a fiery furnace. God met them in the furnace and protected them there.

Prayer also affects the pray-er. If I pray it will make a difference in me! Prayer Edifies us ... Encourages us ... Empowers us ... and Enlightens us.

Prayer is important!

A young man in college was visiting his girlfriend's hometown for the first time. We'll call him Tommy. It was a small town with only one drug store. Tommy stopped in and told the pharmacist he wanted to buy three boxes of chocolate: a small box, a medium box, and a large box. The pharmacist asked why he was buying three boxes. 199 Tommy said, "Well, I'm going to my girlfriend's house for supper. If she only lets me hold her hand, I'll give her the small box. If she lets me give her a kiss on the cheek, then I'll give her the medium box. But if she lets me do some serious smooching, I'll give her the big box."

That evening at dinner his girlfriend's father asked Tommy to pray before the meal. Tommy proceeded to pray a long, sincere, intense prayer that lasted over five minutes. When he finally said, "Amen," his girlfriend said, "Why Tommy you never told me you could pray such powerful prayers!" Tommy said, "And you never told me that your father was the local pharmacist!"

Let me give you four words as we look at Practical Praying: 101.

I. Faith Mark 11:24

The verse actually says, "Whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it (not that you will receive it) and it will be

yours.”

The thing about faith is that you must believe God before you see the answer to your prayer. In other words, when you ask God for something, you should begin to act like God is already answering that prayer. If you pray for rain, you should carry your umbrella, even if the sun is shining.

You may be thinking, “Well, I prayed for something and it didn't happen. God didn't answer my prayer. So how can I have faith?”

God always answers prayer. Sometimes the answer is “Yes.” Sometimes the answer is “No.” Sometimes the answer is “Wait.” And sometimes God give us something different or better than we asked for. But God always answers prayer.

You must believe without a doubt that God hears your prayers. “Pray and believe and you shall receive; pray and doubt and you'll do without.”

Here's a caution: You can't take any of these four things I'm going to give you and act like prayer is a blank check. All of these things I'm going to mention must be in place. For example:

I John 3:21-22 says if we expect God to answer our prayers, we must be obedient to His commands.

I John 5:14 says, “If we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.” God will not grant a request if what we ask is not according to His will.

Let me say one other thing about praying in faith before I move on. The faith that is spoken of here is faith that is persistent faith.

Jeremiah 29:13 says, “You shall seek Me, and find Me, when you shall search for Me with all your heart.”

200 II. Fervor

James 5:16: “The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.”

God answers the prayers of His children. The only prayer that God answers of a lost man is the prayer of mercy and forgiveness relating to salvation.

III. Faults Psalm 66:18

If you are trying to hang on to some sin and you are rebellious toward God, He will not hear you.

IV. Forgiveness Matthew 6:12, 14-15

Unforgiveness stands as a barrier between us and the Lord.

Forgiveness doesn't come easily. By nature we are creatures of revenge. We want to extract an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth. But Jesus came and taught that we are to love our enemies and forgive those who have wronged us.

Forgiveness is not forgetting.

You've probably heard the expression, “Forgive and forget.” But it's not that easy. Or perhaps you've heard someone say, “Well, I'll forgive, but I won't forget!” What they really are saying is, “I'm going to say 'you're forgiven' but I'm going to actively remember what you did to me and I'll remind myself of it every time I hear your name!” That's not real forgiveness.

Forgiveness is an active choice. Forgetting is a passive process in which a matter fades from our memory with the passing of time. We all forget things like names, telephone numbers, and birthdays. It's amazing how some men can forget their wedding anniversary but can remember the score of the 1983 Super Bowl! You don't have to make yourself forget something, it just happens. And the older we get the more there is to forget!

Once an old elephant was drinking at a watering hold and spied a turtle. The elephant walked over and swatted the turtle across the pond with his trunk. A passing giraffe said, “Why did you do that?” The elephant said, “I recognized that turtle as the one who took a nip out of my trunk 47 years ago.” The giraffe said, “Wow, you must have a great memory.” The elephant said, “Yes, I have turtle recall.”

The sad thing is when it comes to people who have offended us, we have total recall. Forgive them for Christ's sake, and let it go even if you still remember what they did. Forgiveness means that you don't go actively digging into your memory and dredging up their act whenever you see that person.

Forgiveness is releasing someone from your desire for revenge.

201 Our natural desire is to hurt those who hurt us. When someone insulted us in elementary school, we said, “The same to you and more of it!” Perhaps you’ve seen the bumper sticker that says, “I DON’T GET MAD; I GET EVEN!”

The Bible word “forgive” is *aphiemi*, which means “to send away; to release.” It’s a picture of you holding a person by the throat when you have a reason and the means to punish them for what they did to you. But instead of choking them, you release them. That’s mercy in action.

But we seldom have the means or opportunity to grab someone by the throat, so what we continue to hang onto is a desire to hurt them. We have a stranglehold on resentment and a desire to hurt that person that hurt us. Forgiveness is letting go of that harmful urge.

How do you release someone who has hurt you? You forgive them. You don’t do it for their sake; you do it for your sake. You don’t forgive them because they ask you to forgive them; you do it because God has forgiven you. They may not every ask you to forgive them, but you can forgive them anyway.

One of my favorite Bible commentators is Warren Wiersbe. He writes: “The world’s darkest prison is the prison of an unforgiving heart. Some of the most miserable people I’ve met have been those who would not forgive others. They dream about punishing the one who wronged them, and don’t realize that they are only punishing themselves.”

Corrie Ten Boom was imprisoned by the Nazis during World War II because her family provided a hiding place for Jews when they were being arrested. She and her sister Betsy were sent to Ravensbrück where horrible torture, rape, and death occurred on a regular basis. Betsy died in the prison camp, but Corrie miraculously survived. She became an effective Christian author and speaker. In 1947 she was invited to speak in Munich, Germany. That evening, she spoke on the topic of forgiveness – how God buries our sins in the depths of the sea. After her talk she was approached by a man who looked familiar to her. With horror she recognized him as one of the cruelest guards at the concentration camp. She remembered the shame of walking naked in front of this very man. Suddenly all the fear and hatred returned in a flash.

He said to her, “In your talk you mentioned Ravensbrück. I was a guard there. But since that time, I have become a Christian. I know that God has forgiven me for the cruel things I did there, but I would like to hear it from you as well, Fraulein.” He held out his hand to Corrie and said, “Will you forgive me?”

Here’s how Corrie describes that encounter in her own words: “It could not have been many seconds that he stood there, hand held out, but to me it seemed hours as I wrestled with the most difficult thing I had ever had to do. I stood there with the coldness clutching my heart. But forgiveness is an act of the will, and the will can function regardless of the temperature of the heart.

‘Jesus help me!’ I prayed silently. ‘I can lift my hand. I can do that much. You supply the feeling.’ And so woodenly, mechanically, I thrust my hand into the one stretched out to me.

And as I did, an incredible thing took place. The current started in my shoulder, raced down my arm, sprang into our joined hands. And then this healing warmth seemed to flood my whole being, bringing tears to my eyes.

202 ‘I forgive you, brother!’ I cried. ‘With all my heart!’ For a long moment we grasped each other’s hands, the former guard and former prisoner. I had never known God’s love so intensely as I did then.” (Tramp for the Lord, pp.55-57)

MURDER IN A VINEYARD

Mark 12:1-12

The events in our text took place on Tuesday of the last week on earth for Christ. On Friday He will be crucified at Calvary. On Sunday He rode into Jerusalem on a small donkey as the people shouted “Hosanna!” When He finished His ride into Jerusalem He went to the Temple. There in the Temple He saw corruption, defilement and dishonesty.

Because the hour was late He said and did nothing, but He and His disciples went back to Bethany, where He and His disciples had a meal in the home of Simon the Leper. Mary served during the meal and before the meal was over, Mary came in with a very expensive bottle of perfume and she anointed our Lord’s head and feet with the perfume. Then she let down her hair and dried His feet with her hair.

The next morning, Monday, He left Bethany and headed back to Jerusalem. On the way Jesus became hungry. He saw a fig tree that was full of leaves, indicating that there were figs on the tree. But when He got to the tree, He examined the tree and found it had no figs and Jesus placed a curse on the tree and it dried up and died.

It was after that that Jesus went into the Court of the Gentiles and cleansed the Temple and began to teach the people.

On the next day, Tuesday, He went back to Jerusalem and the people asked Him what authority He had to cleanse the Temple. They asked, "Who do you think You are? What right do You have to do what You did to the Temple.

Jesus answered their question with a question: "What about John the Baptist? Who gave him his authority to preach repentance? God or man?" They would not answer Him, so Jesus told them this parable about the vineyard.

Jesus told them three things about the Lord of the Vineyard:

I. The Lord of the Vineyard and His Goodness Mark 12:1

This parable is about the Jews' rejection of their Messiah, the Lord Jesus. Many of our Lord's parables are complex and difficult to understand. In fact, there were times that the disciples would ask the Lord to explain the parable. But this parable is not hard to understand. Everyone standing around knew exactly what Jesus was talking about. Look at Mark 12:12 and you will see that the Jewish religious leaders knew that Jesus was talking directly about them.

Here is what we learn in Mark 12:1:

204 The owner of the vineyard is God the Father. He created the vineyard and planted the vineyard with choice plants.

The vineyard represents Israel. God placed His people in their own land flowing with milk and honey, hoping to find much fruit from the people of the land. The vineyard had been the national symbol for Israel for centuries.

The "land-workers" or "tenant farmers" were like "sharecroppers." They lived on the farmed land that didn't belong to them. They plowed the Owner's land, planted the Owner's seeds, and picked the Owner's harvest. In return for their hard work, they kept a certain amount of the food they produced and gave the rest to the Landowner.

Look at the goodness of God toward the nation of Israel:

God has been so good to Israel. He choose Israel and the Jewish people as His own people. Out of all the people in the world, He choose them. He gave them great inventive minds. They excel in literature, architecture, music, engineering, cattle and olive farms, sheep rearing, and mining. God gave them sharp economic minds and medical minds. More than that, God gave them spiritual advantages. The Messiah would come from the Jews, the Word of God was given to us by the Jews, the greatest prophets were Jews. Although Israel is smaller than the state of Mississippi, it is a rich, fruitful land, flowing with milk and honey.

Consider the Lord's attention to detail as Jesus tells this parable. He put a strong wall around it to keep wild animals out and to discourage thieves from making off with the crops. The words "set a hedge around it" means a hedge made of prickly cacti plants.

He built a watchtower for shelter and storage and as a vantage point from which men could see the whole vineyard.

He dug a pit for the winepress, one shallow pit where the bunches of grapes are crushed, and one deeper pit to hold the juice as it flowed in.

God thought of everything; all provisions were made for a great harvest and prosperity for the farmers. This was Israel in the Holy Land He had promised to Abraham when he left Ur. God asked, "What could have been done to My vineyard that I have not done in it?"

This parable is actually a prophecy that our Lord took from Isaiah 5:1-7. (Read) God has been good to Israel and yet, they rejected Jesus as their Messiah.

When Israel should have brought forth good fruit, it brought forth wild fruit!

God had tenderly raised up His vine in a land called Egypt. Then, He had taken that vine and transported it across the burning sands of the Sinai and He had planted it in Canaan. There it took root and there it flourished. God had given His vine a good land in which to grow. He had given Israel His word and His protection. By God's own testimony, He had done everything He could have done to ensure the success of Israel. But it brought forth wild grapes.

205 We are not Israel, but every saved person here must confess that God has been good to us. He came to us in our Egypt, dug us up by the roots and transplanted us in the new country of His kingdom.

Add to our salvation all the blessings He has given to us: Answered prayer, the presence of His Holy Spirit within us, His Word, freedom to worship Him, His great and precious promises. How we should praise Him and bring forth much fruit for His glory!

II. The Lord of the Vineyard and His Grace Mark 12:2-8

It's time for the landowner to send his servants and receive his part of the harvest. But look what the workers did. Mark the words: Caught ... beat ... sent him away ... cast stones at him ... wounded him ... killed him ... wounded him in the head (probably referring to John the Baptist).

Notice Hebrews 11:36-38.

Then last of all he sent his well-beloved son, saying, "They will respect my son." and what did they do to Him? They killed him and cast him out of the vineyard.

Verse 9: "What will the owner of the vineyard do?" Destroy the vineyard workers and give the vineyard to another.

Isaiah 5:5-6 says, "I will remove the hedge and wall of protection and give it to another." The spiritual privilege will be taken away and given to another.

It was not long after the Church was born in Acts 2 that the Jews failed to use their spiritual privilege and the Lord gave it instead to the Gentiles. But sadly, the Gentiles are not using their spiritual privilege either.

Look what happened in Great Britain.

Charles H. Spurgeon preached three times on Sunday – twice on Sunday morning and once on Sunday night. Each service was filled and many turned away. The building would hold 5,000 people. He begged the saved to stay away in one of the Sunday morning services so lost sinners could come, hear the gospel and be saved. After Spurgeon died, Britain began to compromise the gospel, they became immoral and shut God out of its political and social affairs. Today in the same building where Spurgeon preached, they have only one service on Sunday. On a good day they will have 50 who attend worship. God took Britain's special privilege away.

May I tell you that the same thing is happening in America. God is taking America's privilege away as I speak. America doesn't want God in her affairs.

In most pulpits in America, there is little spiritual power. Most churches in America want contemporary songs and feel-good sermons. Most contemporary songs have a beat or a movement but no theology or biblical content. Too many sermons have so little Biblical content and focus instead on social issues. Too many sermons are some man's opinions or ideas and very little "thus says the Lord" or "The Bible says." The only word promised to bless is His Word. 206 God has removed the hedge from America. We decided we don't want God in our affairs. A song on radio talks about a shooting in one of our schools. Six shots fired, three lives lost, why would God allow this. Mr. Carter says, "It's not God's fault, you asked Him to leave." Now we are wondering which restroom transgender folks should use. Folks didn't like the way God made them so they changed who they are. Our sin has gotten us in the mess we're in.

III. The Lord of the Vineyard and His Glory Mark 12:9-12

The Lord of the vineyard is left with no choice. He has tried to work with the farmers time and again, but they refused to listen to him. Now, because they have rejected his slaves and killed his son, he will come in wrath and destroy those who have taken what is his.

Romans 11:22 is an interesting verse. It says, "Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God." On one hand, God is good to those who come to Him in faith, He forgives them, He saves them, and He gives them everlasting life in Heaven. On the other hand, those who reject Him will face Him in judgment. You will either face Him as the Lamb or you will face Him as the Lion. The choice is yours.

In Mark 12:10-11 Jesus changes the image. He stops talking about a vineyard and He starts talking about a building. He quotes Psalm 118:22 to make His point.

The key to a good foundation is a perfectly straight cornerstone. That stone, if straight would ensure that the building would be plumb and square. If the stone was not right, the building would not turn out right.

These words were on a Church sign: "Sin is like a credit card: You get the pleasure first, but then you must pay for it."

Some folks choose to live life without Christ, but they also have to live with the consequences.

By His grace God has given you the choice to live with God in your life. Will you choose Christ? He will forgive your sin, save your soul, and make Heaven your eternal home.

God will get glory whichever choice you make, but it is His desire that you choose Him.

PAY WHAT YOU OWE

Mark 12:13-17

Things are heating up in Jerusalem because of Jesus. His enemies are out to get Jesus and they don't care how they accomplish their goal. They either want to discredit Him with the people or to have a reason to accuse Him before the state and put Him to death.

A conspiracy was formed against Jesus by all of the religious groups of that day to silence Jesus.

Notice Mark 11:27-28. The chief priest, the scribes, and the elders wanted to know who gave Him the authority to cleanse the Temple.

Mark 12:13. The Pharisees and the Herodians were sent to Him to catch Him in His words. They intended to trap Him.

Mark 12:18. The Sadducees come to Him trying to trap Him.

They all team up against Him: The chief priest, the scribes, the elders, the Pharisees, the Herodians, and the Sadducees, all are out to get Him.

But Jesus was in full control. His time had come. He knew He would die on the cross at three o'clock Friday afternoon; at the very hour that the Passover lamb would be slain in the Temple. He would die at the same time as the Lamb of God slain before the foundation of the world. Although the religious leaders didn't know it, they were participating in God's plan.

I want to share just two thoughts with you from this passage.

I. The Jews and Their Attack Mark 12:13-15a

A. The Conspirators Mark 12:13a

This verse tells us that the men who approached Jesus came from two very different groups that held opposing beliefs.

The Pharisees were the religious conservatives of that day. They were very legalistic in that they tried to keep the very letter of the Law of God perfectly. The very name "Pharisee" means "the Separatists." Still, they were marked by pride and self-righteousness. For them, it was all outward show. They had no real faith relationship with God. Yet, the Pharisees were very nationalistic in their political views. They hated being under Roman rule and wanted to be free from it.

208 The Herodians were a political party among the Jews who were supporters of King Herod. They enjoyed the benefits they received under Roman occupation. While the Romans controlled their country, the people enjoyed religious freedom, protection, and prosperity.

Normally, these two groups had nothing to do with one another. They were polar opposites. They hated one another. It would be like the NAACP and the KKK cooperating with one another. Yet, they came together for the common goal of destroying Jesus.

B. The Conspiracy Mark 12:13b

These men came together in an effort to "catch Jesus in His words." The word "catch" has the idea of "setting a trap to catch one's prey."

They wanted to outsmart Jesus and get Him to say something that would get Him in trouble with either the Roman authorities or the common people. If they could get Jesus to offend Rome, they could label Him as an insurrectionist and Rome would take care of their problem for them. If they could discredit Jesus with the common people, He would lose His influence there. Either way, their problem would be solved.

C. The Compliments Mark 12:14a

These men come to Jesus and they try to use a psychological trick. They come to Him with flattery. People will do that, won't they. They will try to butter up before they drop the hammer on your head. That's what these men are doing.

By the way, you would do well to watch out for those folks who are always trying to flatter you. There are people all around us who try to get us on their side through flattery. They as dangerous and ultimately they will turn on you.

Dale Carnegie said, "Flattery is telling the other person precisely what he thinks about himself." Someone said, "Flattery is all right as long as you don't inhale."

Everything they said about Jesus was true, but they didn't believe a word of it. Their insincere flattery was designed to cause Jesus to drop His guard and say something stupid. This trick might have worked with an ordinary man, but not Jesus. Verse 15 tells us the Lord knew their motives and could see the condition of their hearts.

Well, what did they say to Jesus? What was their compliments? See verse 14:

– They began by calling Jesus "Master" or "Teacher."

– Then they said, "we know you are true," that you have integrity.

– "And care about no one," that you are indifferent to public opinion.

– "for you do not regard the person of men," you are not the kind of man who can be manipulated. 209 – "But you teach the way of God in truth," You teach the way of God accurately.

With their sarcastic flattery out of the way, they get to the real reason for their visit.

D. The Challenge Mark 12:14b-15

For both of these groups this was a matter of separation of church and state.

– The Pharisees believed that religion was superior to the state. – The Herodians believed that the state was superior to religion.

The Herodians probably didn't mind paying the tax, because they liked all the benefits they received from Rome. They thought government was dominant over religion and that taxes must be paid to Caesar rather than to God.

The Pharisees, on the other hand, hated the tax. They detested Roman rule and they recoiled against using a coin that bore a graven image of the Emperor. They believed the state was to be subject to religious rule.

They want to know if paying the tax was "lawful" or allowed by God. They were trying to back Jesus into a corner. They thought there were only two possible answers, yes or no.

If Jesus said "No," they could label Him as an insurrectionist and have Him arrested for opposing Roman law. If He said "Yes" He would lose face with the common people, who also hated paying taxes to Rome.

II. The Lord and His Answers Mark 12:15b-17

A. Jesus' Answer Involved Exposure Mark 12:15b

Jesus knew their hearts and knew they were nothing but hypocrites. He knew they had no respect for Him or for His ministry. He knew they hated Him and wanted Him dead. Knowing their intentions, He confronted them publically.

By the way, He knows your heart as well. What does He see in your heart?

B. Jesus' Answer Involved Example Mark 12:15c-16

"Bring Me a penny," or a denarius which was a day's pay for the common worker in those days.

When they brought the coin to Jesus, He asked, "Whose Image and Inscription is on this?" They answered, "Caesar's." On the front of the denarius was an engraving of the head of Caesar Tiberius – that was the Image. In Latin on the front were the words, "Tiberius Caesar, divine Augustus, son of Augustus." On the back, in Latin, 210 were the words "Pontifex Maximus, High Priest of the Roman nation." These were the Inscriptions.

By the way, on our one dollar bill is the image of George Washington; on the back are the words, "In God We Trust." The dollar belongs to one whose Image it bares and Inscription it bares.

No wonder the religious Jews bristled at using these coins. After all, when they claimed divinity for Caesar the they claimed that Caesar was the High Priest of the Roman Empire.

C. Jesus' Answer Involved an Exhortation Mark 12:17

Jesus answered their question, but not in the way they expected. Jesus is saying, we who belong to the kingdom of God are responsible to human government AND we are responsible to divine government.

The word “render” means “to pay back what is owed.” We owe something to government and we owe something to God.

What do we owe Caesar – Human Government?

1. Taxes

The question that was raised with Jesus that day in Jerusalem was a question of paying taxes to Rome and Caesar.

The people who lived in ancient Rome enjoyed many benefits by being in that Empire. They enjoyed peace, protection, safe travel, justice, good roads and many other things. All of that had to be paid for, so Rome taxed the people. The same is true today. We enjoy certain things in our society that must be paid for. Roads, school, police and fire protection, clean water, military protection, all must be funded by the tax-payers.

I don't know of anyone who enjoys paying taxes. I don't like the way government spends our tax dollars, but we are commanded to do so by the Word of God. I think we are over taxed, but until that changes, we have a responsibility to pay them on time and in full.

Try to imagine what life would be like today if no one paid taxes. We'd have no government, so anarchy would rule. No police to patrol the streets. No roads to drive on. Parents would have to pay the salaries of teachers. No welfare for the needy and no Social Security program for our retirement.

I'm not an IRS agent, but we need to show them some respect, even if we have a beef with them. One man said every time he sent them his check, he addressed it to the Infernal Revenue Service.

Look at Romans 13:1-7.

211 What else do we owe our government?

Prayer. See I Timothy 2:1-3.

2. What do we owe God? Mark 12:17

Our Trust – Our Time – Our Tithe – Our Testimony

Pay what you owe – Both to the Government and to God!

A QUESTION CONCERNING RELATIONSHIPS IN HEAVEN

Mark 12:18-27

We are still in the last week of our Lord's life before He is crucified on the cross. And we are on the Tuesday before Christ is hung on the cross on Friday.

Tuesday was a full day for our Lord.

Early Tuesday morning Jesus cleansed the Temple. Then Peter noticed that the fig tree that Jesus cursed was dried up from the roots. Then in Mark 11:27 the chief priest, the scribes, and the elders asked Jesus where He got the authority to cleanse the Temple. Then Jesus gave the parable of the wicked vineyard owner. Then the Pharisees and the Herodians asked Him about paying taxes to Caesar. Now the Sadducees come to Him asking about the resurrection. Next time we look at the Gospel of Mark, the scribes will come to Him, asking about the Greatest Commandment.

All of these religious groups asked Him questions that were intended to discredit Him, or pit Him against Rome so Rome would kill Him, or to get Him to say something that would cause Him to lose His favor and influence with the common man. But they could not out-smart Jesus. He would always turn the tables on those who were trying to trip Him up.

Now I want us to look at the Sadducees and the question they asked Jesus about the resurrection.

I. The Challengers Mark 12:18

The Herodians were more of a political group than a religious group who didn't mind being under Roman rule because of all the benefits they got from Rome.

The Pharisees were the conservative religious group who tried to keep the Law of God perfectly outwardly. They were legalistic in that they tried to keep the Law outwardly, but there was nothing of God in their heart. They were all show and no reality.

The chief priest and scribes and elders were the local boys who were much like the Pharisees but with less influence.

The Sadducees were a minority sect among the Jews. They may have been few, but they were the most powerful and influential of all the Jewish sects.

213 The Sadducees controlled the priesthood. All the high priests and the chief priest were Sadducees.

The Sadducees formed a majority of the Sanhedrin, or the Jewish Supreme Court.

They were aristocratic and wealthy. They controlled all the buying and selling that went on at the Temple. They hated Jesus and were angry with Him because He had interrupted their business enterprises when He cleansed the Temple.

Most of the Sadducees were disliked by the common Jew. They had an air of superiority about them. They were often aloof, thinking they were better than everyone else. They were rude, insensitive, and very harsh in the judgments they handed down. They had nothing for the common man.

They were mainly disliked for their theology and they would not budge on their beliefs.

The Sadducees accepted only the first five books of Moses as authoritative, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. They believed that one could not base doctrine on what the prophets or the other Old Testament writers said.

The doctrine that caused the most trouble with the people was their denial of all things supernatural. They believed in the existence of God, but they rejected everything else that was of a supernatural nature.

Acts 23:8 tells us that they did not believe in angels, or demons, or heaven, or hell, or miracles, or the resurrection, or the future judgment. They believed that when you die on this earth, that's all there is.

Because they didn't believe in life after death, a resurrection, or a future judgment, they tended to live for the moment. They lived their life for power and profit. Their philosophy could be described as one of "Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die."

The Sadducees have a lot of relatives in our day. They may not come out and say they don't believe in heaven or hell or a final judgment or a day of accountability, but they live their life as if they will never have to answer to God.

II. The Challenge Mark 12:18c-23

Notice: "Moses wrote to us." Remember that I told you that they only believed what Moses wrote.

I'm here to tell you that the Old Testament does teach the resurrection from the dead.

Look at Job 19:25-27 (By the way, Moses wrote the Book of Job.) Look at Isaiah 26:19 Look at Daniel 12:2

The story the Sadducees came up with is found in Deuteronomy 25:5-10. 214 This is called "the levirate marriage law." This assured two things: That the family name would continue and that the property holdings would be kept in the family. (One great instance in the bible when this law was put into practice in the Old Testament is when the widow Ruth became the wife of Boaz.)

Notice Verse 23. With sarcasm and a giggle one asked, "So whose wife will she be in the resurrection (and with an added jab) when they rise?"

The Sadducees thought this argument was irrefutable. The Sadducees had used this passage over and over and no one had been able to answer them, and they thought they had Jesus trapped.

There are some of you who might want to know the answer to a question like that. Let's say your mate died and you remarried, or you have been divorced and remarried. Which one of your mates will be your husband or wife in Heaven? Or if your ex-husband or ex-wife happens to go to Heaven, what's your relationship going to be like with the two mates? (I remarried after my first wife died and my present wife's husband is now in Heaven. I told her that when we get to Heaven, she had better choose me over him!)

III. The Correction Mark 12:24-27

Jesus told the Sadducees, "You err, your theology is wrong. You don't know two things: You don't know the Scriptures and you don't know the power of God."

1. Their Theology was Wrong.

The Sadducees, and many folks today, see life in Heaven simply as a continuation of what's going on in this world. They cannot conceive that God would change the qualities of life and give men a totally new environment in which to live. Many think we will be

resurrected into exactly the same state of being that we are Before we die.

Marriage on earth is a temporary arrangement for this life, but people die and the marriage on earth ends. But in the resurrection, when God's people are raised from the dead to enter into the full experience of eternal life, this "temporal" arrangement will no longer be needed.

Jesus says we will be "like angels in heaven." Contrary to popular folklore, when we die, we DO NOT become angels – we become LIKE angels. That's a very important distinction. How are we LIKE the angels? Angels don't die. There is never a reference in the Bible to an angel birth or an angel funeral.

Future life and relationships will exceed earthly relationships. Heavenly life and relationships will be perfect. Our love will be perfect and we will love everyone perfectly. God will change all relationships into perfection.

Some folks worry about an "ex" being in Heaven and what the relationship in heaven will be like. Maybe a parent and a child relationship, or a brother and brother or a sister and sister

215 relationship is bitter and hurtful and resentful on earth and you are wondering what that relationship will be like in Heaven.

God will change us into His likeness. We will love one another in a perfect way and there will be real harmony.

2. There's a second thing. The Sadducees Didn't Know the Power of God.

God IS (now) the God of past saints, believers who have passed on. God's relationships are active relationships. God does not say "I was the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob," but "I am their God." His relationships with His own are active, continuous, and perfect.

He is the God of the Living; not the dead.

There will be no rival relationships in Heaven. There won't be any feeling of jealousy in Heaven.

By the way, there will be one marriage in Heaven. Jesus will take us as His bride. And I'll tell you this, we'll have eyes only for Him!

GOD'S GREATEST COMMANDMENT

Mark 12:28-34

There are many benefits to expository preaching. For example:

1. It is the natural way to study the Bible. When someone sends you a letter, you don't open the letter and start reading the middle of the letter first, because what is written first might make a lot of difference about what is written in the middle of the letter.
2. Expository study and preaching also gives you a sense and understanding of the heart and mind of the one writing.
3. Expository study and preaching will give you the whole counsel of God. You won't be able to skip over the hard stuff or the things that may be unpleasant for you.

Let's face it, some things in the Bible are more meaningful to us than other things. Some things lend themselves to more powerful preaching than others. Jesus told the Pharisees that they gave themselves to the details of small things and neglected the weightier things. For example, they would tithe on the number of leaves on a plant, but they would not care for their needy or aging parents.

Not every passage of Scripture carries the same weight. With some passages of Scripture the preacher ought to be able to hit a home run while with other passages the best he can do is hit a single. So, when I preach, don't leave saying, "I didn't get much out of that sermon. He blew it today. It was a weak sermon." It may be that the passage was designed as a "single." My problem is, I keep hitting foul balls with a "home run" passage – and that's not good!

4. I like expository preaching because you always know what you are going to preach. You preach what comes next.

Let me tell you how I prepare to preach. I get my Bible, my commentaries, and my study helps and put them all out before me. But I never even read the passage of Scripture without going to the Lord in prayer.

God works through clean vessels, so I spend time confessing my sins and asking God to forgive me of my sins and to cleanse me from all unrighteousness.

Then I confess to God that without Him I am nothing and can produce nothing and I ask Him to be involved in every area of the preparation of the message.

Then I confess and declare that the Holy Spirit is the Great Teacher. I ask Him to give me insight into the Word of God and to teach me so that I can teach His people. I want God to speak His message through me.

But when I come to this passage, after I had made all of the preparations I just told you about, a question kept flashing through my mind. I didn't find the question raised in any of my commentaries, so I assume they knew the answer and didn't see a need to deal with it.

Now here is the question: This passage is about loving God with your total being and your neighbor as yourself. This is not only God's commandment to us, it is God's Greatest Commandment to us.

Now here is the question: Why would God see it necessary to COMMAND us to love Him? He gave us life. We breath His air. We live on His planet. We drink water and eat food He provides for us. He saved us from our sin by sending His only Beloved Son to die for our sins. He is preparing us an eternal home to be with Him.

So why would He have to command us to love Him with all of our being?

There is only one answer! He knows we are weak, sinful, selfish, ungrateful folks. We have to be reminded and commanded to love Him because of our sinful heart.

All day long on this Tuesday of His final week on earth, religious leaders have been asking Jesus hostile questions, trying to find some way to trip Him up so they could get rid of Him. Matthew's account of this same incident says, "No one was able to answer (Jesus) a word, nor from that day on did anyone dare question Him any more."

The scribe or lawyer who asked Jesus this question about the greatest commandment was with the group who were trying to discredit Jesus, but I believe as he watched and listened to Jesus, he saw that the Lord had demonstrated divine wisdom in the answers He had given; and that he truly wanted to receive a wise answer to the question he asked.

His motive was not to trap Jesus. He agreed with Jesus' answer (see Mark 12:32-33). Then look what Jesus told this man – Mark 12:34.

This man asked a genuinely good and sincere question because he desired to know the truth.

So, what was our Lord's answer to this man's question? Which commandment was the first in priority in our Lord's mind?

In answering this man's question Jesus used two Old Testament passages. No doubt some scribes were still standing around and you will remember that they accepted only the first five books of the Old Testament. See Deuteronomy 6:4-9 and Leviticus 19:18.

Every Jewish person would have known by heart these verses from the time they were a little child.

Why didn't Jesus just quote the first of the Ten Commandments? "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before me." (Exodus 20:2-3) 218 Jesus taught that it's not enough to simply "have" the one true God exclusively as one's only god. All those seeking to destroy Him would agree with that. Rather, the chief command is to love Him! No one who truly loved the Father would have hated His Son.

Jesus said our love for God is to be a completely exclusive and totally encompassing love.

Jesus breaks it down for us into concrete details of life.

A. Our God is to be our Personal God.

"The Lord our God, the Lord is one." He is to be our singular God – Him and no other. He is a jealous God and He is to have no rivals.

He is to be ours personally. He is "our" God ... the Lord "your" God.

Psalm 63:1: "O God you are my God; early will I seek you; My soul thirst for you; My flesh longs for You in a dry and thirsty land where there is no water."

He is our very own God and we are to have a close personal relationship with Him; we are to be personally involved with God on a face-to-face basis.

Man is responsible to maintain a loving relationship with God, which involves commitment and loyalty, trust and respect, giving and

surrendering of oneself, knowing and sharing.

Man is to love God Supremely. Jude 21.

B. Out Love for God is to be With all our Heart.

God is to have exclusive, first place in all our affections.

We are to love Him above all others. Jesus put it this way: "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me" (Matthew 10:37).

C. Our Love for God is to be With all Our Soul, the Seat of Our Inner-life.

It is hard to think of anything that is more "yours" than your own being. Our soul makes us what we individually are. Yet, it is with our soul that we are to love God first.

Romans 12:1 says we are "to present our bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is our reasonable service."

D. Our Love for God is to be With All Our Mind, the Center of Our Intellect, Our Beliefs, Our Convictions.

Our mind is one of the most private parts of our being. What goes on in our minds is ours and is accessible to no one except those to whom we choose to share our thoughts. Our mind is what we reason with. 219 Davis prayed, "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer" (Psalm 119:14).

E. Then Jesus Adds, We are to Love God With all Our Strength – The Totality of Our Being.

The man only asked about the greatest commandment, but Jesus told him what the second most important commandment is as well; to love your neighbor as yourself.

The Greatest Commandment speaks of the first four of the Ten Commandments – the ones that govern our relationship with God. The second greatest commandment speaks of the last six of the Ten Commandments – the ones that govern our relationship with other people.

If you love your neighbor as yourself:

You'll honor your father and mother – which is saying you will honor the human authority that God has placed over you.

You will not murder your neighbor nor seek to diminish your neighbor in any way, but seek to protect their life.

You will not steal from your neighbor or take from them what God has given to them to use and enjoy.

You will never bear false witness against them – either by lying to them to their disadvantage, or lying about them to advantage yourself.

You'll be content with what God has entrusted to you, and not look in envy upon what God has entrusted to them.

What tells us whether we love God or not?

John 14:15: "If you love Me, keep My commandments."

John 14:21: "He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me."

John 15:10: "If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love."

Love is the abiding principle in keeping our Savior's commandments.

Romans 13:8-10.

THE BEGINNING OF THE END

Mark 13:1-13

Three passages are known as the Olivet Discourse: Mark 13, Matthew 24-25, and Luke 21. In these passages Jesus talks about the end time and the events which surround the end of the world.

Three things I would point out about the Beginning of the End:

I. The Strange Prediction Mark 13:1-2

Jesus was leaving the Temple. This is the last time while He was on earth that He visited the Temple.

Jesus has just completed some tense times with six groups of religious leaders in the Temple. They had asked Him questions that were designed to trip Him up and, if possible, to get Him in hot water with the Roman government.

Now the time in the Temple is over, and one of the disciples tries to lighten the mood. After all the negativity they have experienced, this disciple wants to say something positive. So, he calls the Lord's attention to the Temple, its construction and its beauty.

The Temple in Jerusalem was considered to be among the most spectacular wonders of the ancient Roman Empire. The original Temple constructed by Solomon was a magnificent building, but it was completely destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians in about 600 B.C.

When the Jews returned to the homeland 7- years later, they constructed the second Temple. It was much smaller and not near as magnificent as Solomon's Temple. This Temple had served the Jews for nearly 500 years, but by the time of the New Testament, it had suffered great damage due to the passage of time.

When King Herod assumed the throne of Israel, he wanted to gain favor with the Jews. So, he offered to rebuild their Temple. They accepted and in about 20 B.C., the work began.

By the time of Jesus, the work had been underway some 46 years, and would not be completed for another 20 years, in 64 A.D. For almost 80 years the Temple was under construction.

The Temple sat atop Mount Moriah and literally dominated the skyline of the ancient city. The Temple mount covered about one-sixth of the land area of Jerusalem.. The Temple itself was 172 feet long and 20 stories high. It could be seen from many miles away and from anywhere in the city.

The disciple who spoke called the Lord's attention to the stones and the buildings. The stones were enormous. Some were 40 feet long, 18 feet high and 15 feet wide and weighed a hundred tons, two 221 hundred thousand pounds. They were cut by hand from pure limestone, and fit together so tightly and perfectly that a sheet of paper could not be inserted between the stones.

The doors, walls, and even the floors of the Temple were overlaid with pure gold. No wonder they were proud of their Temple.

But look what Jesus said in Verse 2: "There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be THROWN down." He didn't say "fall" down or be "shaken" down, but "THROWN down." The Temple is going to be destroyed, but it's not going to be destroyed by a natural disaster like earth- quakes. It's going to be destroyed by some human force. It is going to be intentionally and deliberately dismantled and torn down.

They thought, "Oh, it must be the end of the world." What Jesus said was literally fulfilled in 70- A.D. when the Roman general Titus and his army conquered the city. Titus ordered his men to preserve the Temple, but the building was gutted by fire set by one of the soldiers. As a result, the general ordered the Temple and the city totally destroyed. The Romans dismantled every stone in the building to get to the gold that melted into the cracks during the fire.

What about the Wailing Wall? It is still standing. I thought Jesus said that not one stone will be left upon another. There are two possibilities:

1. Jesus was speaking only of the Temple building or 2. The wall is yet to be dismantled there.

There has not been a Temple there in 2,000 years. Instead there is a Moslem mosque, the Dome of the Rock and God is not there.

II. A Startling Panorama Mark 13:3-8

After leaving the Temple, Jesus led His men to the Mount of Olives, which stood some 150 feet higher than the city itself. It gave them a commanding view of the city and the Temple and its grounds.

Four of His disciples came and asked Him three questions. Only Mark gives us the names of the four disciples. They asked the same questions people ask today – Mark 13:4.

When will these things be? What will be the sign when all these things will be fulfilled?

Jesus says over and over that there will be massive deception – Mark 13:5, 6, 9, (Keep your eyes open), Mark 13:32-33 (Keep your

eyes open).

1. There will be False Messiahs Mark 13:6

In the end time people will be crying desperately for leaders to deliver them and many will claim to have the knowledge and power to deliver them.

The spirit of antichrist will deceive many. Not THE antichrist, but the spirit of antichrist. I John 4:1-3

2. There will be national conflicts – Mark 13:7.

3. There will be international conflict – Mark 13:8a. Russia will play a big part.

4. There will be national disasters – Mark 13:8b.

5. There will be religious persecution – Mark 13:9-11.

6. There will be distrust and hatred – Mark 13:12-13.

Understand that this is not referring to the Rapture but to the beginning of the Tribulation.

III. A Sobering Promise Mark 13:13

“The beginning of birth pains.” Any mother can tell you that when the birth pains begin, the delivery time may not be immediately. It may be hours, days, or weeks before the baby comes.

We are to be ready. Watch. Work, for Jesus is coming. The time is short. What we are going to do for Christ, we had better do now!

JESUS' EXTENDED FORECAST

Mark 13:14-27

God has placed within us an interest in the future, an awareness that life as we know it is not going to continue indefinitely. There is going to be a time of the end.

Prophecy is history in reverse. Only God knows what is going to happen before it actually happens. Listen to Isaiah 46:9-10: “For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me, I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is to come. I say: ‘My purpose will stand and I will do all that I please.’”

Jesus is God and in this passage He is pulling back the curtain to give us a glimpse of the future.

Jesus has told His disciples that the great Temple is going to be destroyed; that not one stone of the Temple will be left upon another stone; that every stone will be dismantled. The disciples asked the same questions we ask about future events: When is this going to happen? What are the signs we can look for before this takes place?

Jesus begins by telling His disciples some events that will take place following the Rapture of the Church. Jesus talks about the horrors on the horizon; that time known as the Great Tribulation. There is A Warning of a Sign; A Warning of Sorrows; and A Warning of Seduction.

I. A Warning of a Sign Mark 13:14-18

Jesus is describing the Tribulation. The Tribulation is a seven-year period of time that will occur after the Rapture of the Church.

The Tribulation is also known as “the time of Jacob’s trouble” (Jeremiah 30:7). It is a time when God will pour out His wrath on a Christ-rejecting world. It is also a time when God will prepare a remnant of believing Jews to enter into the millennial kingdom of Christ.

The focus of our Lord’s prophecy in these verses is the Tribulation period. The first three and one-half years of the Tribulation will be a time of relative peace and prosperity on the earth.

The Church will be gone, caught up in response to our Lord’s call to “Come up hither,” and will be with the Lord in Heaven (I Thessalonians 4:13-17; Revelation 4:1).

God will raise up an army of 144,000 saved Jewish evangelists who will take the Gospel to all the nations of the world (Revelation 7:1-12). These men will be persecuted by the world’s governments, but they will be supernaturally protected and vast multitudes of

people will be saved (Revelation 7:13-17). More could be said about those first three and one-half years of Tribulation, but the emphasis in this text is on the last three and one-half years.

Jesus gives His men a sign that stands as a warning that severe trouble is at hand. Jesus warns them about “the abomination of desolation.”

Now, you have heard that phrase, “the abomination of desolation,” but what does it mean? Well, let’s break it down:

The word “abomination” refers to some detestable practice that takes place in the Temple. The word “desolation” means to abandon or leave the Temple.

The literal rendering of that phrase could be “the abomination that defiles and makes desolate.” He is referring to an event that will defile a holy place. It is my understanding that Jesus is referring to an event that will take place in a future Temple that has yet to be built in Jerusalem.

Let me say a word about that future Temple that is to be built in Jerusalem. We are told that all the material needed to build the Temple is already near the Temple site and once the building is started it will go up at an amazing speed.

Daniel refers to this event in Daniel 11:31. Like many prophecies in the Bible, this one seems to have a dual fulfillment. That is, it was partially fulfilled in history and it will be completely fulfilled in the future.

In 168 B.C. the Seleucid King, Antiochus Epiphanies, attempted to force the Jews to adopt Greek culture. He would not permit the Jews to circumcise their male children or offer the Levitical sacrifices. He forced them to offer swine to God. On one occasion, Antiochus entered the Temple in Jerusalem and offered a pig on the altar. He also erected a statue of the Greek god Zeus in the Holy of Holies, and he opened a brothel in the Temple chambers. He so defiled the Temple that the Jews abandoned it until a successful rebellion defeated Antiochus and his successors.

The ultimate fulfillment of this prophecy will occur in the future. The Antichrist will make a seven-year treaty with Israel. He will break this treaty after three and one-half years (Daniel 9:27). At that time, the Antichrist will enter the Temple in Jerusalem and declare himself to be god. He will demand to be worshiped and will destroy those who refuse (2 Thessalonians 2:1-4).

At that same time, the False Prophet, who will dominate world religion during the Tribulation, will erect an image of the Antichrist in the Holy of Holies (Revelation 13:11-15).

While the Antichrist will affect the whole world, the greatest trouble will be upon the Jews in Israel who rejected the Lord Jesus as their Messiah. When the Jews see this sign of the abomination, those living in Jerusalem are to flee for their lives immediately. They are not to worry about possessions or personal property. A person on the top of his house should not bother to go into the house to retrieve anything. A man in the field should not even take time to go to the end of the row to retrieve his garment. To delay in that day will prove deadly.

This flight will be especially hard for pregnant women and for women with small children. Their escape will be compounded if these events take place in the winter months. In fact, they are commanded to pray that it will not occur during the hard, cold winters in Palestine.

II. A Warning of Sorrows Mark 13:19-20

In these two verses Jesus said that time will be a time of unprecedented sorrow and horror. The Lord Jesus condenses one of the most horrible times in human experience into a few words. There will be two sets of intense judgment that will take place and I want us to take a moment to look at these terrible events.

The First Trumpet Revelation 8:7

One-third of the green vegetation on the face of the earth is destroyed.

The Second Trumpet Revelation 8:8-9

One-third of the oceans become blood and one-third of the life in the sea is destroyed. One-third of the world's shipping is also destroyed.

The Third Trumpet Revelation 8:10-11

Perhaps this refers to a meteor that falls into the water supplies and pollutes one-third of the fresh water of the world. This poisons the water and many more people perish in this plague.

The Fourth Trumpet Revelation 8:12

Some event takes place in the heavens and the sun's light is diminished by one-third. Also, one-third of the light of the other heavenly bodies is destroyed.

Before the Fifth Trumpet sounds, an angel flies through Heaven and pronounces three "woes" upon the earth. The reason? Things are about to take a turn for the worse (Revelation 8:13).

The Fifth Trumpet Revelation 9:1-12

The earth is invaded by an army of demons from the pits of Hell. The demons have power to torment men for five months. They won't kill men, but the pain will be so intense that men will want to die, but they will be unable to achieve death! Even attempts at suicide will fail!

The Sixth Trumpet Revelation 9:13-21

A demonic invasion of an army that numbers 200,000,000. The results of this invasion will be that one-third of the human population will be destroyed. 226 NOTE: When this event is coupled with the Fourth Seal, it means that over one-half the population of earth has been killed. But, what is the reaction of humanity? Revelation 9:20-21 – they remain unrepentant!

Notice that before these six judgments are poured out on the earth, there is a time of silence in Heaven (Revelation 8:1). It appears that what is about to happen is so severe that calls for a time of silence and of mourning. All of God's judgment is performed out of holiness and not a desire to make men suffer! God does not like to destroy the wicked. But, His righteousness demands it!

The Seventh Trumpet Revelation 11:15-19

This trumpet announces the soon return of the Lord Jesus. It also introduces the seven Vial or Bowl Judgments.

The Vial Judgments

The First Vial Revelation 16:2

Some kind of vile cancerous sore is poured out on mankind.

The Second Vial Revelation 16:3

The waters of the sea are turned to blood and every creature in the sea dies.

The Third Vial Revelation 16:4-7

The fresh waters of the earth are turned to blood.

The Fourth Vial Revelation 16:8-9

The sun's heat is intensified and men's bodies are burned by the heat of the sun. Yet, with all these torments, they do not repent!

The Fifth Vial Revelation 16:10

This plague brings darkness and intense pain to the inhabitants of the earth. Again so intense that they gnaw their tongues in their pain, yet they still refuse to repent.

The Sixth Vial Revelation 16:12-14

The Euphrates River is dried up preparing a pathway for the nations of the earth to descend upon Israel for the final conflict.

The Seventh Vial Revelation 16:17-21

This vial brings with it a terrible cataclysm in the earth. There is an earthquake of such magnitude that the islands of the sea sink and all the mountains of the earth 227 fall down flat. On top of this, all the major cities of the earth will be destroyed! Then, hailstones fall from the heavens that weigh in at around 125 pounds each.

There are but a portion of the events that will take place during the Tribulation. It will be a time of unspeakable horrors and trials.

During the Tribulation, over one-half of the world's population will die from starvation, disease and war. Wrath from heaven and demons from Hell will assault the inhabitants of earth. It will be a time of unimaginable horror, suffering, pain and death!

However, no one in this room should ever have to worry about this. If you are saved, you will not be here. If you are not saved, you can be! The Lord Jesus will receive you, forgive your sins and allow you to join Him in His Heaven when you leave this world.

Mark 13:20 tells us that if God were to permit the horrors of the Tribulation to continue unabated, no humans would survive. God shortens those days “for the elect’s sake.”

III. A Warning of Seduction Mark 13:21-23

Again our Lord warns of deception and false christs.

But then Christ will come again. How will He come and what will His coming be like?

A. He will come in Splendor Mark 13:26

He will come “in the clouds with ... glory.” He will appear in His unveiled glory.

B. He will come in Strength Mark 13:26

“. . . in great glory.” The Bible says His feet will touch the top of the Mount of Olives and that the mountain will split from top to bottom.

C. He will come with Salvation Mark 13:27

Everyone will be gathered unto Him and will bow at His nail-pierced feet.

Are you ready for Jesus to come back again. The last prayer of the Bible is, “Even so, come quickly, Lord Jesus.”

PAY ATTENTION TO ISRAEL

Mark 13:28-32

The disciples asked Jesus two questions at the beginning of Mark 13 concerning the destruction of the Temple and the ushering in of His kingdom. The first question was, “When will these things happen?” Jesus now answers that question by exhorting them to “learn a lesson” or to “learn a parable.”

We usually say that a parable “is a heavenly story with an earthly meaning.” The word “parable” is a transliteration of a Greek word that means “comparison.” So, a parable is a short discourse that conveys spiritual truth by making a vivid comparison. The truth to be taught is compared to something in nature or a common-life experience. A parable usually expresses a single important truth. Don’t look for more than one major lesson in one parable. Don’t try to force the parable to say more than it means. A parable draws its hearers to take part in a situation, evaluate it, and apply its truth to themselves.

Here the parable is about a fig tree. You will remember that in Mark 11, Jesus and His disciples were on their way to the Temple and Jesus was hungry. He saw a fig tree that was full of leaves and if a fig tree had leaves, that meant that it had fruit. But when Jesus got to the tree, He saw that, although it had leaves, it had no fruit. Jesus placed a curse on the fig tree and as they passed by the same tree the next morning, Peter called attention to the tree, for the tree was dried up from the roots. That fig tree with leaves but no fruit was like Israel; a lot of outward show but no fruit or inward life. Now Jesus is going to say that a miracle is going to take place: dead Israel is going to have life again! The rebirth of Israel will be a clear indication of the return of Christ to this earth, it is near, even at the door.

I. The Prediction Concerning Israel Mark 13:24-33, 35-37

The early Church lived in anticipation of the return of the Lord.

Listen to Acts 1:8-11: The disciples thought Jesus could return during their lifetime.

Listen to I Thessalonians 4:15-18: Paul believed Jesus could come at any time.

Listen to 2 Peter 3:10-14: Peter believed Jesus could come at any time.

Listen to Revelation 22:20: The last prayer of the Bible.

Every Church Age since that first Church Age has believed that Jesus could come back in their life-time. And rightly so; for this world seems ripe for our Lord’s return! I’m here to tell you that I believe Jesus could return in my lifetime. Many people today are looking at the woeful world conditions and think that we must surely be approaching the end of the world. The world seems to be in chaos.

I recently read an article that said, “It is a gloomy moment in the history of our country. Not in the lifetime of most men has there

been so much grave and deep apprehension; never has the future seemed so unpredictable as at this time. The domestic economic situation is in chaos. Our dollar is weak throughout the world. Prices are so high as to be utterly impossible. The political cauldron seethes and bubbles with uncertainty. It is a solemn moment of our troubles. No man can see the end.”

When do you think that was written? Last week? Last month? That statement appeared in October 1857 in Harper's Weekly Magazine!

So there have always been times when world conditions seemed ideal for the return of Christ.

In the Old Testament, Israel is symbolized by a fig tree. The fig tree was cut off at the root, but we have lived in a period of time, when the leaves started growing again. When the nation of Israel was destroyed in 70 A.D., the Jewish people were scattered to all the nations of the earth. But in the early 1900s a few brave Jews started returning to the Holy Land. They had to live in fenced communal camps called kibbutzim for protection. Then on May 15, 1948, the fig tree sprouted leaves. On that day, the United Nations chartered Israel as a nation.

There are many Old Testament prophecies that speak of Israel returning to resettle their homeland.

In the parallel passage in Luke 21, Jesus made this clear when He predicted, “Jerusalem will be trampled on by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled” (Luke 21:24). A Gentile is anyone who isn't a Jew and history records that Gentiles were in control of Jerusalem until 1967. Let me give you a thumbnail history of Jerusalem over the last 2,000 years. Buckle your pew belt and put your seat in its upright position because we're going to be moving fast.

From 70 A.D. until about 637, the Romans controlled Jerusalem, the last 300 years of that rule is called the Byzantine period because of the influence of the Greek Orthodox faith based in Constantinople – and of course, they were Gentiles. During this period many beautiful churches were built in Israel.

In 637 A.D. the Persian Muslims attacked Jerusalem and took control. They destroyed every church in Israel except one – the Church of the Holy Nativity in Bethlehem. That's because Persian soldiers saw a mosaic on the wall of the church depicting the Magi from the East. The Magi were dressed as Persians, so the church was spared.

Jerusalem was under Muslim control until the Crusaders from Europe came to “liberate” the Holy sites from the pagan Muslims. Beginning in 1099 for about 200 years the Christian Crusaders had a tenuous control of Jerusalem, but like the Persians, they were Gentiles.

In 1244, the Egyptian Muslims called the Mamluks pushed the last of the Crusaders back toward Europe. Then in 1517, the Ottoman Turks took control of Jerusalem for the next 400 years. During this time, the land deteriorated into poverty and waste. In his book *Innocents Abroad*, American writer, Mark Twain described his visit to Jerusalem. He found a sleepy village with only 8,000 residents!

It wasn't until 1917, near the end of WWI, that the Turks lost control of Jerusalem. The movie, “Lawrence of Arabia,” was set in this time period. As the British forces were getting ready to advance on Jerusalem, British General Allenby sent three biplanes, called Sopwith Camels flying over the city. From these airplanes they dropped thousands of leaflets that read in Arabic, “Surrender Jerusalem immediately.” General Allenby signed his last name only on the leaflets, “Allenby.” The Muslims, who had never seen an airplane before thought the name on the leaflets read, “Allah bay” which means 230 “servant of Allah.” They must have thought the message was from Allah because they surrendered Jerusalem to the British without a shot being fired!

During the war of Jewish independence in 1947, the British put up token resistance to the Israeli freedom fighters, but when the nation was established in 1948, they deserted Jerusalem. It became part of the West Bank, and under Jordanian control from 1948 until 1967. But on June 7, 1967, during the Six Day War, Israel gained control of Jerusalem for the first time in almost 1,800 years!

Do you know the very first thing the Jews did? The soldiers went immediately to the Western Wall of the Temple, and began to weep and pray. The Jews call it the Western Wall, but we call it the Wailing Wall. Jerusalem was no longer under control of Gentiles. And in 1980 Jerusalem was declared the capital city of Israel. Under President George W. Bush, plans were being made to move the U.S. Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, but those plans probably won't be carried out by our current administration.

Every time you see the Israeli flag flying, it should remind you of how the time of the Gentiles controlling Jerusalem has been completed. We are living in a time of fulfilled prophecy.

II. The Preservation of Israel Mark 13:30-31

There are some powerful verses about Israel where God promises to gather the scattered Jews from all over the world and bring them back to the Promised Land.

Ezekiel 36:24 Amos 9:15

Israel is an independent nation again; but when was the starting date when Jesus said His coming is near or close; even at the door?

Some say May 15, 1948, when Israel was declared a sovereign state. That was the position of Hal Lindsey who wrote the book entitled *The Late Great Planet Earth* in 1970. He correctly understood the re-establishment of Israel in 1948 was the budding of the fig tree, but he took the word "generation" to mean 40 years. In the Bible, genealogical lists often divide generations into 40-year increments. So Hal Lindsey assumed "generation" to be 40 years. He added 40 years to 1948, so he predicted Jesus would return to earth before 1988. As you know that didn't happen.

Others say, "No, the date should be June 7, 1967, the day the Jews recaptured Jerusalem and took the Temple mount. But you add 40 years to 1967 and you get 2007. It didn't happen then either.

The errors are based on the misinterpretation of the word "generation." The word Jesus used for generation is the word "genea." Jesus wasn't talking about a time period; He was talking about a people group. Two thousand years ago, He predicted the Jews would be scattered to all nations and would be destroyed. Yet He said the Jews would maintain their ethnic identity. 231 There are all kinds of people surrounding Israel today, but can you find a Philistine? Or a Moabite, or a Jebusite, or an Edomite? No, but you can find plenty of Israelites. The miracle of the Jewish people is they did not pass away while Jerusalem was enduring 1,900 years of Gentile control.

The survival of the Jewish people is a miracle that ranks right up there with the parting of the Red Sea. Throughout the centuries, the devil has tried to destroy the Jews. Pharaoh was the first to try by killing the male Hebrew babies. The Romans tried to rid the world of the Jews. Even Adolph Hitler conspired to kill millions of Jews. Why do you think the Muslim world hates America so much? Because we are one of the few friends Israel has. What we see transpiring in the Middle East is all because the fig tree has budded and the Gentiles are no longer controlling Jerusalem.

Look at Mark 13:32. Throughout the centuries there have been hundreds of predictions of the date that Jesus would return – and they were all wrong. Jesus IS coming! We just can't say when!

Bible scholar Warren Wiersbe has a good word about date-setters: "The purpose of Bible prophecy is not for us to make a calendar, but to build character. Jesus warned us not to set dates for His coming. Date setters are usually up-setters."

When it comes to the Second Coming of Christ, I'm not on the Scheduling Committee; I'm on the Welcoming Committee!

But I can pray with John: "Even so, come quickly, Lord Jesus!"

What if He were to come today? Would you be ready? What if He had come last week? Would you have been ready?

If not, if you come to Him now, you will be ready whenever He comes.

We'll Work Till Jesus Comes

Mark 13:32-37

During His last week on this earth, our Lord told His disciples that He was going to die and leave them. Of course, their hearts are troubled by what He tells them, but then He reassures them that He is coming again to them and for them. He tells them, "Let not your heart be troubled. You believe in God; believe in Me."

Then Jesus gives them His longest discourse on His Second Coming. He comes to the end of the discourse and He gives them some take-away truths.

Jesus tells them to:

I. Be Forewarned

Jesus told them that after He is gone there will be great deception, for many will come claiming to be Christ; The Messiah.

Four times in these verses Jesus tells them TO WATCH. The word has a twofold meaning. It is a call to stay alert, to keep awake, to be ready. It has the idea of a watchman who dares not fall asleep while on duty. He keeps his eyes and ears open. He stays on the alert at all times.

The second meaning is: not only stay awake and alert because of the danger, but also to live every moment in anticipation of His

return. Be attentive to what is going on around you.

WHY?

A. The Date of His Coming is Unknown

Angels don't know when He is returning. Jesus Himself doesn't know when He is returning. Only the Father knows.

B. He is Coming Unexpectedly

It will be a time when you least expect it. How many of you expect Jesus to return in the next hour? Hmm, that means it would be a good time for Him to return, nobody expects Him!

C. He is Coming Unannounced

Matthew 24 adds some things Mark doesn't mention. Jesus says, "as it was in the days of Noah, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For in the days before the flood they were eating, drinking, marrying."

Understand that Noah had been preaching; warning folks that the flood was coming – for 120 years; but they were indifferent. It was business as usual. They did the normal short-term things of life – such as eating and drinking, and they did so in the shadow of the ark while hearing the warning of impending judgment. They carried on, paying Noah no mind, even when the days of grace were short. They laughed and mocked the old man as he plead with them to turn to God. But suddenly – unannounced and when they were not expecting it, the rain began to fall.

Jesus also said His coming would be like a thief in the night. A thief doesn't announce his arrival in advance. If he did, we'd be ready for him. We'd watch for him, We'd keep our eyes open and we would listen for any unusual noise.

And a thief is selective. He takes only that which is valuable to him. Our Lord will take only what is valuable to Him at His coming – only His blood-redeemed saints.

II. Be Faithful Mark 13:34-37

This is exactly what the Lord Jesus did. In the Upper Room discourse Jesus told His disciples He was leaving earth for Heaven to go to His Father's house. Then He told them what He expected them to do while He was gone; for He was coming back.

When I was growing up, my parents would leave me at home while they went somewhere for a while, but before they left, they told me what they expected me to have done by the time they got back. I knew if I did not do it, things would not be pleasant when they got back.

Look at I John 2:28. There are two possibilities of how a Christian may meet the Lord. We may be ashamed or we may have confidence.

Is there anything in your life right now that if the Lord came back today, you would be ashamed?

You and I can face Him with confidence if we "Abide in Him", "Continue in Him."

III. Be Fruitful Mark 13:33a, 37

Notice again Mark 13:35. Everything around us is temporary, but Jesus declares that His Word would exist forever.

As our world becomes more and more unstable, we need something permanent upon which we can base our lives. God's Word stands forever. There are only two things in this world that are eternal – the souls of men and women and the Word of God. So if you want your life to matter for eternity, don't sit around waiting for Jesus to return. Instead, get busy and invest your life in the souls of men and in the Word of God.

One day Jesus will return. You and I may die and meet Jesus before He returns. So what should we be doing until Jesus returns? We should be watching and working. I love an ole song we used to sing that answers that question. Elizabeth Miles wrote the words in 1837. The verse asks a question:

"O land of rest, for thee I sigh! When will the moment come When I shall lay by armor by And dwell in peace at home?"

We'll work till Jesus comes, We'll work till Jesus comes, We'll work till Jesus comes, And we'll be gathered home."

Mark 14:1-9

There are certain scenes in Scripture that seems too sacred, too holy, and too priceless to touch. It's almost as if the Lord says to us, "Take the shoes off your feet, you are standing on Holy Ground."

We come to one of those scenes today. We come to the last week and the final hours of our Lord on earth. It is as the Holy Spirit is saying, "Here is where the Lord spent His final days. Here is what He did and this is the way He died. Come here with a high sense of respect and reverence. Just be quiet and experience it. Take time to feel the emotion and grasp the significance of God's Word."

Simon, a leper that Jesus had healed, invited Jesus and His disciples to a dinner meal. Lazarus, whom Jesus had raised from the dead, was there, along with his sisters, Mary and Martha. Seventeen people in all.

What a beautiful scene this is!

Simon opened his HOME to Jesus. Martha opened her HANDS and serves the guest. Mary opens her HEART of love and anoints the head and feet of Jesus with a perfume worth a year's wages, between 20,000 and 25,000 dollars in today's economy.

Mary is about to express extravagant love to our Lord as she takes a pound of spikenard and anoints the head and feet of our Lord. A Roman pound was twelve ounces; not sixteen. Why was this spikenard so expensive? Spikenard grows in the Himalaya Mountains in India at high elevations from 11,000 to 17,000 feet. The roots of the plant were used to make perfumes.

Mary is about to express extravagant love and worship upon the Lord Jesus.

The word "extravagant" is defined as spending too much, by excessive spending, spending beyond what is reasonable, of going overboard and doing too much.

When it comes to worshiping our Lord Jesus, nothing is too extravagant. After all, He is worthy of everything we can render to Him, because all we have comes from Him anyway. No gift is excessive; no expression of love is over the top. The worship of Mary has much to teach us about our own worship of the Lord Jesus.

Gloria Gather and Bill Gather wrote a song based on this encounter between our Lord and Mary entitled "Broken and Spilled Out." I would like to change the word "spilled" to "poured," because when you spill something, it is an accident. What Mary did was intentional. Listen to the words:

One day a plain village woman Driven by love for her Lord Recklessly poured out a valuable essence Disregarding the scorn. 236
And once it was broken and poured out A fragrance filled the room Like a prisoner released from his shackles, Like a spirit set free from the tomb.

Broken and poured out Just for love of you, Jesus, My most precious treasure Lavished on Thee. Broken and poured out And poured at your feet, In sweet abandon Let me be poured out And used up for Thee.

Lord, you were God's precious treasure, His loved and His own perfect Son Sent here to show me the love of the Father, Just for love it was done. And though you were perfect and holy You gave up Yourself willingly, You spared no expense for my pardon, You were used up and wasted for me.

Broken and poured out Just for love of me Jesus, My most precious treasure Lavished on me. Broken and spilled out And poured at my feet. In sweet abandon Let me be poured out And used up for Thee.

Three things I want to share with you from this passage:

I. The Devotion of Mary Mark 14:3

Mary's heart was about to burst with love for Jesus and she just had to show Him how much she loved Him. She gets up from the table, goes to her house which must have been close by, gets the expensive vial of perfume, and anoints our Lord's head and feet (according to John 12).

I can almost imagine the conversation that must have taken place during that meal.

Simon must have told how the Lord healed him of leprosy. How the rotting flesh had grown back and was now as smooth as a baby's flesh; how his fingers that had fallen off reappeared; how his 237 eyebrows had grown back; how much he loved the Lord for all He had done for him.

I think Lazarus must have said, "Well, that's nothing, Simon. I was in another world for four days. I saw the "biggies" – Abraham,

Moses, David, and all the rest. And I saw Paradise! But then I heard Jesus call my name and I walked out of that tomb and they loosed me from those grave clothes. Old Peter's eyes were as big as plates when he saw me alive!" They must have asked him all kinds of questions about what it was like on the other side.

That's when Mary gets up and goes to her home and gets the perfume. Mark says it was an alabaster box of perfume. An alabaster box is actually a small vase which held about twelve ounces of costly perfume. The perfume was so precious that a special vase was made for the perfume. It was made of clay. The potter would shape the little vessel very carefully like he would any small vase until he got to the top. Then he would make a long, thin neck that could be easily broken to let out a small amount at one time, and after the perfume was put into the vase, he could seal it at the top so that all could be kept until a special time, and then be re-sealed.

Mary was so filled with love for Jesus, she wanted to worship Him and express her love for Him in a special way.

Our word "worship" in Old English was pronounced "worth-ship." It literally means "to give God everything He is worth," including our praise, love, service, and gifts.

1. Worship is a Personal Act of Love

It is an expression of adoration to God. That expression can take many forms.

– The Hebrew word for worship (sagad) means to bow down; that's an expression of humility and adoration.

– The Greek word for worship (proskuneo) means "to kiss toward." It's like throwing a kiss to someone. There are many ways to express your adoration to God. For example, Martha's expression of worship was serving the Lord.

2. Worship involves a Costly Act of Surrender

Worship is not coming to God to GET something; it is coming into the presence of God to surrender something. When you worship you are giving something to the Lord. You are giving Him your time, your effort, your service, your love, your financial resources.

Worship involves "Holding Back Nothing." Sometimes when we give to God, we ask, "How little can I get by with?" "What can I afford to give and it not really affect my lifestyle?"

The word "extravagant" comes from two Latin words. One means "outside or beyond." The other word means "to wander." An extravagant gift is one that wanders outside the usual; that goes beyond the normal.

238 Mary wanted to make a statement: About her commitment to Him. About His value to her. About His worthiness to be worshiped and served.

Jesus held back nothing from us; we should hold back nothing from Him.

I gave my life for thee, My precious blood I shed. That thou might'st ransomed be, and quicken from the dead. I gave, I gave My life for thee, What hast thou given for Me? I gave, I gave My life for thee, What has thou given for Me?

Watch Mary as she takes that alabaster box, breaks the top off, pours some of it on our Lord's head and some on His feet, and dries His feet with her hair.

In Christ's day, people didn't sit at a table to eat their meals. The tables they used were low to the floor, and the people reclined around the table. Typically, their heads were near the table while their feet were farther away; they would prop on their left hand and eat with their right hand. This would mean that anyone walking up to a person in such a position would be considerably taller than the person at the table. Therefore, Mary would have assumed a kneeling position near Jesus, in order to anoint His head and feet with the perfume.

In this one moment of time, Mary was making a great statement of surrender and adoration before the Lord. She was displaying her love to Jesus for all to see.

Mary was more in touch with Jesus than any of His disciples were. Jesus had said over and over that He was going to die, but none of them got it. In fact, only one person got it, and that was Mary. The disciples were with Jesus much more than Mary and heard Him speak many more times than Mary, so why did she get it and they did not?

II. The Denouncement of Mary Mark 14:4-5

You might have thought that everyone at the dinner would have applauded such an extravagant act of worship, but not so. "Some were indignant," "they rebuked her harshly." The Greek indicates that they "snorted their indignation like an angry horse."

These are the first recorded words of Judas in the New Testament and they reveal his heart. His complaint was about doing too much for Jesus. There are always those who think the Church can do too much for the cause of Christ.

So Judas criticized her. G. Campbell Morgan said, "It's a great compliment to be criticized by certain people."

Some said, "Why this waste?" Nothing we ever do for Jesus is a waste!

239 They said, "What a waste"; Jesus said, "What an investment." They said, "What a foolish thing"; Jesus said, "What a beautiful thing."

Jesus never forgets our expressions of love, worship and service to Him, and all will be rewarded by Him.

In the Tabernacle there were certain utensils called "snuff-dishes" or "snuff-boxes." They were made of a talent of gold, or 75 pounds of gold. These boxes were used to store the wicks that had burned out of the lampstand in the Tabernacle. When a wick burned out, it was not thrown away, it was saved in the "snuff-dishes." Those wicks burned in the Tabernacle and gave off light to those within. They represented service to God.

God is teaching us that everything that represents true service to Him will never be forgotten. Those things are noted by Him and they possess lasting, eternal value. Hebrews 6:10.

Did you notice that Mary didn't try to defend herself? She knew that even if she tried to explain, people with the kind of spirit they had would not understand anyway.

III. The Defense of Mary Mark 14:6-9

Mary didn't come to her own defense, but Jesus did. "Leave her alone" means, "That's enough! Stop it! She has done nothing wrong and everything right."

Jesus said, "She has done what she could." Have we?

"And what she has done will be told as a memorial to her." This message fulfills our Lord's promise.

THE GREAT PRETENDER

Mark 14:10-21, 43-50

Perhaps the greatest tragedy of all time is seen in the life of Judas Iscariot. He is the most notorious and the most vilified, not only of all of our Lord's disciples, but of all men who ever lived.

The tragedy in this man's life is seen especially when you consider the opportunities and the privileges that were afforded to him. He was chosen by the Lord Jesus to follow Him for three years. He was exposed first-hand to the Person of the Lord Jesus. Judas witnessed the character of Jesus. No one ever loved like Jesus. No one ever displayed grace and mercy and wisdom like Jesus. Judas saw how Jesus handled thousands of situations. He heard the teachings of Jesus first-hand. He saw the miracles of Jesus first-hand.

Yet, Judas was a first-class hypocrite, a liar, a thief; Jesus even called Judas a devil (John 6:70-71). Don't think that Jesus was deceived by Judas. Jesus knew the heart of Judas. He knew that Judas would betray Him. Yet, Jesus kept reaching out to him, trying to draw him to repentance. But, as one man said, "Judas kissed the door to heaven, but went to hell." By a deliberate act, he betrayed Jesus!

Judas' decision to betray our Lord came, at least in part, because of what happened right here in Mark 14.

In the first nine verses of Mark 14, Mary demonstrates the height of love and devotion to Jesus as she gives all of her most precious possession to anoint the head and feet of Jesus and to dry His feet with her hair. She was offering to Jesus all of her love and adoration, and worship. Jesus declared that her deed would never be forgotten and that "whosoever the Gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, that which she has done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her."

But there are two kinds of remembrances: there is the remembrance of honor and glory; and there is also a remembrance of infamy and shame.

Judas was Mary's arch-critic. While Mary is the incarnation of love, Judas is the incarnation of hate. Judas' true nature is displayed in this incident. Judas called what Mary did for Jesus, "a waste." Love and devotion motivated Mary; what motivated Judas?

1. Jealousy

I think Judas was jealous of the other apostles. At first it seemed to the other disciples that Judas had some unusual qualities and some great potential. Judas was not only called by Jesus, he was elevated and given a position of authority among the apostles. He had been appointed the treasurer of the group, an extremely important function. He was in charge of the group's funds and purchased whatever was needed. It was a position of responsibility.

241 Although Jesus did not treat Judas any differently than He did any other of the disciples, Jesus knew that Judas was a tare among the wheat. He was not a part of our Lord's inner circle. The other disciples had a living relationship with Jesus and he did not. Imagine being in a group who truly knew Jesus and loved Him and you did not. He had no real intimacy with Jesus.

2. Ambition

Judas thought Jesus would set up His kingdom and he would get a place of power and authority. He thought Jesus would overthrow Rome and set up his kingdom on earth. The other eleven thought the same thing, but they loved Jesus for Who He was and Judas felt cheated.

3. Greed and covetousness

Judas was a thief, consumed with greed and the love of money. In fact, this is the sin of Judas that is stressed above all others by Scriptures. Judas asked, "What will you give me, and I will deliver Him unto you?" (Matthew 26:15).

4. Devil-possessed

John 13:27 tells us that the devil entered into Judas. He agreed to betray Jesus for thirty pieces of silver. From that time "he sought how he might betray Him."

I. The Plan

Look again at Mark 14:3-5. John 12:4-5 says that Judas was the instigator of the criticism and then that all the other disciples followed Judas' lead. But look at Mark 14:6. Jesus said, "Let her alone! Don't bother her! She has done the right thing!" That rebuke stung Judas.

When Jesus said that "she has come beforehand to anoint my body for my burial," Judas saw that he had been wrong about Jesus. He had no plans to lead a revolt against Rome.

It was then that Judas went to the chief priest. He was not going to get anything out of following Jesus, so he had might as well get what he could out of the deal.

When Judas offered to help the chief priest in the taking of Jesus, the officials could hardly believe their ears. At last they had found a way to trap the hated Nazarene!

At that moment, Judas could have asked any reward, but when they saw the anxiety of Judas, their shrewd minds suggested bargaining, and they agreed on thirty pieces of silver. Any one of them would have paid more for a slave in the market. They were ecstatic; their problems had been solved; Jesus was as good as dead.

"And Judas sought how he might conveniently betray Him;" he kept seeking a convenient opportunity; a suitable time or place. 242

II. The Prophecy

Our Lord was not caught off guard by Judas. In fact, Judas could have read about himself in the Old Testament Scriptures.

Three Old Testament prophecies need to be considered:

Psalm 41:9 Psalm 55:12-14 Zachariah 11:12-13

III. The Prediction Mark 14:18-21

Jesus told His men, "One of you which is eating with Me now is going to betray Me." Not one of My foes; not one of the scribes or Pharisees; not one of the chief priests; it is "one of you."

We are told that the Lord said this with great sorrow of heart. But not only did the Lord experience sorrow, look at Mark 14:19. "Is it I?"

This may be the most thought-provoking detail of the whole passage: the inability of the disciples to identify the betrayer. No one said, "I know who it is! It's Judas!" No! Each disciple had rather expect himself!

It is possible to be near Jesus and to associate with Him closely and still be hardened by sin. It is a sobering thought to see that Judas was a tare among the wheat, and no one but Jesus knew it. I'm not sure that Judas knew. For all we know, he was so caught up in the work of serving Christ, and seeing the fruit of that work, that he might have convinced himself that everything was right between him and the Lord. Jesus tells us that many will face God in that condition on judgment day. Be sure you are not one of them.

Matthew 7:21-23: "Not every one that saith unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom heaven; but he that doeth the will of My Father which is in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy Name? And in Thy Name have cast out devils? And in Thy Name done many wonderful works?' And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from Me, ye that work iniquity."

2 Corinthians 13:5: "Examine yourselves, whether you be in the faith; Prove your own selves. Know you not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except you be reprobates (phonies)."

"Lord, is it I?" They never suspected Judas. They thought Judas was just as true a disciple as themselves. They never expected any one of the other eleven. We have noticed faults in the disciples of our Lord. They were indeed full of faults and failings. But they had faith in one another, not a man of them dreamed that one of them could turn traitor. 243 When they cried, "Is it I?", they suspected no one but themselves. They all knew they were proud, self-seeking, and materialistic.

They took the warning home to their own souls. Every man of them looked into his own soul. It is what they saw in their own souls that caused them to ask, "Lord, is it I?" They saw in themselves weakness, cowardice, and love of the world. There was a certain distrust of themselves.

"Is it I?" is a question that often comes when we look into our own heart. We know of the possibilities of evil in our heart. Like the disciples, knowing my own weakness, I know that I may be that one! All I can do is to give myself and this deceitful heart of mine into the keeping of Almighty Love, and say with the Psalmist, "Keep back Thy servant from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me; then shall I be upright and I shall be innocent from the great transgressions" (Psalm 19:13).

Jesus tries to reach out to Judas. Even now he can repent and Jesus will forgive him. Look in Mark 14:20. Jesus gives the sop to Judas but his heart is set.

IV. The Punishment Mark 14:21

What a sad end to a man's life. "It would be good for that man if he had never been born." So it is for every man who dies without Jesus.

Scripture goes on to tell us that Satan enters into Judas; he betrays Jesus with a kiss; tries to return the money, and goes out and hangs himself. The rope breaks and when he hits the ground, his body bursts open. And he is in hell this very moment.

Scripture says, "And he went to his own place." Hell.

Jesus died that you might be with Him in Heaven. If He is speaking to your heart, respond with a "Yes" to Him!

SHARING THE PASSOVER MEAL WITH JESUS

Mark 14:12-26

SHARING THE PASSOVER MEAL WITH JESUS

Mark 14:12-26

In our prison system, a condemned prisoner is usually allowed to choose what he will have for his last meal. Some of their choices are interesting.

Gary Gilmore: The first man executed after the death penalty was reinstated in 1977 chose hamburgers, eggs, potatoes and bourbon, which was smuggled into his cell.

Ted Bundy: A serial killer executed in Florida in 1989, had a burrito and Mexican rice.

Timothy McVeigh: Executed in 2010 for his part in the 1995 bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City, OK, had two pints of mint chocolate chip ice cream.

John Wayne Gacy: A serial killer who murdered at least 33 young men and buried them under his house, had Kentucky Fried Chicken, fried shrimp, french fries, strawberries, and a diet coke.

Walter LaGrand: Executed in Arizona in 1999, asked for six fried eggs, 16 strips of bacon, one large serving of hash browns, a pint of pineapple sherbert, a breakfast steak, a cup of ice, a 7-Up, a Dr. Pepper, a Coke, hot sauce, coffee, two sugar packs, and four Roloids.

In our text today, the Lord Jesus Christ gathers with His disciples to partake in His last meal. He does not have the privilege of requesting what He will eat for His last supper, but the meal He eats may just be the most important meal ever eaten.

The meal Jesus Christ eats on the eve of His death is a meal that was designed by God the Father to exalt God the Son. It is a meal that preaches the Gospel. It is a meal that displays the grace of God. It is a meal that signifies the creation of a new spiritual covenant between God and repentant sinners.

For some 3,500 years the ancient Hebrews were liberated from slavery after having served their cruel Egyptian masters.

God had instructed them to celebrate their freedom each year with a seven-day Jewish holiday called Passover. God told them to get a roasted lamb from the Temple and take it home and eat it. They were to eat it with bitter herbs, usually horseradish, to remind them of the bitterness of slavery. Then they were to eat it with Karpas (parsley or boiled potatoes) dipped into salt water to remind them of the tears their ancestors shed. Then they were to eat it with Charoses (a unique Passover dip made of chopped apples, nuts, and wine) to remind them of the mortar used to make bricks they made to build Pharaoh's cities. Then they were to eat hard boiled eggs to remember the oppression and struggles from 245 generation to generation (just like eggs get harder the longer they are boiled, just so the oppression and struggles for survival got harder from generation to generation).

The two most important items were the Matzah or the unleavened bread and the wine. The Hebrews were forced to leave suddenly and with very little preparation and the dough for bread hadn't had time to rise. It was baked by the sun as it was being carried on the backs of the fleeing Hebrew slaves.

Then there were four cups of wine. Wine was considered the drink of free people and was to be drunk while leaning to the left. Four different phrases are used to describe how God saved the Hebrews from Egypt taken from two verses in Exodus 6:6-7:

"I will take you out, I will rescue you from their bondage, I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgment, I will take you as My people and I will be your God."

One more thing: Tell the story in detail to your children. And sing a joyful hymn.

Two things I want to share with you about this Passover meal:

I. The Preparations for the Meal Mark 14:12-16

Christians are no longer required to observe the Passover meal, but understanding it will give you a deeper understanding about the death and resurrection of Jesus and will enhance your appreciation of the Lord's Supper.

The disciples asked Jesus about what they should do to make preparations for the Passover. This involved more than just finding a room.

Look at Exodus 12:19-20. To prepare for the observation of the Passover, the Jewish people had to spend the week getting rid of all their leaven, or yeast, in their house. We'll see in a moment that leaven is a symbol of sin. Even today, religious Jews still follow these instructions. To prepare for Passover they went through a frenzy of house cleaning to get rid of all the food products that contained leaven or yeast. They meticulously scrub down the kitchen, making sure to get into the cracks in the counters to remove any trace of leaven. Because Passover is always in the spring, did you know that is the origin of what we call "spring cleaning"? Really! Google it sometime.

So what is the application of this preparation for us? Simply this: I must make spiritual preparation to receive the Lord's Supper. God was telling His people, "I want your houses to be free of any trace of leaven because leaven represents evil and sin." As followers of Christ, we don't have to get rid of the leaven in our kitchens, but we should constantly be concerned about sin and evil in our lives.

Look at I Corinthians 5:6-7. A tiny bit of sin has a profound impact on us. Just a little bit of sin can ruin you. It will cause your soul to rot. Unconfessed sin spoils you and changes you like nothing else. So before you partake of the Lord's Supper, would you do a little spring cleaning?

246 II. The Picture in the Passover Meal Mark 14:22-26

It's interesting that Luke and Paul gives us something relating to the Last Supper that Matthew, Mark, and John doesn't mention. It's also interesting that Luke got much of his information from Paul. Paul wrote First Corinthians before John Mark wrote Mark and Matthew wrote Matthew. Turn to I Corinthians 11:23-26 and see if you can pick out what Paul added. ("This do in remembrance of Me.")

Jesus said, "Remember My death! Dwell on My violent and shameful death!" Why would He say that?

Suppose someone in your family has been charged with a felony, and, though he was innocent, he was found guilty by a court of law, and sentenced to die by a firing squad, or by hanging, or by electric chair. The night before the execution, he or she tells you, "Don't ever forget my death."

Which had you rather remember about your loved-one who died for something he didn't do: Would you want to remember the happier times of his or her life or the tragic death of an execution? Imagine seeing that person struck in the heart with a bullet, or his feet trying to find a solid place for his feet as he kicks only air or his body shaking all over as electricity passes through his body.

No one would ask you to remember and cherish their violent and shameful death. No one, that is, except Jesus. "Take the Lord's Supper and remember My horrible death!" Why would Jesus ask such a thing? Because in the midst of the shame and cruelty we see God's love, our sin, and Christ's salvation!

Jesus took the bread in His hands and did four things with it:

1. He took the bread in His hands symbolizing that His death was a voluntary act. He did not have to die, but He willingly died.
2. Jesus gives thanks. He thanked God that the giving of His life would result in sinful man's deliverance from sin and his eternal salvation.
3. Jesus broke the bread, symbolizing that His body was to be broken as a sacrifice and substitute for our sins.
4. Jesus gave the bread to the disciples to eat. The words, "Take, eat. This is My body," means that a man is to take and receive Christ into his life by faith. The moment a man takes and received Christ is the moment he is redeemed!

Receiving Jesus is as easy as swallowing a morsel of bread. When we eat the Communion bread, we're saying, "The crucified and risen Savior has come into my heart, and I now enjoy a personal relationship with the living Christ."

Then, Jesus did four things with the cup:

1. He took the cup into His hands. Again teaching that His death was voluntary. His life was not being taken from Him; He was laying it down.
2. He gave thanks to God for man's deliverance through His sacrifice.
3. He gave the cup to His men and they drank it. When we taste the juice, we remember that He tasted death for every man!
4. Jesus identified the cup as His blood. This is My blood. His blood is to take the place of the sacrifice of animals. There is now a new covenant between God and man!

Mark 14:26. This is the only recorded instance of our Lord singing.

"For the joy set before Jesus, He endured the cross, despising the shame, and is now seated at the right hand of the throne of God."

GETHSEMANE: THE WORLD'S GREATEST BATTLEFIELD

Mark 14:32-42

Jesus is now just hours from the cross. Jesus and His now eleven disciples, for Judas had already departed to gather the band of soldiers against Jesus, but now Jesus and His eleven disciples leave the upper room where He has eaten the Last Supper with them, and they go to the Garden.

Jesus and His disciples descend from Mount Zion down into the Kidron Valley. The Brook Kidron was a narrow stream in the bottom of the Valley, but nobody ever drank from the water. Josephus reported that it often ran red because of the remains of the bloody sacrifices up on the Temple mount drained into the Brook Kidron. I wonder as Jesus crossed the bloody stream, what was going through His mind. They crossed that bloody creek and walked just a few hundred feet to an olive grove that some rich men had

made into a Garden. That's where Jesus fought the battle for our souls.

This is not going to be an easy place for Jesus. He was forty days in the wilderness, being tempted by Satan himself, but this will be a much greater struggle. Jesus and His disciples had been there many times praying to the Father, but this time would be different.

I want us to look at three things about Gethsemane:

I. It was a Place of Pressure Mark 14:32-34

There are times that you have a great burden to pray and maybe you need your closest, most spiritual friends to be with you in prayer. There are other times that you just need to be alone – just you and God.

The disciples probably knew our Lord had gone there to pray. They had seen Him pray hundreds of times. They were amazed at His prayer life. They even asked Him, "Lord, teach us to pray." They saw Him standing and praying. They had seen Him kneeling in prayer. But Verse 35 tells us that He fell to the ground; in a prone position, with His face to the ground.

The name "Gethsemane" is Aramaic in origin and means "olive press." There were many olive trees there, so it would make sense to have an olive press nearby. Olives aren't picked; they have to be harvested by taking long sticks and beating the branches so the ripe olives fall into a cloth spread beneath the branches.

There were three steps to crushing the olives. First, all the olives would be dumped into a round stone trough and would be crushed by a man or a donkey advancing a wooden arm attached to a heavy round stone. The olive mush was then collected and put into round bags. These bags were stacked on top of each other and a long tree trunk was placed on the bags to squeeze out even more oil. That oil was harvested as the virgin oil. Then, finally, stones were attached to the tree trunk to crush even more oil from the sacks.

Jesus said in Verse 34, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful unto death." The word means "to be completely surrounded with sorrow", "to be squeezed in from every side with sorrow."

"Tarry ye here, and watch." "Watch" doesn't mean "to look at Me or to watch for others for Me," but, "to stand with Me; to do battle with Me."

Now get the picture. Jesus said to His disciples, "I am about to enter into battle, into conflict – even with Satan and with all of his forces of evil. They will surround Me and put pressure on Me as never before. I need you to watch; to stand with Me; to enter into battle with Me against Satan."

The writer of Hebrews put it this way, "He offered up prayers and petitions with fervent cries and tears to the One who could save Him from death." (Hebrews 5:7).

Dr. Luke tells us, "And being in anguish, He prayed more earnestly, and His sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground"(Luke 22:44). His scalp began to ooze bloody sweat.

II. It was a Place of Prayer Mark 14:35-38

"Abba" was the most affectionate term a Jewish child could ever use to their father. It meant "Daddy" or "Papa." Jesus said, "Daddy, you can do anything. I'm asking You to take this cup from Me." "To drink a cup" means to experience something.

Jesus peered into that cup, and what He saw caused His blood to freeze. The Son of God recoiled in horror. So what did He see in that cup?

A. He saw Physical Pain

Jesus was 100 percent God, but He was 100 percent human as well. As a man, He experienced physical pain just like we do. He had nerves running through His body. His humanity shuddered at the thought of the physical pain He was about to face. He knew rough hands would grab Him and beat Him and slap Him and jerk the beard from His face. He knew brutal soldiers would drive long, hard thorns into His brow. He knew He would experience the cat-of-nine-tails whipping His back. He knew nails the size of railroad spikes would be driven into His hands and feet.

Was He afraid to die? No! That's why He came from heaven to earth.

Sometimes the dread is worse than the experience itself. Ask someone going into major surgery. He saw the physical suffering and He said, "Please, Daddy, take it away."

B. He saw the Emotional Isolation

Jesus went about doing good. He ignored no one. He is the most compassionate Person who ever lived. But He saw in that cup that all would forsake Him and He would have to bear it all alone.

It was alone the Savior prayed, in dark Gethsemane, Alone He drained the bitter cup and suffered there for me. Alone, alone, He bore it all alone. He gave Himself to save His own. He suffered and bled and died alone.

He asked the three closest to Him – His inner circle – to pray for Him, and they slept!

C. He saw the Spiritual Shame

As terrifying as the physical pain and the isolation were, I don't think either of those came close to what Jesus dreaded on the Spiritual level.

On the cross Jesus would take all the sins of the world. Second Corinthians 5:21 says, "God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God."

And then Jesus saw that fellowship between Him and His Father would be broken for three hours because His Father could not look upon sin. Isaiah said that the Father would lay upon Him the iniquities of us all.

Jesus prayed for two things:

For strength. Jesus knew what sin could do. It turned angels into demons and corrupted all of mankind.

For surrender. In the Garden of Eden Adam told God in effect, "Not Your will, but mine be done!" And with that resolve death came into the world. But here in the Garden of Gethsemane, the last Adam turned the first Adam's prayer around and said, "Not My will, but Yours be done."

C. S. Lewis said there are only two kinds of people: those who, like Jesus, say to God, "Your will be done," and those to whom God says on the Judgment Day, "Your will be done" as they are lead off into eternal separation from God.

III. It was a Place of Peace Mark 14:39-42

Jesus explained why the disciples had not prayed and were asleep: "The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." I can identify with that. My spirit is willing, but my flesh or sinful nature is too often unwilling. I face that battle daily. 251 Someone once said, "When you find it hard to pray, pray the hardest."

Look at Mark 14:41-42. Where was Jesus going? Away from Judas as fast as He could? No. He was going forward to meet Judas. He knew God's perfect will was for Him to drink from the bitter cup of sin, and He was beginning to lift that cup to His lips.

FAILURE IS NOT FATAL

Mark 14:27-31, 66-72

Have you ever failed the Lord? I don't mean, have you ever failed the Lord intentionally or deliberately. If you are a child of God and you love the Lord, I don't think you would set out to fail the Lord. But, if you are a human being, even if you are saved, you are going to fail and make mistakes. But the thing that reveals the strength of your character is what you do AFTER you fail. If you stay down, then you wallow in your failure and you won't mean much if anything to the kingdom of God. But if you get back up, make things right with God, and keep trying to follow the Lord, He can still use you.

Simon Peter, the leader of our Lord's disciples, failed the Lord; even after declaring to the Lord Himself that he would not fail Him. So, how did Peter handle his failure?

Read The Passage.

From this familiar passage of Scripture, I want to share three things with you:

1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1. I. The Prediction of Peter's Failure Mark 14:27-31

Jesus said ALL of the disciples would "be offended because of Me ...", "All of them would be made to stumble ...", all would "fall away." I don't know what the other disciples thought when Jesus said that, but Peter spoke up and said, "Lord, you're wrong. Even if

everyone else is made to stumble, I will not!" It was not until Peter began to tell the Lord he would never fall away that all the rest of the disciples said that they would not either.

The words "stumble" or "fall away" or "be offended" speaks of being unfaithful to a friend because of something you see in your friend that offends you. That night when Jesus was arrested, the disciples saw that loyalty to Him could lead to their own arrest and death. Because that offended them; they would forsake Him.

How did Jesus know this would happen? Of course, Jesus is all-knowing, but a second thing is that Zechariah 13:17 prophesied that it would happen.

A. Pride and Overconfidence

Peter's problem? Pride! Overconfidence! The Bible has a strong warning against over-confidence. Proverbs 16:18: "*Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.*"

I'm not a Catholic priest, so I don't hear confessions. But through the years, I've had perhaps hundreds of people come and confess sins to me. Of course, I will carry all these confessions in confidence to the grave. As you can imagine, I've heard plenty of sins over the past forty years. But I've never had a single person come to me and confess the sin of pride. Pride is a condition that blinds the person who has it.

Peter was guilty of two sins here.

First, he exalted himself over his fellow disciples. Peter could see the other disciples being unfaithful and disloyal to Jesus, but he would say, "I may have to die for you, but I will never be unfaithful to you." Little did Peter realize that he would fail Jesus more that night than any other disciple, except Judas.

Never say, "I would never do so-and-so." Gordon MacDonald was a well-known pastor who committed adultery and lost his ministry. He has since repented and been restored. In a magazine article MacDonald later recalled that a friend had asked him, "If Satan were to bring you down, how do you think he would do it?"

MacDonald answered, "I don't know how Satan would do it, but I do know how he could not do it – by making me be unfaithful to my wife." Yet, that's exactly what happened. He was caught off guard by his own sin, just like Peter in this passage.

Remember this: None of us are as strong as we think we are. None of us can resist all temptation. None of us are as good as we think we are.

A pastor was talking to his wife as they were driving home after the morning service. He said to his wife, "You know, there are not many really good preachers any more, are there?" She said, "No, there aren't. And there is one less than you think there are."

Here's a Bible Principle: I Corinthians 10:12: "*Let him who thinks he stands take heed, lest he fall.*"

A great ole saint used to say when he was a young man that he wanted to finish in a blaze of glory. When he reached 65 he said now he just wants to finish without committing a horrible sin.

B. Backsliding Mark 14:54 (Three of the Gospel writers declare this.)

The first step to backsliding is slack-abiding. One step from Grace leads to Disgrace – one step from the Lord.

Peter put himself in the Danger Zone. The Lord's promise is that He will not allow His children to be tempted above that they are able to bear. But that does not apply to willful disobedience. If we willfully put ourselves in the place of temptation, the Lord will not override our choice.

How often we put ourselves in the Danger Zone and all the time the Holy Spirit is saying, "Be careful ... do not go there ... you're in danger ..." and we pay no attention and then wonder why we yield to sin.

C. Peter Identified Himself with the Enemies of Christ.

John 18:18-19. A fire was built close to where Jesus was being tried and Peter stood with them around the fire, warming himself. Luke 22:55 says, "*And Peter sat with them.*" He wanted to blend in with the crowd, so he gave the impression that he was one of them.

You can't win the world by becoming like them – dressing like them – acting like them – going to the places they go – doing the things they do – and singing the songs they sing. Peter was in the wrong place with the wrong people. Be careful of the company you keep. Evil companions are more likely to drag you down than you are to lift them up.

Poor Peter! He wanted to be with Jesus, but he thought he had to be a part of the crowd too!

Charles Spurgeon tells of a girl who wanted to live for Jesus, but wanted to be a part of the world, too. He said, "Suppose there was a streetcar outside this tabernacle (church). You have three choices. You can put one foot on the streetcar and leave one foot on the muddy ground ... but you won't stay that way long when the car begins to move. Or, you can stand with both feet in the mud and let the car go its way. Or, you can put both feet on the car and go to the place the car is going. But you can't do both!"

1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 2. The Pathway to Peter's Failure

A. First Denial

This servant girl who let Peter in the gate saw him by the fire. She said, "I know you – you were with that Jesus of Nazareth" (said with feeling of contempt). Peter tried to play dumb and said, "I don't understand what you're talking about."

Then the girl put the question to Peter in a negative form: "You are not one of His followers, are you?" He said, "I am not." And Mark said that Peter went out on the porch and a rooster crowed.

That first rooster was saying to Peter, "Be careful." Peter lied, and he knew it.

Why didn't Peter witness to the girl instead of lying to her? We are told not to give place to the devil – don't let him get his foot in the door. If you do, he'll take over.

I think Peter got blind-sided. He planned how he would defend himself against a soldier, but he was totally unprepared – caught off-guard by this servant girl. Your true character is shown when you are caught off-guard.

B. Second Denial

Another maiden saw him at the fire and began to study his face and then said, "I do know you. You're one of His disciples." One of the men speaks and says, "Yes, your speech betrays you. You talk with the accent of a Galilean." Peter said, "I do not know the man."

What dishonoring words! In his great confession Peter had said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." He called Him "Master" and "Lord," but now he said, "I don't know THE MAN."

When you tell one lie, you feel almost trapped to tell another lie, and it's easier to tell the second lie.

C. Third Denial

Luke says it was about an hour later, Peter tried to get a better look at how the proceedings were going. Standing around the fire, no doubt there was some jesting about Jesus – some course jokes. Peter listened and laughed with the rest. Peter made no protest because he had to keep up his deception. On that cold night, Jesus was being buffeted, and Peter was warming himself at the fire, trying to make himself comfortable.

By this time Jesus had been declared a blasphemer. He had been beaten, spat upon and taunted. Then a man kin to the man that Peter had cut his ear off, said, "You are one of them. I saw you in the Garden with Him."

Then Peter began to curse and swear ... "I don't know Him ..." And the rooster crowed while he was still speaking.

Curse – means to call down a curse – to make an oath. When a person made an oath they assumed to make it in the presence of God. Peter called God to witness his lie! With an oath he was saying, "May God kill me if I'm not speaking the truth."

Swear –

– Peter reverted back to his old style of speech. Being a fisherman he learned some raw language. Now he reverts back to his old habit.

– It's important not to acquire evil habits lest in some hour of weakness they come back to us. (Drinking/cursing – That's why, it's important to be saved young.)

– People always get into trouble when they have to resort to defiled speech to enforce what they are saying. Foul talk only shows a lack of intelligence (vocabulary not large

enough to express themselves any other way, and character. Some think foul speech is a sign of strength, but it is weakness. He is not a he-man, but a weak-man.

1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 3. The Pardoning of Peter's Failure

Mark 14:28; Luke 22:31-32. At the time Jesus told Peter that he would deny Him, He told Peter that He would restore him.

Somewhere in the night a rooster stretches its neck, shakes its feathers, and crows an indictment. Most folks paid no attention to that rooster crowing. It was nothing out of the ordinary. But for Peter, the crowing of the rooster was like the blast of a trumpet! I think every time Peter heard a rooster crow after that, he remembered that night.

The Bible says that Jesus turned and looked at Peter – beaten, bloody, Jesus utters no words – nor does He shake His head in disgust or lower it in disappointment. It is not an “I-told-you-so” look. It was a look of pain, but also pardon.

Grace was announced before Peter fell. Jesus knew he would fall; He told him so. But He made it easy for him to return. “When you are restored, strengthen your brothers.”

Thank God the story of Peter doesn't end in failure – but in repentance. He begins to return and recover.

The true Peter is not seen in his denial, but in his repentance. He went out and wept bitterly! I wonder if he went back to the Garden of Gethsemane, where earlier he had felt no need to pray. Sin is a great provoker of tears. Tears tell us that sin only brings trouble and sorrow. In some private place he confessed his sin and sought forgiveness.

I wonder if he didn't pray as he did in Luke 5, “I am a sinful man, O Lord.” I think he prayed, “O, Lord, what have I done ... what have I done? Give me another chance. Forgive my sin. Cleanse me from this stain.”

Peter is a smaller man now ... without all that thick husk that once surrounded his life. Now he is broken ... and the real wheat is showing ... chaff is gone.

There is a little rooster inside all of God's children.

The crucial question: How will we handle our failure?

Proverbs 24:16: The well of grace will never run dry!

THE BETRAYAL OF JESUS

Mark 14:43-52

Wouldn't it be wonderful if every Christian loved Jesus totally, with all their being? And if every Christian was wholly committed to Jesus? If we are honest, every Christian knows they come far short of what they could be. Someone wrote these descriptions of Christians:

- Some Christians are like wheelbarrows – no good unless they are pushed.
- Some Christians are like canoes – they need to be paddled.
- Some Christians are like kites – if you don't keep a string on them, they fly away.
- Some are like footballs – you can't tell which way they'll bounce next.
- Some are like balloons – full of wind and ready to blow up.
- Some are like neon lights – they keep going on and off.
- But some are like good watches – pure gold, quietly busy, open-faced, and full of good works.

What kind of Christian are you?

At the arrest of the Lord Jesus, His disciples responded in three different ways, and Jesus Himself responded. Each response represents a different kind of believer. Let's look for ourselves in one one of them.

1. 1. 1. 1. 1. I. Are You a Counterfeit Christian? Mark 14:43-45

Our passage opens with Jesus waking His disciples from their sleep in the Garden of Gethsemane for the third time. Jesus had asked them to pray for Him as He prayed to His Father. As Jesus woke them, He asked, “Couldn't you watch with Me one hour?” Jesus was still speaking to the disciples when Judas came up.

Something caught my eye as I was studying this passage. Verse 43 says that a “great multitude” “from the chief priest and the scribes, and the elders” came after Jesus with swords and staves (clubs). Don't pass over that too quickly, because they were expecting Him or His disciples or both, to offer some kind of resistance.

Then I remembered John's account of this event in John 18:3, *“Then Judas, having received a detachment of troops And officers from the chief priest and Pharisees, came there with lanterns, torches, and weapons.”*

The word “detachment” means soldiers; the word “officers” refers to the Temple police.

A full detachment of troops had the potential strength of 1,000 men – 760 foot soldiers and 240

cavalry soldiers (men on horseback). A normal detachment was no fewer than 200 men, plus the plus the Temple police.

Most Bible students believe there were no less than 1,000 men in all coming to arrest Jesus. Here was Jesus and His eleven men; here were 1,000 men, some on horse back, some on foot, with lanterns and torches, others with swords and clubs, plus a host of sightseers hoping to see something sensational. This was a military operation. They intended to not only arrest Jesus, but to fill Jesus and His disciples with fear.

Below in the valley, the Lord calmly awaited their arrival. Our Lord knew it was the Father's will for Him to go to the cross and He had submitted Himself to do so. Jesus could have destroyed them all, or He could have called 72,000 angels to destroy them, but He willingly gave Himself for our sin debt.

Notice Mark 14:44. Judas was saying, “Stay close to me and do not make any mistake. Once I identify your Man, seize Him; make sure He does not escape. Don't underestimate His powers; He might try to escape, so hold Him tightly, and guard Him well.”

Judas knew that when he betrayed Jesus, he would never again be able to fellowship with the other disciples; they would hate him and feel contaminated by his presence. Wherever he went, people would call him the greatest of traitors. He would be without home, friends, peace; he would be a lost soul wandering in unending darkness – but at least he would have his fist full of silver.

Judas had given them a signal, saying, “Whomever I kiss, He is the one; seize Him.” The word “kiss” is written in an intensified form, meaning he kissed him fervently. It is the same word used when the father kissed his prodigal son who returned. He kissed him again and again. Judas was pouring it on.

It is not without significance that this took place in a garden, because it was in a garden where sin first entered the world. It was in a garden where the first Adam fell. It was in a garden where sin gained his victory, and it will be in a garden now where the last Adam will undo what Satan did and gain victory over Satan, death, hell, and the grave.

1. 1. 1. 1. 1. II. Are You a Carnal Christian? Mark 14:46-47

We know from John's gospel that it was Peter who wielded his sword and the name of the wounded slave was Malchus.

Peter couldn't understand what was taking place around him, but for him, the moment for resistance had come. The enemies of Christ had said and done enough. Peter was going to split Malchus right down the middle. Fortunately for Peter, the nimble servant jumped in the nick of time, so that only his right ear was sliced off.

That first blow from Peter, if he had killed Malchus, would have announced the beginning of a revolution. Within a matter of seconds, blood was flowing from the side of the victim's head, and as the man was moaning with pain, Peter was ready to take on the whole army. Peter had already told his Master that he would be ready to die for Him. The time had come for action; not words! Peter was not going to allow this to happen to his Lord!

The only thing that kept Peter from becoming a murderer was the grace of God. If Peter had beheaded Malchus, he would have been crucified with Jesus the next day. Had not Jesus acted immediately, the Garden of Gethsemane would have been stained with the blood of every disciple. Jesus stopped the blood shed by telling Peter to put his sword up and touching the man's ear and healing him.

A carnal Christian, like Peter in Gethsemane, will try to fight the Lord's battles with worldly weapons. By healing Malchus, Jesus was undoing the work of Peter. Every time we follow Peter's example and act independently of the Lord, we injure someone else, and only the healing touch of Jesus can restore them. One telltale sign of a carnal Christian is running ahead of the Lord, and it's an easy trap to fall into.

How like Jesus to perform His last miracle before the cross by restoring the unfortunate man his ear!

Let me show you the strength of Jesus. They wanted to put Jesus on trial, but He put them on trial. Look at Mark 14:48-49.

It was as though the Lord asked, "What has changed? I was with you publicly in daylight; I was teaching in the Temple. Why didn't you take me then? Were you afraid the people might resist you? Why do you come to Me with weapons of war? Are you afraid of Me? Who do you look for and want to seize?"

When they answered, "Jesus," John 18 5-8 says that Jesus said, "I AM He" and they were all swept from their feet and hit the ground.

1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1. III. Are You a Cowardly Christian? Mark 14:50

Earlier that night the disciples had promised Jesus they would be faithful to Him. He had never deserted them. He had always been there to calm their fears and comfort their hearts, but now they were forsaking Him.

The disciples were not the only ones who abandoned Jesus in the Garden. Look at Mark 14:51-52. Who was this unnamed young man? Most scholars believe it was John Mark, the author of this Gospel.

How could he have known about this unless he were the person involved?

The home of John Mark was the outstanding Christian home in Jerusalem; the place to which the disciples went to pray (Acts 12:12). Judas may have taken the troops to Mark's house, looking for Jesus. John Mark may have slipped out of bed, wrapped a bed sheet around him, and went to the place in the Garden that he had prayed with Jesus and His disciples before. Somehow, John Mark escaped, left the sheet, and ran home naked.

1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1. IV. Are You a Committed Christian?

The final example in this passage is that of our Lord. Jesus did not bail out when the pressure was on. He knew the pain and the shame that was before Him, but He knew it was the Father's will to go to the cross.

What courage, compassion, and commitment we see in the Lord Jesus.

I gave My life for thee, My precious blood I shed

That thou might'st ransomed be, and quickened from the dead.

I gave, I gave My life for thee, What hast thou given for Me?

I gave, I gave My life for thee, What hast thou given for Me?

I suffered much for thee, More than thy tongue can tell,

Of bitt'rest agony, To rescue thee from hell.

I've borne, I've borne it all for thee, What hast thou borne for Me?

I've borne, I've borne it all for thee, What hast thou borne for Me?

And I have brought to thee, Down from My home above,

Salvation full and free, My pardon and My love.

I bring, I bring rich gifts to thee, What hast thou brought to Me?

I bring, I bring rich gifts to thee, What hast thou brought to Me?

THE ARREST AND TRIAL OF JESUS

Mark 14:53-65

Jesus knew He was only hours from the cross and before that time came, Jesus wanted to spend some time with His Father in prayer. He wanted His disciples to pray With Him and For Him as He prayed to His Father alone. Three times Jesus found them asleep instead of praying.

About 1,000 men were making their way toward Jesus. They had lights and swords and clubs with them because they expected

resistance. Instead, Jesus gave Himself willingly to them. Peter attempted to take on the soldiers, but Jesus told him to put his sword up. All that was happening was in the Father's will.

They are going to accuse Jesus falsely, arrest Him, arraign Him, and condemn Him that night.

Three things I want you to see:

1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1. I. The Convocation Mark 14:53

A convocation is an assembly of religious leaders. The seventy-one-member Sanhedrin were there to question and judge Jesus. This was the Supreme Court of the Jews. It was made up of Sadducees, the priestly class, the Pharisees, the scribes, who were the experts in the Law, and the elders, who were the respected men. The court was presided over by the High Priest. The students of the Rabbis were there. They were allowed to speak on behalf of the person on trial, but they could not speak against him.

When Jesus was arrested in the Garden, He was first taken to the home of Annas (John 18:13), who was the father-in-law of the current High Priest, Caiaphas. He was a man of considerable influence. After Annas was finished questioning Jesus, he sent Him bound to Caiaphas.

As judges, the members of the Sanhedrin should have been neutral toward our Lord, but Verse 55 says they were "against Jesus." These men should have stood for impartial justice, but they were out for cold-blooded murder. This wasn't a court; it was a slaughterhouse!

In fact, their little convocation was illegal on several levels. The illegal nature of their proceedings would have invalidated any ruling they might have issued, but the wheels of divine sovereignty are in motion and they will not stop until Jesus is dead on the cross.

Let me share with you some reasons why this trial was illegal.

1. It was illegal because of WHEN it was held.

The Jew's own laws that regulated their court system, prohibited them from having a trial at night or on a feast day. Having the trial at night time would prevent the entire council from gathering and it would make it more difficult for witnesses to come to the trial.

2. It was illegal because of WHERE it was held.

The Jewish law mandated that all trials conducted by the Sanhedrin were to be held in The Hall of Hewn Stones, which was located on the Temple grounds. This rule was violated because the trial was held in the private residence of the High Priest.

3. It was illegal because of the WAY it was held.

The Sanhedrin could not bring charges against a defendant, they could only investigate charges that had been made by others.

The charges against Jesus were changed during the trial. He was first charged with threatening to destroy the Temple. Later, He was charged with blasphemy. Then when He stood before Pilate, His charges were changed again. This time, He was charged with claiming to be the King of the Jews and of forbidding the paying of taxes to Rome.

Jesus was allowed no defense before the court. All charges against Him should have been thoroughly investigated and He should have been allowed to call His own witnesses.

The Sanhedrin pronounced the death sentence. By law, the Sanhedrin could not convict or pass down a death sentence.

4. It was illegal because of the Witnesses they called.

No one had brought any charges against Jesus, so the court should have refused to bring Him in. They went out scouting around only for prosecution witnesses. The witnesses they did bring were all found to be false witnesses. None of the testimonies of their witnesses agreed with one another.

Remember that Peter was standing close enough to hear what was going on. Why wasn't he willing to give a witness for Jesus?

He made the choice to simply stay silent. I wonder how many times we have done the same thing. How many times have we had an opportunity to speak for Jesus and we remained silent? How many times has the Holy Spirit urged us to say a word to someone, and we remain silent?

Psalm 107:2: *"Let the redeemed of the Lord say so."*

Yet, through all the lies, all the abuse, and all the miscarriage of justice, Jesus never defended Himself. Why not? By remaining silent Jesus was fulfilling a prophecy in Isaiah 53:7: *"Like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, so He did not open His mouth."*

1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1. II. The Confrontation Mark 14:60-62

Caiaphas was frustrated and mystified by the fact that Jesus has not opened His mouth to refute the lies the false witnesses have told about Him. He calls on Jesus to defend Himself.

So, Caiaphas changes tactics. He places Jesus under oath before God. He asked Jesus point blank, "Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" This question is designed to make Jesus incriminate Himself.

If Jesus remained silent, Caiaphas could tell the people that He refused to affirm His deity. If He denied being the Christ and the Son of Gos, He could go free, but that would be the end of His ministry. If He said He was the Son of God, the Sanhedrin could find Him guilty of blasphemy and do away with Him. Caiaphas asked this question, not because he wanted to know if Jesus were the Son of God, but to condemn Him.

Jesus doesn't disappoint Caiaphas. Jesus opens His mouth and speaks two words that identify Him to His enemies and those two words condemn Him to the cross. When Jesus opened His mouth, He said, "I AM!" That is the covenant name of God! It was a clear claim by Jesus that He was God in the flesh.

Jesus went on to warn Caiaphas, *"And you shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power, and coming with the clouds of heaven."* Jesus was saying, "One day our roles will be reversed. Today you have set yourself up as My judge, but in the future God will set Me up as your judge."

1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1. III. The Condemnation Mark 14:62-65

When Caiaphas hears the words of Jesus, he has heard all that he needs to hear. In his mind there is no more need for evidence; there is no more need for witnesses; there is no more need for trials! Caiaphas believes that he has heard blasphemy, when in fact, he has heard the truth!

Caiaphas rips his clothes. It was a dramatic reaction to what he considered blasphemy. Caiaphas thought he was being dramatic, when in truth, he was doing far more than that.

See Leviticus 21:10. When Caiaphas ripped his garments, he was disqualifying himself from his office. Caiaphas didn't realize it, but he had declared his own unworthiness to remain the High Priest of Israel.

After this, the whole council renders their verdict, "Guilty!"

After Jesus is condemned, the true nature of these men comes out. They turn on Jesus like a pack of rabid dogs. They spit in His face. They blindfold Him and hit Him with their fist and slap Him with the open hand and mock Him saying, "Prophecy! Tell us who hit You!"

But they could not put an end to Christ. His cross became His throne and He sits today at the right hand of power!

The day is coming when each of us will stand before Christ at the judgment. What Christ will do with us then depends on what we do with Him now!

LIFE'S MOST IMPORTANT QUESTION

Mark 15:1-15

There is a conflict going on in our world and it has been going on since Satan tempted Eve in the Garden of Eden. It is a conflict between good and evil – right and wrong – between God and Satan – and all of us are involved in that conflict every day.

Every day you and I have to make decisions between doing what is right and what is wrong. Someone has well said, "Every day we make choices and then those choices turn around and make us."

Galatians 5:17 says that our *"flesh wars (battles) against our Spirit; and our spirit wars against our flesh; and these are contrary to one another."*

1 John 3:8 says, *"For this purpose the Son of God is manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil."*

Each one of us – you and I – must choose which side of the conflict we will be a part of. Will we choose to be on God's side, or will we choose to be on Satan's side?

In the passage before us, Pilate chose the wrong side. Pilate asked a question we must all answer" "What will you do with Jesus?" It is Life's Most Important Question!

Three questions come to my mind as we ask and answer Life's Most Important Question "What shall I do with Christ?"

1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1. I. What Can I Do With Jesus?

Here are the two options: You can Receive Him or you can Reject Him, but you cannot remain neutral.

Some folks think, "Well, I'm just going to remain neutral about Jesus. I'm not going to receive Him and I'm not going to reject Him."

Listen to what Jesus says in Matthew 12:30, *"He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters abroad."*

Jesus is standing in Pilate's hall,

Friendless, forsaken, betrayed by all:

Harken! What meaneth the sudden call!

What will you do with Jesus?

Jesus is standing on trial still,

You can be false to Him if you will,

You can be faithful thro' good or ill:

What will you do with Jesus?

Will you evade Him as Pilate tried?

Or will you choose Him whate'er betide?

Vainly you struggle from Him to hide:

What will you do with Jesus?

What will you do with Jesus?

Neutral you cannot be;

Someday your heart will be asking,

"What will He do with me?"

"Jesus, I give Thee my heart today!

Jesus, I'll follow Thee all the way,

Gladly obeying Thee!" will you say:

"This will I do with Jesus!"

What an opportunity Pilate had to make a right decision!

A. Pilate Examines Jesus

He did a good job too. He asked Jesus seven questions about Himself and His purpose. In fact, he examined Jesus until he was satisfied that Jesus was guilty of nothing.

Someone said:

- If Pilate had examined His mind, he would have found no evil thought ...
- If he had examined His heart, he would have found it pure ...
- If he had examined His feet, he would have found that they went only where the Father directed ...
- If he had examined His hands, he would have seen they did only good.

Four times Pilate told the crowd, "I find no fault in Him." He even said in Luke 23:15, "neither did Herod" find any fault with Him.

Pilate should have said at that moment: "Case closed! Set Him free!" But he did not.

B. Pilate Evades Jesus

Pilate tries everything to get Jesus off his hands.

- He told the Jews to take Him and try Him for themselves. But they wanted to put Jesus to death and under Roman law, the Jews could not sentence anyone to death nor carry out an execution.
- Pilate tried to shift the responsibility to Herod so he wouldn't have to make a decision about Jesus, but it didn't work.
- He offered to release Jesus and crucify Barabbas.
- He tried to wash his hands of the whole matter. The Jews knew what he was doing.

In Deuteronomy 21:1-9 if there was an unsolved murder, the leader could take a heifer that had not been worked, break the heifer's neck, put the heifer under flowing water, wash his hands over the heifer and atonement would be made. But Pilate's washed hands were still guilty!

C. Pilate Exonerates Jesus

He proclaimed, "I find no fault in Him!"

Pilate is at the fork of the road. He had to make a decision. What did he do?

1. He Violated his own Conscience

He knew what the right thing to do was, but he didn't do it. That happens in church all the time. The Word of God is preached, the Holy Spirit stirs the heart and impresses the heart of someone to make a decision for Christ, but they refuse to do what they know is the right thing for them to do.

Pilate became indecisive. Jesus' testimony makes the right impact on his heart. But he is afraid of the reaction of the religious crowd if he decides for Christ.

Pilate is also impressed with Jesus' reaction when He is falsely accused. Mark said that Pilate "marveled" (Mark 15:5). He marveled that our Lord remained silent and did not argue or try to defend Himself. He marveled at our Lord's control and nobility.

Why did Jesus remain silent?

- Jesus knew it was futile to argue with a closed-minded person. To argue only dignifies their behavior.
- Jesus was purposed to do God's will by dying for the sins of the world. His hour had come and there was no need to argue.

2. Pilate Tried Compromise.

He offered to crucify Barabbas and release Jesus. He still lacked courage and decisiveness to take a stand for Christ.

Pilate's wife is the only one to take a stand for Jesus. She declared Him sinless. When she said He was a just Man not only did she

say He was innocent, she also gave a word of warning if Pilate didn't release Jesus. " *I have suffered many things this night in a dream because of Him.*"

2. Pilate Ignored the Right Thing to do the Easy Thing.

3. He was Shaped by the Crowd.

He went with the crowd.

1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1. II. Why Must I Do Anything With Jesus?

A. Because God has given you the Power of Choice.

God did not make us robots or puppets on a string. No one else can experience the power of personal choice for you.

I don't want folks making decisions for me that are going to effect my life and my eternity.

They might not make the choice I would make for myself. They might make the wrong choice for me.

B. Because Jesus died for my Sin.

C. Because you must Personally Experience the Consequences of Your Choice.

The crowd chose Barabbas over Jesus. Pilate knew that was the wrong choice; yet, he let the crowd decide what he would do.

1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1. III. What Kind of Question is This?

A. It is a Personal Question.

What must "I" do with Jesus? It's personal. Every one of us must answer it for ourselves.

His sacrifice was personal and our decision must be personal.

What have you done with Jesus? Oh, you say, "I haven't done anything with Jesus!" Oh,yes, you have. Every time He deals with your heart and you don't respond positively, you say no to Christ; you reject Him!

You must respond for yourself. No one can trust Jesus for you. I wish I could make the decision for you. I wish I could make the decision for everyone, but I can't.

B. It is a Pressing Question.

Today is the day of salvation. Pilate did not choose that moment to be faced with making a decision about Jesus. The moment chose him. God may be choosing this moment as your moment to decide for Jesus. Don't ignore it! Don't let it slip by!

C. It is a Powerful Question

It is powerful because it is far reaching and life changing. Once we are asked by the Holy Spirit and once we answer, no matter what we answer, we are never the same again.

We will all live forever somewhere. What we do with Jesus determines how and where we will spend eternity and what Christ will say to us when we stand before Him!

WHEN HE WAS ON THE CROSS, YOU WERE ON HIS MIND

Mark 15:15-41

Before reading the Scripture.

We are about to read about the cross experience of the Lord Jesus. Jesus has been on trial before Pilate and he has heard the Jewish leaders cry out over and over, "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" But as Pilate has examined Him, he said four times, "Why? I find no fault in Him! Nothing worthy of death!"

Listen as I read the Scripture:

There's a great gospel song recorded by the Gaithers, I've chosen as the title of this message. Ronald Michael Payne wrote the words which say:

"A look of love was on His face;

The thrones upon His head.

The blood was on that scarlet robe;

Stained it crimson red.

Through His eyes were on the crowd that day,

He looked ahead in time,

And when He was on the cross,

You (and I) were on His mind."

As you study the cross experience of the Lord Jesus, you become aware that it was all About Him and all For us.

Listen as I read Psalm 8:3-9.

Before God created the heavens and the earth, there was nothing but eternity past AND God. Then He began to create the heavens and the earth and time began for man.

God created the land and the water, the sun and moon, the mountains and the trees; glorious things, but not an over-abundance of fellowship for God. Then He created animals, and that brought Him pleasure. Somewhere in all of this God created angels, but God wanted fellowship with someone and worship from someone. And so, His crowning creation was man.

God put man in a beautiful garden, gave him everything he could ever desire – and man sinned. But God still loved man in spite of his sin and wanted to to redeem him.

The price would be high! The Father would have to allow His Son to become man, go to the sinful earth, shed His blood on a cross and die so that man would have the opportunity to be redeemed and God could have fellowship with him.

Scripture says that just before Christ went to the cross, He went to the Garden of Gethsemane and prayed and saw in the cup that He must drink, what it would cost Him to redeem man, and what He saw in that cup was so horrible that He prayed, "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me, but not My will; Your will be done."

What did He see in that cup? Have you ever wondered what was going through the mind of Christ as He was experiencing the cross? So many things – but let me just mention three.

1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1. I. The Scriptures

No body knew the Scriptures like Jesus, and knowing the Scriptures, He knew everything that was going to happen to Him before it happened. As it was happening to Him, He must have thought, "Yes, just as the Scriptures said."

Let me just pick one chapter in the Bible to show you what I mean.

Seven hundred years before crucifixion was ever used as a form of capital punishment, David wrote a Psalm about it. Most likely David had never seen a crucifixion, but he wrote some amazing details about crucifixion. God inspired David to write some things that he knew was not about him, but were about The Christ.

The Gospels record the FACTS about the crucifixion; this Psalm records the FEELINGS of the crucified One. In the Gospels we get the vantage point of those who watched from ground level as Jesus was being crucified; but in Psalm 22, we have the vantage point of Jesus from the cross.

John, the Beloved disciple, and Mary, our Lord's mother were at the foot of the cross when they crucified Jesus, but in His wisdom and love, Jesus sent them away. Looking down from the cross, Jesus saw His mother, Mary, at the foot of the cross, weeping and John standing with her. Jesus speaks early on the cross, "Woman, behold your son (John will treat you as his own mother); son, behold your mother (John, treat my mother as your mother)." And the Scripture says that from that hour the disciple took her to his

own home.

Now it is only Jesus and His Father and in a little while His Father will be at a distance.

Picture Him: hanging on a cross, naked, wounds in His hands and feet, every bone out of joint, His whole body ablaze with pain – dying for me and you!

Up Calvary's mountain, one dreadful morn

Walked Christ, my Savior, weary and worn;

Facing for sinners death on the cross

That He might save them from endless loss.

Chorus:

Blessed Redeemer! Precious Redeemer,

Seems now I see Him on Calvary's tree;

Wounded and bleeding, for sinner pleading.

Blind and unheeding – dying for me!

Father, forgive them thus did He pray

Even while His life's blood flowed fast away;

Praying for sinners while in such woe –

No one but Jesus ever loved so.

O how I love Him, Savior and Friend,

How can my praises ever find end?

Thru years unnumbered on heaven's shore,

My tongue shall praise Him forevermore. (Chorus)

So what did He feel on the cross? What did He see?

1. He was scourged with a cat-of-nine tails, laced with pieces of metal, bone, or glass that ripped His flesh, and chunks of flesh were ripped from His rib cage, so much so that He could see His rib bones. Psalm 22:17.
2. Before they nailed Him to the cross, they dislocated all His bones. Psalms 22:14.
3. They nailed His hands and feet. Psalm 22:16
4. From the time He was made to carry His cross and while He was still on the cross, the mob was like a pack of wild animals, mocking Him and taunting Him.

Psalm 22:12: Bulls of Bashan refers to the mocking and taunting of the Priests, elders, scribes, Pharisees, and rulers.

Psalm 22:13: May refer to demons and demonic spirits that jeered and taunted Him.

Psalm 22:16: "Dogs." The words "enclosed me" speaks of how they hunted with wild

scavenger dogs. Men and dogs would encircle their prey, gradually narrowing the circle with a ring of men and dogs, and then the men let the dogs loose to attack and rip and tear the flesh.

Psalm 22:6-8: Jesus compared Himself to a worm – a helpless, powerless, down-trodden worm. Step on a grub worm and crush it and it doesn't bother you. Jesus was discredited, despised by the people, sneered at, laughed at, insulted, treated with contempt.

Psalm 22:18: The executioners divide up His garments.

Psalm 22:15: He was dehydrated and his tongue was so swollen that it cut off His air passage.

Psalm 22:1: His Father forsook Him. (Verse 3 tell us why.)

1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1. II. The Sacrifice Isaiah 53

Again this chapter is All about Him and All for us.

Read Isaiah 53:3-11 – Emphasize “He” and “Him”, and “We”, “Our”, and “Us.”

For sake of time, let's just look at one verse: Verse 4.

“He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows.” He came into the world to bear The Burden of our sin and The Blame of our sin. Jesus comes and says, “Here, let Me carry that for you.”

Notice: He has borne our griefs And carried our sorrow. Where did He carry them? To Calvary and from there, out into a land not inhabited where they have been buried out of sight of both God and men.

And Jesus paid the price for our sins. Notice the words in Verse 4b: “stricken,” and “afflicted.” It means “a stroke at God's own hand.!”

As a result (Verse 5) He was “wounded” (pierced through), bruised (crushed), chastised with stripes (blows that cut). Isaiah 53:5.

1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1. III. The Satisfaction

When He said on the cross, “It is finished!” He had paid the final, total price for our sin!

Oh, how I love Him, How I adore Him.

My breath, my sunshine, My all in all.

The great Creator Became my Savior

And all God's fullness Dwelleth in Him.

Down from His Glory, Ever living story

My God, my Savior came, And Jesus was His name.

Born in a manger, To His own, a stranger,

A Man of sorrows, fears and agony.

Oh, how I love Him, How I adore Him,

My breath, my sunshine, My all in all.

The great Creator, Became my Savior,

And all God's fullness Dwelleth in Him.

Without reluctance, Flesh and blood His substance,

He took the form of man, Revealed the hidden plan.

Oh, glorious mystery, Sacrifice of Calvary

And now I know Thou wert the great "I Am."

Oh, how I love Him, How I adore Him,

My breath, my sunshine, My all in all.

The great Creator, Became my Savior,

And all God's fullness, Dwelleth in Him.

"YOU! CARRY HIS LOAD!"

Mark 15:21-22

Jesus is being lead away from Pilate's Hall and He is now on His way to Calvary. He is going to be put to death on the cross just minutes from now.

Keep in mind what the Lord Jesus has already experienced. He and His disciples had gathered together in the Upper Room. He had washed their feet, they had observed the Passover meal together for the last time, Judas has been exposed as the traitor and has left the room.

Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper after Judas departed. Jesus uses broken bread to represent His broken body on the cross and the fruit of the vine to represent His blood that would be shed on the cross. They sing a hymn, leave the upper Room, follow a path to the Mount of Olive to the Garden of Gethsemane. There He prays until about one A.M. when they are interrupted by Judas and about 1,000 men carrying torches, swords, and clubs. The Temple guards and soldiers arrest Him and He will go through six illegal trials.

Remember that He has not slept all night;; not one moment of rest has He had. They have slapped Him repeatedly with the open hand and pounded Him with their fist. They have spat on Him, pulled His beard out by the handfuls, put a crown of three-inch thorns on His head, and hit Him repeatedly on the head with sticks, driving the thorns deeper into His brow. They have mocked Him, ridiculed Him, and scourged Him with a cat-of-nine-tails. Chunks of flesh have been ripped from His body. His entire body is pouring blood. He is emotionally and physically drained.

Yet, they put the heavy crossbeam on Him to carry to the place of crucifixion. In the Roman system, part of the humiliation process against the criminal was to make him carry his own cross. The crossbeam would weigh between one hundred and two hundred pounds. From the house of Pilate to the city gate He carried the cross. But that was as far as He could go. He was worn out. All of His energy was gone. The loss of blood and the lack of sleep and the emotional pressure has left Him weak and unable to carry His cross, so He collapsed with the cross bearing down on Him.

That's why Simon of Cyrene figures into all this at all.

How the mob must have laughed and mocked Jesus when He fell under the weight of the crossbeam and couldn't get up. "T-h-i-s is your king!? T-h-i-s is your Messiah!?"

But it's hurry-up time. No more time for delay. He must die and He must die now!

1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1. I. Simon the Conscript

The word conscript carries the idea of one being drafted into forced labor or to be pressed into public service.

Luke 23 tells us that Simon was cutting through a field, taking a short-cut to get to Jerusalem; but as he was going INTO the city, the procession with the three men to be crucified were coming OUT of the city.

We don't know how long Simon had been standing in the crowd when Jesus fell or how much he had seen. It was Passover weekend and it was unusual to have a crucifixion on Passover Weekend, but it was happening that year! Someone probably filled

Simon in, telling him that these three men were going to be put to death on the cross.

The streets were narrow and he couldn't get past the mob and maybe out of curiosity, he stood there watching as Jesus reached the end of His strength and energy.

Simon of Cyrene lived some 800 miles from Jerusalem in North Africa. He was just there in Jerusalem to worship during Passover. Think about that for a moment: To come 800 miles just to worship says something about a person. For some folks driving a mile to worship is too much trouble.

Jesus has fallen beneath the load. It was evident that Jesus could carry the heavy beam no further. Someone must carry it for Him, and the soldiers certainly had no intention of carrying it.

So what would the soldiers do? The centurion eyed the crowd. Why not compel one of those detestable religious Jewish leaders to carry the cross, but not telling how the Jews would react to that.

Then the centurion saw this black man, and he was alone. It's not likely he has friends in high places. He would be safe enough to press into this distasteful service of bearing the weight of the cross.

The time was shortly before 9:00 A.M. Scripture says "they laid hold of" Simon. The words mean "to take possession of." "Hey, you there. Pick up that cross!" A rough, strong hand took hold of Simon's arm and he knew he had little choice. There was no room for debate.

How did Simon react to this unwelcomed experience? It must have stirred in him hot anger and resentment. "Why me?" He was probably embarrassed. This was a humiliating experience. There was a terrible stigma attached to a Roman cross. Suppose someone he knew saw him carrying the cross. The mob must have reacted when the crossbeam was placed on his back.

There is no record that Jesus ever spoke to Simon, but, somehow, I think He did. I think Jesus might have said to him, "I'm sorry you have to do this for Me. I know it must make you angry and I'm sure you're embarrassed. I do want to thank you for lifting my burden and making it easier for Me. I want you to know that, though it might not look like it now, I really am the Son of God and I'm going to the cross to die for man's sins and that includes your sins."

Today, any Christian would be honored to carry His cross. I know I would.

Remember, too, that the blood of Jesus had covered that cross and now the Savior's warm blood was on Simon.

As they reach Calvary, Jesus speaks to Simon again. "Thank you for lifting my load. We are almost there. I can manage the rest of the way."

Little did Simon know that he was being identified with Christ in His death. I wonder, if by the time they got to Calvary, if Simon's hated task was transformed into a privilege. Maybe his shame had become his supreme boast! Paul said, "*God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.*"

1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1. II. Simon the Convert

When they reached that skull-shaped hill, it must have been with a sigh of relief when Simon put down the cross and melted into the crowd. But surely he waited to see what would happen next. Lingered at Calvary, he would look and listen, wanting to know what would happen. I think his heart was touched because we know he was converted.

A. I Think Simon was Touched by the Suffering.

He watched as they pierced His hands and feet. He heard Jesus pray to His Father, begging forgiveness for those putting Him to death. He heard one thief rebuke his cursing companion and then address Jesus as "Lord" and begged Him to remember him when He came into His kingdom. He heard the Lord's response, "Today you shall be with Me in Paradise."

He must have read the sign Pilate had made that said, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." Was this crucified man the Messiah, the Son of David?

B. I Think He was Troubled by the Signs.

Before long strange things begin happening all about him. It was as though nature found a voice with which to protest the murder of its Maker! The rocks rent. There was a terrifying earthquake. The veil of the Temple was torn from top to bottom.

Darkness covered the earth at high noon and the darkness continued for three hours.

Then there came a mighty shout, "It is finished!" He didn't die a Victim, but a Conqueror!

Then later, the graves burst open and many bodies of the saints that slept arose and appeared to many in the city.

C. I Think He was Transformed by the Savior.

The centurion and the soldiers left there confessing Christ. Both Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea took bold stands and buried the body of Jesus.

Then, maybe on resurrection morning or maybe a month later on Day of Pentecost,

Simon, the black man from Africa, was saved.

1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1. III. Simon the Christian

We know from Scripture that Simon went home, told his family what he had experienced, and his wife and two sons, Alexander and Rufus were also saved and became a great influence for the cause of

Christ (Mark 15:21; Acts 13:1; Romans 16:13).

I think Simon told his family, "I left home with Religion; I came back with Redemption! I left Empty; I came back Full!"

He carried the cross for Jesus and then the cross became a part of his own heart and life.

Have you been to the cross? You cannot be saved without going to the cross!

THE MAN WHO PREACHED CHRIST'S FUNERAL

Mark 15:37-41

Jesus was dead. He had already released His spirit. The Bible says that He gave up the ghost and now His body hangs lifeless on the cross. Jesus was dead.

But let's not pass by this too quickly or we will miss some important insights.

Mark 15:37 says that "*Jesus cried out with a loud voice, and breathed His last.*"

This is very significant, for dying people do not shout. As all of life shuts down, vocal sounds diminish and finally noises in the throat announce that death is almost here. We call it the "death rattle." Yet, this customary weakness was not seen in the death of the Lord Jesus. Instead of getting weaker, He appeared to be getting stronger! I think that's the reason Mark and the other Gospel writers called our attention to it. By crying out with a loud voice, Jesus proclaimed from the cross that He was not dying as a victim of a mob; He was laying down His life and departing life as a Victor, and not a Victim.

Jesus did not die from weakness or exhaustion. The Jews did not kill Him. The Romans did not kill Him. No device of man could kill Him. He knew that all was now accomplished in payment for man's sin, so He sovereignly dismissed His spirit by a deliberate act of His will. He had said that "no man takes my life from Me, I lay it down of Myself." He chose the time of His death. In Luke 23:46 we read that when Jesus had cried out with a loud voice, He said, "*Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit. Having said this, He breathed His last.*" Matthew 27:50 adds that He "*yielded up His spirit*" in a voluntary act.

Then in Mark 15:38 we are told that "*the veil of the Temple was rent in two.*" The veil had stood in the Holy Place of the Temple and Tabernacle for some 1,500 years to keep all people away from the presence of God. That barrier was passed only by the high priest once a year on the Day of Atonement, and then with great precaution. That rending of the veil marked the abolishing of Judaism, the end of the Old Testament sacrificial system – no more deaths of the lamb, for the Perfect Lamb that takes away the sin of the world, has shed His blood – and, now, all men everywhere are invited to come boldly into the presence of God.

The timing of the rending of the veil indicated God had been watching every detail of the drama on the hill called Calvary. The rending of the veil happened not before, nor during the crucifixion; it came at the end after Jesus had paid the full price for man's sin. The rending of the veil from top to bottom meant that the Mercy Seat, once hidden, had become visible for all.

Look down at Mark 15:42 and notice the term, "Day of Preparation: of just "preparation." The Day of Preparation was on Friday, the

day of the crucifixion and the day before the Sabbath. They had to prepare for the Passover celebration. It was most important that dead bodies be removed from the cross by 6:00 P.M., and Jesus died at 3:00 P.M., so they had to hurry.

The Jews besought Pilate that all three men might have their legs broken so that they would die quicker and so they could remove their bodies from the cross. Normally the Romans didn't remove the bodies from the cross for several days after crucifixion. The Romans even had a law against burying a crucified person. The Romans commonly left the bodies of the condemned on the cross so that they became prey of wild beast. They also wanted to leave the bodies of crucified criminals on the cross as a warning to others not to do wrong against Rome.

Once again Pilate is playing politics with the Jews by yielding to the desires of the Jews. Pilate gave the command to break the legs of all three criminals. Breaking the legs was a painful experience for one hanging on a cross, for it was done with a heavy mallet. This was more than just a broken bone and giving the men a nice clean break. They would pound the leg until the bone was in splinters to make sure the bones were broken. The pounding of the bones was a powerful shock to the system. The crucified could no longer put weight on the legs so they would die more quickly.

Jesus had told the thief, "Today you shall be with Me in Paradise" and the breaking of his legs helped to fulfill Christ's promise.

"But when they came to Jesus, and saw that He was already dead, they broke not His legs"(John 19:33). The soldiers were convinced that Jesus was dead and these kind of soldiers did not make mistakes about when a person was dead.

It may not seem important to you that they did not break His legs, but it is both important and inspiring. The Paschal lamb which was sacrificed during the Passover was to have no broken bone when it was sacrificed. The Paschal was a marvelous type of Jesus Christ who was being slain on the cross. Twice in the Old Testament the people were instructed about the lamb that "neither shall ye break a bone thereof" (Exodus 12:46; Numbers 9:12).

In order to fulfill the prophecy about the bones not being broken, the soldiers had to disobey an order from Pilate. Roman soldiers did not disobey orders casually. But here they simply did not hear the orders, for God was in control and there was no power on earth that could cause the bones of Christ to be broken. So in order for Scripture to be fulfilled, the soldiers did not do what they were ordered to do (break the bones), but did do that which they were not ordered to do (piercing His body with a spear). The spearing was certainly not necessary (for Christ was already dead), and it was not ordered by Pilate.

I want us to see this centurion in three lights:

1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1. I. We See the Centurion Crucifying Christ

A centurion was a Military man. All centurions were men of rank who had reached at least the rank of captain in the imperial army. They were hard men, experienced men, rough men, determined men, disciplined men, and usually brutal and blood-thirsty men with a cold heart.

They were also men of Authority. They had 100 men under them and they expected to be obeyed.

Then they were men of Responsibility. They had different responsibilities. For example, some had the responsibility of guarding the palace gates; others had the responsibility of guarding the emperor. This centurion was in charge of the death squad. He was responsible for carrying out executions according to plan. Often they would have to put down resistance at the sight of the crucifixion.

This centurion received his orders some time before nine o'clock in the morning. He had already stripped the scarlet robe away from Jesus. He was clad again in His own garments.

The centurion gave orders for the cross to be brought. It wasn't much to look at. No money had been spent on it. It was made of the coarsest, cheapest, roughly-hewn wood that could be found. All three men were forced to shoulder their portable gallows to Golgotha. Jesus had not gone far before He began to stagger beneath the weight of the wood.

Think what He had been through. There had been days of increasing opposition, tension, and struggle as His enemies plotted His death. There was the sleepless night of agony in the Garden of Gethsemane followed by His secret arrest and the flight of all His friends. He had endured six trials from about 1:00 A.M. until about 7:00 A.M. He had been mocked, spat on, beaten, scourged, and crowned with thorns.

Crucifixion has been abolished now for 1,500 years by Constantine, but it was common enough in Bible times. When at last they came to the place called Calvary, He was stripped naked and positioned on the dreadful instrument of death. His arms were stretched along the cross-beams. This centurion gave the order to place the large, rusty nail on His hand and to drive it through His

flesh and into the wood. They hammered home the nail causing His flesh to be ripped, bringing instantly a flash of searing pain.

The same was done to His other hand and feet. Then the cross, with its living human burden, was hauled up by strong hands and its foot dropped, with a sickening thud, into a deep hole dug in the ground to receive it.

There God's beloved Son hung between heaven and earth. This man, the centurion, supervised the whole terrible business!

1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1. II. We See the Centurion Considering Christ

Matthew puts it this way: *"And sitting down they watched Him there."* The centurion, the soldiers, the men who just came to observe, and the women who loved and followed Him, they watched Him there. They sat down and contemplated what they were seeing. Their work was finished. His work was still to be done.

It was the man who crucified Christ that now begins to consider Christ.

A. The Centurion Had Never Seen Such Dignity.

To the centurion, Christ graced the cross with such dignity as though He might have been reigning on a throne. Never before had this centurion seen such Majesty in the face of such Misery, such Calmness in the face of such Cruelty, such Patience in the face of such Persecution.

As he listened he heard Jesus pray, *"Father, forgive them, they know not what they do."* Those words were for him and his men who drove the spikes through His hands and feet. He had never heard a man he was crucifying say anything like that before! He was used to hearing curses and obscenities, but not words of forgiveness. This man who Pilate had proclaimed King of the Jews was acting like the very Son of God.

B. The Centurion Had Never Seen Such Distress.

In the midst of all His suffering – His pain, His torn flesh, His knotted muscles, His raging thirst – He thought of others. He thought of His foes and forgave them. He could think of the repentant thief and promise him paradise that very day. He could think of His mother and assigning someone to care for her. Then there was the distressing cry that chilled the blood and sounded like the cry a lost soul might give, but that was no lost soul. This was a good man, a righteous man, a truly holy man; yet He cried, *"My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"*

C. The Centurion Had Never Seen Such Deeds.

The Romans glorified power, naked power. He knew somehow that the three hours of total darkness at noon-day was related to the Man on the cross. Then he heard that the Temple veil had been torn, then the strange earthquake happened, then the graves opened.

With all the sights and sounds, the centurion was convinced!

1. 1. 1. 1. III. We See the Centurion Confessing Christ Mark 15:39

Look again at the word "SAW." The word means to see with understanding and comprehension. He saw for the first time something that he had never seen and understood before. And all that he saw was used of the Holy Spirit to bring him to a saving experience with the Lord Jesus.

But he saw something else. He saw his own sinfulness. If you ever see Jesus as He really is, the sinless Son of God who sacrificed His life for our sins, then you will also see yourself as you really are, a vile, wicked sinner. If you've never seen yourself as a wicked sinner who deserves hell, then you've never seen Jesus as He is.

Jesus said, *"Out of the abundance of the heart a man speaks"* (Matthew 12:34). This centurion gives his personal testimony and at the same time preached our Lord's funeral. Matthew said that this centurion "feared greatly." Luke says that he "glorified God" or "praised God" – while Jesus was still hanging on the cross!

In that moment he passed from death unto life. He confessed Jesus as Lord!

Luke's account says that the centurion said, *"Certainly this was a righteous Man."* Seeing all that had happened his conclusion was that Jesus was not guilty of anything. There had been a miscarriage of justice by man. He was indeed the Lamb of God *"without*

blemish and without spot" (I Peter 1:19) and the One *"Who did no sin"* (I Peter 2:22).

Pilate said, "I find no fault in Him." Herod said, "Nothing worthy of death is done in Him." Pilate's wife warned her husband, *"Have nothing to do with this just Man."* Judas Iscariot said, *"I have betrayed the innocent blood."* The repentant thief said, *"He has done nothing amiss."*

Matthew 17:54 records that the centurion said, *"Truly this was the Son of God."* He confessed the deity of Jesus. And he glorified God!

Have you seen Jesus as this Roman centurion did – with understanding that Jesus Christ is a righteous Man Who is the Son of God? Have you professed Him as your Savior and Lord?!

AND HE WAS BURIED

Mark 15:42-47

When the Apostle Paul defined the Gospel in I Corinthians 15:3-4, he put it like this: *"For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures."*

Some churches call themselves "Full Gospel Churches." Well, here is the full gospel: "Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures; and He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures."

There is not a person in this room who would question the importance of the Lord Jesus dying for our sins. Jesus had to die if anybody was going to be saved. We sing: "What can wash away my sins, Nothing but the blood of Jesus." Nothing else can cleanse us inwardly except His blood.

And all of us could stand and share why the resurrection is so important. The Bible says we are saved by His life. Jesus Christ did die for our sins, but He rose again on the third day triumph over sin, death, hell, and the grave. The resurrection is important. Paul said, "If Christ be not risen from the dead, then our faith is in vain." There is no reason to be here if Christ did not rise from the dead. There is no reason to sing the great hymns of the faith and no reason to come to church, except that Christ is alive.

So we know how important the death of Jesus is and we know the importance of the resurrection of Jesus, but Paul said the Gospel, the Good News, is that Christ died and that He was buried.

What's the big deal about the burial of Jesus? After all, that's what you do with dead people; you bury them. That's normal. You bury dead people.

But when we read of the burial of the Lord Jesus, you are reading something out of the norm. Let me tell you why: Jesus died on the cross. Paul said, "Even the death of the cross:" meaning the death of a criminal. People who died on a cross were the rejects of the world; the outcast of society. They were the worst of the worst. Nobody ever came for their bodies. Nobody cared about them. They were worthless; just pieces of trash, so when a man died on a cross, they were not buried.

Roman soldiers would come after death had taken place and they would take those bodies off the cross and carry them down to that ever-burning garbage dump and throw those bodies over into the garbage dump and the fires would engulf their bodies. There would be nothing left but ashes; and if anything happened to be left of the body, the dogs or vultures from the sky would dispose of it. Nobody ever wanted the body of a crucified person.

But I'll tell you, this is not the way the body of Jesus was treated. Jesus was crucified – one criminal on one side of Him and one on the other side of Him – but His body was treated with great respect and reverence.

Why does the Bible provide so much detail regarding the burial of Christ?

1. To prove that He really died.

There was a big issue in the early Church – and it remains so to this very day. The details of His burial reinforce the central truth – that Jesus really and truly died on the cross.

2. To show the true cost of our salvation.

We are accustomed to saying, "our sins put Jesus on the cross." That's true, but we can say it stronger than that. "Our sins sent Him to the grave." He was buried because He died carrying the heavy burden of our guilt and shame. The burial of Jesus shows us the true end of our rebellion and lawlessness. Left to ourselves, we end up in the grave; which is where our Lord ended up after He had suffered for our sin.

3. To fulfill prophesy.

Isaiah 53 contains the most extensive Old Testament prophecy concerning the death of our Lord. Isaiah 53:9: "*He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in His death, though He had done no violence.*"

4. To teach us that God does not forsake us when we die. We know that "precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints." Death seems anything but precious to us. We fear death; yet, we learn that God did not abandon His Son in death. The ministry of Joseph and Nicodemus, and the kind care of the sorrowing women were God's way of saying, "I have not forsaken My Son in His death." We learn from this that burying the dead is a Christian duty and a Christian service to our loved ones. We do well to care for the dying and to provide for a decent burial for the dead. If God cared enough for His Son to see that He was properly buried, even so we should do the same for those we love.

All four Gospels tell of the burial of Jesus, but we will look mainly at Mark's record.

1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1. I. The Pallbearers of Jesus

If you have ever experienced the death of a loved one, one of the things you had to do was to select some pallbearers. Usually it was someone who was a close friend or family member, but it was someone who knew and loved the person. In our day we usually have six pallbearers, because you have the weight of the body and the weight of the casket. Sometimes it takes eight men. I have a rather heavy preacher friend who said his goal was to have fourteen pallbearers.

Mark only mentions one pallbearer, Joseph of Arimathea. John 19:39 tells us that Nicodemus was also with Joseph.

- Luke tells us that Joseph was a "Counselor." That means that he sat on the Sanhedrin, the Jewish Supreme Court. He was a man of great prominence.
- The Bible says that he was "a good man." That's not a term God throws around loosely.
- It was not about his goodness, but when a person received Jesus into his heart, all of His goodness comes out in our life. The goodness spoken of here is the goodness that comes from having God in your life.
- Then the Bible says that he was a "just man" or a saved man and a man of high character.
- Then we are told that Joseph "*waited for the kingdom of God*" (Luke 23:51). He was looking for the time when the Messiah would rule and reign over Israel. He believed the promise of the Old Testament about the coming kingdom and expected fulfillment.

A secret disciple seldom amounts to much for the Lord. Here is what the Scriptures seem to suggest: The High Priest led the Sanhedrin. He stands and says, "I say Jesus is guilty of blasphemy. He says that He is the Son of God and equal with the Father. That's blasphemy. I say we should put Him to death. What do you say?" They shout, "Guilty!" Joseph and Nicodemus say nothing, but no one knew it. Neither did they say, "Not guilty!"

There were some who voted against Jesus with their SHOUTS and two voted against Jesus with their SILENCE! And that's where a lot of Christians live today. Put them on the spot in church and ask them, "Do you believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God?" You would say, "Of course I believe that!" "Do you believe Jesus died on the cross and rose again?" "Absolutely, Preacher, I believe that."

But then Monday comes, and for a whole week, not one word is spoken for Jesus. "Preacher, I would never, never, never stand against Jesus," but maybe in your silence that's what you are doing! You see, some say silence is golden, but sometimes silence is yellow and so you end up being a secret disciple.

1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1. II. The Internment of Jesus

Finally, Joseph comes out of the closet! If shameful, vile homosexuals can come out of their closets, then those of us who name the Name of Jesus ought to come out of our closets and say, "I'm not ashamed to say I belong to Him."

Finally, after the death of Christ, both Joseph and Nicodemus are ready to let folks know that they are followers of Christ. They cast off their fear and go to Pilate, and the Bible says that they beg for the body of Jesus.

You see, the body of a person who died on a cross was the property of the Roman government. Roman soldiers would take a crucified body down and throw it in the burning garbage pit. It was very unusual for someone to want the body of someone who was crucified. Even family members were ashamed of a family member who was crucified and wanted nothing to do with the body. But Joseph didn't want the body of Jesus thrown in the flaming garbage dump and burned.

There was an urgency here. Jesus was crucified at 9:00 A.M. And He died at 3:00 P.M. The Jewish Sabbath began at 6:00 P.M. We begin our new day at midnight, but the Jews began their next day at 6:00 in the morning. Their Sabbath began at 6:00 P.M. And no Jew could do any work after that, so he must hurry. There was no time to waste.

Joseph went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Mark 15:44 tells us that Pilate marveled that Jesus was dead so soon, so he called the Centurion in charge to confirm that Jesus was indeed dead. When the Centurion confirmed Jesus' death, he gave the body to Joseph.

Joseph and Nicodemus clean the body and wrap the body with linen. Nicodemus put a mixture of myrrh and aloes – about 100 pounds in weight – on the body. They had to do it quickly because the time was almost up. It was meant to be a temporary service. They meant to come back after the Sabbath and give Him a proper burial. They did what they did just to protect the body. The women were going to come back with spices for the body early on Sunday. That proved to be unnecessary! They rolled the stone down the groove to cover the tomb. That's the internment.

The Attendees at the Funeral

Who was there? Sometimes we value the importance of a person by the number of people who attend their funeral. Not so!

Take someone like Princess Di who was in an adulterous relationship against her husband and her husband was involved in an adulterous relationship with another woman. Di is killed in a car wreck and the whole world watches her funeral.

But who went to the funeral of Jesus? The pallbearers, Joseph and Nicodemus were there. The two to five women were there. These women had been with Him in Galilee. They followed Him when He taught His disciples. They followed Him to Jerusalem. They were there when He was crucified. Now they are with Him at His funeral service. They were there because they loved Him.

Let me make three concluding remarks:

1. It really is possible for people to be saved. Look at Joseph and Nicodemus. I've seen some hard people get saved and then somebody say, "Well, I just hope it lasts." Well, it will probably last longer than yours did with no more faith than you've got. People really can be saved.
2. It really is possible to serve Jesus all of your saved life. Look at these women who faithfully followed Jesus, even to His burial. I hear some testify, "I got saved and drifted away and came back and drifted away again." It doesn't have to be that way. You can live for Jesus every day.
3. It really is possible to start over in the Christian life. Maybe you are saved and you did well for a while, but something happened and you got away from the Lord. Our churches are filled with "Use To" and "Going To" Christians. There was a time when you were on fire for the Lord. Your heart burned hot for God, but now it's cold. You are a secret disciple. You really can come out of the closet.

UP FROM THE GRAVE HE AROSE

Mark 16:1-8

Before I read the text, I want to make you aware that there is a disputed ending to the Gospel of Mark. Some publishers of the Bible point this out and most study Bibles with notes explaining the text point this out.

Almost all Bible students believe that Mark 16:1-8 come from the pen of Mark. The dispute is over whether Mark 16:9-20 comes from Mark. While the majority of the Greek manuscripts contain these verses, the earliest and most reliable do not.

Let me just mention two problems causing the dispute. For one thing, the transition between Verse 8 and Verse 9 is abrupt and

awkward. The Greek participle translated “now” that begins Verse 9 implies continuity with the narrative. What follows, however, does not continue the story of the women in Verse 8.

The masculine participle in Verse 9 doesn't match the women of Verse 8. Most likely, the true ending of Mark's Gospel was lost and someone just added an ending.

With that in mind, let's look at the first eight verses that we know belong to Mark.

The one unique thing that set Christianity apart from all other religions is the resurrection of Christ. Christianity is not a religion, it is a personal relationship between the believer and the Lord Jesus.

Go to the tomb of Buddha and you will find that his remains are still there. Go to the tomb of Confucius and you'll find his remains are still there. To to the tomb of Mohammed and you'll discover that his remains remain. But, go to the tomb of the Lord Jesus Christ and you will find that His tomb is empty. None of His remains are there. He is the Resurrected Christ! He is Alive! The word “resurrection” means “to stand again!”

Paul said, *“I want to deliver to you the gospel, how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised again the third day according to the Scriptures”* (1 Corinthians 15:3-4).

The resurrection has never been disproved, though many have tried, but, as the Bible says, *“Jesus showed Himself alive after His death by many infallible proofs”* (Acts 1:3).

Low in the grave He lay, Jesus my Savior,

Waiting the coming day, Jesus my Lord!

Vainly they watched His bed, Jesus my Savior,

Vainly they seal the dead, Jesus my Lord!

Death cannot keep its prey, Jesus my Savior;

He tore the bars away, Jesus my Lord!

Up from the grave He arose;

With a mighty triumph o'er His foes.

He arose a Victor from the dark domain,

And He lives forever, with His saints to reign.

He arose! He arose! Hallelujah! Christ arose!

Two things I want you to see about our Lord's resurrection: The Facts of His Resurrection and The Impact of His Resurrection.

The Facts of His Resurrection

Are there any evidences that Christ is risen from the grave? There are many and they are very strong and very persuasive.

A. There is the Testimony of the Women Mark 16:1-5

The women were the last to leave the cross of Jesus and the first to go to His tomb. They were actual witnesses of His death and burial. They knew He was dead and they knew where He had been laid. They had followed along behind the procession to the tomb.

Luke says they *“beheld the sepulchre, and how His body was laid”* (Luke 23:55). Apparently they went in, looked over the sepulchre, and perhaps helped Joseph and Nicodemus all they could with the body. They probably stayed with them until the great stone was rolled into the entrance.

They planned to go home and prepare the spices and ointments, rest the Sabbath day and come back early Sunday morning to anoint His body. The ladies left Bethany while it was still dark but got to the tomb just as the sun was coming up. As they got close to the tomb of our Lord, they began to talk among themselves and asked, “Who will roll away the stone from the door of the tomb for us?”

The first thing that happened was a surprise. These women were not expecting the resurrection. They didn't come from the city to the tomb expecting that Jesus wouldn't be there. They are bringing spices to anoint His body. Their worrying about who is going to move the stone away. They were miserable and dejected and without hope looking down at the ground, but Mark gives this detail, they looked up to see the great stone, but it was not there! They even went into the tomb and the Lord was not there.

So they ran to tell His disciples.

B. There is the Testimony of the Stone Mark 16:4

The stone was not rolled back for the benefit of Jesus, but for the witnesses to the resurrection. When Jesus arose, He was in His resurrection body, the body of the spiritual dimension of being which has no physical bounds. The stone was rolled back for their benefit.

C. There is the Testimony of the Angel Mark 16:5-6

The first thing the angel said to the women was "Fear not." Those were the same words the angels spoke to the shepherds at the birth of Christ.

Did you notice that the angel knew exactly why they were there and what they were looking for? "You are seeking Jesus who was crucified. He is not here. He is risen, just like He told you He would. Look for yourselves. Go to Galilee and you'll see Him there, just as He told you."

The angel gave them a message of:

- Peace – Verse 6a – Be not afraid, alarmed
- Power – Verse 6b – He is risen
- Potential – Verse 6c – He is not here
- Promise – Verse 7 – *"You will see Him in Galilee, as He said to you."*

The Impact of the Resurrection

What does Christ's resurrection mean for me?

1. I know that Jesus is more than just a man.

Some people say if there had been no resurrection, Jesus would be remembered today as simply a good teacher. I disagree. Had there been no resurrection, we would never have heard of Jesus. His influence would have been buried with Him in the tomb.

If there's no resurrection for Christ, everything you've heard and read about Christ is just smoke and mirrors.

2. I know that I can be forgiven.

The two biggest problems of all people on the earth are sin and death. All have sinned. The wages of sin is death. Nobody is immune to sin. And the soul that sins – it shall die.

Obtaining forgiveness for your sins deals with the death problem as well. One of the clearest salvation verses is Romans 10:9: *"If we confess with our mouth, Jesus is Lord, and believe in our heart that God raised Jesus from the dead, we will be saved."* Why? Because it is the resurrection that makes Jesus totally unique among all men. The only way you can get into heaven is to have your sins forgiven, and the only way you can have your sins forgiven is to believe in the resurrection of Jesus.

3. I know that the grave isn't the end.

We don't like to talk about death, but death is inevitable. But the bigger question is: What happens to a person after they die. Many insist this life is all there is, and the grave is the end. It would be good for the lost person who dies without Christ if that were true. But, the resurrection of Jesus lets us know for certain the grave is not the end.

Before His resurrection, Jesus taught that each of us would also be resurrected. See John 5:28-29.

Just because you may not believe in God or an afterlife will not change the fact there is something beyond the grave. It's interesting

that Jesus compared the spiritual life to being reborn.

Imagine a conversation between two twins in their mother's womb. The female twin, Sandy, asks her brother, Andy, "I believe in life after birth, do you?" Andy replies, "No, this is all there is." Sandy sighs, "No, I've got to believe that there is another place – a place of light where we will have the freedom to move."

Later, Sandy says to Andy, "I've got something else to say, and you probably won't believe it either, but I also believe that there is a mother." Her brother says, "What? What are you talking about? We've never seen a mother. I tell you, this place is all there is. Why do you want more? We've got everything we need here."

For a while Sandy doesn't say anything else. But finally she couldn't stay quiet. She blurts out, "But don't you feel those squeezes and can't you hear those muffled sounds?"

I know the squeezes are sometimes painful, but I think they're just getting us ready for another kind of living that's much more beautiful than this where we will see our mother face-to-face." Finally, Andy is so fed up he doesn't even answer – after all, the womb was all there was, and all there would ever be.

Some time later they were born – and boy, was Andy surprised! For Sandy, it was even better than she imagined!

Do you believe in life after birth? Do you believe in life after death? When we die, some people, like Andy, are in for a surprise. But for many of us, like Sandy, it will be better than we could ever imagine.

... AND PETER ... Mark 16:1-7

When we last saw Simon Peter he did something that he said he would never do – deny his Lord! And, yet, not only did Peter deny Jesus one time; he denied Him three times – and then the rooster crowed – and Jesus turned and looked at Peter.

When Peter saw His bloody face and His tender look of love, Peter was overcome with shame and sorrow and ran out the gate and into the street.

It was Peter's darkest hour.

Three things I want to share with you as we look at what comes next in Peter's life:

Peter's Regret

No one in Jerusalem suffered more that Friday night than did Simon.

Peter must have wondered: Would Jesus forgive me? Will I ever be able to forgive myself? When Peter fled the scene of his denial, that last look of tender love from Jesus haunted him.

Where did he go when he left the courtyard? I think he went to the Garden – maybe to the very spot where Jesus had prayed – and wet the ground with his tears. Then it seems that he went to John's house where he would be hidden from prying eyes of others.

From the distance he could hear the crowd saying, "Crucify Him!" Then he could hear them say, "Release Barabbas!" He could hear the ringing of the the hammer as Jesus Jesus and the two thieves were nailed to the crosses.

Then he could see John coming toward the house, supporting Mary, the mother of Jesus, as he had to almost carry her into the house. I think as Peter met Mary he wept the more saying, "I'm so sorry. How could I have denied Him?"

And I think he was ashamed to show his face in public.

- He didn't want to face the other disciples.
- He couldn't sleep – his appetite was gone – he was burdened down by guilt – and filled with regret.

He missed seeing Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus take the body of Jesus off of the cross.

Jewish law said they had to have the body in the tomb before 6:00 P.M., Friday. In a Jewish burial, they would wash the body and cover the body with strips of linen cloth except for the face, neck, and upper part of the shoulders.

The women watched as Joseph and Nicodemus prepared His body. They took 100 pounds of dry spices and inserted them into the

folds of linen. They used aloe and myrrh. Aloe was a powdered wood, like fine sawdust with an aromatic fragrance; myrrh was a fragrant gum that could be carefully mixed with the powder. Jesus' body was encased in these. His head, neck, and upper shoulders were left bare and a linen cloth was wrapped about the upper part of His head like a turban.

When they laid Him in the tomb, they had a large rock, 1½ – 2 tons, placed in a large groove that was slanted in an upward angle. It would take 20 men to push the rock down the sloped groove to its resting place.

Peter's Reconciliation Mark 16:1-7

When you tie all four Gospels together we find that four women – maybe more – went to the tomb, very early in the morning – Mary Magdalene, Mary, the mother of James the Less, Salome, and Joanna.

They kept saying to one another on the way to the tomb, "Who shall roll away the stone for us?" Not one of them said, "It's of no use. We might just as well go home." The cross had shattered their hopes, but it couldn't kill their love for Jesus.

Mary Magdalene got to the tomb first and saw the stone rolled away and the body gone. She ran to John's house to tell Peter and John and, no doubt Mary, the mother of Jesus.

- John 20:1-8 (explain). Three times the word "saw" is used – three different ways.
- John 20:5 – Suggest nothing more than sight.
- John 20:6 – Theoreo – from which we get theory or theorize – means trying to figure something out.
- John 20:8 – Orao – to see with understanding.

What did they see in the tomb?

We say the tomb was empty, but it was not quite empty. The body was gone but the grave clothes were still there. Even the critics admit the tomb was empty, but they try to find ways around the resurrection. Alternative explanation:

Some theories by critics:

1. Wrong tomb theory.

– That would mean the women, the disciples, the angels and the seal were at the wrong tomb.

– The leaders would have wasted no time getting the body if the wrong tomb theory was true.

2. Swoon theory.

That Jesus didn't really die, he just fainted and was revived in cold tomb, came out of the wrapping, and moved the stone himself.

3. Stolen body theory.

His friends had too much respect for His body – plus the soldiers.

His foes – did everything to keep His body from being stolen. They would have produced it if they could.

What did they see in the tomb? The grave clothes help to prove the resurrection of Jesus. They were not pulled apart – but the grave clothes were in the same condition and arrangement they were in when they were on Christ – as though He passed through them, as He would later pass through the closed door. The only difference, because of the weight of the spices, the cloth had subsided. The napkin was lying separate.

If the body had been stolen, they would have taken the grave clothes.

Peter's Reinstatement Mark 16:7

The appearances of Jesus on that first Sunday: To Mary Magdalene, to the women, to Peter alone, to the Emmaus disciples, to disciples without Thomas in the upper room.

There was both a Private and a Public reunion with Peter on that first Easter Sunday. It was a matter of grace, mercy, and love that the Lord met with Simon Peter privately first. We are not told one word about what went on between the Lord and Peter – that was

private – just between Peter and his Lord.

I'm so glad the Lord deals with us privately. He doesn't share the work He does in my heart when I fail Him with anyone else. If He exposed to you what He was dealing with me about – shouted my sins that He has to deal with in my life to others – it would be so embarrassing.

Though we don't have a record of the interview, from my own experience, I can fill in the blank page:

- There must have been bitter tears, broken words, long breaks of silence when words just wouldn't come.
- There was confession of sin – asking for forgiveness.
- Maybe he repeated what he remembered of the prodigal son's words ... "I am no more worthy to be one of your apostles, just let me remain as one of your disciples."
- "I just want You to forgive my sin and love me."

Watch this: The great desire of Jesus was to rescue His wayward friend and let him know He loved him still.

The Song of Solomon gives three traits of God's perfect love for us – see Song of Solomon 8:6-7.

1. Love can't be bought; only given away. Song of Solomon 8:7b.

2. Many waters cannot quench love. Song of Solomon 8:7a.

– A lot of water – failures – had passed under the bridge – but they didn't quench love.

– Peter failed Jesus in the garden – broke his vows to the Lord that he would never deny Him – even swore he didn't know Him.

– The Lord said, "Peter, that's water under the bridge. I've forgiven your sins. I want you to come forth stronger in spite of your failure.

Love is stronger than death. Song of Solomon 8:6.

This was the turning point in Peter's life. He never forgot that meeting with Jesus. The resurrected Lord caused Peter to look at life and commitment to his Lord differently.

Easter makes us look at everything differently, too ...

It makes us look at the grave differently. To many, the grave is little more than corruption and decay. But with Jesus the grave brings rejoicing for we know if this earthly house of this tabernacle be dissolved, we have a building of God, not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

D.L. Moody tells of a 15 year old girl who was completely paralyzed on one side, nearly blind. She couldn't see, but she could hear. The doctor, standing by her bedside said, "She has seen her best days, poor child." She said, "No, doctor, my best days are yet to come, when I shall see the King in His beauty."

Her hope, like ours, is in the resurrection.