

Sermons on Matthew 8-28-Lowell Johnson

Matthew 8-28 by Lowell F. Johnson

2016-2017

MATTHEW 8-28 SERMONS

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TOUCHING THE UNTOUCHABLE

Matthew 8:1-4

When we come to Matthew 8, we come to the third section of Matthew. Matthew is written primarily to the Jews, though not exclusively, and presents Jesus as the King.

- Our Lord's Person is revealed in Chapters 1-4 of Matthew.
- Our Lord's Principles are recorded in Chapters 5-7 of Matthew.
- Our Lord's Power is revealed in Chapters 8-10 of Matthew. In these three chapters Matthew records ten miracles.

The Sermon on the Mount was over. The astonished multitudes dispersed and the awed disciples accompanied their royal Master down the mountain toward the lake. His words were beautiful and wonderful, but what Israel needed was not just One who spoke with authority, but One who acted with Power. Notice Matthew 7:28-29.

Matthew begins Chapter 8 by saying, "When He was come down from the mountain." The retreat was over. Life consists of hills and valleys, but always the mountains are preferable to the lowlands. The air is purer, the vision is far reaching, and the scenery more attractive.

Valleys are often filled with busyness and undesired tasks. The children of Israel were warned prior to their entrance into the promised land, "The land, whither ye go to possess it, is a land of hills and valleys" (see Deuteronomy 11:11). Life is just the same. We experience mountaintop experiences only to discover that the problems of the valley remain.

I think that's why Simon Peter said to the Lord on the Mount of Transfiguration, "Lord, it is good for us to be here, let's just stay." But service for the Lord is impossible on the mountain. The need is in the valley! We must learn to appreciate our mountaintops but, at the same time, remember it is only the place where we recharge our batteries! Having done that, we descend to needy people that our light might shine into the darkness of their souls.

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 him 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.

I. The Condition of the Leper Matthew 8:2

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 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 pus 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.

- 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. Some would throw stones to keep the leper 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 have 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 as 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 is 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.

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."

II. The Cry of the Leper Matthew 8:2

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 comes 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 Matthew 8:2

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. 1 Peter 3:9 – He does want to save all.

III. The Compassion of Jesus Matthew 8:3

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.

IV. The Cleansing of the Leper Matthew 8:3

Matthew 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.

A MAN WHOSE FAITH AMAZED JESUS **Matthew 8:5-13**

Before reading the Passage.

We are going to study about a man that the Bible says "amazed Jesus."

- He was not a Jew; he was a Gentile. But he was not just a Gentile, but a Roman and a soldier of the nation that enslaved the Jews.
- Not only was he a Roman soldier, he was a Roman centurion. The word "centurion" comes from the word "century," which means one hundred. He was a military officer with one hundred men under him in the Roman military.
- Roman centurions were considered to be some of the best men of Rome. They were really the backbone of the Roman army. They were often older, hardened soldiers who had been involved in much bloodshed and cruelty.

But the Bible says that Jesus was amazed at this man. Why?

Notice Matthew 8:10. Notice the words, "So great faith." Jesus was amazed at this man's "So Great Faith." We all know that people were amazed at Jesus. That's the consistent testimony of the Bible.

People were amazed and astonished at our Lord's power over diseases and demons and death.

1. In Matthew 8 : When Jesus calmed the powerful winds of the sea. "His disciples said, 'What kind of man is this that even the winds and waves obey him?'"
2. In Matthew 9 : When Jesus cast the demon out of a man, the people said, "Nothing like this was ever seen in Israel."

3. In Matthew 15: We are told that great multitudes came to Jesus and brought with them those who were lame and cripple and blind and dumb and many others and when He healed them, "the whole multitude were amazed."

It's not surprising that people were amazed at Jesus, because Jesus is God! But it is shocking that Jesus was amazed by a mere man ... But He was and I want you to meet this man.

Read the Passage.

What was it that amazed Jesus about this man?

His ... what? His faith. His amazing faith.

Would your faith amaze Jesus?

Frankly, when you think about it, it's amazing that Jesus would be amazed at anything.

Several times Jesus said, "Your faith has made you whole," but He never described any other person's faith as "so great faith."

There were times that He rebuked His disciples and said, "O, ye of little faith."

- On one occasion the disciples asked Jesus to increase their faith.
- But several times Jesus had to say, "O, faithless and perverse generation."

Only twice did Jesus say He was "amazed" in relation to faith.

In Mark 6 Jesus went back to His hometown of Nazareth to teach and to heal, but He could do no mighty works there because of their unbelief and Mark 6:6 says that He marveled – was amazed – at their unbelief, their faithlessness; their LACK of faith. But He is amazed at the LARGNESS of this man's faith.

In our church services we use to include a "testimony time." Someone would stand and share their testimony of when they were saved or some special blessing from the Lord.

Testimonies are to be both heard AND seen. A person's outward character ought to match up with their profession.

The testimony of lip and life should correspond exactly.

Look at the testimony concerning this centurion.

I. The Testimony TO the Centurion

Luke's account differs from Matthew's account. Luke says the centurion sent some Jews to approach Jesus, whereas Matthew says the centurion approached Jesus. There is no contradiction: both accounts are true. It was the centurion's request, but it was delivered through some Jewish elders. An executive might say, "I told them to cancel that order," when in reality he told them through his secretary and she actually made the phone call.

This centurion had been a Gentile pagan, but like other Gentiles there was an emptiness in his life. Through daily contact with the Jewish people, he began to learn something of the true God and his heart was stirred.

No doubt he had walked up to that barrier in the Temple in Jerusalem that prohibited Gentiles from proceeding further into the Temple. He understood the distinction between Jew and Gentile, and he knew he could not go into the holy place within the Temple. That may be the reason he didn't approach the Lord himself, but sent some Jewish elders with his request.

This centurion was given high marks by the Jewish elders.

There's an old proverb that says, "It's better to die with a good name, than to live with a bad one." This man had a good name among those around him. They said to Jesus, "If there is anyone who deserved that you do something for them, it is this man."

Why did they respect him so highly?

A. He was an Honest Man.

These Jews were under no obligation to help the centurion, and would not have if they did not trust and respect him.

He had a good reputation among them that he was an honest man and he was always fair with people of the other races and religions.

B. He was a Generous Man. Luke 7:3-5

He loved the Jewish nation and he backed up his love for the Jews in Capernaum by building their synagogue there. Not that he paid for it himself, but he commanded his soldiers to work to build it. Jesus Himself had taught there.

C. He was a Kind Man.

He cared deeply for his slave who was sick. The word "dear" means honored, precious, prized.

In the society of that day, a slave was nothing, only a tool or a thing to be used as the owner wished. He had no rights whatsoever, not even the right to live.

Matthew points out that he was a child-slave and that he had the palsy. That means he was completely helpless and useless to the centurion. He was disabled and could not work, yet the centurion took care of him.

No wonder both Jesus and the Jews were impressed with this man. What a testimony from the Jews who usually hated centurions.

II. The Testimony OF the Centurion Matthew 8:8

A. He Demonstrated Humility

Others said, "He is worthy," but he said "I am not worthy – either to go to Jesus myself or to have Him come under my roof."

The centurion did not say, "My servant is not worthy to have you come," but he said, "I am NOT worthy."

– Romans 12:3: "Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought."

– James 4:10: "Humble yourself in the sight of the Lord and He shall lift you up."

What is humility? It is the absence of vanity or arrogance. This man measured his worth against the absolute standard, the Lord Jesus.

Why did he say, "I am a man under authority?"

– He understood that authority is not one-way; it is a two-way street. Only those who are under authority can truly exercise authority over others.

– This centurion had a captain, the commander of his cohort, to whom he was responsible.

– He recognized that Jesus was someone who was under authority. While Jesus was on earth, He voluntarily humbled Himself and submitted Himself to the Father, although they were co-equal and co-eternal.

– He also recognized Jesus had authority over sickness and disease, so all he had to do was speak a word – give an order – and it would happen.

– He saw himself as a private being visited by the Chief of Staff.

B. He Demonstrated Faith

The essence of faith is to believe God without seeing any evidence. He said, "I believe you can heal my servant. Just say the word." Unbelief says, "I'll believe it when I see it." Amazing faith says, "I believe it whether I see it or not."

The centurion had such amazing faith that he didn't need Jesus to come and lay hands on his servant or to pray over him, but to just say the word even from a distance and the boy would be whole.

What is faith?

The Bible answers that question in Hebrews 11:1-3. Faith is believing God even if we don't see any evidence. It is being sure and certain about that for which we have no evidence. That's what salvation and Heaven is all about. I've never personally met anyone

who trusted Jesus, believed He forgave their sin, redeemed them, died and went to Heaven and came back to tell me about it, but I believe it – without evidence.

I've invested my life in telling folks what Jesus WILL do for them.

The centurion illustrated perfectly what faith is – Hebrews 11:6.

- It is believing that Christ IS – that all power belongs to our Sovereign Lord.
- It is believing that Christ is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

Notice that the servant was healed as the result of someone else's faith.

- It was vicarious faith – one person's faith is used for the benefit of someone else.
- Like the man borne of four. When Jesus saw THEIR faith – the four men's faith – He forgave and healed the man.

Preacher, do you mean if I have a friend or family member who needs the power of God released in their life that God will honor my faith as I pray for them?" Absolutely!

III. The Testimony To the Nation of Israel Matthew 8:11-13

Two things are pointed out:

1. The kingdom will include Gentiles who place their faith in Jesus.
2. Some Jews, who ought by right, to enjoy the kingdom will be cast into outer darkness because they did not have faith.

Let me remind you again of the power of the Lord to heal at a distance.

The Lord is in Heaven. We are on the earth. Yet, He can save at a distance if we have faith in His authoritative, saving power.

THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP OR FICKLE FOLLOWERS Matthew 8:14-22

Now I want to focus on Mt.8:18-22, but I want us to look at Luke's expanded account as well. So, if you will, let's read Luke 9:57-62.

Three things I want us to see about Christian Discipleship:

I. The Call to Discipleship

The truth of the matter is that every saved person is called to discipleship. Somehow, we have gotten the idea that we can commit to Jesus as Savior, but not as Lord. We say, "I'll trust Him as Savior – I don't want to go to hell; I want my sins forgiven; I want the security that I'm going to Heaven when I die – but I don't want to fully commit to Him. Savior? Yes. Lord? Maybe later. It doesn't work that way.

Some believe in what Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German preacher who was put to death by the Nazis for his opposition to Hitler's policies, called "Cheap grace." He said, "Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance. "Cheap grace" is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without the living Christ."

The contrast is "costly grace." What is "costly grace"? Look at Matthew 11:28-30.

Matthew 11:28 says "Come TO Me;"; Matthew 8:22 says, "Come AFTER Me (follow Me)."
Matthew 11:28-30 says (Read the passage.)

"Come to Me." That's for anyone who is weary and burdened by sin. Believe that Jesus can lift sin's weight and burden from your life. It's an open invitation to all.

When Jesus said to the man in Matthew 8, "Follow Me," He is saying, "Walk the path that I walk." He goes ahead of us and we follow Him.

Back to Matthew 11, Jesus says, as you walk AFTER Me – as you follow Me – learn of Me. Enter His school. He is the Subject Matter and He is the Teacher!

The Greek preposition translated "learn FROM Me" is the Greek word "APO" and can be translated "Learn OF Me" or "Learn FROM Me" or both. In this case I think it's both:

"Learn OF Me" – I'm the Subject Matter.

"Learn FROM Me" – I'm the Teacher.

Become like Me! Live like Me. Love like Me. Think like Me. Manifest the Fruit of the Spirit in your life.

Did you notice Jesus used the word "rest" twice in Matthew 11? Rest is "given" and rest is found." (Matthew 11:28, 29)

Sometimes preachers and evangelists are more interested in numbers and decisions than they are in real commitment to Jesus and so they offer cheap grace. We are doing folks no favors by offering them easy believe-ism or cheap grace. Many have a false sense of spiritual security because they believe they can receive Jesus as Savior, but do not allow Him to be Lord of their life. Grace is free; but it is costly. If you are saved, He has called you to discipleship.

Matthew 16:24-26.

II. The Casualties of Discipleship

To be a "disciple" of Jesus means to be His faithful, fully-devoted student-follower. The terms of discipleship are that we lay our whole life on the altar and completely surrender to His curriculum for us; so that we permit Him to take us where He wants us to go, and teach us the lessons He wants us to learn, and equip us to do the things He wants us to do. Tuition in the school of Jesus is the offering of our whole selves over to the Teacher.

But we are introduced to three casualties of Discipleship.

A. We'll call this first man the Enthusiastic Disciple Luke 9:57-58

This man voluntarily said he would follow Jesus wherever He went. Although I can't prove it, I think he was a young man. He's obviously sincere in what he says. He didn't say "I might follow You" or "I'm thinking about following you." He said unconditionally, "Wherever You go."

He had seen the crowds. He was amazed by the miracles. He was in the atmosphere of excitement! He just got back from church camp and it was so inspiring and moving. Maybe like youth today. You thought total commitment to Jesus would make life easier. You'd never encounter any problems, all your relationships would be perfect, you could whip the devil and never yield to temptation. You said, "Jesus, I'll follow You anywhere!" Then your life got harder, your life fell apart, and you got discouraged.

I find it interesting that Jesus didn't say, "Thank you. I welcome you as my newest disciple."

Jesus told him: Count the cost, because there is a cost involved. Think what following Jesus will involve. Jesus didn't want anyone to follow Him under false expectations.

"Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head." The song says, "It pays to serve Jesus; it pays every step of the way ..."
It's not all Alleluia! It may not always be easy and fun! Count the cost!

B. We'll call this second man the Reluctant Disciple Luke 9:59-60

"Lord, I'll follow you later. I have some obligations right now. As soon as I get through with the really important stuff in my life, I'll follow You."

Jesus was not being hard or hateful or insensitive to this man. His father had not died. He wanted to wait until he fulfilled his family obligations before he followed Jesus.

Jesus said, "Let the spiritually dead bury the physically dead."

Family can be a hindrance to following Jesus. A mother or dad may say to their child, "It's not right for you to take those

grandchildren to another state or country. How could you deprive them and us?"

A pastor preached on yielding to missions, but when he saw his daughter coming forward to surrender to missions, he said, "Oh, I didn't mean you!"

Your family must not become an excuse not to serve the Lord.

C. We'll call this third man the Divided Disciple Luke 9:61-62

"Lord, I'd love to serve You, but ..." Let me tie up some loose ends first.

Every car salesman knows the problem here. If a potential buyer says, "I'm going to go home and talk it over with my wife," you know the chances are good you'll never see him again.

Jesus knew this man would be easily influenced and he could be talked out of his decision.

"Putting your hand to the plow and looking back ..." You can't plow a straight row looking behind you. You lose focus. Some are so locked into the past that they don't count for God now. Either the failures of the past or the successes of the past.

III. The Challenge of Discipleship

Here is the meaning of the text: Following Jesus is the most important thing in life. Everything else pales by comparison.

May God help us to count the cost. Put Jesus first. No conditions! No delays! No buts! No excuses!

Follow Christ at any cost!

FACING THE STORMS OF LIFE

Matthew 8:23-27

Matthew 8:24 says, "And, behold, there arose a great tempest (storm) in the Sea, insomuch that the ship was covered with the waves ..."

Matthew, Mark, and Luke all three tell us about this incident, but none tell us what body of water they were on. But we know, nonetheless. We know because of the location of where the ship landed. We know because Luke tells us two things.

1. He tells us that they landed in the country of "the Gadarenes", which is over against Galilee (Matthew 8:28).

2. Then Luke tells us that the storm of wind "came down" on the lake.

With those two details, we know that it had to be the Sea of Galilee. The Sea of Galilee is actually a relatively small fresh-water lake. It is some 14 miles long, seven miles wide, and about 150 feet deep. The shoreline is 680 feet below sea level and the lake is shaped like a harp. The Sea is surrounded by mountain gouges with deep ravines that act like a wind tunnel that funnels great whirling winds down onto the lake without notice.

Most of the storms on that Sea come suddenly. At one moment it might be peaceful and the next minute a storm would suddenly arise, with driving rain and gale-force winds. The water stirs into violent 20-foot waves. Boats look like small bobbing corks on a stormy water.

This is the way life is 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's 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 lightning often come with it.

Where do the storms of life come from?

1. Some storms come because we live in a fallen world. It may be because of our own foolishness or our own failure. Let's face it, some storms are our own fault. We do it to ourselves!

2. Sometimes storms come from God – not to destroy us, but to develop us. God may

send storms our way to discipline us or to draw us closer to Him.

James 1:2-4 says, "Count it all joy when you fall into various trials ... because these trials test your faith and produces endurance."

3. Then sometimes storms are satanic in origin. Satan will whip up a storm to defeat you or to draw you away from the Lord. I believe Satan was behind this storm here in Matthew 8, and I'll tell you why in a moment.

In this miracle there are at least five life-changing lessons to learn.

I. Storms Come Even When Jesus is in the Boat With Us

Whose idea was it to get in the boat and sail to the other side? 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 to be 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 folks.

God never promised us we would have no afflictions as His children. Listen to I Peter 4:12-14.

At the same time, we must not assume that if someone is going through some great storm, God must be dealing with some great wrong or sin in their life.

- John 15:20 "The servant is not greater than his Lord. If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you."
- Jesus was never more in the center of God's will than when they put Him on the cross.

God loves us too much to promise us that we will never have storms in our life. Storms teach us many lessons, without which we would never learn some lessons that God wanted to teach us. Storms often reveals our weaknesses; they draw us closer to God, they purify us, they wean us from the world, and they make us long for Heaven. One day we will thank God for every storm.

Learn to expect storms as you follow Jesus, because storms will come!

II. Thought it May Seem As If the Lord is Asleep During the Storm, He is Still Present Matthew 8:24-25

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

The disciples doubted two things about the Lord:

A. They Doubted His Goodness

Simon Peter remembered something that happened that day that Matthew didn't remember and he told it to John Mark and he put it in his gospel. "Carest Thou not?"

They accused the Lord of not caring about what they were facing. Truth is, we've all questioned God's concern for us at times. You might not have said it out loud, but I'm sure there have been times when our flesh cried out, "Lord, don't You care about what's happening to me?" "Don't You care that my child is sick?" "Don't You care about my finances?" "Don't You care that my marriage is falling apart?" OF COURSE HE CARES!

B. They Doubted His Grace

"We perish!" "Lord, You sent us out here. Now are You going to abandon us?" No! He is absolutely committed to you and He has promised never to forsake you!

III. When Storms Come in Our Life, Don't Forget the Lord: Depend on Him Matthew 8:26

The indication is that the disciples tried to handle the storm themselves. They thought they could make it without calling on Jesus – and they almost went under. Finally, someone said, "Get Jesus!"

Why is it that so often our last resort should be our first response? They went through so much fear and anxiety before they ever got

to Jesus. They could have saved themselves so much fear if they hadn't tried to act independently without Jesus.

IV. Fear of the Storm Caused More Damage Than the Actual Storm

The disciples were fighting two storms that night. The first was the visible storm on the outside; the other was the invisible storm on the inside.

If you are fighting inward fear, God has a word for you. See Isaiah 41:10. If God doesn't calm the storm Around us, He will calm the storm Within us.

Did you notice that our Lord rebuked His disciples before He rebuked the storm? See Matthew 8:26.

Here is why I said earlier that I believe this storm was from Satan.

I think Satan wanted to kill Jesus before He got to the cross. When he saw Jesus was asleep, he thought this was his chance.

Mark's gospel (Mark 4:39) says that Jesus Rebuked the winds, but Spoke to the sea. His rebuke to the winds was the same rebuke He gave to some demons: "HUSH!" "Be muzzled!"

To the waves He said, "Peace, be still ..." (to make speechless).

V. Our Lord Was Magnified in the Storm Matthew 8:27

Instantaneous tranquility! I can imagine Jesus laying back down and resuming His nap!

Are you in a storm at this very moment? You are not there by accident, but by the Father's design. You are not alone, though it may feel that way. He doesn't want to hurt you, but He does want to develop your faith. When the time comes, He will whisper, "Peace be still," and the storm will run out of breath.

RELEASING YOUR DEMONS

Matthew 8:28-34

Jesus and His disciples have just experienced a stormy night on the Sea of Galilee. The power of Satan was seen in the powerful winds in the storm, but then we see the greater power of Jesus as He calms both the wind and the waves.

What was Jesus and His disciples doing on the Sea to start with? Well, it had been a long day for Jesus. He had been with the crowds all day, working one miracle after another, and He was exhausted and needed to get away from the crowds for a while.

But He also knew that there were two men who were severely demon possessed who needed to be delivered from those demons. Mark and Luke call this man "Legion." The term "legion" speaks of a Roman military unit of 6,000 infantrymen, so this man was controlled by an extremely large number of militant evil spirits.

These two men lived in the country of the Gergesenes. It was Gentile territory and it is the only recorded time that Jesus went to Gentile territory, but He went there to heal these two men.

Jesus and His disciples got out of their boat where there were mountain cliffs of rocks and the cliff was full of burial places. Actually, it was a large cemetery. In those days people were not usually buried IN the ground. Tombs were carved into the mountain side and the bodies were placed there. After a time, the bodies would decompose, people would sweep the remains out and use the tomb again. These two demon-possessed men were living in this cemetery among the bodies that were in different stages of decomposition.

Because they were demon-possessed they were wild men with extraordinary human strength and people were afraid of them. They tried to bind them with chains but they would just snap the chains. Actually, you could often hear them before you saw them. They would scream with a mournful, high-pitched, shrieking cry. Their hair and beards were long and matted. Their bodies were bleeding from self-inflicted wounds they made with sharp rocks with which they cut themselves.

In this message I want to answer five questions about demons. But the point of this message is not to just give you information about demons, but to tell you how you can be liberated from the influence of demons like these two men were.

What or Who Are Demons?

Demons are fallen angels or spirit being who followed Lucifer when he rebelled against God and was kicked out of Heaven.

Notice Revelation 12:9 and notice that Satan and his fallen angels are operating on the earth.

Satan is not omnipresent like God so he can't be everywhere at once, so he has a mobilized demonized army of angels who carry out his work.

There are two dangerous extremes to avoid when it comes to demons. On one hand some people deny their existence and say demons are like ghosts and goblins – they don't really exist. The other extreme to avoid is to be so afraid of demons that you see a demon behind every bush. It's like someone hiccupped and said, "I rebuke you demon of hiccups!" Demons exist, but they aren't everywhere and we don't have to be afraid of them.

Some would downplay the reality of demons and call this symbolic of evil, but I'll tell you this, they were real to this man and they are real to Jesus.

People in Asia, Africa, Haiti and other pagan lands who are involved with the occult would nod their heads in agreement when they read this story. What seems alien to us is common place and very believable to them.

II. Is It Possible for a Person to be Demon Possessed?

The word "possessed" doesn't appear once in the New Testament in relation to demons in the Greek. There is just a single word used to describe a person who was under the influence of demons. The Greek uses the word translated simply as "demonized." It means that a person is under the influence of a demon, like a drunk person is under the influence of alcohol. But we never say an inebriated person is alcohol-possessed.

When you spray your room to make it smell better, we say it was deodorized, not deodorant-possessed.

Six times in the New Testament it says a person "has a demon." Some folks like to hang on to their pet sins. So, it actually may be more accurate to say that people sometimes possess demons than that demons possess people!

III. What Are Some Signs of Demonic Control?

There are four evident symptoms of demonic control:

A. Violent Behavior

Matthew tells us that these men were so violent that nobody could pass that way without the risk of being hurt. They chained the man, but he was so strong he had broken the chains and no man could subdue him.

Sometimes, violent, uncontrollable behavior may be the result of demonic influence. Not everyone in a mental institution is affected by a demon, but there are modern accounts of some people being so agitated they cannot be restrained and display almost superhuman strength in their agony.

B. Morbid Obsession

This man lived in the tombs. He felt more at home among the corpses of the cemetery than with living people. Very often an obsession with death and dying can be a direct result of demonic control.

C. Sexual Perversion

Luke says that this man didn't wear clothes. He was what psychologist call an exhibitionist. He got a thrill out of people seeing him naked. Sexual perversion and sexual predators are a greater problem today than ever before in history. The availability of internet pornography has opened the gateway of the mind to addiction to porn. Marriages and careers are being ruined because of addition to porn – even in the Church.

D. Self-abuse

This man would often cut himself with sharp rocks. People who are struggling with emotional problems often cut themselves.

IV. In General, How Do Demons Try to Influence Us?

They attack us at our point of weakness (stronghold).

The Bible uses military language to describe Satan's strategy against us. In 2 Corinthians 10:4 Paul says we are not to use the weapons of the flesh to go against Satan. That's the area of our weakness.

Paul says we have only one weapon of warfare we can use to defeat the strongholds in our life –
2 Corinthians 10:4 – the Word of God!

Satan most often uses our minds to defeat us – those negative patterns of thought which are burned into our minds – usually through repetition over time. These strongholds in our minds lead us away from God's plan for us. (Common strongholds: pornography, hostility, inferiority, manipulation, homosexuality, eating disorders, compulsive behavior, alcohol, and drug abuse.)

V. How Can I Get Free and Stay Free From Demonic Influence?

A. Immediately run to Jesus and cry out to Him for help.

Don't delay. Don't try to handle it on your own. Cry out to Jesus.

B. Continually draw close to God and resist the devil. James 4:7-8

Draw near to Him and He will draw near to you! The closer you are to God, the farther you are from the devil, and the farther you drift from God, the closer you are to the devil.

C. Consciously reject tempting thoughts.

The battleground against Satan takes place in your mind. The best way to resist temptation is to reject the tempting thought when it first enters your mind. If you hang onto a tempting thought and keep analyzing it, before long, you'll find that you have fallen into that trap.

D. Joyfully claim your victory in Jesus' name over the devil and his demons.

1. The devil is a defeated foe. First John 3:8 says that Jesus came into the world to destroy the works of the devil.

2. The devil's doom is certain.

John said that Jesus showed him something as He gave him the Revelation of Jesus Christ: "And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of fire where the beast and false prophet had been thrown. And they will be tormented day and night for ever and ever" (Revelation 20:10).

THE FORGIVENESS OF SIN

Matthew 9:1-8

Matthew 9:1.

Remember that as we closed out Matthew 8 that Jesus had cast out many demons from two men and permitted the demon to go into a herd of pigs and as soon as the demons entered the pigs, the pigs rushed off a high cliff and fell into the Sea and they were all drowned. The whole town heard about what Jesus did and, we are told that the whole town went to where Jesus was and begged Him to leave their country. The result was that Jesus did leave and we have no record of Jesus ever returning to that country again.

They said, "Jesus, leave. We don't want You here!", and Jesus left and never returned. Jesus will not force Himself upon any man or upon any place. That is a frightful thing! If folks say they don't want Jesus in their lives, He will leave and maybe never return. We are told that Jesus went to His own city, Capernaum.

America has said to God, "We don't want You here. We don't want You in our country, we don't want You in our affairs, we don't want You in our courts, our schools, our homes, our businesses, and God has all but left; and we see the results. People of America are filled with fear, with uncertainty, with the collapse of morals and little hope for our future. Look back at the passage. Matthew 9:1-8.

Mark and Luke tell us that four friends of this paralytic made the man a bed; each got a corner of the bed and carried him to the house where Jesus was teaching. The house was packed and they could not get in, so they went to the roof, tore open a hole, and let the man down before Jesus.

Go back to Matthew 9:2. There is a wonderful, very short phrase there that Jesus uses on five occasions. It is only one word in the

original Greek, but our English versions take four words to describe it. These four words are part promise, part commandment. The four words are: "Be of good cheer." And on all five occasions it was spoken by Christ Himself.

- Matthew 9:2: "Son, be of good cheer, your sins are forgiven you."
- Matthew 9:22: When Jesus discovered the lady, who touched the hem of His garment, she could be made whole – "Be of good cheer, daughter; your faith has made you well."
- Matthew 14:27: The disciples of Jesus are in the middle of the Sea and the winds begin to toss their boat and they are afraid. Then they look up and think they see a ghost walking on the water toward them and they are more afraid. Jesus speaks to them and says, "Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid."

• John 16:33: After our Lord's death, the world will continue to attack the Lord's people and persecute them, but the Lord says, "In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."

• Then in Acts 23:11: There was a plot against Paul for preaching the gospel and the military commander was afraid that either the Pharisees or the Sadducees would take Paul and pull him to pieces, but that night the Lord stood by Paul in a vision and said to him, "Be of good cheer, Paul; for as you have testified for me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at Rome."

These words are given by inspiration of the Holy Spirit and recorded in the living Scriptures for us. They are intended for you and me, just as surely as they were spoken to the individuals who originally heard them.

Exercise your imagination for a moment. It is possible for us to imagine sound, just as we can visualize scenes from our past or the faces of our loved ones.

- Imagine the blast of a jet. Can you hear it?
- Imagine the crunch of dry leaves as you walk in the woods.
- Imagine the tune of your favorite song.

Now listen to the deep, resonate voice of the Son of God calling your name and saying directly to you: "Be of good cheer! Your sins are forgiven you; your faith has made you well. It is I; don't be afraid. I have overcome your problems. I want you to testify of Me, so be joyful. Be happy. Change your mood, and be of good cheer!"

There is no message we need to hear more. Depression is at epidemic levels, and it is an affliction that destroys us in both body and soul. What could cause us to be of good cheer more than knowing that our sins are forgiven?

This man they brought to Jesus was paralyzed on the inside just as much as he was on the outside. He was paralyzed by sin. But Jesus said to him, "Be of good cheer! Your sins are forgiven."

Here is a liberating way to look at the Christian life: Are your sins forgiven and do you know it?

Let me ask and answer four questions:

I. Why Do We Need Forgiveness?

Because there is something wrong with us. God has set the standard we are to live by and we don't live by those standards. God made the rules and His rules don't change. We can't do away with the rules and His rules don't change. We can't do away with the rules. When God made the rules, He didn't ask for our opinion. God has spoken – and He did not stutter. "Thou shalt not" still means "Thou shalt not."

In today's society, if we don't like a rule, we vote it down or we simply say, "I'm going to do whatever I want to do and no one can stop me." So, we make up the rules as we go along. But after we've changed the rules so we can do what we want, we still aren't happy. There is still something wrong – despair, shame, restlessness, and dissatisfaction.

Oprah and Dr. Phil and a host of other self-help gurus say the answer is within us. The Bible says the opposite is true: The Problem is within us. The answer lies outside us. As long as you think you can solve your own problem, you can only get worse.

We lie about our lies and we cover up our cover ups. We pretend that we didn't do what we know we did. No wonder we're so messed up! Why don't we confess our sins to God, and find the forgiveness we need?

II. What Is Forgiveness?

The Bible uses seven words to describe what forgiveness is. Three of them are Hebrew words; four of them are Greek words.

One Hebrew word for forgiveness “Nasa” means “sin taken away by God; to release,” “to take out of the way.”

One of the Greek words is very close to that – “Apoluo” means “to put away.” By the way, God commands us to confess our sins to the Lord, but I've heard a lot of incorrect praying. Often, I hear someone pray like this: “God, please forgive me.” You have just asked God to take you out of the way; to remove you. Don't ask God to forgive you; ask God to forgive your sins. It's your sins you want removed; not you! You want your sins to be released; not you!

Listen again what Jesus said to this man in Matthew 9:2: “Be of good cheer; YOUR SINS ARE FORGIVEN YOU.”

III. What Happens When Our Sins Are Forgiven?

The Bible uses a number of images to describe how God deals with our sins:

A. Isaiah 44:22: God blots out our sins as a thick cloud. As a person cannot see what is ahead because it is blocked by a thick cloud, so God obliterated the sins of those He has redeemed. It's like trying to drive in heavy, thick fog. You can't see what is ahead of you.

B. Jeremiah 31:34: God forgets our sins and remembers them no more. God, Who is all-knowing, chooses not to remember my sins that He has forgiven any more. He never brings them up any more.

C. Isaiah 38:17: God puts our sins behind His back.

D. Micah 7:19: God buries our sins in the depths of the sea.

E. Psalm 103:12: God removes our sins as far as the east is from the west.

A lot of folks imagine that in Heaven when we give account of ourselves before the Lord, that God is going to put all our sins on a large screen so everyone can see them. “Oh, my wife/husband is going to find out what I did.” Listen, when God forgives our sins, He clears the record, He erases the tape so that when He pushes the button, nothing shows up on the big screen in Heaven. Our sins are forgiven, forgotten, removed, buried, and blotted out. They can never condemn us again. Glorious thought! Let that grip your soul, and you will never be the same.

But how could it be this way? How could God forgive us? Why doesn't He look at our sins? Here's the answer: A long time ago God fixed His gaze on the cross of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. When we are honest enough to admit that we are wicked and evil, a stream of mercy flows out from the cross of Christ and our sins are covered by His blood. With God there is forgiveness. There is nothing more important than our sins being forgiven by God.

IV. How Can We Know Jesus Can Forgive?

In this passage we see four things:

1. Jesus' Power to Forgive Sin is Demonstrated.
2. Jesus' Power to Forgive Sin is Questioned.
3. Jesus' Power to Forgive Sin is Proven.
4. Jesus' Power to Forgive Sin Brings Glory to God.

When Jesus saw the four men's faith, He said to the man on the bed, “Your sins are forgiven you.” The Scribes said, “This man blasphemes.” That would have been true if Jesus were just a man. Jesus proved He was more than mere man when He read their thoughts. Jesus then asked, “Which is easier to say, ‘Your sins be forgiven you’ or ‘Arise and walk?’” Well it's easier to say, “Your sins be forgiven you” because no one could see in this man's heart. But then Jesus said, “To prove that I have power on earth to forgive sins,” He said to the paralytic, “Arise and walk.”

And he did!

And the people glorified God.

Jesus has promised that “Whosoever calls on the Name of the Lord shall be saved and his sins forgiven.”

The last verse of the hymn "Softly and Tenderly" says this:

Oh! for the wonderful love He has promised,
Promised for you and for me.

Tho' we have sinned, He has mercy and pardon,
Pardon for you and for me.

Come home, Come home.
Ye who are weary, come home.
Earnestly, tenderly, Jesus is calling.
Calling, O Sinner, come home.

Are your sins forgiven?

MATTHEW'S PERSONAL TESTIMONY

Matthew 9:9-13

You do know, do you not, that the first book of the New Testament, in fact, the first of the four gospels of the Lord Jesus, was written by someone who had been such a notorious and despised sinner that the decent and respectable people of his day would have nothing whatsoever to do with him.

The Apostle Matthew was a tax collector before he was saved. A "publican" as he is called in some translations of the Bible. A tax collector in Jesus' day in Israel was a Jewish man who collected taxes from his own Jewish kinsmen on behalf of the Gentile Roman government. He made his living by collecting not only the required revenue appointed by the Roman government, but by also collecting a percentage above that required amount as his own cut.

Matthew likely was a customs official with a tax office by the Sea of Galilee in Capernaum, which means he was responsible for collecting customs, duties on the lucrative fishing trade. That means that Matthew had probably collected taxes from Peter, James, John, and Andrew.

Tax collectors were considered a traitor to his own people. He was despised by his fellow Jews. They were considered by the Jewish people as "legal-robbers." Tax collectors were excluded from any religious fellowship. Any money that they may have come by was considered "defiled." They were not permitted to serve as a witness in a court of law because they were all known as liars.

Yet, that's the kind of man Jesus is going to invite to follow Him.

Read the Passage.

Three things I want you to see about Matthew's personal testimony.

I. Matthew's Call and Conversion Matthew 9:9

It's interesting that when the other gospel writers tell the story of this particular apostle's call to Jesus, they use a different name for him. Mark and Luke, in their gospel accounts of his call, both refer to him by the name "Levi," but when they refer to his ministry as an apostle, they call him Matthew.

Matthew, however, in his humility, did not disguise his past or make any excuses for it. "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.

Scripture says that as Jesus was walking along the Sea shore, He saw Matthew sitting at his tax office.

Think about this for a moment. Matthew has already told of the personal testimony of others who had come to know Jesus as

personal Savior. Now he is going to share his own personal conversion. It must have been a moving experience for Matthew to write this portion of his gospel.

How his heart must have swelled with emotion as he remembered the experience.

He says that, as Jesus passed by, He saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax office.

- Jesus saw where he was sitting and what he was doing.
- He saw everything about Matthew. He saw his heart, his mind, his thoughts, his hurt, his pain, his loneliness, his lack of purpose and meaning in life. He saw a useless life, a life being wasted.
- He saw a man, a man who needed a Savior, a Savior who could meet every need of his existence.

Sometimes when we see a man who is a great sinner, we turn away in disgust and will not look at them or have anything to do with them. Not Jesus! I believe Matthew was used to people looking away from him. People saw him as a vile traitor – a notorious and hopeless sinner. I think Matthew had sort of hardened himself to people's averted eyes and sneering lips.

But here was Jesus – the Messiah, looking right at Matthew! I don't think Matthew could have possibly missed the love for him that he saw in the eyes of Jesus. What a shock that must have been to him. And what an even greater shock it must have been to Matthew when Jesus then – with His eyes locked in love on him – extended His hand to him and said, "Follow Me!"

I hope you appreciate what a decisive invitation this would have been to take. Matthew gave up more to follow Jesus than did the rest of the disciples. Matthew knew that, if he arose and followed Jesus, there would be no turning back. If he left the tax office to follow Jesus, and then changed his mind later and tried to go back to his old business, he wouldn't be accepted back. His tax office would have been given to someone else. People who yearned to "get rich quick" would be standing in line to take his place. If he tried to get another job later, who among his people would ever hire a former tax collector?

When Jesus called Matthew to follow Him, Luke says he "left all" to follow Him (Luke 5:28). Someone said that Matthew left all except his pen and paper behind, and he would use that to tell the wonderful gospel of Jesus.

When Jesus told Matthew to "Follow Me," there would be no questions asked, no hesitation, no "buts," no half-heartedness, and no delayed decision. He followed immediately!

II. Matthew's Commitment Matthew 9:10

I want you to notice the modesty and humility of Matthew. Matthew tells us that Jesus sat at the table in the house with many tax collectors and sinners, but he doesn't tell us whose house it was, nor who the host of the meal was. Both Mark and Luke tell on Matthew. They both say that the meal was in Matthew's house and that he hosted the meal. Matthew's humility is seen in the fact that he doesn't draw attention to himself. He turns the focus away from himself and towards Christ.

In fact, Matthew is the only one of the disciples who is never recorded to have said anything in the gospels.

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.

III. The Conversation Matthew 9:11-13

The Pharisees were upset because Jesus was eating with all of these tax collectors and sinners. But did you notice that the Pharisees chose to bring their complaint to the disciples instead of bringing them to Jesus?

Their aim was to cause the disciples to question Jesus' judgment. "Doesn't the first Psalm teach that the blessed man doesn't sit or stand with sinners? Here He is reclining with sinners at the dinner table. What kind of Man are you following? Why would you want to follow Him?" These Pharisees hoped to cause a rift between Jesus and His disciples. They questioned His judgment and the rightness of His actions, and they hoped to cause His disciples to doubt Him and fall away from Him.

But Jesus overhears their words to the disciples and He responds to them with a devastating rebuke. He tells the Pharisees, "You don't understand sin; you don't understand the Law; and you don't understand the prophets."

Look again at Matthew 9:12-13. 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 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 these 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!

If the song had been written when he was on earth, I think this song from the Gaithers would have been Matthew's favorite song:

Something beautiful, something good;
All my confusion; He understood.
All I had to offer Him was brokenness and strife;
But He made something beautiful of my life.

And He can do the same in your life!

THE LORD OF THE HARVEST OR IT'S HARVEST TIME! Matthew 9:35-38

When it comes to reaching folks for Christ, the Scriptures always talk about reaching them with a sense of urgency.

For example, Paul said in 2 Corinthians 6:2: “Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.” Don't let your opportunity for salvation slip by. If God speaks to your heart today, say “Yes” to Him today!

Hebrews 3:7-8: “Wherefore (as the Holy Spirit saith), Today if you heard His voice, harden not your heart.”

In our text for today, He said in Matthew 9:37-38: “Then He said to His disciples, “The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore, pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into the harvest.” During harvest time you can look at the planted fields and see the ripe beans or corn or cotton.

When I was a kid, I could always tell when it was about time for Mississippi/Alabama Fair and Dairy Show because the cotton fields were always covered in white. We always wanted to go to the Fair so on Friday after school and on Saturday we would go to the field and pick cotton. We got about two dollars for a hundred pounds of cotton. That was enough to get into the Fair, ride some rides, and lose the rest of our money trying to win a prize worth about ten cents. But the Fair always came about harvest time.

Jesus said, “The harvest is ready.” It's not time for planting, but it's time for picking! Look! It's harvest time!

When the harvest is ready, you must get it picked and on to the market before it ruins. Imagine that the owner of the fields calls on his workers to go quickly into the field to gather the crop, but instead of moving to the fields to work, the field-hands sit around waiting for their next meal or complaining about the conditions on the farm. Needless to say, the farmer would be looking for new workers.

Now think of something far more critical. Consider the fields as the souls of men and women who will perish if they are not brought to the saving grace of Christ. Christ is Lord of the field and knows that each soul is in danger of being ruined. The souls are ripe but must be harvested now! He calls on those who are the field-hands, the members of His family – His Church, to go and harvest the crop. What do the field-hands do? Many of them sit around waiting for the Lord of the Harvest to bless them with more spiritual food. Some are complaining about things they don't like on the farm (the Church). All the while, the crop is rotting. The loss is great. The Lord of the Harvest is grieved!

This is the picture we have. The owner of the field is God, Himself. Jesus tells the disciples to plead with the Owner, the Lord of the harvest, to thrust out workers into the fields before it is too late.

Three things will cause us to work in the fields of living souls:

I. The Passion in the Harvest Work

Jesus was filled with passion for soul work. He said, "I have come to seek and to save that which was lost." In Matthew 9:35, we find Jesus teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing those who are sick.

A. He had Eyes to See the Need

Jesus didn't just see flesh and bone people among the crowd. He saw an ever-living, never-dying soul wrapped in human flesh that is going to spend eternity in either heaven or hell. Is that what you see?

A new trend has developed in American churches over the last few years. It involves what is known as "targeting." That simply means that some churches focus or target a certain group of people that they will reach out to. Here in Mississippi there are at least two motorcycle churches. Some target people who are involved with horses and they call themselves "cowboy churches."

Another way of "targeting" is by age. A lot of the contemporary churches target people in the age range of 25 to 39 years old. Some target the wealthier folk so those who don't have much of this world's goods don't feel comfortable coming to those churches.

The folks Jesus targeted can be summed up in one word – Everyone! Everyone is included. Jesus said, "Whosoever will may come ..." and you are a whosoever! You fit in that group. That's our target here at New Hope as well!

B. He had a Heart to Feel.

He saw the people as sheep, but instead of those sheep being together, He saw them as scattered. The King James Version says that Jesus saw them as "faint" and "scattered abroad." That means that He saw them as "Distressed and Dispirited." They felt hopeless, empty, weary, wounded, and helpless. They were going through life aimlessly and without direction.

Isaiah says, "All we like sheep have gone astray." We need the Shepherd!

C. He had a Mind to Understand.

See that phrase that says that "He was moved with compassion"? That word "compassion" is only found twelve times in the New Testament and each time the reference is used of Jesus – either in reference to His own response to the needs of people or as a part of the teaching in His parables.

Jesus gives us seven examples of compassion in this passage:

1. Jesus went to them –Matt. 9:35. "They know where the church is; they'll come if they want to." He didn't just wait around for them to come to Him; nor should we. The first two letters in "gospel" is "go."
2. Jesus served them –Matt. 9:35. He taught them and preached to them and healed them. He met their needs.
3. Jesus saw them – Matt. 9:36. He wasn't in too great a hurry or too busy to take time to see their needs.
4. Jesus felt compassion for them – Matt. 9:36. He felt what they felt. Like sheep with no shepherd.
5. Jesus knew what was going on in their inner life – Matt. 9:36.
6. Jesus wanted them to want Him – Matt. 9:37.
7. Jesus prayed for them – Matt. 9:38.

II. The Practice of Doing the Harvest Work

When we were picking cotton, not one bale of cotton ever came to the wagon on its own. Every bale that was harvested was harvested because somebody went to that field and personally picked that bale of cotton.

The problem was not the crop. There was plenty to be harvested. It was a lack of folks willing to go and together what was there for the picking.

Jesus knew that if no laborers went into the field, no crops would be gathered into the barns and the crops would perish.

A man who was a great soul-winner was once asked the secret of his success in winning souls. He said, "I can answer that in one word: TEARS!" Then he read Psalm 126:5-6.

Sometimes as a pastor a young person will put me down as a reference for a leadership position for a church camp.

One of the questions that is on the questionnaire often is: "Does this person share his or her faith in the church community?" Their feeling is, if a person doesn't share their faith in their local setting, they will not do so among strangers in a camp.

The Lord is looking for folks with a burden for the lost.

III. The Prayer for the Harvest Worker Matthew 9:38

Understand that the harvest of souls does not belong to us; it is the Sovereign Lord who owns the fields. He is the One who has sent us out into it.

Jesus said, "As My Father has sent Me, so send I you." (John 20:21)

The Great Commission says, "Go into all the world and make disciples." (Literally, "As you go into the world, make disciples.") Matthew 28:19

My duty is not to the lost, but to my Sovereign Lord who saved me and calls me to the field of service. We are not encouraged to go, we are commanded to go! He said, "Go, and I will be with you."

Notice that He said, "Pray the Lord of the harvest to send workers." Why? Because the ones who are praying will become the ones who will be burdened to go into the fields. And the ones praying will be the ones prepared to go.

Pastor Billy Strayhorn tells about an experience he had several years ago. He said he was standing in line at the grocery store. "In front of me was a boy about eight or nine years old. He was looking over the display of candy bars. When he picked a big old Baby Ruth and laid it on the counter, I remember thinking, 'Good choice!'

"The cashier rang it up and told him how much it was. The boy reached in his pocket and pulled out a bunch of pennies, nickels, and a single dime, and plopped them on the counter. The cashier gave him one of those looks and started counting. Then she looked up and said, 'you're 12 cents short. You need another 12 cents.'

"The boy's shoulders dropped, his face dropped, and he went from a grin to a groan in less than a second. Just as the cashier started to tell the boy to put the candy bar back, I reached in my pocket and put 12 cents on the counter. The boy's face lit up. He said, 'Thanks, Mister.'" And he took off, but then he turned around and came back.

"He held up the candy bar and asked, 'Hey, Mister, you wanna bite?' I said, 'No, thanks. You eat it.'" Then the boy looked at the preacher real careful, like he was studying him and asked, "How come? How come you did that?" The preacher said before he could answer, the boy got a look of recognition on his face. He said, "Oh, I know you. You're that preacher. Jesus made you do it, didn't He?" The preacher said, "What could I say but, yes, He did."

Then the boy said, "I sure like Jesus, and I'm glad Jesus makes nice people like you. Bye." Then he was gone.

The preacher said, "I don't know who was touched more. I DO know that I've never gotten that much pleasure out of 12 cents before or since. I didn't do anything special, but with God's love and 12 cents, I was able to touch a little boy's life and bring glory to God simply by obeying Christ's command to love one another."

There's a world out there that needs to know that Jesus is real.

They need to know that Jesus makes people different. They need to know Jesus in a personal way. The harvest is plenteous, but the workers are few. Would you pray to the Lord of the harvest for workers to be sent? If you do, don't be surprised when He answers your prayer by thrusting you out into that ripe, ready harvest.

JESUS' ORDINATION SERMON TO HIS DISCIPLES

Matthew 10:1 – 11:1

In the last two verses of Matthew 9, Jesus said, "It's harvest time! Time for reaping has come! The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore, pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His field."

But it didn't end there. Jesus said to pray that the Lord of the harvest would send laborers into the field. Jesus instructed the disciples to pray and, no doubt, they prayed. And, undoubtedly, Jesus prayed Himself.

I told you when we looked at that section, that if you prayed that the Lord would send someone into the field to harvest, that the one praying might very well become the answer to their prayer.

It's like in Isaiah 6 when Isaiah saw the vision of the Lord, high and lifted up in all of His splendor, with the seraphim flying in service and worship around the throne of God, crying: "Holy, Holy, Holy," and hearing God say, "I need someone to go for Me and to be My spokesman. Whom shall I send and who will go for Me?" And Isaiah answered, "Here am I! Send me!" And God sent him.

Now God calls for workers in His field, and when the disciples pray and the Lord prays, He sends them – two-by-two into the fields – under His authority and with His blessings and power to heal the sick, cast out unclean spirits, and even raise the dead.

Jesus had chosen twelve men to be WITH Him, to learn FROM Him, and now they are sent out BY Him. But before He sends them out, He preached an ordination sermon to encourage them and to prepare them. In this ordination sermon, Jesus had something to say to ALL of His servants – past, present, and future. Unless we recognize this fact, the message of this chapter will seem hopelessly confusing.

There are six collections of Jesus' teachings in the Gospel of Matthew that are somewhat unique to Matthew:

1. Matthew 5-7 gives us The Sermon on the Mount, which deals with kingdom principles.
2. Matthew 10 deals with Jesus making His disciples (students or learners) into Apostles (sent out ones) and He ordains them and sends them out under His authority.

These Apostles were given special power and authority from Christ to perform miracles. These miracles were a part of their "official credentials."

3. Matthew 13 gives us the seven prophetic parables of the kingdom of Heaven.
4. Matthew 18 gives us the discourse on forgiveness.
5. Matthew 23 gives us our Lord's eight "Woes" of judgment to the scribes, Pharisees, hypocrites.
6. Matthew 24-25 gives us the Prophetic Olivet Discourse.

The Greek word for "Apostle" means "to send forth with a commission." It was used by the Greeks for the personal representatives of the king, ambassadors who functioned with the king's authority.

A man had to meet certain qualifications to be an apostle of Jesus Christ:

1. He must have seen the risen Christ – I Corinthians 9:1.
2. He must have had fellowship with the Lord – Acts 1:21-22.
3. He had to be chosen by the Lord – Ephesians 4:11.

Needless to say, there are no apostles today.

We can divide this chapter into three sections:

1. Instructions for Past Apostles – Matthew 10:1-15
2. Instructions for Future Apostles – Matthew 10:16-23
3. Instructions for Present Apostles – Matthew 10:24-42

Let me point out that a number of cults use this chapter for their authority for their conduct. But the instructions for Christians are not found in this chapter.

I. Instructions for Past Apostles Matthew 10:1-15

There is a story told of Jesus' return to heaven. After dying for our sins, being buried, rising from the dead and ascending back to heaven, He was greeted by the Angel Gabriel.

"An awesome thing you did, Lord," Gabriel said. "Incredible! Does the world know?"

Jesus answered, "Not really. As a matter of fact, only a few folks in Palestine understand what I did."

"Well, how is the rest of the world going to understand?"

"I'm entrusting those folks with the message. I'm trusting they will carry My message throughout the world."

"But what if they don't?" Gabriel asked. "What if they decide to return to fishing? Or what if they get afraid? Or what if they just neglect to tell? What happens then? What is your plan then?"

And Jesus replies, "I have no other plan."

This is just a story, but it's reality. The Lord entrusted the Gospel of the kingdom to men and left it to them, sending them out to tell the Good News that men's sins are forgiven because of His death on the cross. That was His only plan.

The listing of the Apostles is found four times in the New Testament: Matthew 10, Mark 3, Luke 6, and Acts 1:13. Mark tells us they were originally sent out in pairs – for companionship, encouragement, and support.

1. Jesus gave them power over unclean spirits, power to cast out demons, power to heal all kinds of sickness and diseases, and to raise the dead. Matthew 10:1.

2. They were not to go to the Gentiles or to the Samaritians lest they be rejected of them as well as the Jews when they found out that they went to the "pagan." They were to go only to the lost sheep of Israel. Matthew 10:2-8a.

3. They were not to charge money for their ministry, but they could accept support to meet their basic needs, for the workman is worthy of such support. The point here was to teach them to trust the Lord to supply their needs through the generosity of the people to whom they ministered. If they healed folks, many would show their appreciation by supplying their needs.

4. Stay at the first home that invites you to stay. Don't be looking for a finer place to stay where the people are more influential so you can move out of the poor home and go to the wealthy home. That would make the poor family feel even poorer. Matthew 10:11-13.

5. If no one will allow you to stay in a home in a town, leave it and shake the dust off your feet. Matthew 10:14-15.

I told you that many cults practice some of the things recorded here even though it was not written for our day, but to the twelve Apostles. For example, have you ever been visited by some Jehovah's "False" Witnesses? If you won't let them in or take any of their material, after closing the door, if you peek out the window, you may see them shake the dust from their feet as they go to the edge of your sidewalk. They do this because they're taking this verse literally and pronouncing judgment on you. That's the thing Jesus did when they left Gentile territory when they got back on Jewish soil, because Gentile dirt was defiled.

If you see a Jehovah's Witness shake the dust off his feet when he leaves your house, don't worry about it. God's Word tells you not to let them into your house. See 2 John 7-11.

This was the commission of the first Apostles; not our commission today. They were sent only to the house of Israel. Our commission is found in Acts 1:8 and Matthew 28:19-20.

II. Instructions for Future Disciples Matthew 10:16-23

The "atmosphere" of this section is different from that of the previous section. Here the Lord spoke of persecution, but we have no record that the Twelve suffered during that time.

- Jesus also spoke of a ministry to the Gentiles – Matthew 10:18
- The Holy Spirit had not been given, yet Jesus talked about the Spirit speaking to them –Matthew 10:20
- Matthew 10:22 indicates a worldwide persecution; yet, the Apostles ministered only in their own land.
- Finally, Matthew 10:23 speaks of our Lord's return, which moves these events to the future.

But when? When you compare what is written here with Matthew 24:25 and the Olivet Discourse, it seems to fit.

The Tribulation period will be a time of Opposition when God's servants will be like sheep in the midst of wolves. Folks in that time will need to be "tough-minded" but tenderhearted.

It will also be a time when family love and loyalty will decay. It will be a time of deceit and disloyalty among family members and friends.

The three institutions which God established are the home, human government, and the Church. In the last days, all three

institutions will oppose the truth instead of promote it.

III. Instructions for Present Disciples Matthew 10:24-42

While the truths in this section would apply to God's servants during any period of Bible history, they seem to have a special significance for the Church today.

The emphasis is, "Fear not!" (Matthew 10:26, 28, 31). The particular fear discussed is in Matthew 10:32-33. The fear of confessing Christ openly before men.

The public confession of faith in Christ is one evidence of true salvation – Romans 10:9-10.

There are several reasons why we must not be afraid to confess Christ openly:

1. Suffering is to be expected – Matthew 10:24-25.

We are no better than Jesus.

2. God will bring everything to light – Matthew 10:26-27.

The truth will come out. All things will be revealed, made public, and made right. We are to fear God only – Matthew 10:28. If we fear only God, we will fear no man.

3. We cannot escape conflict – Matthew 10:34-39.

Once we have identified with Jesus Christ and confessed Him, we are part of a war. We didn't start the war. God declared war on Satan and Satan knows he can't get to God, so the best way Satan can hurt God is to hurt one of His children.

The only way a believer can escape conflict is to deny Christ and compromise his witness, and this would be sin.

4. We will be a blessing to others – Matthew 10:40-42.

Hebrews 6:10: "The Lord is not unfaithful to forget our works of righteousness" – even to the giving of a cup of cold water. When we do something for someone in the name of Jesus, they may forget it and you may forget it, but our Lord promises He will not forget it and you will be rewarded. When? Perhaps now – but even better, in heaven.

DEPRESSED AND IMPRESSED

Matthew 11:1-15

Let's be honest this morning. Have you ever been disappointed with Jesus? Have you ever felt as if Jesus had let you down? Have you ever expected something from Jesus and He didn't fulfill your expectations?

Several years ago, a lady who was angry with God came up to a young man in her work place. He was a young Christian and was on fire for the Lord and with a joyful spirit told his co-workers what Christ meant to him since he was recently saved. She said to him, "I was in that 'Christianity' stuff once, but I turned away from it, and I'll never return again. I want nothing to do with the kind of God you Christians worship. He let me down when I needed Him most."

The young Christian asked the lady what she meant. She told him of a sister that she loved very much. They were best friends. But she came home one day to the horrible sight of her sister in her room – hanging by the neck at the end of a rope. She said with bitter tones, "If there's a God in heaven, then why did He let my sister commit suicide? Why didn't He stop her? If that's your God, then I want nothing to do with Him."

The young man who told that story said that he wished he could make a happy ending to that story, but he couldn't, He was young in the faith and didn't know what to say to the poor woman. He said that if he could go back in time, he would listen to her pain and weep with her over her loss. He said, "I'd ask about her sister's life and let her share what she loved about her sister."

Then after a lot of tender and sympathetic listening to her pain, I would gently and lovingly let her know that she was mad at Jesus for failing to keep a promise that He never made. She had an unfair expectation of Jesus. She had expected Jesus to violate the will of her sister to prevent her from ever doing something harmful to herself. And so, when God didn't do what she expected that He had

a duty to do, she became disappointed with Him, grew to resent Him, and finally came to reject Him.

That's just one incident, but I've met many people who became offended at Jesus because He didn't do what they EXPECTED Him to do.

Can I say with love; the problem is never with Jesus when He disappoints our expectations. The problem is always with us and our expectations. We expect Him to do something that He never said He would do.

We expect Him to fulfill our expectations on call. And yet, the plain fact is that He isn't obligated to fulfill the expectations we place on Him.

I'm so glad the Lord included the story of John the Baptist in the Gospels. He is one of the greatest men in the Bible; and yet, he had doubts and disappoints.

I. John – The Depression Matthew 11:2-3

The Outward Situation that Discouraged Him.

John is inside a dark, damp, dreary prison cell with its cold nights, damp bed, and tasteless food. He has been there for some eighteen months.

Why was he there? He was not there for committing some crime. He did not break some law. He was in jail because he stood for the truth.

Herod Antipas was the Roman ruler in Israel at that time. He had a half-brother named Phillip who had just married a woman named Herodias. Phillip carried his new bride to meet Herod. She was a beautiful woman and Herod decided he wanted Phillip's wife for his own. In order to have Herodias for himself, he had to divorce his wife, so the marriage is based on adultery. The Holy Spirit had John the Baptist to confront Herod regarding the sinful situation.

Here is the message John delivered: Matthew 14:3-5. John kept sharing the same message, "It is not lawful for you to have her". Matt. 14:4

Mark 6:20 tells us that Herod was afraid of John because he was a just and holy man and he protected John, and he enjoyed hearing John preach.

Herod was like so many today. He heard God's word, but he decided to stay in his sin, rather than turning to God.

Remember that John was a wilderness evangelist, but things had changed over the last eighteen months. He had stood alone against the powers of evil, and had enjoyed success in every phrase of his ministry. Beneath the blue skies of Galilee, he had seen multitudes gathering to hear God's message, and he had the privilege of baptizing many converts. He had been uncompromising as he denounced the hypocrisy of religious leaders. He had insisted on their repentance if they were to participate in his ministry.

Listen to John's boldness: Matthew 3:2, 7-8, 10-12.

But John knew that he was just the forerunner; the one to prepare the way for Jesus, the Messiah (see Matthew 3:13-15). Some of John's disciples told John that more disciples were being baptized unto Jesus than he was baptizing, and in humility John said, "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30).

But prison does strange things to people. If you talk to men who have been in prison, they call it the worse place in the world. It sucks the life and hope out of even the best of men. Even John was not immune to bouts of discouragement and depression.

Worst of all, I think, is that Jesus didn't fulfill John's expectations. John had introduced Jesus as the Messiah, but Jesus was so different from John and Jesus didn't do what John expected Him to do.

- John had Denounced sinners; Jesus Dined with them.
- John expected Jesus to be riding into Israel on a white stallion. Instead, it seemed as if He were strolling across the land with a first-aid kit.
- John remembered what Isaiah said the Messiah would do – See Isaiah 61:1-2. "To open the prison doors." John thought: "Don't I have a right to expect Jesus to open these doors after eighteen months? Where is He? What is He doing?"

Jesus is going to send John a message: "Focus on what I am doing; not on what I'm not doing. When the time is right, I'll open prison doors."

John wants to know, "Are You the One that is to come or do we look for another?" This is the same John who said, "Behold the

Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.”

See Matthew 11:4-6. In Verse 6 there is a gentle rebuke for John: “John, Jesus is working whether you see it or not!”

To my knowledge, Jesus never did visit John in prison; nor did He keep him from being beheaded. But Jesus always has a reason for doing things His way.

II. Jesus – The Impressed Matthew 11:7-15

Did you notice that in Matthew 11:7 Jesus waited until John's two disciples left before He shared with the people why He was so impressed with John? Maybe our Lord thought it might tempt John to be proud if he knew what the Lord thought of him.

Jesus asked: “What did you go out to see (when John preached)?”

– “A reed shaken by the wind?”

Tall weeds reacting to the wind? If the wind blew from the north; the reeds leaned toward the south. When the wind blew from the south, the same reed leaned toward the north.

Those reeds are not dependable; they are affected by circumstances. They are like politicians and other leaders who carefully watch to see which way the wind of popularity might blow and then act to increase their popularity.

J. Vernon McGee said, “John was no reed shaking in the wind! He was a might wind, shaking the reeds!”

– “A man dressed in soft garments?”

If you went out to hear some pretty-faced sissy sermonizer in a silk suit, you were going the wrong direction when you went out to hear John! He wore camel's hair, a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey (Matthew 3:4).

By the way, I heard about a Texan who went to Australia and he thought he would make fun of the outback. His driver took him to one of their large lakes and the Texan said, “It's about the size of the mud-puddle in my backyard. A little later they crossed a long bridge and the Texan said, “Looks like one of the toys my kids play with. A little later a kangaroo jumped out in front of their jeep and the quick-thinking Australian said, “I see we're coming into grasshopper country!”

“A prophet?”

He's more than a prophet. He is a “prophesied prophet.” He's a man set apart to declare who is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

Look at Matthew 11:11. “Among those born of woman (up to that point) none is greater than John the Baptist.” That is the estimation of our Lord Jesus. It makes a difference who says someone is the greatest. When Jesus says it, that settles it!

But don't stop! John died before the kingdom of heaven was brought in. What is the kingdom of heaven? It is the rule and reign of Christ in our heart by the Holy Spirit. All believers after the cross are greater still, because they participate in the full understanding and experience of something John saw only in shadowy form – the actual atoning work of Christ.

There are times when we may be down or depressed; but if you are a child of God, living for God and loving God, God is Impressed with you.

One day He will reveal what we mean to Him and His kingdom!

THIS GENERATION **Matthew 11:16-19**

There are folks who study the generations of mankind and give names to those generations. For example:

- Those born between 1901 and 1924 are part of what is commonly called the “GI Generation” or the “Builders Generation” because they largely built the America that their children and grandchildren enjoy.
- Tom Brokaw said the generation between 1930 to 1946 is called the “Greatest Generation.”
- From 1946 to 1964 is the “Baby Boomer” generation or what some call the “Me Generation.”

- Then from 1965 through 1980 is called “Generation X.” It is also called the “Latch-Key Kids” generation because kids would come home from school to an empty house.
- From 1982 through 2000 is known as “Generation Y” or the “Millennials.”
- Those born after 2001 are called “Generation Z” or “Boomlets.”

My first sermon was entitled “The Pepsi Generation.” It was a youth Sunday message. I surrendered to preach one week before youth Sunday and no youth would volunteer to preach that Sunday. The youth were teaching Sunday School, serving as deacons, taking up the offering, but no one would preach. At that time, 48 years ago, Pepsi Cola had an ad that said, “Come Alive! You're in the Pepsi Generation! Live life to the fullest!”

I don't remember how I found the passage, but I preached from Proverbs 30:11-14. I'm sure I did a lot of spiritualizing because I wrote nine pages of sermon notes. I preached in front of a mirror several times, once it was 40 minutes long. But then I used the same notes on Youth Sunday in front of the church folks and it took me nine minutes. Just so you know, although I'm a man of few words, I don't have any more nine-minute sermons!

But I want us to look at that Proverbs 30 passage for just a minute because Agur wrote this about the generation of his day.

In Proverbs 30:11 he says there is a generation that disrespects their parents. Sons and daughters were rebellious, disrespectful, and cursing their parents. The Law said that if the behavior of sons and daughters were like this, they could be stoned to death. I wonder what he would think of some of our youth today!?

Then in Proverbs 30:12 he said his generation were self-righteous. They were pure in their own eyes, but filthy in God's eyes. They lived in open immorality, indulged in lustful pleasures, drunkenness, and other excesses, but boasted they were doing nothing wrong.

Then in Proverbs 30:13 he talked about the people who were filled with pride – having haughty eyes. They arrogantly looked down on others and on God's Law.

Then in Proverbs 30:14 they regularly took advantage and oppressed the poor.

Human nature hasn't changed much in 3,000 years, has it?

But now Jesus describes His generation. Notice again Matthew 11:16: “But to what shall I liken THIS generation?” Jesus offered an evaluation of the generation in which He lived. His evaluation was not exactly a positive one.

What was His generation like?

I. It Was a Sinful Generation

Notice the expression “this generation.” It occurs sixteen times in the Gospels. It occurs another nine times with adjectives – “evil”, “wicked”, “adulterous”, “sinful”, “fatherless”, “perverse”, “untoward” (perverse – Acts 2:40).

With only one exception (Matthew 24:34), the expression describes the generation that rejected the Messiah.

By introducing the phrase “this generation,” the Lord began to toll the bell for the Jewish nation. It's day of visitation and judgment was fast approaching. He had weighed the nation in the balance and found it wanting.

Look at Matthew 11:20-24. Jesus evaluates three cities where He did most of His miracles. All three cities rejected Him. And He placed a curse upon all three. Today, none of the three cities exist. They are nothing but archaeological ruins. Although their location is good and there is plenty of water there they do not exist.

These were privileged cities in Jesus' day. They were privileged to have the gospel available to them. The Lord's presence was there; yet, they neglected and rejected Christ.

Jesus said the judgment upon them will be much greater than the judgment will be for Tyre, Sidon, and Sodom. You see, there will be degrees of judgment. The greater degree of privilege and light, the greater degree of judgment because they rejected Christ.

May I tell you, I fear for what's ahead for America. We have been a blessed nation and God has been good to us. But we have said that we don't want God in our nation any more.

It is as if we are spitting in God's face and God's principle is still true: “Whatsoever a man (or a

nation) sows, that will he also reap.”

1. It Was a Silly Generation Matthew 11:16-19

They were like little children, playing games in the market place. They were silly and selfish. Each wanted his own way. They could not be pleased.

One group said, “Let’s play wedding. Someone plays the flute and the rest of us will dance.” Like spoiled brats who couldn’t get along, the other group said, “No, let’s play funeral and you mourn!” Then they begin to whine, “They won’t play with me!”

Jesus said, “They are never happy.”

“John came and he was a separatist. He was from the desert and lived a highly disciplined life. He didn’t associate with people or make friends. He isolated himself and cut himself off from everyone. He withdrew from society. His message was one of repentance and separation, and you accused him of having a devil, of being mad or insane for choosing to live that way.”

Then Jesus came and He was the opposite of John. He ate and associated with people and shared in their social affairs and mixed with the people and “you accused Him of worldliness. You said He was a glutton, a winebibber, and an immoral friend of sinners.”

The people were just like children: they found fault with both and accepted neither. They just wanted their way.

We are much like the folks in our Lord’s generation. When a preacher proclaims the wrath and judgment of God, for the most part, folks are either offended by it or they simply ignore it. The generation in which we live is much like the one in Christ’s day. Like children with their fingers in their ears, they refuse to hear the Word of the Lord.

In 1969, in Pass Christian, MS, Sheriff Jerry Peratta pulled up to a group of up-scale apartments on the beach, and warned the residents to evacuate. Hurricane Camille was headed directly for the little coastal town. One of the men, with a drink in his hand, told the sheriff that they were not leaving. In fact, some twenty people decided to have a “hurricane party,” and wait out the storm in their apartments.

The sheriff took the names of all those in the apartments along with the name and phone number of their next of kin. After Camille had passed, the worst damage was to that strip of apartments and homes. The only thing left of the posh apartments that had hosted the “hurricane party” was the foundation. Every person who stayed was now dead because they would not listen to the warning.

THE GREAT INVITATION Matthew 11:28-30

The Bible is filled with invitations from the Lord.

Listen to Moses in Exodus 32:26a: “Then Moses stood in the gate of the camp, and said, who is on Lord’s side? Let him come to me ...”

Isaiah 55:1: “Ho, every one that thirsteth, come to the waters, and he who hath no money; come ye, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.”

Isaiah 1:18: “‘Come now, and let us reason together’ says the Lord, ‘though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.’”

John 7:37-38: “In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, ‘If any man thirst, let him come to Me, and drink. He that believeth on Me, as the Scriptures hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living waters.’”

Revelation 22:17, the last invitation of the Bible: “And the Spirit and the Bride say, ‘Come.’ And whosoever will let him come and take of the water of life freely.”

But our passage for today may be the greatest invitation: Matthew 11:18-30.

I see here:

I. The Summons Matthew 11:28

I appreciate that! The Lord of the universe invites anyone who is weary to come to Him. Keep in mind that at this point of Matthew's Gospel, Israel and the Jewish people are rejecting Him. "Come to Me all of you who are depressed, or discouraged or diseased."

I might have said, "Come unto me, all you who are happy – let's celebrate life together. Let's lift each other's spirits."

Or maybe I would have said, "Come unto me, all you who are wealthy. Come and share your prosperity."

Or "Come to me all you who are wise; let's interact intellectually." No, He said "Come to Me – you who are weary; all of you who are bruised and hurting and loaded with sin and iniquity."

And come to Me! Salvation is coming to Jesus! It is not coming to a church or a creed or to some man or to a baptistery or to good works or striving to live a good life.

Salvation is coming to Jesus. And He invites ALL. Anyone who sees their need of a Savior can come to Jesus and they will be saved.

II. The Scope Matthew 11:28, 29c, 30

"Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden (burdened), and I will give you rest ... and you will find rest for your souls, For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."

What is causing the burden? What is causing that heavy weight and burden on your soul? Jesus is talking about soul burden. He is talking about the burden on your heart and on your mind.

He is not talking here about physical rest and refreshment and rejuvenation. What causes your heart and mind to be burdened down? Sin!

Sin will rob you of peace of mind. You will discover that there is conflict and unrest in your soul. You will be burdened by your own spiritual bankruptcy and your sinful rebellion and your guilt.

I said that the rest Jesus is talking about here is not physical rest, but spiritual rest of your soul. But – your spiritual unrest can affect your physical rest.

How many times have you been dog tired and you look forward to a good night's sleep, but when your head hits the pillow, your burden of sin won't let you sleep? The video of your sin keeps playing over and over in your mind. God often deals with us at night about our sins. That weight and burden of sin will not give us peace. Maybe it's an unforgiving spirit. Maybe it's some bitterness. Maybe it's some sin you're contemplating. But there's a heavy burden on your heart and mind.

I think there is a second thing Jesus is talking about. These Pharisees were trying to earn their salvation by keeping the Law and focusing on trying to live up to the "Thou shalt nots" of religion.

How many people struggle inside because they can't live up to some man-made way to go to Heaven? They can't live up to the Law. The Law was given to show us we are sinners; not as a goal for us to strive for. That's why Jesus came. He knew we needed Him – God's perfect Sacrifice – to die for our sins and through His sacrifice, grace, and mercy, by grace through faith, He will forgive us and give us rest.

III. The Supervision Matthew 11:29-30

"My yoke."

Joseph was a carpenter and Jesus followed in his footsteps. Tradition says that Joseph was a craftsman who specialized in making farm implements and one of them was the yoke. Yokes were not one-size-fits-all. Yokes had to be crafted to fit each animal or it would bruise the animal and cause chafing. The yoke had to be shaped and fitted so it would fit properly and it would make the burden easier to bear or pull.

Jesus said, "I want you to yoke up with Me." The yoke was so fitted that the stronger, more experienced animal could take most of the burden and make the burden lighter for the other animal. Life is burdensome, but Jesus wants us to yoke up with Him so life will be easier. Who wouldn't want to do that?

Perhaps the most glorious thing Jesus said is in Verse 29. "Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart."

This is the only time Jesus ever talks about His human personality. He made many statements about His Functionality – what He does and Who He is.

He is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. But this is the only time he ever

talks about His Human Personality. This is the only autobiographical statement He ever says about Himself.

“For I am meek and lowly in heart.” Of all the things He could have said about Himself, He said this about His personality; “For I am meek and lowly in heart.”

The One who spoke the universe into existence and who now holds everything together, the Lord of Lord's. “I am meek and lowly in heart ... And I want you to learn of Me.”

What does that mean? It means He is humble. He is approachable. He is Patient and Kind and Gentle toward everyone – And He wants us to learn that from Him so we'll treat people that way.

Watch Him as He is meek and lowly in heart:

- A lady had been bleeding for twelve years. Because of that she was considered unclean and ostracized from folks. She heard that Jesus was coming her way, but she was to embarrassed to go to Jesus with her problem. So, she thought if she could just touch the hem of His robe, she could be healed. She touched Him, but Jesus felt power go out from Him and He said, “Who touched Me?” When she confessed – listen to Jesus – He said, “Daughter, your faith has made you whole.” Such a tender word: Daughter. It's the same word Jesus used for His own mother. A word of love and respect.

- A woman was caught in the act of adultery. She was dragged before Jesus and thrown before Him. Her accusers said, “The Law says stone her. What do you say?” Jesus stoops down, writes something on the ground and says, “He who is without sin, cast the first stone.” Jesus looks up and says, “Woman (same word He used with His mother). Where are your accusers?” Jesus had sent her accusers away. Tenderly, Jesus said, “Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more.”

- Jesus meets a woman at a well and asks for a drink. She hesitates and Jesus says, “Go call your husband.” She says, “I have no husband.” Jesus didn't say, “Liar!” He said, “I know all about you. You have had five husbands and the one you're living with now you haven't even bothered to marry.” And Jesus gives her living water.

- Jesus sees a wee little man up a tree. And Zacchaeus was a wee little man and a wee little man was he. He climbed up in a sycamore tree for the Lord he wanted to see. And as the Savior passed that way He looked up in the tree; And He said, Zacchaeus, you come down, for I'm going to your house for tea! Everyone else wanted to avoid Zacchaeus, but not Jesus. He was meek and lowly in heart. He is approachable.

- Jesus goes to the shores of Galilee and shouts to some men in a boat. “Children, have you caught anything?” “No!” was the reply. They had been told to wait in Jerusalem for the Holy Spirit to come, but they went back to their old life of fishing. Jesus didn't say, “Backsliders! You caught nothing! Good!” No, He wanted to restore them, have a meal with them, recommission them.

- A leper came up and said, “Jesus, if You wanted to, You could make me whole.” Jesus didn't just shout, “Be clean.” He walked over, touched him, and said, “Be clean!”

Do you see how He treats folks? He is “meek and lowly of heart” and He says, “Learn of Me.”

We need to get to know Jesus, love Him more, and learn from Him.

There's not a friend like the lowly Jesus – no, not one! No not one!
None else could heal all our soul's diseases – no, not one! No, not one!

No friend like Him is so high and holy – No not one! No not one!
And yet no friend is so meek and lowly – No, not one! No not one!

There's not an hour that He is not near us – No, not one! No, not one!
No night so dark but His love can cheer us – No, not one! No, not one!
Jesus knows all about our struggles, He will guide till the day is done;
There's not a friend like the lowly Jesus – No, not one! No, not one!

What a Friend we have in Jesus, All our sins and griefs to bear.

What a privilege to carry Everything to God in prayer.

O what peace we often forfeit, O what needless pain we bear,
All because we do not carry Everything to God in prayer.

Just a closer walk with Thee, Grant it, Jesus, is my plea,
Daily walking close to Thee, Let it be, dear Lord, let it be.

I am weak but Thou art strong; Jesus keep me from all wrong;
I'll be satisfied as long As I walk, let me walk, close to Thee.

When my feeble life is o'er, Time for me will be no more,
Guide me gently, safely o'er To thy kingdom shore, to Thy shore.

There is no one like Jesus! Everyone and everything will ultimately in and of itself disappoint you.
The Reward – the Prize for Christianity is Christ! He is All in All !

WHY PARABLES?

Matthew 13:10-17, 34-35

The Lord Jesus did not come to earth primarily as a teacher, but as our Redeemer; our Savior. Yet, when He taught, He left no doubt but that He was the Greatest Teacher who ever set foot on the face of His earth.

One of the methods He used in His teaching was the use of parables. Good teachers use illustrations to get their point across, and Jesus was a master at it.

As we study the parables:

1. You will see the poor: breaking bread, patching garments, sweeping the floor.
2. You will see a king: marching to war, and a rich man with his barns bursting with increase.
3. You'll see a widow, begging for help from a judge.
4. You'll see a Pharisee and a tax collector praying in the Temple.
5. There are stories about sheep and birds and flowers.
6. You'll see a man beaten and robbed, and thrown in a ditch.
7. You'll see a father, waiting for his son to return home from the far country.

It is interesting to note that our Lord's parables are found exclusively in the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke). There are no parables recorded in the Book of John. The word "parable" is used one time in John in the King James Version, but other translations rightly translate the word "illustration" or "figure of speech."

The Gospel of John does give us the great "I AM" affirmations: I AM the Bread of Life ... I AM the Light of the World ... I AM the Good Shepherd, etc.

By way of introduction to this study on our Lord's parables, I want to share three things with you concerning the parables:

I. The Definition of Parables

What are parables anyway?

One familiar definition of a parable is that a parable is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning.

The Greek word "parabole" (pronounced para-bow-ley) means "to place beside, to cast alongside something else, a comparison."

A parable places the known or well-known beside the unknown or not-so-well-known for the purpose of teaching so that we may learn.

Jesus took common things out of everyday life, things that the Jewish people knew well, and told stories to teach them things they were yet to learn.

- A parable makes truth better known.
- Originally parables were meant to be heard, not read.

Now we read them because we have a record of the life and ministry of our Lord. We've got time to study them, using commentaries and other study notes, thinking about all the different truths we can glean from the story.

But the people who were originally hearing these stories, heard them and made an instant split-second appraisal of what Jesus was saying.

Now, what's my point? While there may be several truths in one parable, generally – as far as parables are concerned – there is

ONE main point that the Lord Jesus wished the people to grasp. One main truth.

A parable is not an allegory, and that's a mistake many people make when studying the parables. An allegory is a story where there is symbolism and the symbols represent something. A parable is not an allegory, every symbol in a parable doesn't necessarily have to represent something. Sometimes they do, but not always, so don't get sidetracked by the symbols and miss the main point of what the Lord was saying.

Don't get bogged down with the details of a parable and then miss the main point. Don't try to make every detail of a parable mean something.

II. The Design of Parables

Why did our Lord use parables? There are five reasons:

1. Parables catch the attention of the listener.

There is something about a story that catches our attention. I've noticed that, in my preaching, people forget a lot of what I say, but they do remember the illustrations I use.

2. Parables compel the people to think for themselves.

Sometimes our minds get lazy. When people discover the truth for themselves, they learn and they feel good when they work the truths out for themselves.

The worst way to help a child with his homework is to do the work for them. They never learn that way. They need to take responsibility and work out truths for themselves.

3. To sow spiritual seed.

Our Lord's parables had a long-term purpose: to sow seed into people's lives that would later grow and bear fruit.

Seeds take time to grow. Jesus planted seeds in the people's minds that would eventually explode when the time was right. Sometimes it may have taken years until the understanding came – long after Jesus had gone – but the seed He had planted bore fruit all the same.

4. Parables were used to reveal truth Matthew 13:34-35

Parables are both mirrors and windows. As mirrors, they help us to see ourselves. As windows, they help us to see life and God.

5. Parables were used to conceal truth Matthew 13:10-16

"Now wait a minute, Preacher. I thought parables were supposed to help us learn truth. I thought the purpose of a story was to illustrate something that you want people to understand and to make truth better known."

Jesus reveals a paradox at work. The parables are designed so that our Lord's disciples will understand their meaning, but the truths will be hidden – veiled – from others – those who have rejected God's Law already and the Christ that was sent.

This is a great principle which God still uses today.

The spiritually receptive get more, while those who reject Him slide further away.

This is a key to spiritual growth. Those who respond to the spiritual light will be given more light and will continue to grow. Those who have refused to accept the simple things of God will not be given any more truth, and the little they have will be taken away from them.

Lack of revelation is due to the lack of willingness to receive it.

III. The Decoding of Parables

The first recorded parable is that of the Sower of the seed. In Matthew 13:3-8 Jesus gives the parable. In Matthew 13:18-23 Jesus decodes or explains the meaning of the parable.

There are some important principles we need to keep in mind as we study and attempt to rightly decode and understand each parable.

1. Study each parable in its context.

Ignore the context and you can make a parable teach almost anything.

2. Look for the main truth in each parable.

There is one main truth in each parable. There may be secondary lessons, but there is one main lesson.

3. Don't try to make the parables "walk on all fours."

Don't try to attach meaning to every detail. Don't spiritualize it. Don't try to make it say what you want it to say.

May the Holy Spirit be our Great Teacher and Guide as we walk through these parables together.

BROADCASTING THE GOSPEL

Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

When we think of the word "broadcasting" today, we think of communicating a message through various forms of media, like radio and television. But "broadcasting" took place years before radio and television. Broadcasting is actually a farming term. It means to scatter or to sow seed over a wide area of land by throwing the seed by the hand.

Jesus talks about sowing the seed of the Gospel, broadcasting the Gospel so all can hear.

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, because not every passage talks about every person, but this one does. I want you to know that God has just called your name and mine in these verses.

Every person here has been identified in these verses. How so? Jesus has given us four responses to the Gospel and there are no more. One of these responses represents you, so listen carefully and see if you can identify yourself in this passage.

Have you ever wondered why some people respond to the Gospel message when it is preached or shared 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.

Look at Matthew 13:23. Notice the words: "Hears ... Understands ... Receives ... Bears fruit."

The climax of every Gospel service is the invitation. It is that time when we respond to what God is doing in our hearts. 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, but God always sees what is going on inside our hearts.

There are three specific parts to this parable:

I. The Seed

Jesus said that the seed represents the Word of God. Well, how is the Word of God like seed?

A. A Seed has Potential, and so does the Word of God.

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! You get down to the life. Take a seed – any seed; maybe a kernel of corn – it may look dry and lifeless, but there is life inside the kernel, but plant that seed in good ground, water it, let God's sun shine on it and you will see life spring forth from it.

So, it is with the Word of God. When God's Word is planted in man's heart, it come alive.

The Bible is God-breathed and life-giving.

B. A Seed has Power, and so does the Word of God.

I have seen the power of a seed as it grows in the cracks of cement and the roots sometimes may crack the concrete, depending on what kind of seed it is.

C. A Seed is Productive, and so is the Word of God.

A seed can reproduce itself. For example, an apple is in an orchard and an orchard is in an apple. You can cut the apple open and count the seed, but you don't know how many apples the seeds in the apple will produce.

But you must plant the seed or nothing will happen; so, it is with the Word of God.

II. The Sower

Anybody can be a sower if they know Christ. All one has to do is to tell others what Christ has done for them. Just tell others how they came to know Christ.

There are a lot of ways to sow the seed. You can tell it one-on-one. You can sing it. You can teach it. You can give a Gospel tract.

The sower sows with Purpose. He sows because he desires to reap a good harvest. He casts forth the seed with expectation of much more in return.

The sower has an investment in his sowing. He invests his time and energy. He gives away or broadcasts what he has. He sows abundantly. The more he sows, the more he reaps.

III. The Soils

This is the main point of this parable. The parable is not mainly about 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 kinds of soil or the different responses of the heart to the Gospel. Listen carefully because you identify with one of these four types of soil.

A. The Calloused Heart Matthew 13:4, 19

The “wayside” refers to a narrow footpath that runs beside or even through the fields. They were the roads of that day. It is a pathway that has been walked on over and over again by both men and animals, until the path becomes so packed and hard that it's almost like concrete. The ground is so hard that the seed sown on it makes no impact on the ground. The seed just bounces off the hard ground and the birds come and feed upon the seed.

Remember that the four types of soil represent the heart-condition of man. I used to think these four soil types were permanent. That is, that a hard-hearted person had always been hard-hearted and would not change. But I have come to see that that is not true. This pathway had not always been a pathway. It became a pathway over time.

The truth is, on any given day, in any given week, this can change. We don't remain in the same spot or place. It is possible for each of us to reflect all four types of soil at different times in our life. We have all been hard or calloused at times. We have all been impulsive and shallow at times. We have all been open and receptive at times. The question is: “How are we responding to and receiving God's Word at this moment?”

The spiritual impact of a Bible message isn't based solely on the content of the message, but How the Word is Heard and Received. That is why Jesus said, “Be careful How you hear.” And, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”

How does a person become hard-hearted? Remember that the heart was soft and receptive at one time. What causes a heart to get hard?

The number one way a person become hard-hearted is to refuse to respond to the convicting of the Holy Spirit in their life. Every time a person says “No” to God, their heart gets a little harder toward God.

Proverbs 29:1.

Then when your heart gets hard, Satan will come and steal the Gospel seed away from your heart when you do hear it. Jesus said that Satan come Immediately and takes away the Word from their hearts.

This is a very serious condition in which to find yourself. The old-time preachers use to call this getting “Gospel Hardened.”

A man told George W. Truett, “Preachers just don't preach like they used to. I can remember when I was young, I came to hear you 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.”

The answer may be found in Jeremiah 4:3: “Break up your fallow ground.”

Plow the hard ground of your heart, break it up, let the Word of God do its work in your hard heart.

B. The Casual Heart Matthew 13:5-6, 20-21

In the hard-hearted soil the seed didn't get IN; here the seed got in, but it couldn't get DOWN!

Much of Palestine is limestone and bedrock and is covered over with a thin layer of soil. If you take your finger and begin to burrow down into the soil, you wouldn't go but about half a joint and you'd hit bedrock.

The seed is scattered and it begins to work its way in. It works its way in but it can't work its way down. There is no soil or water to sustain the plant, so when the sun comes up it is scorched and dies.

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

Perhaps their emotions are stirred or they follow a friend down the aisle or they like the part about escaping hell and going to heaven or they testify and say, "O, I had such a wonderful feeling."

Their emotions are stirred, they come down the aisle, crying buckets of crocodile tears and folks say, "Man, that guy has had an experience with the Lord. He's right with the God. He's really on fire for God." About three weeks later his flame goes out and you never see him anymore.

I call these folks, "Alka Seltzer Christians," they fizzle furiously for a short while and then fade out. They go up like a rocket and fall like a rock!

Were they saved? No! They made a decision but they don't make a commitment. How do I know they are not saved? They produce no fruit. They go back to their old ways.

C. The Crowded Heart Matthew 13:7, 22

These folks want the best of both worlds. They want the benefits of the Gospel, but they still cling to the old life of sin. Without a conscious break from the old life of sin, this person doesn't have a chance of being saved. The cares of the world, the sins of the old life, choke out God's life.

They have never repented of their sins and turned to God and committed to Him. Are they saved? No! There is no fruit of salvation in their life.

D. The Converted Heart Matthew 13:8, 23

The only difference between these types of soil is fruit. What kind of fruit does the Gospel seed produce?

- Colosians 1:10 Good Works
- Romans 1:12 A Burden for Souls
- Hebrews 13:15 A Spirit of Praise and Thanksgiving
- Romans 6:22;
- Philippians 1:11 A Life of Holiness and Righteousness
- Romans 15:27-28 The Sharing of Material Goods
- Galatians 5:22-23 The Fruit of the Spirit

Jesus tells us something important in Matthew 13:8-9. Jesus doesn't want us to become discouraged as we sow the seed. He tells us up front that everyone will not respond to the Gospel and be saved. In fact, only about 25 percent will be saved. That means 75 percent who hear the Gospel will not respond to a full commitment to Christ.

That's not to discourage us; it is to challenge us to keep on sowing the Seed. Hearts can be changed! How glorious when they are!

The question is: How about your heart? Has there been a change in your life? Are you bearing fruit as evidence that you are saved?

COUNTERFEIT CHRISTIANS **Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43**

The first parable our Lord gave in Matthew 13 was the parable of the Soils. There were four types of soil: the Wayside soil which was the hard-hearted soil; then the Stony ground of emotionalism; then the Thorny ground where the life was choked out; and then

the Good soil that produced fruit.

In this second parable there are some similarities to the first parable, but there are also some great differences.

1. In the first parable the sower was anyone who goes forth sowing the Word of God. But in the second parable the sower is definitely the Lord Jesus Christ (Matthew 13:37 The Son of Man was Jesus' favorite term to describe Himself).

2. In the first parable the seed was the Word of God. But in this parable the seed are people – not the Word of God, but people.

3. In the first parable all of the seed was good, for it was the Word of God. But in this parable some seed is good and some is bad.

– The good seed is called “wheat” (Matthew 13:25, 29, 30) ... “Children of the kingdom” (Matthew 13:38) ... “the righteous” (Matthew 13:43).

– The bad seed is called “tares” (Matthew 13:25, 26, 29, 30, 40) ... “the children of the wicked one” (Matthew 13:38).

4. In the first parable the enemy operated by coming and stealing away the seed of the word of God that had been sown. But in this parable the enemy actually sows his own seed.

– The enemy is the same in both parables ... he is the devil, Satan.

– Jesus, along with the saints of the New Testament, believed that there was (and is) an evil personality known as the devil. In our day we have thrown this doctrine aside. The devil has lost his terror. But Satan is real. No one can explain away the existence of evil in our world. One man said, “I know the devil is real today, because I've done business with him!” Sadly, that's true of all of us.

5. In the first parable we saw a harvest, but we saw only a good harvest. In this parable we see both a good harvest and a bad harvest. There is coming a harvest not only to the saved of God, but also to the lost.

Before I get to the parable, let me call your attention to the fact that you will find two similar phrases in the New Testament, but there is a great difference between them.

The phrases are “the kingdom of heaven” and “the kingdom of God.” What's the difference?

- The Kingdom of heaven appears only in the Gospel of Matthew and speaks of the sum total of all professing Christians on the face of the earth at any given point in time. That includes Baptist and Methodist and Presbyterians and Church of Christ and Roman Catholics and Jehovah's Witness and Mormons and the cults. It includes all those who “profess to know Jesus Christ personally.” The Kingdom of heaven is made up of both saved and lost who say they are saved.

- The Kingdom of God is made up only of true believers ... of those who are truly saved. Luke 17:21 says, “the kingdom of God is within you.”

- There are only two kinds of people – saved and lost.

When the Titanic went down hundreds and thousands of people gathered around, waiting to know what happened to their loved ones who had set sail on the Titanic. Word spread that some had been saved in lifeboats, but many others had drowned in the cold, icy sea. These people began to cry out. “What happened to my loved one ... my dad ... my mother ... my wife?” So there in Liverpool, England, in order to cut down on the chaos, they put up two massive poster sign. One said, “These known to be saved.” The other, “Those known to be lost.”

That's the way God looks at people today. Every person is either saved or lost.

Now, let's go back to the parable.

These verses remind me of a prank that happened in New Albany around 1965. They were going to beautify the courthouse grounds. A bunch of old men had formed a club around the courthouse – the spit and whittle club – and for years had sat and whittled and spat Redman on the ground. Nothing could grow on the stained ground.

So, some ladies decided they were going to change things. They raked and dug and put new top soil down and put out grass seed and put out flowers. The night after all of the lady's hard work, unknown to them, some teenage boys got some turnip seeds and sowed over what the ladies had done. As far as I know, none of the town officials found out who had done it, but they had a mess on their hands.

That's what we find in this parable. Our Lord sows good seed and the devil comes and sows over the ground with tares.

In the kingdom of heaven there is a mixture: There are the real Christians and there is the counterfeit. That shouldn't surprise us, for Satan is the counterfeiter and imitator. Jesus told this parable to explain to His disciples how good and evil would co-exist during this Church Age.

A farmer plants a wheat field. He uses good seed and expects a good harvest. But at night the enemy plants tares among the wheat.

What are tares? Basically, they are weeds that go by the name "Bearded Darnel." In the early stages of development, it looks exactly like wheat. It is only when the plant matures and the kernels have formed in the head of the genuine wheat plant that the two plants can be told apart.

The bottom line is this: When the wheat develops and the kernels grow inside of the wheat plant, the weight of the kernels causes the wheat stalk to bend, making the head appear to be bowing toward the earth. The tares on the other hand, have light heads, filled with little black seeds and they continue to stand straight and tall.

The tares are those who may look saved, act saved, sound saved, but who are in truth deceived about their salvation. The tares are those who expect to go to heaven when they die, but will, in fact, go to hell.

Listen to what the Bible exhorts us to do:

- 2 Corinthians 13:5
- 2 Peter 1:10

Three things I want you to see about the wheat and tares:

I. The Sowing of the Tares Among the Wheat Matthew 13:24-25

A. Who planted the tares?

Satan – the intruder and imitator, comes and sows the tares among the wheat.

Satan is not against religion. In fact, he is up to his ears in religion.

B. Why did he do it?

Here you get a real insight into the methods of Satan.

1. Notice carefully that Satan mimicked Christ.

He did not sow thorns or thistles. Had he done that his work would have been easily detected. Rather, he chose something that so closely resembles the genuine article that the one cannot be distinguished from the other until harvest time.

2. The tares were exposed to the wheat for a long time.

Sapping as much from the wheat as possible and hindering their growth. Satan is in the business of undoing all the Lord is doing.

3. The tares couldn't be uprooted because its roots were entangled with the wheat's roots. You have to be careful pulling up weeds in the flower bed lest you pull up the flower also.

4. Satan worked at night – SECRETLY – then went his way.

Notice: Satan didn't sow in his own field, but in the Lord's field. Satan's work is always dirty, dark, and deceitful.

C. When does he do it?

At night ... while men slept ... when their guard was down. Think of Samson who slept ... and the disciples who slept ... and the condition of the Church today. It's time for the Church to wake up and stay alert.

II. The Similarity of the Tares to the Wheat Matthew 13:26

Notice the phrase – "The blade sprung up." When the two began to grow together, you couldn't tell which one was which.

As the wheat grew, the tares grew alongside them. The tares did everything the wheat did and they looked good doing it.

Satan is not bothered by folks being religious, as long as they don't know Jesus. In fact, he delights in it.

One thing that made Vietnam so tough to fight was that we couldn't tell who we were fighting. In the day time the soldiers worked in the field and at night time they fought as soldiers.

Jesus had twelve disciples; yet, one of them was a devil. Even at the end, no one suspected Judas.

That's the way things are in the Church. We cannot tell the difference between the genuine and the artificial. The tares in the Church dress right, talk right, walk right, and give every appearance that they are saved. Tares sing in the choir, serve as deacons, attend faithfully, even stand in the pulpit and preach the Word of God. The fact is we can't tell who is real and who is not, unless we happen to be the Holy Spirit, and none of us are.

I wish I could say to you that every person whose name is on the roll here at New Hope Baptist Church was a born again Christian, but I know that's not true because of what the Word of God says.

God has planted many good seeds here. But Satan also has seed here. Now that doesn't mean they are mean, contrary, and always negative. How do lost people become members of our church?

1. Some join a church with a wrong motive.

One man said, "I joined the church because I was getting married and my fiancée was a Baptist and she wanted a Baptist husband, so I walked down the aisle and told the preacher I wanted to be a Baptist. I never did get saved, but I'm a Baptist."

2. Sometimes folks join the church because they want to get somebody off their back.

Maybe friends or family put pressure on them, so they join.

3. Sometimes folks join because it's an opportunity to make business contacts.

4. Sometimes folks join just to be with their peers.

"All my fellow classmates come to this church"; or "folks I work with go here," etc.

5. Tragically, sometimes folks join and are lost because they were not adequately dealt with when they came forward.

You couldn't tell the difference between the wheat and the tares UNTIL ... Matt. 13:26 ... "it brought forth fruit."

- "By their fruit you shall know them."
- The black seeds in the head of the tares are light and allows the tares to stand tall.
- God sends forth His angels to gather and bind the tares together and to burn them.

He describes the place where the tares are to be cast as a "furnace of fire." That term is the most expressive image of suffering (Matthew 13:42).

– There will be "wailing" – tears, crying because of the suffering and pain (Matthew 13:42).

– There will be "gnashing of teeth" because of the pain. And there will be no end to the suffering ... for ever and ever (Matthew 13:42). Many do not believe in hell today, but God has not eliminated hell because modern man no longer believes in hell.

A lot of folk think that just because they live a long time as tares and no judgment has come to them, yet, they think they will escape God's judgment.

Robert Ingersoll, the notorious atheist, used to exalt defiantly against God's existence. "It was usually the custom of Robert Ingersoll, at the close of his lectures, to 'prove' the non-existence of God by taking his watch from his pocket, and arrogantly say, 'If there is a God, I defy Him to strike me dead within the next five minutes!'

"Standing before the audience, with watch in hand, he could count off the minutes: 'One minute; two minutes; three minutes; three minutes; four minutes; five minutes!' And then with a smirk of satisfaction wreathing his face, he would triumphantly say, 'There, I told you there was no God!'" (W. B. Knight).

But what Ingersoll did not realize was that he was simply one of those tares in the wheat field which in God's grace was allowed to stay there until harvest time. Ingersoll being alive did not prove that there was no disapproval of his being in the wheat field. His not being struck dead did not prove that God did not disapprove of his evil. But the day was coming when the Divine householder would order the harvesters into the field. And when that day came, Ingersoll, as a tare, would be put in the bonfire while the wheat was put

in the barn. There are no tares in God's barn and no wheat in God's bonfire.

Harvest time is coming ... accountability day is coming ... separation will take place.

Well, what are we to do about the tares growing with the wheat? Two suggestions are given:

Matthew 13:27-30

1. Get rid of the tares.

Both the master and his servants want to get rid of the tares. The difference comes in how to go about getting rid of the tares.

– The servants said, “Do you want US to go and deal with them?” (Matt. 13:29)

– Tare pulling is one of the most appealing methods dealing with evil, but Jesus did not sanction this method. Why?

a. Because pulling tares required wisdom and judgment that alone belongs to God.

b. Tare pulling endangers the wheat that grows beside it. Have you ever been hoeing corn or some other plant in the garden and you intend to cut down only the weed that is next to the corn, but you make a mislick and cut the corn also?

You end up hurting the wheat when you try to destroy the tares.

2. What is our Lord's remedy? Let both grow together.

– Don't focus on the tares but on the wheat. Preach a positive gospel, live a positive life.

– “Be not overcome with evil, but overcome evil with good.”

That's not to say there's not to be any discipline, but the purpose of discipline is not to “root out”, but to restore.

III. The Separation of the Tares from the Wheat Matthew 13:30, 40-43

The day of harvest will eventually arrive. The reapers are sent into the field to gather the tares first, and then the wheat.

It is easy to tell the difference between the wheat and the tares now that both are mature. The wheat is filled with kernels and the kernels are heavy and cause the wheat plant to bow or bend toward the ground.

There's a great day coming, a great day coming
A great day coming by and by,
When the saints and sinners shall be parted right and left.
Are you ready for that day to come?

There's a sad day coming, a sad day coming
A sad day coming by and by,
When the sinner shall hear his doom,
“Depart I know you not.”
Are you ready for that day to come?

Notice: Tares will be gathered to be burned.

Wheat will be gathered in My barn.

Do you know Jesus as your Savior?

THE WHEAT AND THE WEEDS

Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

Before reading Matthew 13:36-43.

Last week I preached on this same passage and I focused on two things: (1) The difference between the Parable of the Soils and

this passage about the Wheat and the Tares; (2) the part Satan played in the sowing of the Tares in His parable. Now I want to deal with this parable from a different angle.

Read Matthew 13:36-43.

Jesus voluntarily gave the disciples the meaning of the Parable of the Soils, but this Parable of the Wheat and the Tares is the only other parable that the disciples asked Jesus to explain. They didn't ask Him to explain the Parables of the Mustard Seed or the Pearl of Great Price or the Dragnet, but they did ask Him to explain this Parable of the Wheat and the Tares. Why? I think it was because there was some of the elements of this parable that bothered them.

Here is the context of this parable. A farmer plants good wheat seed in his field, expecting a good harvest. However, at night, while his servants slept, his enemy entered the field and planted tares among the wheat. The tares were known as "Bearded Darnels," which in the early stages of development, looks exactly like wheat. So in this parable the soil where the seed is planted is the same, but the seed are different. It is only when the plant has matured and the kernels have formed in the head of the genuine wheat plant that the two plants could be told the one from the other.

The bottom line is this: The wheat plant has wheat kernels that are rather heavy growing in the head of the plant that causes the wheat stalk to bend and bow to the ground. The tares, on the other hand, have light heads containing little black poisonous seeds and its stalk continues to stand straight and tall.

The servants see the problem and offer to pull up the tares, but the master, knowing that the roots of the tares intertwined with those of the wheat, forbids them. He knows if the tares are pulled up, that much of the wheat will be uprooted along with them. He says to let them grow together until harvest time, then send the reapers to gather only the tares together and bind them to be burned. Then the wheat will be gathered and placed in his barn.

Satan is the great counterfeiter. Whatever good thing God does, Satan tries to counterfeit it.

- The Bible says that God is light; Satan presents himself as the angel of light.
- God has His kingdom of righteousness; Satan has his kingdom of unrighteousness.
- God has His saints in His Church; Satan puts his look-alike saints in God's Church.

Satan doesn't try to produce something extremely different from the real thing because then it would be easily identifiable. Rather, he produces something as close to the real thing as possible.

Satan will say, "Yes, Jesus and the Church is good, but put your trust in what you do as well – in keeping religious rules and religious rituals."

Billy Graham has said his greatest mission field has been the rolls of churches. During his crusades, about 70 percent of the people who make professions of faith were members of churches. They were weeds among the wheat. There were good people who probably thought they were already saved. Jesus described them in Matthew 7:21-23. Then Graham said that he would be thankful if 50 percent of those who came forward and made a profession of faith in his crusades were truly born again.

As the old song says, "Everybody talking about heaven ain't going there."

The wheat are those who are truly saved and going to heaven. The tares are those who have the appearance of salvation. They are those who look saved, act saved, sound saved, who expect to go to heaven, but who in truth are deceived about their salvation.

I am almost 100 percent sure that I am preaching to some today who are tares. I'm not judging anyone, but Jesus said that we are not to be deceived, there are tares among the wheat in the local church. Now, they think they are saved. They hope they are saved. They act as saved as anyone around them, but they have never been born again.

I used to say that there are only two people who know if you are saved: you and God. But I've come to realize that there are some who think they are saved and they are not.

"Preacher, are you trying to get us to doubt our salvation?" No! A thousand times, No! I know some preachers who do, and it is a sad, sad tactic.

A preacher came to the church I was pastoring, preached messages all week long that were designed to make folks doubt if they were really saved. A fine young lady who was a leader in our youth group came forward, saying she was not sure she was saved. I asked her to go back to the time when she thought she was saved. She did and I really believed she was saved, but she still doubted. Finally, I said, "You know what the Bible says you must do to be saved. Would you do that now?" She did and then I asked, "Did anything happen in your heart?" She said, "No, my mind kept going back to the first time I asked Jesus to save me." I said,

“Listen, you can only be saved one time, and the Holy Spirit has borne witness to your spirit that you are saved.”

You see, the Bible says we can KNOW we are saved – I John 5:13. God wants us to have the assurance of our salvation. It's like asking someone, “Are you married?” Nobody says, “I think so” or “I hope so.” They know! You can have that same assurance about knowing Jesus and knowing you are saved!

Do real Christians doubt? Yes! John the Baptist did.

Why do some doubt?

1. There are basically two kinds of folks: Introverts and Extroverts. An extrovert is that happy-go-lucky person who seems not to have a care in the world. Not much gets to him. An introvert is always looking inward, examining himself inwardly; questioning things. The introvert is the one more likely to doubt, but he is also more likely to go into the deeper things of God.

2. Sin in one's life will cause one to doubt – Isaiah 59:1-2

3. Lack of fellowship with the Lord.

4. Difficult circumstances, hurtful situations, great personal loss, and depression will cause doubt.

I have one objective in preaching this message and that is to get each of us to do what Paul and Peter commanded us to do:

- 2 Corinthians 13:5

- 2 Peter 1:10

Let me point out three things about the parable of the Wheat and Weeds:

I. Both Were Planted Together Matthew 13:24-25

Both the wheat and the tares shared the common experience of having been planted. The difference is seen in two things:

A. The Character of the Seed

The wheat seed produced wheat while the tares produced tares. On the spiritual level, the SEED is that thing we have placed our faith in. The truly born again person is trusting Jesus Christ alone for their salvation. The lost person is trusting something other than Jesus or Jesus-plus something else.

“Preacher, my Mama assures me that when I was little, I trusted Jesus.” Friend, your Mama cannot assure you of your salvation. You had better not depend on the assurances of others when it comes to your eternal destiny.

“Well, it's kind of fuzzy and I don't remember much about it, but everyone tells me I have been saved.” Hell will be filled with folks who base their salvation on some fuzzy experience when they were a child.

Here's the question: “What do you base your hope of heaven on?” Be sure your faith is in Jesus.!

B. The Character of the Sower

The good seed was sown by the owner of the field; the tares were sown by his enemy. Why did the enemy do this? It was an effort to ruin the crop and it was an attack upon the farmer.

Satan is in the business of sowing tares among the Lord's wheat. Why? He knows that if he can place enough of the artificial among the genuine, then he can devastate the entire crop. Satan knows that enough lost people in the Church will give the Church a bad name.

II. Both Progressed Together Matthew 13:26-30a

A. There was the Activity of the Wheat

This is interesting, both the wheat and the tares grew. As the wheat grew, so the tares grew alongside them. They did everything the wheat did and they looked good doing it.

It's obvious saved people grow in the Lord, but did you know that it's possible for a lost church member to grow in the things of the Lord? They sit under sound Bible teaching where the Bible is explained and made clear, and they can learn some things about the Bible. They can join in the activities of the church and have a natural talent to sing in the choir and join in the fellowships of the

church, all without being saved.

B. There was the Appearance of the Wheat

The tares may talk and act or give like wheat, and we can't tell that they are tares. Only God can.

C. There was none of the Abundance of the Wheat

One thing the tares cannot produce – Fruit. Or may I say, lasting fruit. Man judges by outward appearances; God knows the heart.

III. Both Were Processed Together Matthew 13:30b

Eventually the day of harvest arrived. The examination of fruit begins. Think about that day when you stand before the all-knowing God of the universe. If He were to ask, "Why should I let you into My heaven?", what would you say?

I think there will be some great surprises on that day. There will be some there you never expected to see there. Others that you thought would be there will not be there.

"Nothing in my hand I bring; simply to Thy cross I cling!"

Without Jesus, Who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, we will never enter His heaven!

IS BIGGER BETTER? Matthew 13:31-32

Let me remind you that there are seven prophetic parables given in Matthew 13. Jesus gets into a boat, pushes away a little from the shore so He could use the water to amplify His speech, and gives seven parables in consecutive order. Jesus gave these parables to show what His people could expect during the Church Age – that time between the birth of the Church in Acts 2 and the time He returns for His Church.

Jesus declares in these parables that, although the Church started out with only believers, Satan will seek to corrupt and pollute the Church by putting counterfeiters or unbelievers in the Church as well. Satan will put a mixture of true and false believers in the Church or, as we saw in the second parable, Satan will seek to sow his tares in God's field of wheat.

Jesus gave the interpretation of the first two parables, but left us with the task of interpreting the last five. It was as though Jesus was trying to train His disciples in the art of interpretation. The problem is that the other five parables of Matthew 13 have suffered much misinterpretation. Some very fine men, men that I respect greatly, have misinterpreted several of these parables in my opinion.

There are several rules of interpretation we must keep in mind if we are to rightly interpret these parables.

1. There is the Law of First Mention. If you are unsure of what something means in the Bible, go back to the first time it was used in the Bible. The meaning or interpretation will remain consistent throughout the whole of Scripture. That includes symbols, names, names of countries. Scripture NEVER uses a symbol in two conflicting ways; it uses them consistently throughout. Use the symbol the same way wherever it appears.

2. Scripture is its own interpreter. The best commentary on the Bible is the Bible itself.

3. All seven of these parables were given on the same day and are connected and they are connected as a whole. There is a common theme running through all seven of the parables.

Notice that this third parable begins the same way the second parable of the wheat and tares began. Notice Matthew 13:24-25, 31: "And another parable He put forth to them." That is, He laid one parable along side the other parables. Each parable must be interpreted in the light of the other.

- The parable of the soils speaks of true Christians.
- The parable of the wheat and tares speaks of false Christians.
- The parable of the mustard seed speaks of false growth.
- The parable of the leaven speaks of false doctrine

Has it ever bothered you that so many folks fall for false religion or cults? You watch some television preacher who preaches some false things and folks flock to hear them, their ministry gets rich, and you wonder, "How can folks swallow that stuff?"

The truth is, most folks don't know the difference in true and false doctrine, especially the teaching that mixes the true with the false.

Now let's look at this parable.

I. The Error

Did you notice that in the first three parables that something was planted?

- In all three parables something is sown – good seed, wheat, mustard seed.
- In all three parables, something grows.
- In all three parables, Satan is involved: In the parable, the birds take away the seed that lands on the hard soil; in the second parable Satan over-sows tares on the wheat that Jesus has sown; in the parable of the mustard seed, birds (which speak of Satan) came and nest in the branches of the tree.

I told you that to rightly interpret parables, you must constantly make the symbols mean the same thing all the way through. And yet, here is the way about 80 percent of Bible students interpret this passage and why.

They say that the Lord Jesus knew that His interpretation of the first two parables would discourage His disciples. Think about the parable of the soil. He said that 75 percent would reject the good seed of the gospel. And then in the parable of the wheat and the tares there would be a mixture of true and false believers in the Church. And that the false looked so much like the real that you could not tell them apart until the harvest. And the disciples were disappointed.

So, they say, the Lord wanted to encourage them, so He says a mustard seed was planted and a wonderful thing took place. The mustard seed which was to produce a herb, produced instead a tree so large that the birds were able to come and roost on the limbs. Look how it has grown! It started out so small, but it became great in size.

They say that Jesus started out with 12 men, then as He ascended back to heaven, He had 120 in the upper room praying, then at Pentecost, 3,000 believed, etc. Then they say, believers in the gospel will continue to grow until the whole world is consumed by it and things are going to get better and better until Jesus comes and ushers in the millennium.

If that's what this third parable teaches, it is a clear contradiction of the first two parables.

And, too, if that is what this parable is teaching, it has never happened. There has never been an all-Christian nation or community or Church.

Then, too, the meaning of the symbols would have to change, and that is against the rules of interpretation. Jesus said in the first parable that the birds represented Satan and evil; and not something good that we could glory in.

II. The Explanation

It should be evident to all that our understanding of this parable hinges upon the correct interpretation of its three central figures: the mustard seed, the great tree which sprang from it, and the birds of the air which came and lodged in its branches.

So, what do each of these represent?

A. The Mustard Seed

The mustard seed is so small, about the size and weight of one piece of black pepper; and it makes such little impact on men. It isn't worth much. It doesn't have much influence.

Here Jesus is evidently stressing the apparent insignificance of the gospel. It doesn't look like much. It doesn't sound very impressive to many people. It is so simple that little children can understand it. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved." It's insignificant; it is despised!

But let someone actually believe it and see what happens! Let them really trust Christ with their heart and invite Him into their life and it is the most transforming thing that they can experience! It's the beginning of a new life for them!

B. A Tree

Here is the key to the passage. Have you ever seen a mustard tree? No! The mustard plant dies every year. It's impossible for it to grow into a tree. If the herb became a tree, it would no longer be good for what it was designed for.

Mustard does not grow into a tree. Then why did Jesus say it did? There is the heart of the parable. Our Lord obviously intended to

teach that this growth is abnormal, unnatural growth. It is something different than is to be expected.

Instead of the lowly, humble plant you would expect from a mustard seed, there would be a huge, unnatural tree with its towering branches which speak of prominence and loftiness with its roots sinking deep into the ground. But we are strangers and pilgrims, moving through this world; not grounded in this world.

What is the normal result that you expect when the gospel comes into the human heart? What kind of character does it produce? From the Scriptures and from personal experience, we know that it produces lowliness of heart.

It takes away pride, destroys egotism and self-centeredness and renders a person humble and meek, gentle toward others, ready to serve.

Jesus said, "He that is greatest in the kingdom of heaven must become the least of all. If any would become great among you, let him become the servant of all" (Mark 9:35).

That is the normal, natural, usual result of the mustard seed's growth.

III. Some Examples of Mustard Trees

We still have one more symbol to look at. We have seen the Mustard Seed and the Tree. Now what about the Birds?

To be consistent with the first parable, these birds represent the evil activities of Satan. Birds are the natural enemies of the sower. Like the birds, Satan is described as "the prince of the power of the air."

So, what is the prophetic message of the parable? Are there examples of false growth?

1. There is an example in the area of Political Power

In Daniel 4 we are told of a vision of a tree with its branches spreading far. God had put Nebuchadnezzar in the place of King in Babylon. For a time, he honored God; then he began to take credit unto himself for what God had done. God appears to him and tells him that he will go insane. He will eat grass like oxen, his hair will grow to the length of eagles' wings and his finger and toe nails will be like bird's claws, for seven years.

2. Constantine – 300 A.D. – was going to battle and before the battle saw a vision of the cross in the sky and took it as a message from God and he went into battle with the theme, "Conquer by the Cross." He commanded that all his men profess Christ and be baptized unto regeneration.

3. In 700 A.D., Rome set the Catholics up as the official state religion with its false teaching of purgatory, the separation of Pope and laity.

What about today? Jude 4. Instead of the Church changing the world, the world is changing the Church. The influence of the world has come into the Church.

Someone said that the Church is so much like the world that "It is strictly for the birds."

The Church needs to get back to being the Church. We need real reverence for God, holy living, a ready testimony for the Lord, and real compassion for the lost.

THE CASE OF THE SNEAKY HOUSEWIFE

Matthew 13:33

This is one of the shortest parables of our Lord ... only one verse long.

I remind you that our Lord did not begin to use parables until late in His ministry, and then the bulk of His teaching was done in parables.

When His disciples asked Him why He used parables, He said He did so for two main reasons. See Matthew 13:10-11.

1. To Reveal

These mysteries of the kingdom were given to reveal God's truth to believers, but to conceal His truths from unbelievers.

2. To Conceal

A lost person may hear or read these stories and, yet, they will not understand what Jesus is trying to teach. For example: A person may be told about the new birth, but until he or she experiences the new birth in their heart, they cannot understand what Jesus means when He says, "You must be born again."

This is the fourth in a cluster of seven parables that Jesus gave in Matthew 13. The first four parables were given in public, for all to hear. The last three parables in Matthew 13 are given in private, only to His disciples.

1. The Parable of the Seed and the Soils speaks of the Receptiveness of man's heart to the Gospel.
2. The Parable of the Wheat and Tares speaks of False Christians mixed with the True Christians in the Church.
3. The Parable of the Mustard Seed speaks of false Growth in the Church.
4. The Parable of the Leaven speaks of False Doctrine in the Church.

Three things I want us to look at in this parable:

I. The Problem

The most popular interpretation of this parable is the wrong interpretation. Many read the parable like this: "The kingdom of heaven is like leaven", and they stop there. But Jesus did not stop there. Jesus did not say that the kingdom was like leaven, but that the kingdom of heaven is like a loaf (meal) with leaven in it.

They wrongly interpret that the woman is the Church and the leaven is the Gospel and the meal or loaf is the world.

Here is the wrong picture: The woman or the Church takes the Gospel or leaven and puts it into the world until the whole world is affected by the Gospel and the world is changed for the better and we all become Christians.

Let me give some reasons why that interpretation is wrong:

1. The Lord has committed His Gospel into the hands of men, not women. Not that women cannot teach, for they can, but the preaching of the Gospel is a man's responsibility.
2. The false interpretation has been disproved by years and years of history. The world is not getting better and better, but it is getting worse and worse.
3. Leaven in the Bible always speaks of evil; not good. To rightly interpret Scripture one must be consistent in his use and meaning of symbols.
4. If this interpretation is true, then the Gospel has failed. The majority of folks today have rejected the Gospel; not embraced it.
5. Never did Jesus ever say to hide the Gospel as the woman did here. In fact, just the opposite is true.

– He did say, "You are the light of the world ... don't put your light under a bushel."

– He did say to "Shout the Gospel from the roof top."

– He did say that "nothing is to be done in secret."

II. The Process

The three symbols given in this parable are important: The Loaf (meal) ... The Lady (woman) ... The Leaven.

A. The Loaf (meal)

The phrase "three measures of meal" is found several times in the Bible and always refers to worship and fellowship.

Let's go back to our old friend of Bible Interpretation: The Principle of First Mention. The first time something is mentioned in the Bible gives insight into the meaning and that meaning is carried over to the rest of Scripture.

So, where do we first find the phrase, "three measures of meal?"

1. Genesis 18:6-7; 19:3

Abraham was in his tent by the oaks of Mamre one day and he looked out the door of the tent and saw three strangers approaching. He went to meet them, for strangers were an uncommon sight in those days and anyone passing by was offered hospitality. He welcomed them and offered them, according to Genesis 18:6-7, three measures of meal baked into bread which Sarah made in the

tent while they were fellowshiping together out under the trees. During their conversation Abraham suddenly realized that the Son of God Himself was visiting him, accompanied by two angels. That was the beginning of the use of the three measures of meal as a symbol.

What did it mean? It was a symbol of the fellowship of God with His people and their fellowship with one another. It was a picture of oneness between God and His people.

2. Exodus 12:13-20

The second time we see this is when God told His people to prepare for leaving Egypt. They were to prepare unleavened bread for their journey. They were to cleanse their house of ALL leaven in preparation for Passover. They were to go all through their houses with lights and candles looking for leaven. Never once was leaven ever used as a symbol of anything good.

3. Judges 6:19

Gideon prepared bread for the Angel of the Lord with “three measures of meal.”

4. I Samuel 1:24

Hannah presented bread made with three measures of meal before the Lord when she brought Samuel back to the Temple for him to serve there.

5. I Corinthians 5:6-8

When Paul told the Church to deal with immorality in the Christian church there, he warned that if they did not do so, that a little leaven would leaven the whole lump.

B. The Lady (the woman)

The lady represents the Church, but not the pure Church. The Lord presents the woman as both cleansed and corrupt. Again, she is the mixture of good and evil; of true and false.

Notice: She “TOOK” the leaven; it was not received, but taken and she “HID” it in the meal. If it was something good, why would it have to be something she had to hide?

C. The Leaven (yeast)

Leaven in the Bible always represents something evil.

- Leaven changes the character of the meal. It is not tainted.
- Leaven is unseen and works silently.
- Leaven works from the inside, but affects everything with incredible transforming power.
- Leaven hidden in the loaf represents the way Satan comes against the truth. It works quietly but quickly.
- Leaven works best in a lukewarm condition – not too hot and not too cold.

The Bible mentions several forms of leaven: Legalism, Hypocrisy, Liberalism, Immorality, Worldliness.

III. The Product

When the world gets into the Church, it loses its power and effectiveness. The Church becomes more and more like the world. There is lack of power because there is lack of commitment. Other things become more important than the Church and one's commitment to Christ.

The answer: Deal with evil influences that would come into the Church.

GOD'S PERSONAL TREASURE
Matthew 13:44-46

There are seven prophetic parables in Matthew 13. When Jesus gave the first four parables, He got into a ship, pushed out a little from the shore, and taught them in parables. In the first four parables Jesus taught a mixed crowd of both saved and lost.

But when Jesus gives the last three parables of Matthew 13, He goes into the house – most likely Simon Peter's house – to teach only His disciples (See Matthew 13:36).

Why? Because He wants to reveal only to His own that although Satan is going to be busy during His absence – for He is going to return to His Father. He is still sovereign and His purposes will be fulfilled.

So, He takes His own into the house to reveal to them what will be going on in glory behind the scenes and what He will be up to in heaven, although He is absent from the earth. Jesus is about to give His disciples some “inside information” about the mystery of the kingdom.

We need to understand our Lord's heart for three groups of the human race: the Jews, the Gentiles, and the church of God (See I Corinthians 10:32). The last three parables of Matthew 13 deals with these three groups and tells us what our Lord's behind the scenes plan for each of them is.

Here is the key to understanding the last three parables of Matthew 13:

- Matthew 13:44, The Hidden Treasure represents Israel, or the Jews.
- Matthew 13:45-46, The Pearl of Great Price represents the Church.
- Matthew 13:47, The Dragnet represents the Gentiles.

Let me share an insight that will help us understand these last three parables of Matthew 13.

When God created Adam and the Spirit of God breathed life into him, he was a man who had never been polluted by sin and was born without a sin nature. God gave Adam the authority, the opportunity, and the responsibility to oversee, tend, and rule this planet. But Satan came to Adam to tempt him, and Adam submitted to Satan when he ate of the forbidden fruit. The Bible says to whom you submit, of him you become the servant. When Adam submitted to Satan, he became the servant of Satan and handed to him the title deed, the authority and the dominion of this planet. Thus, the ownership of the world changed hands – from God to man to Satan.

When there are hurricanes or storms that bring about devastation and destruction, insurance companies refer to them as “acts of God.” Actually, many of them are acts of Satan. God gets a bad rap and gets blamed for what the Enemy does.

Will the title deed to the earth remain in the devil's grasp forever? Revelation 5 gives us the answer. Notice Revelation 5:1.

Now, what is this book or scroll? It is a title deed to a piece of property. The scroll sealed with seven seals is the title deed to planet earth, which was given to Adam, who in turn, passed it on to Satan.

Now look at Revelation 5:2: In other words, “Who can meet the requirements? Who is worthy to take back the title deed of earth from Satan?” Since Satan has held the title deed there has been tragedy, war, rape, disease, difficulty, and death.

Notice it does not say, “Who is WILLING?” Many men have been willing to TRY to take control of the world – Alexander the Great, Napoleon, Hitler. They were all willing to take control. But the angel is not asking, “Who is willing?” The angel asks, “Who is worthy?”

Look at Revelation 5:3-4. John wept (“sobbing in agony”) at the thought of the world indefinitely in the hand and control and dominion of the Enemy. Do you mean this earth will continue in war, disease, hunger, tension, destruction and death – forever? John wept because no one was found worthy to take the scroll from the hand of the Enemy.

Notice Revelation 5:5-7. Jesus comes forward, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, saying, “I will redeem the scroll,” and the rest of Chapter 5 is a glorious outpouring of praise, adoration, and thanksgiving that someone was able to take the title deed of the planet. Worthy is the Lamb! He alone is worthy!

How did He do it? Look back at Matthew 13 where Jesus gives us the last three parables that explains the redemptive process.

Read Matthew 13:44.

What could this treasure be? What is so valuable to Christ that He would sell all to purchase this treasure? May I suggest the treasure is Israel?

I. Israel's Favor

In the Old Testament Israel is declared to be a treasure that belongs to God. Why Israel? God did not choose the land and the people of Israel because they were the greatest, or the best, or the most spiritual. Not because they were wiser or sinned less than

the other peoples of the world.

Israel received favor from God because of His great grace and love! That's why Israel is special. Not because of who THEY were, but because of God's choice to make them HIS!

Look at the following verses and notice the word "treasure." Exodus 19:3-8a;

Deuteronomy 7:6-8; 14:2; Psalm 135:4.

God didn't want Israel to ever forget that they were His special treasure.

He never called saints His special treasure; nor did He say that of the Gentiles, only of Israel.

Deuteronomy 4:5-8. Moses tells the people that God has been gracious and good to them and that other nations will notice that God has chosen them as His special treasure, so they ought to be careful to obey Him and do as He bids them.

II. Israel's Failure

According to Genesis 12:1-3, God intended that Israel would be a blessing to all the other nations of the world. The Messiah would come from Israel. "Salvation is of the Jews." The writers of God's Word would come from the Jews. The prophets would be Jewish. The Jewish people were to be an example to the other nations and peoples of her devotion, commitment, obedience, and love for Christ, the Messiah. But – Israel failed to recognize her Messiah.

Jesus came unto His own people, the Jews (John 1:11), but His own did not receive Him. They rejected Him.

When Christ found Israel in His first advent, He uncovered it for a short time. For more than 400 years Israel had been an obscure nation. No voice of God had been in its midst; no prophet proclaimed divine revelation. The nation's glory was gone. The nation was subjected under the iron-fisted Romans. The nation was spiritually, politically, and economically sick. In the short three and a half years of His public ministry, Christ uncovered a little of the glory that will be Israel's when she turns to Messiah.

The secret of Israel's life is its obedience to God through submission to the Messiah who is Jesus Christ. The Jews are returning to Israel today. Is that a sign that the Jews are turning to Jesus?

What we presently see in Israel today is a fleshly return of Israel to the land; it is a Zionist movement, but it is not a spiritual movement in any way. It is not related to Messiah. In fact, most Jews have given up any hope in a personal Messiah.

The parable says that Christ covered up or buried the treasure again. Why? Because the nation as a whole rejected Him. As the nation rejected Christ's person, work, and message, Christ began to change the thrust of His message. He no longer preached the "kingdom of heaven is at hand," but began to preach more and more to the Gentiles, offering the spiritual benefits of His kingdom to them.

Israel's opposition became so intense that our Lord withdrew from Jerusalem and refused to go into the capital city again until His appointed hour to die came. See Matthew 23:37; Matt 21:43; John 19:15.

The "hiding" of the treasure refers in part to the scattering of the Jews throughout the whole earth. So effective has He "hidden" them that ten of the twelve tribes' whereabouts are still unknown.

III. Israel's Future

We might conclude from this that God has given up on Israel; that His promises are now invalid to Israel because of her rebellion. No so, for God never forgets Israel because Israel is still God's chosen people. God will fulfill His promise to Israel; I believe sometime in the near future.

The treasure is presently hidden. Israel is covered up now, but God has not forgotten Israel because He keeps all His promises. Israel lost the secret to their lives – obedience to Messiah – and God set the nation aside. Now God is working with the Church. The nation of Israel has been hidden for some 2,000 years, but one day Christ will dig up the treasure again and Israel will have a future. The future of Israel is what prompted the Apostle Paul to write Romans 9-11. God is not yet finished with Israel.

See Romans 11:1, 11-12, 25-28.

The most significant part of His parable is that Christ with great joy in His heart went out and sold all He had to purchase Israel. This speaks of Christ's atonement for sin that was made to purchase all true Israelites who believe God promises to redeem Israel in the New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34). God should have destroyed all Israelites and cast them into the Lake of Fire for their rejection of Messiah. But He did not because God is faithful, loving, just, and unchanging. God will carry out His promises to Israel with the last generation of Jews before the second advent of Christ.

But notice it says Christ purchased the whole field in which the treasure was hidden. The final fulfillment of this parable will be at the second advent, and those believers who survive the Great Tribulation whether Jews or Gentiles will be converted. All believers in the world at that time will be ushered into Christ's kingdom. Only believers can get into Christ's kingdom and these are the ones who Christ purchased with His own blood.

In Christ's kingdom, Israel will lead the world in justice and peace, and Jerusalem will be the center of righteousness when all the saints of all time will be with Christ in His kingdom.

THE PEARL OF GREAT PRICE

Matthew 13:45-46

These seven parables of Matthew 13 are prophetic parables, telling us what we can expect during the Church Age. The first four of these parables were given to the crowd, but the last three were given in a house, only to His disciples.

Jesus is going to give His disciples some "inside information" about the mystery of the kingdom. Here is the key to the parables:

- Matthew 13:44, the Hidden Treasure refers to the Jews, or Israel.
- Matthew 13:45-46, the Pearl of Great Price speaks of the Church.
- Matthew 13:47, the Dragnet represents the Gentiles.

Three things are brought to our attention in this parable:

I. The Person

The man or the merchant-man represents Christ Himself. In these parables, Christ is active throughout this age.

The word "merchant-man" is a very interesting word. It describes one who goes away into a foreign country to purchase a certain thing. When he buys it, he will not return home with it until he has put his name on it in such a way that his name can never be removed from it. He is the sole owner and he puts his mark and his seal of ownership upon it.

That's what Jesus did for the Church. He left His home in glory and went into the earth's far country, bought the Church with His precious blood and put His seal upon His purchased possession.

The Merchant-man regarded the Church or the Pearl of Great Price, as of great price in His sight. What a staggering thought that is: that God would desire you and me and that we should be of great price or value in His sight. That a holy, pure, gracious God could ever desire a poor, lost, vile sinner like me and in His sight, see us as of great price.

II. The Pearl

The Pearl represents the Church that our Lord gave Himself for. The Hebrew people did not value pearls. In the Old Testament much is said about diamonds, rubies, sapphires and other valuable stone, but nothing about pearls.

(In the Book of Job the word "pearl" is used in the KJV, but in most versions a correction is shown to say it should read "crystal."). It is not until we come to the New Testament that the word "pearl" is found. The Lord knew that this illustration would be familiar to the disciples because all of the disciples were Galileans and Galilee was a region to which many Gentiles came. They knew Gentile traders came looking for valuable pearls and they would pay fabulous prices for them.

A. The Formation of the Pearl

The pearl is the only gem or jewel that is formed from a living organism and the only jewel that is formed as a result of an injury.

A pearl is formed by an oyster when some impurity, like a grain of sand, intrudes and pierces its side. Oysters are the scavengers of the ocean. They live down in the ocean's depths amid its mire and filth. The impurity enters and wounds the side of the oyster. The oyster then secretes a slimy substance called "Mother of Pearl" that covers the wound and coats the impurity. Again and again, layer after layer, the Mother of Pearl is secreted by the little oyster until it becomes a complete, perfect pearl.

Each individual who makes up the Church is a pearl under construction. God is not through with us yet. He is working out His purpose through the daily grind of life with all its pressures, turmoils, and perplexities. These things are God's instruments to make

you a beautiful pearl. Don't resist these trials. Don't push them out of your life. We are all unfinished products; we are all under construction; we are all being made into beautiful pearls.

B. The Unity of the Pearl

The pearl is the only jewel, I know of, that loses its value when it is cut – that is not true with diamonds or with rubies or gold.

Take a pearl and crush it and it loses its distinctiveness, its uniqueness, its value. When it's crushed it is nothing more than lime dust or chalk.

1. A pearl stands for the unity of the saints.

– John 17 – Jesus prays, “Father, I pray that they may be one as You and I are one.”

– Acts 1 and 2 says repeatedly, “They were all of one accord.”

– I Corinthians – Paul writes that there should be no division; no tears in the body of Christ.

2. Pearls are formed slowly and gradually.

You can't rush the formation of a pearl. There is the tedious process of waiting while the pearl is being formed. For over 2,000 years the Church has been in the process of formation – layer after layer of God's redeemed are added, century after century the process of formation by the power and grace of God has taken place.

C. Not seen by the eyes of man.

– The eyes of man cannot see the formation of the pearl in the little oyster.

– Paul says, “Our life is hid with Christ by God.” (Colossians 3:3)

D. Pearls are the Jewel of royalty.

Pearls are not meant to be hidden; they are meant to be put on display.

– They have a place and position in the diadem of the king.

– Ephesians 5:25-27; Eph. 2:4-7; Colossians 3:4

E. Pearls must be rescued to be of value.

The pearl is of no value as long as it is in the muck and mire on the bottom of the ocean. That is where we as sinners were until, by His grace, He lifted us and rescued us.

In loving kindness Jesus came;
My soul in mercy to reclaim,
And from the depths of sin and shame;
Through grace He lifted Me!

From sinking sand, He lifted me:
With tender hand, He lifted me.
From shades of night, to plains of light,
O praise His name, He lifted me!

Now on a higher plane I dwell,
And with my soul I know 'tis well-known
Yet, how or why, I cannot tell,
He should have lifted me.

III. The Provision Matthew 13:46

He sold all He had! It cost Him His all! That's just like my Jesus!
Isaiah 53:5-7a; Isa.53:10a

See my Jesus – on the cross, the people crying

Looking on, a man would think it tragedy.
But, what this world could not see,
Was when they nailed Him to that tree,
It would break the chains of sin's captivity.

Love grew, where the blood fell;
Flowers of hope sprang up for man in misery.
Sin died, where the blood fell.
I'm so glad, His precious blood has covered me!

The Book of Revelation closes by talking about Heaven – Revelation 21:21-23.

When we walk into the presence of God, we will walk through the pearly gate! He has made provision for us to be with Him!

THE DRAGNET

Matthew 13:47-50

Years ago there was a well-known police show on television that was introduced with the notes: “Dummm – dadum – dum!” Dummm - dadum – dum – dum!” Then one of the star detectives would say, “The city is Los Angeles. The time was _____. We were working a case on the east side. My name is Friday. Joe Friday.” Then when he interviewed a witness, he would say, “Just the facts, sir. Just the facts.” The name of the show was “Dragnet.” It was about a police dragnet which swept through the city of Los Angeles and captured all kinds of folks.

Here, Jesus talks about a different kind of dragnet. A dragnet that will take place at the end of this age.

When we come to this parable, there are some details we must look at. There is the net, the sea, the fishermen, and the fish.

- The “net” represents the gospel influence. Notice that proclaiming and presenting Christ to others is the responsibility of men.
- The “sea” represents the nations of the Gentiles; the sea of humanity.
- The “fishermen” are our Lord's “gospellers” who cast the net into the sea – preachers, the Sunday school teachers, the parents of little children, etc.
- The “fish” refers to all types and kinds of people in the world who are confronted with the gospel and convicted by the Holy Spirit.
- The “good fish” represent those who respond to Christ by faith; the “bad fish” represents those who do not have Christ as their personal Lord and Savior.

Our Lord tells us that the separating of the good from the bad will occur “at the end of the age.” The angels with God's full authority, will cast the unbelievers into the fiery furnace of hell where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Three things I want to share with you:

I. The Casting Matthew 13:47

Most of the disciples knew by experience what Jesus was talking about when He said “a net was cast into the sea,” for they were fishermen and they had responded as He cast His net into their sea and said, “Follow Me,” and they did so.

Let me point out several truths:

1. The Inconspicuousness of the Fishermen

Notice that in Matt. 13:47 the fishermen are not even mentioned and in Matt. 13:48 Jesus just refers to them as “they.” Those who are honored by God – and it is an honor to be a servant of Christ; to have a part in casting this net into the sea – are hidden from view. Nothing is said of them except just being referred to as “they.”

I Corinthians 3:4-7. What impresses me about this parable is that the fishermen are hidden. After all, we are only God's instruments, and we are nothing more. Much better for Him to be seen and not us!

2. The Object for the Fishermen is to Cast forth the Net into the sea and gather good fish.

There were two main types of nets in Jesus' day that commercial fishermen used:

– One was a large net. Large in the sense that it was not closely woven, so the small fish could escape and only the large fish would be caught.

– The other type was called a dragnet.

It was a large, closely woven net, as much as a half a mile long, with lead on the bottom part of the net and floaters on the top part of the net. It took 10 to 15 men to work the net. One group would stand on the shore and another group would go out in boats, letting the net down, making a half-mile net-wall. They would let the net-wall stay in place for hours, usually about half a mile from the shore. The men on the shore would pull the ropes connected to the bottom of the net while the men in the boats would pull the top ropes connected to the top part of the net. They would pull both net and fish to the shore, separate the good fish from the bad fish.

The bad fish were those that could not be eaten. They would not throw the bad fish back into the water, but into a pit. They didn't want to have to catch the bad fish again; nor did they want them to multiply. They could not see what was going on under the water. They may have thought not much was going on, but much more may be going on under water than they could imagine. So, it is when we cast out the gospel net. The Holy Spirit is working, but we cannot see what He is doing in hearts.

II. The Catching

We are told that they gathered of every kind – both good and bad. There is a mixture – of every kind – good and bad.

Those caught represent those who profess to have had a relationship with Christ. But not all are good professions or true professions. Just like with the tares with the wheat, some were true and some were false.

The fact that this net gathered bad as well as the good was no reflection on the fishermen.

But the task was not over just because they caught the fish. They had to sit down and discern or distinguish between the good and the bad. That day is coming for every man. We will all be examined by the Lord.

Acts 17:31: "Because He hath appointed a day, in the which He will judge the world in righteousness by that Man whom He hath ordained."

I like the analogy one man drew when he came to this phrase. He said all kinds of fish (folks) are found in the Church. Some are like:

1. Flounders: A flounder is a flat fish that swims on its side. It has two eyes, but both of them are on the same side of its head and it has a rather narrow view of things. Some folks in Church are like that. They see only one side of things – Theirs! You dare not disagree with them because they feel like they have the whole picture.

2. Stingrays: Stingrays always have their stinger out and you dare not cross them.

3. Jelly fish: Jelly fish have no backbone and are content to move with the tide and don't have the spiritual strength to take a stand.

4. Sucker fish: This fish is a parasite that lives off the backs of other fish. I know folks who want the best choir, preacher, programs, and buildings, but give no support to the cause of Christ.

5. Crawfish: Those who are always moving backwards.

That's a good analogy, but I want you to see what Jesus is talking about as we look at:

III. The Conclusion Matthew 13:48-50

Let me give you some broad truths from this parable:

1. The Kingdom of Heaven is Very Large

Not only is it very large, but we must realize that in churches there are all kinds who profess to have had a relationship with Christ, but it is evident from their lifestyle and their fruit that they are bad fish. Jesus warned there would be a mixture of saved and lost – of good and bad – of wheat and tares.

2. Our World is Coming to an End

Not everybody will spend eternity in the same place. Did you know Good people don't go to Heaven? Honest people don't go to Heaven. Neighbor – loving people don't go to Heaven. Decent people don't go to Heaven. SAVED people go to Heaven.

See Matthew 13:48-50.

These verses tell us four things about Hell:

1. Hell is a real place.

Do you know how I know Hell is a real place? Because Jesus said so and He cannot lie.

2. Hell is a Place of Fire. Matthew 13:50

You say, "I don't believe anybody could just burn and burn forever and not be burned up."

Did you know that's what the Jehovah's Witness and others believe?

Go to the Book of Exodus and read of Moses standing before a burning bush – a tumbleweed – that did not burn up.

"Preacher, hell sure sounds painful." Hell is not intended to be a place of comfort or correction. It's a place of punishment.

3. Hell is a Place of Sorrow.

The word "wailing" means heavy sobs, weeping, and crying. There is no joy or happiness in hell; but there is much sorrow and regret.

4. Hell is a Place of Hatred.

That phrase "gnashing of teeth" is a response not only of pain but of hatred. Such hatred for the Lord Jesus that they profane and despise Him.

One other thing – notice the phrase, "which, when it (the net) is full." One day that last "fish" will be caught in the gospel net and Jesus will come again. The only thing that will matter then is whether or not you have had a personal saving relationship with Jesus.

A young man joined a law firm when he finished law school. The senior partner was a Christian and he asked the young man "What do you want to do in this firm?"

The young lawyer said, "I want to establish myself as a trusted lawyer." "What then?", the older man asked. "Well, I want to make a lot of money and build a big house." "What then?", asked the older man. "I want to become a senior partner like you."

"What then?" "I want to retire early." "What then?" "I want to travel, hunt, fish, and enjoy life." "What then?" "Well, I guess I'll die." "What then?"

We are all moving toward eternity. One thing will matter when we stand before the Lord:

What did you do with Jesus?

There's a great day coming, a great day coming,
A great day coming by and by,
When the saints and sinners shall be parted right and left,
Are you ready for that day to come?

There's a sad day coming, a sad day coming,
A sad day coming by and by.
When the sinners shall hear their doom, depart I know you not,
Are you ready for that day to come?

We live in a world in which almost everything is temporary, and is destined to pass away. The great works of mankind and the things that seem so important to humanity and civilization at the time are all subject to change, corruption, decay, and eventually loss. All the great kingdoms, the laws, all of man's great inventions will one day all pass away. All of our money, our stocks, and investments will one day mean nothing.

The Bible says that only two things on this earth will last forever: The Word of God and the Church of God.

Matthew 24:35: "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away."

What about the Church? Jesus said, "I will build my Church and the gates of hell shall not Prevail against it."

What is the Church? The Greek word that is translated "church" is "ekklesia." It is a compound word; a word that is formed by putting two words together. The root word is the passive form of the word "kaleo," which means "to call" or "to summon." And its prefix is the preposition "ek," which means "out of." So, an "ekklesia" is an assembly of "called out" people.

Jesus is the first Person to ever use the word "ekklesia" to describe the assembly of His redeemed followers.

Nowhere in the Bible is the word "ekklesia" ever used in reference to a "building." God's called out people often meet in a building, but the Church has been called out of sin and a lost condition, and into eternal life in Christ.

- Listen to I Peter 2:9

The word "Church" is found in only two verses in the gospels and both verses are in Matthew (Matt. 16:18; Matt. 18:17).

The passage we are looking at now is the first time Jesus speaks of the Church and the passage divides itself rather simply into four parts:

- The Church's Testimony – "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."
- The Church's Foundation – "Upon this rock I will build My Church."
- The Church's Assurance – "The gates of hell shall not prevail against it."
- The Church's Authority – "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven."

I. The Church's Testimony Matthew 16:13-17

After being with His disciples for almost two years, Jesus paused to ask His disciples this basic question: "Who do you say that I am?"

Actually, Jesus ask them two questions:

1. "Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?"

Jesus already knew the answer, but He wanted His disciples to acknowledge what other people were saying. So, they gave Him the four most popular answers about who Jesus is.

– "Some say You are John the Baptist come back to life." Well, that's what Herod, who had John beheaded said (See Matthew 14:1-2).

– "Others say, Elijah." Elijah's ministry was marked by clear convicting preaching and convincing miracles.

– "Others say, Jeremiah." His ministry was marked by compassion and preaching and brokenness, like our Lord's.

– "Or one of the prophets." In the Book of Deuteronomy, Moses said God would send the people one like him.

But this was just a "set-up question."

2. Second question: "But who do you all (plural) say that I am?"

Speak for yourself! It is a probing question; a personal question; a pressing question!

It's one thing to tell what others think about Jesus, but it's another thing to declare what you believe about Jesus down in the depths

of your heart. Your answer tells what your eternal destiny is.

This is not a question just for our Lord's disciples. It's a question for us as well.

Peter answered for all of the disciples: "You are THE Christ, THE Son of THE Living God!"

Peter planted his flag upon that blessed confession. And Jesus called Peter – not Simon, sifting sand – but Peter – a rock!

And Jesus blessed him, and said, "Divine revelation revealed that to you!" Until you believe that and confess that, you cannot be a Christian!

II. The Foundation Matthew 16:18a

"You are Peter and on this rock, I will build MY church." For over 400 years Christians have disagreed over the meaning of these words – "You are Peter and upon this rock, I will build My church."

What is Jesus saying?

1. The Roman Catholic Answer

Catholics say that Peter himself was the rock upon which the Church would be built. That is, Peter was to be head over the other disciples and that the keys of the kingdom that Jesus talks about in Matt. 16:19 would be given to Peter as the first leader of the Christian Church and the first Bishop of Rome. They say that this is proof that Peter was indeed the first pope.

2. The Protestant Answer

Protestants have given a number of different answers over the centuries. One of the most popular evangelical answers goes something like this: There are two different Greek words for Peter and Rock. Peter is "petros," which can mean a small rock or stone, and "rock" is "Petra" which can mean a large rock. In that case, Peter is not the rock; the rock is his confession of faith. Jesus would be saying, "You are like a small rock, but I am building My Church on your rock-like confession."

3. A Third Answer

I believe Jesus was saying, "Peter, you are a small stone, and upon THIS rock, pointing to Himself, I will build MY Church."

I Corinthians 3:11: "For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ."

Remember that when Jesus asked, "Who do you say I am," the question was in the plural.

Jesus wasn't asking Peter alone, He was asking all of them. When Peter answered, he wasn't answering for himself alone, he was answering for all of them.

I think Jesus is saying, "Peter, you are a rock. And upon you, and men like you, I will build My Church." When Peter made his confession – and all the apostles with him – he was a rock – and they were the rocks upon which the Church is built.

Let me say it plainly. The Church is not built on men alone; nor is it build on a confession alone. The Church is built on men confessing together that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. That is the foundation of the Church.

• See Ephesians 2:20-22

I understand it this way: The Cornerstone or the bedrock of the Church is Jesus Christ Himself. And upon that bedrock are the apostles.

• See I Peter 2:4-5

That is to say, Jesus Christ is first. He is the living stone. Upon Him is built first, the apostles, then the first century believers, then the second century believers, then the third century believers, all the way up to the twentieth century. Here's where we fit in. When we confess faith in Jesus Christ, we become living stones, joined into the great Church which Jesus Christ is building.

What was true of the early Church is still true today. Acts 2:47: "And the Lord added to the Church daily those who were being saved."

III. The Church's Assurance Matthew 16:18b

"And the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." The gates of hell will not overcome the Church.

The word translated "hell" is the word "Hades," the place of the departed dead. Jesus is saying that death and all its ugly power will never overcome the Church Christ is building.

Connect Matthew 16:18 with Matt. 16:21. Jesus is saying, when He rises from the dead, He will break open the gates of Hades.

Revelation 1:18 says, "I am the Living One. I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades."

How do you get the keys to Hades? You break the gate wide open. You die and then you come back from the dead.

And that is why the gates of Hades – death itself – can never overpower the Church. Because Jesus Christ has died and come back from the dead and He holds in His hands the keys to the gates of Hades.

IV. The Church's Authority Matthew 16:19

Keys impart authority. I have the keys to my car, my house, the church, and the shop.

Jesus is giving His servants the keys to the kingdom of Heaven. When the gospel is preached the keys are being exercised to unlock the door of heaven so that those who believe the gospel may go through.

Let me give you some examples. I will use Peter as he used the keys of the kingdom.

- In Acts 2 Peter uses the keys to open the door of heaven to the Jews. By his preaching on the Day of Pentecost, he opened the door of heaven for 3,000 Jews.
- In Acts 8 Peter is preaching again, this time to the Samaritans and he is opening the door to the kingdom of heaven to the Samaritans.
- In Acts 10 Peter is preaching to Cornelius. He is opening the door of faith to the Gentiles.

The keys to the kingdom are the offer of the gospel. Whenever you offer the gospel to another person, you are opening the door of heaven to them. What happens if they go through that door? They are saved; born again; they become children of God and you have opened the door for them.

What if, when you share the gospel, the person comes right to the edge, they put their toe in the door, and then they pull it back and walk away. What happens then? They have closed the door to heaven. You have opened it and they have closed it.

God has already done everything necessary for the whole world to go to heaven. What more could He do than He has already done? Nothing!

You need to understand that you cannot get to heaven by yourself. You must cling to the cross of Jesus Christ as your only hope of heaven. That's the condition of salvation.

What is this binding and loosing? Understand that only Jesus can forgive sin. But there is a sense in which, if a person responds to the gospel and confesses Jesus as his Lord and asks Jesus to forgive him of his sin, then on the basis of what Jesus promised to do for him in saving him, you can declare to him, Christ has loosed him from his sin and saved him.

On the other hand, if someone rejects God's only means of salvation, there is a sense that you can proclaim that he is still bound in his sin.

If you have ever taken Evangelism Explosion, you know that the second question they want you to ask when you are witnessing is: "Suppose you were to die tonight and you were to stand before God and He were to say to you, 'Why should I let you into My Heaven?' What would you say to Him?"

That's a good question because it is His heaven and if it is His heaven, He has the right to set the conditions. God has already set the conditions and it has nothing to do with human effort. It has everything to do with clinging to the cross of Christ and receiving Him into your heart as your Lord and Savior.

THE ABSOLUTE NECESSITY OF THE CROSS

Matthew 16:21-23

Someone said that when Simon Peter was good, he was very good, but when he was bad, he was very bad. Peter could say or do something brilliant one moment and the next do something or say something that was just dumb!

One moment you find him with great insight; the next, with no sight at all.

Peter had just come from a mountain top experience when he declared Jesus as the Son of the Living God; now he rebukes his Lord.

Simon Peter had just answered our Lord's question proudly, "Who do men say that I am?" and then "Who do you say that I am?", and Peter spoke for all of the disciples when he answered with great force and authority, "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God." Our Lord commended Peter and pronounced a blessing upon him: "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father Who is in heaven."

Then Jesus goes on to tell His disciples that He is going to build His Church and nothing will be able to overcome it!

But then Jesus continues to tell His disciples what He must do to build His Church and Peter goes from making a Great Confession to Great Confusion.

I want you to notice first:

I. The Revelation Matthew 16:21

"From that time Jesus began to SHOW His disciples that He must die and be raised the third day."

Actually, Jesus had already been telling His disciples about His death and resurrection for some time, but they had not understood, because the revelation had been hidden in pictures and symbols.

The disciples, along with most Jews, thought Israel's Messiah would be a conquering Messiah instead of a suffering Savior. There would be no glory without the cross, and the cross must come before the glory.

John the Baptist first spoke of Jesus' death, although the folks, including John, did not realize it. Jesus was coming to be baptized of John and when John saw Him, he pointed to Jesus and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God who comes to take away the sins of the world."

No one questioned, "Well, how is He going to take away the sins of the world?" The answer: By giving Himself as the perfect sacrifice on the cross! No one saw the cross in John's declaration.

Later, Jesus would continue to speak about His death in pictures and symbols:

- John 2:19: "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up again."
- John 3:14: "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up."
- John 6:51: "I am the Living Bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."
- Matthew 9:15; Matt.12:39-40

But now we are only about six months from our Lord's crucifixion and the hostility of the priestly party in Jerusalem had become more pronounced. There was a significant switch in how Jesus went about preparing His disciples for His death. Jesus knew that His cross experience would greatly affect His disciples, so He wanted to prepare them for it. So, He no longer spoke in pictures and symbols. He now taught them in simple and direct words, that He was going to die and be raised again for the sins of the world. God's plan for saving the world was to take place through a suffering Messiah, not a conquering Messiah.

See Matthew 16:21 Matt. 17:22-23; Matt. 20:18-19.

The key word in this passage is the word "must" in Matthew 16:21. Jesus tells His disciples as plainly as He can that He is going to die. He tells them the PLACE (Jerusalem) ... the SOURCE (religious leaders) ... the EXPERIENCE (suffer many things) ... the EXTENT (death) ... the OUTCOME (He would be raised again).

This "MUST" is a divine necessity. If there is no cross, there is no salvation for mankind. If there is no cross there is no gospel. God's justice requires it. God could not forgive anyone without His own justice first being satisfied; and that He did through Christ's death on the cross for all that would trust in His Son.

God's justice requires legal satisfaction for the grace of forgiveness to be given. Paul uses both accounting and legal language to express Christ removing through the cross the legal obligations against us due to divine justice.

See Colossians 2:13-14. "Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances: means that Christ's death on the cross canceled our debt of hostility from God against us.

See Romans 3:24-26. Because of our sins, we offended deity and offended God's holiness and brought the wrath of God upon us. Jesus' death on the cross satisfied God's offended deity and holiness as well as His wrath against us. Then because we have no merit to offer Him that would satisfy His justice, in mercy He forgives us.

There can be no Christianity, no redemption, no forgiveness without the cross.

II. The Rebukes Matthew 16:22-23

I say "rebukes" because there is more than one rebuke here.

A. Peter Rebuked the Lord Matthew 16:22

"Then Peter took Him aside." Peter could accept Jesus as "the Son of the Living God" but not as the Suffering Savior. Such an idea was repulsive and unacceptable to him. Therefore, he tried to stop the idea. The Greek word for "took" is strong; it means "to catch hold of." Peter took hold of Christ; he grabbed Jesus and took Him aside for a conference.

Have you ever grabbed a child by the shoulders, looked him in his eyes and said, "Are you listening to me?"

Peter said, "Never Lord! This must not and should not and will not happen to You." You and I cannot call Jesus Lord and say to Him: "No, never," and Him still be Lord. You can say, "Whatever, Lord," but not, "Never, Lord."

Do you realize that Peter was saying the same thing to Jesus that Satan said to Him in the wilderness temptations? "Avoid the cross. "By-pass the cross." "Bow down before me," Satan said, "and I'll give the kingdoms of the world to You." Peter said, "The cross ... it's not going to happen!"

That temptation to avoid the cross was with Jesus throughout His ministry. In the wilderness temptations, Satan suggested it. After the feeding of the five thousand, the followers suggested it and were going to take Him by force and make Him King. Now, His close friend, Peter, suggested it.

To Peter's credit, he deeply loved Jesus. The thought of seeing his Master suffer such a death was too much. But Peter, the one who loved Jesus supremely, became the very one who would stand in the way of Christ's obedience to His Father to go to the cross.

Peter didn't realize that by encouraging Jesus to cancel the cross, he was making his own salvation impossible. He would have been lost forever, along with all of us.

B. The Lord Rebuked Peter Matthew 16:23

Proverbs 14:12 says, "There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death."

Having said that, we cannot help admiring Peter's zeal ... But it was misdirected zeal!

When Jesus said, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me," Peter had become the mouthpiece for Satan. Christ had come with the express purpose of dying on the cross as an atonement for sin and those who would thwart His mission were doing Satan's work.

"You are an offense to Me." The word "offense" means "a stumbling block ... a snare ... you are setting a trap for Me." The bait used to catch an animal in a trap was called an offense. Jesus was saying to Peter, "Satan is using you as bait to catch Me off guard."

"You savorest not the things of God." "You have no taste for God's way, but prefer man's way."

Thank God, Jesus chose His Father's will; He chose the cross. And because of that we can be saved. We can be forgiven of our sins.

Have you trusted Christ as your Savior and Lord? You can do that today!

DON'T FORGET YOUR CROSS

Matthew 16:24-26

What does it mean to be a Christian?

Too many folks think being a Christian is just a decision to trust Christ. I mean, you realize you are a sinner and you confess to God that you are a sinner. You believe with both your mind and your heart that Jesus is the Son of God who died on the cross and shed His blood, was buried, and rose from the dead on the third day. You tell God you are sorry for your sins, ask Him to save you, join the church and follow the Lord in baptism. And that's all there is to it.

Someone describes these kind of Christians as "wasp Christians." A wasp is as big as he is 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.

Here is our Lord's desire:

Come TO Me ... that's Salvation; that's Justification; that's Redemption.

Then, come AFTER Me: that's Sanctification. That's growing in the Lord. That's conforming to the image of Christ. That kind of living separates the men from the boys spiritually.

Jesus deals with three things in this passage:

I. The Way of Discipleship Matthew 16:24

What is a disciple? A learner. A student. A follower. One who is loyal and faithful to his master.

Look how Jesus begins. "If any man WILL come after Me." Other translations put it like this: "If any man WISHES to come after Me;" "If any man DESIRES to come after Me." He begins with the desire; the will.

Something remarkable happens to the human will in the new birth. Though bent in rebellion against God and darkened of sin that saturates the mind, and dead to the Voice of God, suddenly everything changes! The mind that was at enmity with God is now set upon following and obeying Him. The heart that was so corrupted with sin now wells up with love and devotion to the light of truth. The will that once stubbornly resisted against the commands of Christ now desires to obey His Word.

The truth of the Word that you heard rehearsed plenty of times, suddenly becomes life and light to you. There is a new longing for Jesus, a new desire to be His servant and follower, a new delight to learn of Him. A desire to know Him and please Him. Does that describe you?

Jesus' followers have four requirements that they must meet in this life if they are to be His disciples. Let me share them with you.

A. Come After Me

Being a disciple means that the goal and aim of your life is to please Christ. To imitate Him. To be one with Him. To be close to Him. To be committed to Him.

B. Deny Himself

Denying self is not the same thing as self-denial. Many have denied themselves many things and thought they were being very spiritual in the process.

Denying self is a call to death to oneself; to lay aside our agenda; to give up our rights. The denial of self is a matter of rule and

authority of one's life.

It means to dethrone self and enthrone God. To allow every part of our life to be governed by God's will.

Jesus is about to pray, "Father, if it be Thou will, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not My will, but Thine be done."

It is saying "No" to self instead of saying "No" to God, which is the basis of all sin.

C. Take Up His Cross

There is no discipleship without a cross. Luke adds the adverb "daily," – "Let him take up his cross daily."

If the Father gave His Son a cross, why should we think He would leave us cross-less? Hebrews 5:8 says Christ "learned obedience through the things He suffered" even though He had no sin.

The cross we are asked to bear is not the same cross Jesus bore. 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. No one else has been asked to bear the cross that Jesus bore. No one else could! In its redemptive aspect, Christ's cross stands alone. His task is completed, perfect, and sufficient. Some folks think their cross to bear is headaches, or their spouse, or a way-ward child.

When a man took up his cross, he carried the instrument of his own death on his shoulders. To take up your cross means to take denying self one step further.

It means to die to your will, your rights, and your ambitions.

We take up our cross when we are willing to bear the shame, the reproach, the humility, the hatred, and even the death that may come to those who are associated with Him.

D. And Follow Me

To follow Him in character, conduct, and consistency.

II. The Way of Deliverance Matthew 16:25

The way to save your life is to lose it. Is this a contradiction or double-talk?

Jesus is saying 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 in your life. You can be your own boss. You can do as you 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 awaiting you.

On the other hand, you can commit your life to Jesus, deny your self-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.

III. The Way to Destiny Matthew 16:26

What if a man could gain the whole world? No man ever has or ever will. If he could gain the whole world, it wouldn't satisfy. If he could gain the whole world, it would not last.

What would a man give in exchange for his soul? Nothing you could gain is worth your soul. Your soul is so valuable that God's dear Son left Heaven's glory, was made in the likeness of man, tried to teach man the truth about Himself, was rejected and hung on a tree and died the death of deaths just so your soul and mine could be redeemed. He paid the greatest price to redeem your most precious possession. Then He pleads: "Choose life and not death!"

What is your choice?

A PREVIEW OF OUR LORD'S MAJESTY
Matthew 17:1-13

You are aware that all of the Bible is inspired of God, but you may not be aware that the chapter divisions are not inspired of God. The chapter and verse divisions were done by man and, for the most part, they are accurate and they are helpful to us. But I really believe that the last two verses of Matthew 16 should be the beginning of Matt. 17. (Read)

In talking to all of His disciples, Jesus said that “SOME OF THEM” would not taste death until they saw the Son of Man coming in His kingdom. Then in Matthew 17:1 we are told that “After six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, and led them up on a high mountain by themselves.”

“Six days after.” What? Six days after Jesus told them that some of them would see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom. The “some of them” would be Peter, James, and John. Jesus leaves the other nine disciples at the foot of the mountain.

These three – Peter, James, and John – form, what we call “the inner circle” of the Lord Jesus. They got to experience things the other nine disciples did not get to experience with Jesus.

The first time Jesus singled these three men out was when He raised Jairus' daughter from the dead. Then Jesus singles them out again here at our Lord's transfiguration. Later Jesus would take these same three men “a little farther” with Him in the Garden of Gethsemane the night before He went to the cross.

We all know that God is no respecter of persons (Romans 2:11). That is, God does not 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. (If you're honest, it's that way with your children and grandchildren.) And those who are closer to Him will see more of His glory and more of His power than those who stay farther away.

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 is transfigured and His inner glory shines forth. His face and garments are changed. When Jesus was born in Bethlehem, His humanity covered His deity. But at His transfiguration there was no hiding of His glory.

Three things I want you to see from this passage:

I. What the Three Disciples Saw Matthew 17:2-3

It must have been when Jesus was praying that He was transfigured. Matthew tells us that the Lord's face “shone like the sun.” Can you imagine what that must have been like, during that dark night in that secluded place?

I wonder if it was the bright light from our Lord's shining face that awakened the disciples. I wonder if they had to hold their hands to their eyes to shield themselves from the brightness.

The Book of Exodus (Exodus 34:29) tells us that on Mount Sinai when Moses received the Ten Commandments, he had been in the presence of God and that as he came down, his face shown as he talked with God and Moses didn't even know it. Aaron and the children of Israel saw it and they were afraid to approach Moses because of it. They asked Moses to wear a veil over his face until “the glory of his countenance” passed away (2 Corinthians 3:7).

Moses' face shown with the glory of God; but it faded away because it was only a “reflected” light. Moses, if I may put it this way, was like the moon. The light with which the moon shines is only a reflected light, borrowed from the sun. But here, we are told that Jesus' face radiated – not from being in the presence of God; but because He truly was God. His was not a mere reflected light; but was like the sun itself in its brightness and strength. Revelation 1:16 tells us of the resurrected Lord in heaven, that “His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength.”

We are also told that our Lord's “clothes became as white as the light” (Matt.17:7). Mark 9:3 tells us that His garments became “exceedingly white, like snow,” such as no launderer on earth can whiten them.

What happened to Jesus? The Bible says that Jesus was transfigured before them. 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 is not as if a spotlight shown on Jesus. Rather, this light came from inside Him.

The disciples are now seeing the glory of God being revealed in Jesus. They are witnessing the fact that Jesus is no ordinary man. They are catching a glimpse of His glory.

Let me give you an example of metamorphosis. If you have ever watched the Incredible Hulk, you've seen metamorphosis. On the outside the star of the show looks like a normal man. But when he gets angry, this man turns into a huge, fierce green man. Why?

Because that's what inside him.

Not so with Jesus. Inside of Him is purity, light, love.

The disciples never forgot seeing the glorified Lord.

- 2 Peter 1:16: Peter said he was “an eyewitness of His glory.”
- John 1:14: John said, “And we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”

But they saw something else. Matthew 17:3 says “Moses and Elijah appeared to them,” talking with Jesus. Luke says they talked together about His death, His exodus.

Why Moses and Elijah? Why not Noah and Jonah. Or, why not Abraham and David? Both Moses and Elijah had unusual “departures” from this world.

- Moses was in good health. He was still strong. But because of his disobedience, God told Moses he could not lead the people of God into the promised land. Moses was 120 years old and God instructed him to go to the top of Mount Nebo and to the top of Pisgah that was next to Jericho. God said that he could not lead the people in, but He would show him the land from the top of the mount. Moses died and was raised from the dead. God Himself buried Moses (Deuteronomy 34:5-8).
- Elijah did not taste of death, but was caught up or taken away (same word that's used to describe the Rapture) “in a whirlwind into heaven” (2 Kings 2:9-11).

Jesus had talked to His disciples about His death, but they didn't get it. They didn't understand it. These two men (Moses and Elijah) could encourage Jesus concerning His upcoming death.

Moses represented the Law; Elijah represented the prophets. Moses represents those who have died and will be raised from the dead to go to heaven; Elijah represents those who will go to heaven by way of the Rapture.

II. What the Three Disciples Heard Matthew 17:4-5

Mark tells us that Peter didn't know what to say ... so he said something, and what he said was wrong! Does that sound like us or what? We don't know what to say, so we say something and it's usually wrong.

Then the Father speaks: “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him.”

Listen to Jesus! If He is God's beloved Son, listening to Him is Listening to God! Hear Him as He declares His Father! He speaks truth. He invites you to come to Him.

We ought to respond like Samuel of old: “Speak, Lord, for your servant hears” (1 Samuel 3:10).

What was the purpose for the Transfiguration?

1. Encouragement: Both for the Lord and for the disciples.

When Jesus goes to the cross, His face will be covered with shame, spittal, blood, and His brow will be bleeding from the thorns. They can remember the glory on His face. His garments will be ripped from Him, but they can remember that His garments were as white as the light.

2. The Transfiguration answers the question, “Will we know each other in heaven?”

There were no name tags on Moses and Elijah; yet, the disciples didn't have to be introduced to them. They knew them.

3. The presence of Moses and Elijah teaches us that Jesus is the life of the living dead.

Those who are physically dead are still alive somewhere and will one day be united with Jesus. There is hope for the resurrection!

III. What the Three Disciples Took Away Matthew 17:5-8

Jesus gently touches them and when they lifted up their eyes, they saw Jesus only. Moses was gone. Elijah was gone. The cloud was gone. All they saw was Jesus – with the words of the Father still echoing in their ears – “Listen to Jesus!” He's all you need!

Notice Matthew 17:9: "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 be risen from the dead."

We cannot be transfigured like our Lord, but He does want us to be transformed. Romans 12:1-2.

BRING HIM TO ME!

Matthew 17:14-21

What a contrast these verses are to the first thirteen verses of this chapter that we have just studied. The first thirteen verses describe for us the heavenly glory and the mountain-top experience of the transfiguration. Our Lord was on top of the mountain with Peter, James, and John and they were joined by two great Old Testament men: Moses and Elijah. Moses and Elijah were there to talk to Jesus about His soon up-coming death and to offer encouragement to Him. Then Jesus was transfigured before all those on the mountain. His face began to shine as the sun and His clothes became white as snow. We are told in the Book of Revelation that heaven has no need of the sun or moon because the glory of Jesus will light all of heaven! Peter told the Lord, "Lord, it is good for us to be here. Let's just stay here!"

It was glorious on the mountain top, but down in the valley at the bottom of the mountain were the other nine disciples who had encountered a problem. A man had brought his son who had been having epileptic seizures and they were intensified because he was also demon possessed. The disciples tried to cure the boy, but they could not – they failed! And the scribes mocked the disciples because they did not have the ability to cure the boy.

When Jesus and His three disciples reached the bottom of the mountain, there was a great commotion and Jesus asked what was going on. A man came out of the multitude, knelt down to Jesus and said, "Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is an epileptic and suffers severely, for he often falls into the fire (and burns himself) and often into the water (and almost drowns). So, I brought him to your disciples, but they could not cure him."

And now we come to a very remarkable passage. It is one of those rare passages in which we find the Son of God – if I may say this with all reverence – frustrated with His followers.

I suspect that many of us provide our Lord with plenty of opportunities to express frustration if He wanted to. I know that I certainly do and I'm so grateful that He is abundantly patient. In this passage Jesus clearly let some of His followers know that He had run out of patience with them. He lets them know that He has "had it" with them.

If the Holy Spirit has seen fit to include a story in the Bible about our Lord getting frustrated at some of His followers, it would be wise for us to pay careful attention and learn the reasons why.

• The Lack of Spiritual Power Matthew 17:14-17

Three times in this passage we are told of the disciple's lack of ability to do something for the boy. "And they could not."

The word "O" in Matt. 17:17 is a word of deep anguish. It was usually reserved for a time of burdened prayer. People would come before God and cry from 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 boy's father. When Jesus sees this lack of faith Jesus cries out, "How much longer am I going to have to put up with you?"

The saddest part of this whole scene is not the condition of the boy; the saddest part 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."

There is a theme in this passage. It centers on the word "ABILITY" – the ability to do something, or the lack of it.

Look at Matthew 10:1, 5-8. When the twelve returned they were so excited. They said, "Lord, it was wonderful! We saw folks healed; even lepers! And we cast out demons!" Jesus said, "Don't rejoice because you cast out demons, rather rejoice that your names are written in heaven" (Luke 10:20).

Here is the point: Jesus had given His disciples His authority and power to heal in His Name. Once they could heal, but now they could not. Why? Here they thought they could heal in their own power Apart from a Dependent Faith In Jesus and they were unable. They sought to do the work of Jesus without any dependent relationship by faith with Jesus.

Here is a tremendously important spiritual principle:

- John 15:4-5
- By contrast: Ephesians 3:20; Philippians 4:13

Here is the great lesson this passage is meant to teach us: We, as followers of Jesus, are unable to do anything FOR Jesus apart from an utterly dependent faith IN Jesus.

II. The Lord of Spiritual Power Matthew 17:17-18

Mark tells us something that Matthew doesn't tell us. The father lacked faith as well, for in Mark 9:20-24, the father said, "If you can do anything." Jesus said, "What do you mean, IF I CAN? All things are possible to him that believes!"

Jesus had rebuked His disciples; now He rebukes the father of the boy. Then the father said, "Lord, I do believe in You and in Your ability. But, my faith is weak! Help me to grow in my faith!"

Jesus commands the evil spirit to leave the boy and to never return. The demon attacks the child one more time and comes out of him. The child becomes 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 lifts him up. The child rises and he is free.

III. The Lessons of Spiritual Power Matthew 17:19-21

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 not." 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?

STRAIGHT FROM THE FISH'S MOUTH **Matthew 17:24-27**

There are some unique characteristics of this miracle worth noting.

1. This miracle is recorded only by Matthew. Being a former tax collector, this miracle would have been of interest to him.

2. This is the only miracle Jesus performed to meet His own need. Satan had tempted Jesus to use His divine powers for Himself during the wilderness temptations, but He refused. He performed this miracle for Himself "lest we cause them to stumble."

3. This miracle is the only miracle performed using money.

4. It is the only miracle using only one fish.

5. It is the only miracle which does not record the results. We would expect another verse that would read: "And Peter went to the sea, cast a hook into the water, and drew up a fish; and when he had opened its mouth, he found there a coin; so, he used it to pay the temple tax for himself and Jesus." But Matthew 17:28 is not there.

Have you noticed that Jesus did more miracles for Simon Peter than any other disciple?

1. In Mark 1:31 Jesus healed Peter's mother-in-law.

2. In Luke 5 Jesus borrowed Peter's boat as He pushed off a little from the shore as a large crowd gathered on the shore. He used the water as a natural amplifier as He spoke from the boat. When He had finished speaking, Jesus told Peter to sail to the deep part of the lake and let down his nets for a catch. Peter said, "We have fished all night and caught nothing, nevertheless, at Your word (just to show You there are no fish out there in the deep) we will go out there and let down ONE net." And when he did the net filled with so many fish that he had to call for other boats to come help him get the fish that he had to shore. It was then that Peter declared Jesus to be Lord of his life and Jesus told him that from then on, He would make him a fisher of men.

3. In Mark 14 as the disciples were crossing the Sea of Galilee without Jesus being with them, a mighty storm suddenly came. They were about to go down because of the storm when they saw Jesus walking on the water toward them. When Peter knew it was the Lord, he asked if he could come walking on the water to Him. Even though Peter took his eyes off of Jesus and began to sink, Jesus reached down and lifted him up.

4. John 18 tells us that in the Garden of Gethsemane Peter cut off the ear of Malchus, the high priest's servant, but Jesus picked up the severed ear and placed it back on the side of Malchus' head.

5. In Acts 12, both James and Peter were in prison. Herod took James, the brother of John, and sawed James in half length-wise. Yet, the Church prayed for the release of Peter and while Peter was asleep between two guards, God sent His angel to release Peter, but he had to wake him up to do so.

5. And now we have this miracle of Peter catching the fish with a coin in his mouth and he paid the Temple Tax for himself and Jesus.

When we come to this miracle, it all began when someone – somewhere on the Sea of Galilee – lost some money.

We don't know how it happened, or who it happened to. But somewhere upon the Sea of Galilee, someone lost hold of a Greek stator – a coin that was worth the rough equivalent of two average days' wages for a common working man – and watched it fall into the water. Perhaps someone flipped their coin into the air and failed to catch it and lost control of it. Or perhaps when they were getting paid, they fumbled the coin and it slipped out of their hands and into the water.

However, it happened, we could imagine that they heard their coin – two full days' earnings – fall into the water and they watched helplessly as it sank out of sight ... and they went home kicking themselves.

Now, imagine that as the coin sank in the Sea, a large fish struck and swallowed the object. The fish did its best to spit the coin out, but now it was lodged in its gullet. Now, all of this, the accidental loss of the coin, the sinking of the coin in the Sea, the fish that came by and swallowed it and swam away, was all under the control of a sovereign God who knew that all these things happened as part of His purposeful plan.

I. The Special Collector Matthew 17:24-25a

This was not the same sort of tax that Matthew collected. He collected a tax from his own people on behalf of the occupying Roman government. Rather, this was a tax collected BY the Jewish people, FROM the Jewish people, FOR the benefit of the Jewish people's Temple.

This was not a civil tax; it was a religious tax paid by every Jewish male 20 years and older. The tax had its roots in the Old

Testament Jewish Law and began in the wilderness. The tax was used to maintain the Tabernacle and Temple. Every Jewish male was required to pay a half-shekel tax – two days wages for the average worker (Read Exodus 30:11-16).

The tax was paid as a ransom for each person's life. It reminded the Jews that they were in debt to God for their sins and that they required an atonement. But Jesus, of course, had no sin of His own. He had come to earth to pay with His blood the ransom price for OUR sins! Only a sinless Person could do that. A sinner cannot redeem someone else, because he himself needs salvation. Therefore, Jesus was not under obligation to pay the ransom tax for Himself. There is no ransom on His soul. He had never been kidnapped by Satan into sin in the first place.

Time and again we are told that Jesus came to be a ransom for us.
(Mark 10:45; I Timothy 2:5-6)

Worship was expensive in that day as it is in ours. It took money to pay the worship leaders, provide sacrificial animals, inspectors of sacrifices, custodial services, priestly garments, repairs on the building.

II. The Serious Consideration Matthew 17:24-26

When asked if Jesus paid the Temple Tax, Peter quickly answered, "Yes." Peter didn't know if it was a loaded question or not. If he had said, "No," the answer could have been used as ammunition to further attack Christ. Peter didn't want to dishonor or endanger Christ.

When Simon came into the house, before he ever said a word, Jesus asked Simon a question, "From whom do the kings of the earth take taxes – from his own son or from his subjects? From his children or from strangers?" Peter said, "Kings take taxes from subjects and strangers." Jesus said, "Then sons don't have to pay taxes."

Peter had just heard the Father speak on the Mount of Transfiguration and say, "This is My beloved Son."

If there was any tax that Jesus was not obligated to pay, it would have been the Temple Tax. He was the one for whom the Temple was built to honor. He is the Lord of the Temple. He called the Temple "His Father's house." God would not be expected to pay for His own worship. Kings would not pay for the crown which sat upon his own head.

Notice Matthew 17:27: "Though I am under no obligation to pay the tax, I will do so lest I should set a bad example to others. I will do nothing to set a bad example."

Here is a principle Peter needed to understand: People are always watching us. By what they see from us, we become either a stepping stone or a stumbling block to them. We should never be guilty of causing others to stumble away from Christ.

We must learn the importance of influence. Jesus did what He had a right not to do. He paid the tax.

Christians have a fishbowl existence. The world has a high expectation from us. Every Christian is a letter of recommendation for Jesus. Whether we like it or not, our life is an advertisement for Him.

Christians are evaluated by others in what they see in us; in how we look; in what we say; in how we say it.

The world doesn't expect us to be Perfect, but it does expect us to be Different!

The principle Jesus is trying to teach is more important than the miracle.

Notice Matt. 17:27: "Nevertheless, lest we offend them." The word "offend" means "to place an obstacle in one's path, causing one to slip, stumble, or slide". It means to go the extra mile in order to prevent an offense.

Romans 14:21; I Corinthians 8:13; Galatians 5:13

There's an old story of a blind man who carried a lighted lantern at night. Someone asked him why he always went around with a lighted lantern since he could not see. He said, "To keep others from stumbling over me." That must be our concern. We must see to it that no one stumbles along the way because of us.

The greatest handicap Christ has is the unsatisfactory lives of professing Christians.

III. The Simple Command Matthew 17:27

Jesus wanted Peter to know that He was in full control of everything.

How many fish were swimming in the Sea of Galilee that day? I don't know – have no idea. We are told there are 22 species in the Sea of Galilee. What are the chances of one fish having a coin in its mouth and that coin being the exact amount needed, and being the one fish that took Peter's hook?

By the way, this is the only place in the New Testament where a fisherman used a hook. Every other time they used a net. Peter is only after the one fish with the coin in its mouth. You don't need a net to catch one fish!

IV. The Strange Catch

We don't have a Verse 28 to give us the results of the miracle.

But I can see Peter going down to the Sea, throwing in his hook, waiting for it to sink to the bottom, feeling a tug and bringing in the fish. I'm sure that when Peter opened the fish's mouth, his own mouth opened as well when he saw the coin in the fish's mouth.

What a fish tale!

I wonder if he kept the fish.

KIDS IN THE KINGDOM **Matthew 18:1-6; 19:13-15**

If you would, please sing along with me as I lead us in a song. Come on, now, sing it out loud:

“Jesus loves the little children, all the children of the world.
Red and yellow, black and white, they are precious in His sight,
Jesus loves the little children of the world!”

He does, you know. Children are unique little creatures! In the two passages we discover several truths about Jesus and children.

- We see that Jesus loves little children and welcomes them into His arms.
- We see that it is a good thing for parents to bring their children to Jesus for Him to bless.
- We also discover that it is a dangerous offense to hinder children from coming to Jesus.

Each of those truths could be an entire message alone. Jesus told those adult disciples that if they ever wanted to enter the kingdom of Heaven, that they must change and become LIKE little children. Now, Jesus DID NOT say that we are to become CHILDISH; but that we are to become CHILD-LIKE! Childishness causes all kinds of problems in the church, but being child-like brings blessings.

Jesus makes a revolutionary statement here. Some folks think children have to become adults in order to understand enough to trust Jesus. But Jesus said adults must become like children in order to be part of His kingdom.

Two things I would point out from this passage:

I. The Sad Scene Matthew 18:1

Remember that in Matthew 17 Jesus and the three disciples, Peter, James, and John had been together on the Mount of Transfiguration. Nine of the disciples were at the bottom of the mount waiting for Jesus and His inner circle to return. While the nine were together, they were discussing, which among them was the greatest or which would be the greatest in the Kingdom. Of all things, they were comparing themselves to one another. Each one of them felt they were more important than the others. Each of them believed that when the kingdom came, they should have the greatest position.

Remember that this topic had come up before – several times, in fact. Peter, James, and John were not with the nine, but they had had that discussion before. In fact, the mother of James and John, who was kin to Jesus, asked that one of her sons might sit on His left side and the other on His right side when He came into His kingdom.

At least she didn't specify which one should be on the left and which one should be on the right.

And Peter! Well, he was the leader of the group. Jesus stayed often at his house. He walked on water and Jesus had given him the keys to the Kingdom.

Each of their arguments was based on pride, selfishness and jealousy. Pride caused them to look more highly on themselves than

they should. Jealousy caused them to think they were better than the others.

This led them to bring their question to Jesus: "Who then is greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?"

Notice Matthew 18:2-5.

Jesus told them that it was great just to be IN the Kingdom of Heaven and they were wanting to know who was to be the greatest in the Kingdom. Suppose one of them was chosen to be the greatest in the Kingdom and Jesus had revealed which one it was. How do you think it would have made the others feel?

But they want to know "which one of them? Tell us!" For one thing, Jesus had already taught them about the type of people who would be citizens of the Kingdom: "the poor in spirit", "those who mourn", the meek", "the merciful", and so on.

Then Jesus talks about "redemption." Look at Matthew 18:3-4. "Unless you be converted" ... that is, unless you turn from your pride and become like a little child and humble yourself; you will not receive the Kingdom of Heaven." Make sure – first – for there was one disciple among the twelve who was not converted – make sure you are converted.

II. The Delightful Scene Matthew 18:2-6; 19:13-15

The disciples were not being mean in Matthew 19:13 in rebuking the parents from bringing their children to Jesus. They thought they were protecting Jesus. They thought the Master's time was too valuable to spend on small children.

Jesus in return rebuked the disciples for their attitude regarding these children. Jesus is never too busy for anyone, and especially children, for the little children are what the Kingdom is all about.

Children usually are a very good judge of character. Jesus always took up a lot of time with children. By the way, the word "little child" in Matthew 18:2 and "little children" in Matthew 19:13 speaks of a toddler. Jesus drew children to Himself like a magnet. Children loved Him. Have you noticed children love "Daddy Bill?" Children love "Daddy Bill."

I've always been fairly proud that I've related fairly well to children until about a year ago. A beautiful little blond-headed girl with curly hair was born to one of the couples in our church, and every time she saw me, she started crying. I'd try to make her laugh and she cried more. It did her mommy so much good. But last Sunday, Adam whispered something in her ear and she kissed me on the cheek – twice!

Sweet victory!

Why did Jesus say that unless we become like little children that we would not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven? There are some wonderful qualities that children have that we must have if we are going to enter the Kingdom of God. And by the way, the question is not "Who is the greatest" but how does one become great in God's Kingdom? How does one prove that he is trustworthy?

1. A child is so trusting. He believes and accepts what you say as truth.

In Matthew 18:2 when Jesus called a child to Himself, the child came. He responded to the call of Christ without hesitation and he felt free to respond to and trust Christ's call.

The older we get, the more we question and hesitate. That's good in some areas, but not when it comes to trusting what God says.

2. A child has a teachable spirit.

I Peter 2:2-3: "As newborn babes, desire (crave) the sincere (pure) milk of the Word, that you may grow thereby."

Children love to learn. They are like sponges soaking up information. They will even ask God funny questions. Here are some:

– "Dear God, is it true my daddy won't get into heaven if he uses his golf words in the house?"

– "Dear God, did you mean for giraffes to look like that or was it an accident?"

– "Dear God, my Grandpa says You were around when he was a little boy. How far do the two of you go back?"

3. A child has a helpless dependency about him.

Don't stop asking God for help. God is bigger, wiser, and far more powerful than we are. Besides, things go much better when we don't try to do them by ourselves.

4. Children are quick to forgive.

Wouldn't the world be a better place if we could forgive people who have hurt us as easily

as children go?

Some boys were bragging one day on the playground about how their dads could beat up other kids' dads. That afternoon a big, strong man rang the doorbell at the house of one of the boys. The dad answered the door and the big guy said, "My kid said that your kid said that you have made a list of people you can beat up and that I am on that list. I don't think you can beat me up, so what are you going to do about it?" The smaller man said, "I'll take you off my list."

The problem with adults is that we keep a list of folks that we haven't forgiven. Why don't you take those folks off your list and forgive them? The Bible says, "Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ has forgiven you." (Ephesians 4:32).

There is a word of Responsibility here – Matthew 19:13a, 14-15.

1. Parents and church: We are Responsible for Evangelizing our children.

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 may be blessed through His praying and His touch.

Parents are encouraged to share the things of God with their children. So are Sunday School teachers and Vacation Bible School workers.

2. Parents and church: We are Responsible for Educating our children.

By bring their children to Jesus, these parents were telling their children that they saw something special in Him. The same is true in bringing our children to church. If my faith does not change my life and cause me to be a better person, my children will pick up on that. I can talk about my faith, but if I do not live out my faith, it translates into hypocrisy in the eyes of my children.

It's our duty to bring our children face to face with a saving Lord. If we make much of Jesus in front of our children, they will be far more likely to come to Him at an early age and remain faithful to Him as they mature.

3. Parents and church: We are Responsible for Encouraging our children.

Christian parents are told to bring their children up "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4). The word "admonition" has the idea of "encourage." We ought to encourage our children to seek the things of God. Teach them to pray at an early age. Make the Bible a big part of their daily life. Pray with them.

One of the best things a parent can do for their children is to be in love with Jesus.

Think of the children who are not brought to Christ. The result is tragic: they never come to know Christ and the life and security He brings to the human heart.

In a very special sense, children are bundles of trust that God has put into the care of parents for a short time. Parents are the trustees of God's property, of the little lives God has given.

The greatest gift of love parents can show to their children is to bring their children to Christ.

A SEARCH AND RESCUE MISSION

Matthew 18:5-14

Jesus has just said that "unless you (we) become as little children, you (we) will by no means enter into the kingdom of heaven." And that if we "receive" or "welcome" a child in His name, it is the same as "receiving" or "welcoming Him."

Now look at Matthew 18:6. If we cause a little child who belongs to Jesus to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and were drowned in the depth of the sea.

Now, before we go any further, let me point out something that, if you are a student of the Word of God, you may have already picked up on.

1. Jesus preached some of His sermons more than one time, but He may word things a little differently. For example, Jesus preached the Sermon on the Mount more than one time.

Notice Matthew 5:1-2. (Notice: "He went up on a mountain".) Now notice Luke 6:17. (Notice: "And He came down with them (His disciples) and stood ON A LEVEL PLACE".)

Compare: Matthew 5:3-6 and Luke 6:20-23.

2. Jesus sometimes preached important points more than one time.

Look at Matthew 18:8-9. Compare this with Matthew 5:29-30.

Three things I want to share with you:

I. The Preciousness of a Child Matthew 18:2-5

Understand that Jesus is not speaking only of literal children, but all of those who have humbled themselves, like children, and are true believers.

I want you to know that if you belong to the Lord Jesus, you are precious to Him. You were redeemed with His precious blood, He has given to you His precious promise. You are safe in His care. He is preparing for you a special place where you can be with Him forever, you are Precious to Him.

II. The Profaning of a Child Matthew 18:6-11

Look at Matthew 18:6-7. The last part of Verse 7 says, "Offenses must come, but woe to that man by whom the offense comes."

Jesus gives this warning to every child of God. "Offenses must come"; "Temptations to sin and influences to do wrong will come."

A. Here is the first warning:

Leading a child of God astray is the worse conceivable sin. There is nothing worse than leading another person into sin.

In fact, it would be better to die than to lead another person into sin. Jesus said it would be better to hang a millstone about one's neck and cast oneself into the depths of the sea than to lead another person astray.

The "millstone" spoken of by Christ was the huge millstone like an oxen or donkey pulled around to grind grain. The very fact that Christ chose the huge millstone to illustrate His point shows just how great this sin is. This person would be held at the bottom of the sea by this awful weight until drowned.

Drowning was a form of criminal punishment used by the Romans but never by the Jews. The Jews saw drowning as a symbol of utter destruction. They feared it. Even Romans reserved it only for the worst criminals.

Jesus added this to add fear to His audience. He painted the picture of a stone around the offender's neck so that the body could never rise to the top and be recovered for proper burial.

Why would Jesus want to put fear in the hearts of those listening to Him? The answer is clear: the sin of leading another person astray is terrible, and the offender must know the fate that is awaiting him.

Someone said that Matthew 18:6 should be written on every school-teacher's desk. The word "offend" means "to throw off course." In other words, Jesus says, "If you cause one of these little ones to question Me or to be thrown off course in their walk with Me, it would be better for you to drown."

There are several ways we cause others to sin.

1. By leading them into sin and teaching them to sin.

"Oh, come on, no one will know. It's not going to hurt you."

The teenage years may be the worse time in a person's life for this type of temptation; especially when it comes to immorality. There are so many ways these days for a young boy or a young girl to fall into immorality. The boy tempts the girl and the girl tempts the boy and before they know it, they have become impure. There is an old saying: "You can't unscramble eggs." That is true as far as morality and purity is concerned.

Young people, let me give you some of the best dating advice you can hear on staying pure while you are on a date: Don't pull

anything up, don't pull anything down; don't unbutton anything, and don't unzip anything. Follow that advice and it will save you a lot of heartache.

2. By example; by the things we do.

If someone sees you doing something wrong, they may say, "If it's alright for him to do it, then it should be alright for me."

3. By considering some sins to be merely "white" sins.

"Oh, that's alright. There's not that much to it. It's not going to hurt anyone."

4. By ridiculing or poking fun at someone who is attempting to do right.

"Man, you're acting like a religious fanatic."

5. By daring someone to do something.

"I dare you to do it!"

B. A second warning:

Becoming a stumbling block to someone – Matthew 18:8-9.

The word "offend" in Matthew 18:8 means "to become a stumbling block." Understand that Jesus is using graphic hyperbole here. He is not advocating self-mutilation. The hand or foot or eye is not the problem. The heart is the problem. If you cut off both hands and both feet and pull out both eyes, the problem would still be there, for the problem is the heart and only Jesus can fix that.

III. The Pursuit of the Child Matthew 18:10-14

What if the child of God does fall into sin? What if he does go astray?

Think about this: God has chosen the Lamb; a sheep, to be the mascot of the human race.

Isaiah 53:6

A. The Wandering Sheep

Let me show you how much Jesus cares for you and me. The shepherd has a hundred sheep, but one is missing and his great concern is for that ONE that is lost. Four times in this passage He talks about the one!

The wandering sheep is in danger and it didn't realize it. Wild animals could attack and destroy it. The terrain with its ravines and pits could cripple or destroy the sheep. It may wander to a place where there is no food or water. It could catch some deadly disease and the shepherd would not be there to detect it.

It is no accident that God calls His spiritual leaders shepherds or pastors.

"Preacher, does it bother you when folks miss church?" One of the first things I talk about when I leave church is who was not there. Oh, I'm so grateful for those who are here. They are where they are supposed to be. But my heart's concern is for that one who is not there. Why were they not there?

B. The Wonderful Shepherd Matthew 18:12

How does the shepherd know one is missing? He takes a count of his sheep. He doesn't just call them by numbers; he knows their names! Every sheep is important. He is committed to every last one of them. He takes action to find the sheep. One is not more important than another, so he wants to find that one.

C. The Willing Sovereign Matthew 18:13-14

In Luke 15 there is the Parable of the Lost Sheep and that parable is dealing with salvation. But this passage has to do with the care and safe-keeping of those who are already saved.

We have a responsibility to win the lost, but our responsibility to the saved is just as great. We must commit to go after those who wander from the fold.

Matthew 18:15-20

As a Christian who is right with God, it is always your turn!

If you have offended someone. If you have wronged someone. If you have sinned against someone. It's always your turn to go to that person and make it right. YOU are to right the wrong.

But look at Matthew 18:15: "If your brother sins Against You – You go to him." It's always your turn. Don't wait for him to come to you. You go to him. Be the bigger man or woman! It's your turn! Go to them and right the wrong.

Three things I want you to see:

I. The Problem Matthew 18:15

How are believers to function when another brother sins? The first thing Jesus says is, "Go to your brother." And remember as you go, he is your brother, so treat him as such. Watch your emotions.

The King James Version says, "If thy brother shall trespass against thee." The word trespass means "to cross over the line."

The New King James Version and most other translations say, "If your brother SINS against you, go and tell him his fault." Does it make a difference if you use the word "trespass" instead of "sin?" I think so.

The Greek word that is used is actually "sin." It pictures a person shooting an arrow at a target and falling short of the bull's eye. It means, "to miss the mark." When it is used by Jesus, it means "to miss the mark of God's standards."

In this lesson, Jesus does not define what this sin might be. That leaves the possibility wide open. There are many ways in which a believer may miss the mark. By using the word that pictures a person taking an arrow, putting it in a bow, aiming at a target, letting the arrow go, Jesus is giving a picture of a person who has taken a deliberate action. One does not accidentally shoot an arrow. It is a deliberate action. It is a deliberate action and it is "sin."

Jesus wants us to know that there is the possibility of a believer sinning and there are times when things are not right and need to be corrected. A believer sinning against another believer is a problem and Jesus addresses the issue. The sinning believer needs to be corrected.

Now there's another problem. The text says that a brother sins against you! And it's your responsibility to go to him and make it right? I could understand if I did something wrong to him that I would need to go to him. But if he does something to me, HE should come to me!

Well, let me throw another twist in the mix. Some manuscripts do not contain the words "against you," and they were added to the text, so that it reads, "If your brother sins, go and tell him his faults."

Question: Should I follow this procedure for every sin?

- Proverbs 19:11 says, "It is to a man's glory to overlook a transgression."
- I Peter 4:8 says, "Love will cover a multitude of sins."

It makes a big difference as to How you go to your sinning brother.

Galatians 6:1: "Brethren, if a man is overtaken (caught; actually seen committing the sin, it is not hearsay) in a fault, you who are spiritual restore such an one in the spirit of meekness (gentleness), considering yourself lest you also be tempted."

"Restore" him. That's the goal. Going to a brother must always be redemptive. The word "restore" means "to mend the break." It is used of "setting a bone" or "repairing a dislocated limb." If you have a broken bone or a dislocated limb, you are already hurting. You don't want someone to add to the pain. You want them to be easy and gentle. So, it is with spiritual matters.

II. The Process Matthew 18:15-17

1. Step One is crucial: Go to the person who has committed the sin and go to them in private (Alone).

Keep the matter between the offender and the offended. Do not talk to someone else about it.

"Go to him and tell him his fault between you and him alone." In the right spirit and with humility.

That takes courage – to go in the right spirit – and it takes humility. Don't come across defensively or judgmental. Always be redemptive.

If the offender refuses to make the situation right, what do you do next?

2. Step Two: Take one or two with you to see the brother.

Keep the circle as small as possible. They go to confirm the facts. They will not deal with hearsay, rumor, or misinformation. They deal only with the facts. This is the second opportunity to make things right with the offended.

What if this second step does not work? What if the offender does not respond and the matter is not settled?

3. Step Three: Take the matter to the church.

The offended plus the one or two witnesses are to bring the situation before the congregation. The case is to be presented publicly. Make sure they are spiritually mature with spiritual wisdom.

Only the offended, the offender, and the one or two witnesses are to speak to the matter. DO NOT allow a question and answer session. Do not let others give their opinion. The more folks talk and share their opinions, the more likely there will be permanent hurt feelings and a split in the church.

4. Step Four: If the person who committed the sin did not respond in a positive way, the church must take action toward the sinning brother. Here is what the church must do.

The church is to respond to this person as if that person were not a believer. He is to be viewed as one who had never been saved. Fellowship is to be withdrawn from him, but the church must still have a redemptive spirit about the person.

I Corinthians 5:11: "But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner – not even to eat with such a person."

Romans 16:17: "Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause division and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them."

2 Thessalonians 3:6: "But we command you, brethren, in the Name of the Lord Jesus, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us."

If he repents at any time, he is to be welcomed back with open arms. Paul wrote about a disciplined believer who did want to be welcomed back into the fellowship.

2 Corinthians 2:6: "Sufficient for such an one is this punishment which was inflicted by the majority, so that on the contrary you should rather forgive and comfort him, otherwise such an one might be overwhelmed by excess sorrow. Wherefore I urge you to reaffirm your love for him."

III. The Purpose Matthew 18:15b

The true purpose for confronting the sinning brother is for him to realize his wrong, causing the person to be remorseful for what he had done, and restore him to fellowship.

"You have gained (won) a brother."

FORGIVENESS FROM THE HEART

Matthew 18:21-35

Before reading the Scripture.

Forgiveness is a major theme in the Word of God. You and I cannot be saved unless God forgives us of our sins.

- Ephesians 1:7: "In (Jesus) we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace."
- Colossians 1:14: "In (Christ) we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness

of sins.”

- Colossians 2:13: “He has made you alive, having forgiven you all (your) trespasses.”

If God has forgiven you of your sins, here is what God expects of you: Forgiven People are to be Forgiving People. If God has forgiven you, He expects you to forgive other people. In fact, God says that He will forgive you on the basis of how you forgive others who sin against you.

In Matthew 6:9-13 Jesus gives us the Pattern Prayer and in Verse 12 He says, “And forgive us our debts, as (in the same way), we forgive our debtors.”

Then Jesus says in Matthew 6:14-15: “For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”

The Bible even says that you can't be right with God if you are not right with your brother or sister in Christ. Look at Matthew 5:23-24. Jesus said that there is something more important than our worship of God ... “First, be reconciled to your brother, And then come and offer your gift.” Forgiving your brother's sin against you and being reconciled with your brother is more important than giving your tithe or offering or trying to worship God in some way.

The Bible tells us something else: You can't be right with God if you are wrong with your brother. That sounds very much like what I just said when I said, “You can't be right with God if you are not right with your brother. Look at I John 4:20-21; I John 5:1-2.

Now let's read the passage. Read Matthew 18:21-27. Isn't this a great story of forgiveness? But wait a minute, there's more. I wish the story ended here. It would be much more pleasant. But I suppose we should read the rest of the story. Read Matthew 18:28-35.

Go back and look at Matthew 18:15: “Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone.” Now look at Matthew 18:21: “Then Peter came to Him and said, 'Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him?’” “Lord, something about that doesn't seem right. Do You mean that if someone sins against me, I should go to him and make it right? And, Lord, if he does sin against me and I forgive him, and he sins against me again and I forgive him, and he sins against me again – Well, Lord, how many times do I have to keep forgiving him?”

I know when God spoke through His prophet, Amos, “God said, 'For three transgressions and for four, I will not turn away its punishment’” and God spoke this same message to eight nations and God punished all eight nations. “But God, if someone sins against ME ... And I forgive him, how many times will I have to forgive him?” The rabbis of that day taught that if someone sinned against them, a “GOOD” Jew would forgive someone three times, but no more.

Well, now, how about you?! Someone did you wrong three times – would you forgive them?

Peter attempted to be magnanimous so he doubled the standard of three and added one for good measure. “Seven Times, Lord?”

Jesus answered by saying that forgiveness isn't about counting; it's about character. There should be no limits to forgiveness.

A pastor tells of the time he was driving along as his two sons fought in the backseat. He looked in the rear-view mirror just in time to see the foot of his ten-year-old connect squarely with the jaw of the seven-year-old, who started screaming in pain. The pastor pulled the car off the road and got his older son out and said, “Why did you do that to your brother?” He said, “Because he keeps hitting me and won't stop.” The father said, “Son, why can't you just forgive him?” His son said, “Dad, why should I forgive him when I know he's going to keep on hitting me?”

The pastor said that was a question he had often been asked by adults, and he still didn't have a good answer. The world's answer is simple: Payback time! But as Christians, we're told to turn the other cheek; we're told to forgive. But sometimes forgiveness is very difficult when we know the person who needs our forgiveness is going to keep on hitting us.

I. The Parable of Forgiveness

In the parable a king, which represents God, is going to call his servants (who represent each of us) together for a reckoning to settle his accounts.

One servant owed the king 10,000 talents, about three billion dollars. The king demanded payment. Of course, the man could not pay. The king says, “Well, then, I'll sell you, your wife, your children and all you have.” The servant fell down before the king, asked for patience and promised to pay. The master knew he could not pay, but he had compassion, forgave the debt, released him, and wiped the debt away.

But the same servant found a fellow who owed him 100 denarii, about \$5,000. He repeated the same words as the first man – “have patience and I will pay you all.” But he would not, but rather had him thrown into prison.

Do you see why the master of the first servant was so upset and angry when he would not forgive his fellow servant?

God has given and forgiven us so much: all our sins, our iniquities, our transgressions; yet, we are not willing to forgive one or two wrongs against us.

Notice something else: This man didn't just happen to cross paths with this servant. He went out looking for him (Matthew 18:28).

How often do you sin? Don't answer out loud. Remember that sin is not only doing wrong things, but it is also failing to do right things. Suppose we only sin eight times a day; that's about one sin every two hours you're awake. If you started willfully sinning when you were about six years old (age of accountability) and kept it up until age 77, that's a sum of over 200,000 sins. What if God said, “Here is your sin bill. What are you going to do about it?”

“Lord, be patient with me! Give me a chance! I'll clean up my act. I'll start doing better!” No, that won't work.

I Peter 2:24 says, “He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree.” A huge debt, but Jesus paid it all!

II. The Problem of Forgiveness

Forgiveness is never easy – for the person you have wronged or the person who has wronged you. Have you ever gone to someone you have wronged and admitted that wrong and asked them to forgive you? It's tough!

Being forgiven is a virtue we Enjoy but hesitate to Employ! We love to be forgiven – we want and expect to be forgiven, but we struggle with forgiving others. We Resist it and sometimes Refuse to do it.

Forgiveness is letting go of what I feel is my “right” to hurt you for hurting me. It is surrendering my “right” to be angry!

But Jesus said that the forgiven must forgive. Forgiveness ought to flow in the bloodstream of God's people. Forgiveness is to be a way of life for those who know the Lord.

In his book, *None of These Diseases*, S. I. McMillan says, “The moment I start hating a man, I become his slave. He even controls my thoughts. I can't escape his tyrannical grasp on my mind. When the waiter serves me steak, it might as well be stale bread and water. The man I hate will not permit me to enjoy it.”

III. The Principles of Forgiveness Matthew 18:35

Notice the phrase, “from his heart.” Sometimes we say we have forgiven when we really have not forgiven at all. Let me give you some marks of unforgiveness:

1. When forgiveness is talked about or preached on, if you have not truly forgiven, the Holy Spirit flashes the names and faces of those you have not forgiven across the screens of your mind.
2. You seek to avoid the person you have not forgiven, especially in public. You don't want to talk to them or face them in any way.
3. You feel anger, resentment, and bitterness toward the person.
4. You play the offense over and over again in your mind. You even have imaginary conversations with the person. You imagine ways of getting back at them and wish you had been quick enough to think of things you later thought of to say to them or do to them. You still want to personally hurt them.

Isn't it interesting we forget all kinds of things, but we usually have total recall when it comes to how other people mistreated us? Forgiving is an active process in which you make a conscious choice not to remember.

If you ask God, He will help you to remove that insult or injury or hurt from your memory.

D. L. Moody said that the most difficult sin to deal with in the life of a Christian is the sin of an unforgiving spirit. This sin, more than any other, is keeping Christians from having power with God.

God wants us to worship Him with a clean heart.

Matthew 18:34 says if we do not let the offense go, we will make for ourselves a prison where we will torment ourselves with bitterness, resentment, severe discipline, and condemnation.

The poet put it this way in a poem called, "Myself."

Myself

I have to live with myself, and so
I want to be fit for myself to know;
I want to be able as days go by
always to look myself straight in the eye;
I don't want to stand with the setting sun
And hate myself for things I've done.

I don't want to keep on a closet shelf
A lot of secrets about myself;
And fool myself as I come and go
into thinking that nobody else will know
The kind of man I really am;
I don't want to dress myself up in sham.

I want to go out with my head erect,
I want to deserve all men's respect;
But here in the struggle for fame and pelf,
I want to be able to like myself.
I don't want to think as I come and go
That I'm bluster and bluff and empty show.

I never can hide myself from me,
I see what others may never see,
I know what others may never know,
I never can fool myself – and so,
Whatever happens, I want to be
Self-respecting and conscience free.

JESUS SPEAKS ABOUT DIVORCE

Matthew 19:1-12

Before reading the Passage.

As we come to Matthew 19, Jesus is leaving Galilee with His disciples and going to the region of Judea and from there He will go to Jerusalem just prior to the passion week and His death on the cross.

Great crowds of folks follow Him and He heals many of them. While He is healing folks, some Pharisees come to Him and ask Him a question that they know is controversial and they do so to cause an argument and, hopefully, discredit Jesus before the people.

Pharisees have always enjoyed debating issues rather than celebrating the good that is happening. Beware of those folks who always want to debate and argue. They have the spirit of the Pharisees.

Here they bring before Jesus a "hot button" issue that they know will bring controversy and a difference of opinion. They know that no matter how Jesus answers, a lot of folks will disagree with Him. In other words, they sat a trap for Jesus. No matter what His answer, He would be in trouble with many of the folks – they thought.

"Hot button" issues sometime just kind of pass off the scene after a while. For example, when I was growing up in our youth group, there were some "hot button" issues: Playing cards, any kind of cards was wrong; mixed bathing, as it was called, was wrong. That is, boys and girls could not swim together; dancing was wrong – any kind of dancing, but especially if Elvis was singing; young men

wearing long hair was wrong and a lot of sermons were preached on boys wearing long hair. I could go on but you get the idea.

But there are some hot button issues that seem to stay with us. One of those issues the Pharisees brought up to Jesus. It was the question of marriage – divorce – and remarriage. These areas are still extremely controversial and no matter what your opinion on the subject, you can't win with some folks.

Now, let's look at the Passage (Read the Passage).

Two things I want to draw from this Passage: The Tricky Question and The Thoughtful Response of our Lord.

There is no question that divorce is a problem in America today. Here are the facts:

- The United States has the highest divorce rate in the world. At the present time approximately half of all marriages in the United States can be expected to end in divorce. Until about ten years ago the divorce rate between non-believers were higher than the divorce rate between born-again Christians. Not so any more. The divorce rate is about the same today.
- Half of all children will witness the breakup of a parent's marriage. Of these, close to half will also see the breakup of a parent's second marriage.
- Here are the raw numbers taken from the National Statistic Abstract: In 1950 there were 385,000 divorces in America; in 1970 there were 709,000; in 1990 we went over the one million mark of divorces with 1,175,000.
- In Mississippi the divorce rates have gone up three times what they were in 1960.

Now, go back to the passage and I want you to see:

1. The Tricky Question Matthew 19:3

“Is it lawful for a MAN to divorce his wife FOR EVERY (any) cause or reason?”

In Jesus' day it was a man's world. A man could request a divorce from his wife, but the wife could not request a divorce from her husband. Women were often abused: used and discarded, neglected and violated. Women were looked upon as nothing but movable property that were often considered of less value than animals.

But here is the hook in the passage: “Can a man divorce his wife FOR EVERY (any) cause or reason?”

There were two schools of thought or two positions on divorce in that day set forth by two rabbis.

Of course, there were those who taught that a divorce was unlawful and could not be granted under any circumstances.

Then there was the conservative view set forth by Rabbi Shamma who said that divorce could only be obtained on the grounds of sexual immorality.

Then there was the liberal view on divorce set forth by Rabbi Hillel who said that “some uncleanness” meant anything that was not pleasing to the man. Maybe she put too much salt on the eggs – divorce. Maybe she said something rude to her husband's mother – divorce. Maybe the man found someone better looking than his wife – divorce.

The Pharisees anticipated that Jesus would go with the conservative view, so they were ready with another question. See Matthew 19:7.

II. The Thoughtful Response of our Lord Matthew 19:4-6

Notice Matt. 19:4. The phrase “At the beginning.” The Pharisees wanted to go back to Moses; Jesus said, “Let's go back further than Moses. Let's go back to the beginning when God first created man and woman.”

Here is God's ideal: One man for one woman until death separates them.

Throughout the earliest history of the human race there was no mention of divorce; men and women were married and remained together until death brought separation. Much later, when more sin filled the earth and many families formed nations and lived in close proximity, problems arose, and it was obvious that laws were necessary to deal with continuing changes within communities.

Have you ever thought about the marriage of Adam and Eve? Now remember that both became sinners. They were not perfect. That means in part that both were selfish, self-centered, and wanted their own way. Do you think they never had problems with each other? Do you think there was never a difference of opinion between them or that there was never conflict?

Eve couldn't say, "Well, I'll just go back to live with Mother and Daddy!" And Adam couldn't say, "Well, I'll just find me another woman!" No, they had to work through issues. They didn't have the escape valve we have today.

When God performed their marriage vows and said, "You are no more two, but one flesh," they knew the act of marriage was not just to make physical union right in the sight of God. Marriage was ordained and blessed of God, not that the couple should do one thing together, but rather that they should do all things together. They were to be one flesh and one heart. They were to share continually love, talents, responsibilities, successes, failures, health and sickness. Marriage was meant to be the joyous union in which the men and women complement and complete the other.

That was to be God's ideal and divorce is never to be desired, but for a variety of reasons, some marriages have no hope of succeeding. When doctors try to help with physical issues and counselors try to help with emotional issues, and ministers try to help with spiritual issues, but matters continue to deteriorate, is it wise or biblical that two people obviously unsuited to each other continue to live in misery until death intervenes?

Someone said, "Marriages truly made in heaven never end in hell! Marriages of convenience seldom end anywhere else!"

God is often kinder than ministers who claim to represent Him. God made provisions for an "allowance clause." Some of God's men are unforgiving, harsh, judgmental and legalistic when it comes to this issue.

God does have strong standards when it comes to marriage, divorce, and remarriage, but God is also redemptive, full of grace, mercy, and love and forgiveness.

Just because someone finds themselves in a hopeless marriage does not mean God says, "Tough! You made your bed, now sleep in it." Do you think our loving God would confine His children to a life of misery, abuse, danger, fighting and conflict all of our life because we unintentionally made a mistake?

If I'm going to err on this subject, I want to err on the side of a redemptive spirit. I won't be redemptive, gracious, loving and merciful because those are the qualities of our Lord. You always see a situation differently when you're in the situation.

The first basic guidelines regarding divorce were expressed in Deuteronomy 24:1-4 (Read).

Rather than living in an abusive marriage or an immoral or unfaithful marriage or one of continuous conflict, or one of neglect, God made provisions to "ALLOW" divorce under certain circumstances.

1. If the marriage were to be dissolved, it must be done legally and in a way that would protect the woman, because in that day, women had few rights. The divorce was to be permanent and there must be a writing of divorcement. It could not be done by word of mouth. Then remarriage was permitted.

2. Moses refused to grant divorce on two grounds:

a. A man who falsely accused his wife of uncleanness was forbidden by law ever to divorce the woman (Deuteronomy 22:13-19).

b. If a man seduced a woman and if there was pre-marital sex and it was proven, he was compelled by law to marry her and was denied the right ever to divorce her (Deuteronomy 22:28-29).

Now let's go back to the text:

When Jesus went back to God's ideal desire and plan for marriage, He quotes Genesis 1:27 and combines it with Genesis 2:24 (See Matthew 19:4-6).

1. Marriage between A man and A woman was God's idea.

2. Marriage is intended to be a lifetime commitment.

Notice the verse carefully: "God made them (Adam and Eve; not Adam and Steve) male and female." God did not make them males and females, as He did with the animals, but He made ONE male and ONE female. Each one was made for the other. They were not made for anyone else, for there was no one else.

God made one male for one female; one female for one male. There was just Adam and Eve. This was not so with the creation of other animals. They were created en masse; a large number were created simultaneously. Added to that, male and female were

created spiritual beings; created for a much higher purpose than animals. Since there were no others like them, they were sharing their purposes together in constant fellowship with God.

Notice also that Jesus said there is a creation of a new family: “A man shall leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: (Matthew 19:5). Creating a new family distinct from the family of his parents. Jesus said, “A man,” not men, and “his wife,” not wives. A man leaves his father and mother, forms a union with his wife, and that union has primacy over the union between parent and child. That’s why husbands and wives must not neglect their life together, for the day will come when they will be all alone with each other.

“What God has joined together, let not man separate.”

There is a phrase I don’t want you to miss: Matthew 19:8. “He said to them, Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to divorce your wives ...” What does that mean?

There are some sins that you can commit against your spouse that lead to permission to divorce your spouse. What is it?

Jesus said, “Because of the hardness of your hearts.” What is the opposite of “hardness”? Tenderness. We are to treat our spouses with tenderness; not hardness of heart.

We are to treat them with tenderness, not harshness; with kindness, not unkindness; with respect, not disrespect; with thoughtfulness, not thoughtlessness; with affection, not coldness; with understanding, misinterpretation; with faithfulness, not unfaithfulness.

Stay clean in your marriage. Don’t yield to sexual temptation. There should never be even a hint of unfaithfulness in your marriage. Always want the best for your mate. God wants our marriages to be the closest thing to heaven on earth. He wants us to have abundant life in our marriages. And that comes only when both husband and wife are committed to Christ and to each other.

How do we prevent hardness of heart toward our mates?

1. Ephesians 5:22: “Wives submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord.”
2. Ephesians 5:25: “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the Church, and gave Himself for it.”
3. Ephesians 5:33: “Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverences her husband.”
4. Ephesians 4:32: “And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you.”

THE RICH YOUNG RULER

Matthew 19:16-26

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 and knelt before Him.

The Bible says that as Jesus looked at this young man, He did more than just look at him; He “beheld” him, that is, he looked within the young man and saw in him such promise and potential. And the Scriptures tell us that Jesus loved him.

He seemed to have everything in his favor. There was so much right about him. For instance, the young man 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. He asked the right question, a question about the eternal destiny of his soul. 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 close to being a Christian: he came close to being saved; yet, he turned and walked away. He threw away his opportunities to be someone forever. Through he came to Jesus, he turned his back on Jesus and went away sad ... sorrowful.

Somebody said that he had one foot in heaven, and then turned away from Jesus and walked into hell.

This account shows how some can show great interest in the gospel but never come to a saving relationship with Jesus.

He went away from Christ, not because he came to the wrong Person, or because he heard the wrong message, or because he didn't believe, but because he was unwilling to admit his sin, forsake all and follow Christ. And he went away sad ... sorrowful. He is the only person in all of recorded Scripture who came to Jesus and went away sad. The only reason a person will go away sad from Jesus is that they refuse to do what Jesus tells them to do. A person who says "no" to Jesus and turns their back on Him will always leave sorrowful.

Three things I want you to see from this passage:

I. The Man Matthew 19:16

Combining the accounts of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, we discover that this person who came running to Jesus was a rich young ruler. His name is not given, but we find three things about him:

A. His Qualities

1. His youth

The young man was in his prime when he came to the Lord. It's good to come to Jesus at any age – even when you are old, but how much better to come to Jesus when you are young. Someone put it this way: "Why give the devil the flower of your life and leave only the stem for God."

One night, D. L. Moody came home from a revival service and his wife asked him if any were saved. He said, "Yes, there were two and a half saved." She said, "You mean two adults and a child?" He said, "No, I mean two children and one middle- aged man."

Ecclesiastes 12:1. 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 while I was young ... so many regrets would never have been.'"

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. Eighty-five percent of those who are saved are saved before they get out of their teens.

2. His Enthusiasm

Mark says he RAN to Jesus! He wanted to capitalize on his opportunity.

He was enthusiastic about the welfare of his soul. That's unusual! How many folks have you ever seen run to Jesus?

3. His Humility

The young man knelt before Jesus. He didn't strut to Jesus. God honors humility. He can manifest His grace to those who are of a contrite spirit.

The Beatitudes given first is "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

God hates pride. The truth is, man has nothing to be proud about, because we have all sinned and come short of the glory of God.

This young man knelt down before Jesus. You don't see folks kneel much anymore, even on carpet.

4. He was Morally Upright

Good conduct had been the pattern of living for him all the days of his youth. But human goodness without Christ is the worse form of human badness. Why? Because most "good" folks are self-righteous and are satisfied that they are all right and don't need God.

No one can behave himself into the kingdom of God. Salvation is not a work of man for God; salvation is a work of God for man.

5. His desire for Eternal Life

As good as this young man had been and as hard as he had tried, there was still something lacking in his life and he knew it.

B. His Question Matthew 19:16

The Pharisees asked Jesus this same question (Luke 10:25), but they were testing Him; trying to trip Him up. This young man truly wanted to know what to do to be saved.

He admitted by his question that he didn't know the answer to life's most important question, how to be saved and go to heaven.

It is amazing how much spiritual ignorance there is today. We are living in one of the most intellectually advanced ages of all times. We know how to put astronauts on the moon, yet we don't know how to get to heaven.

There is, however, a little flaw, a problem, in the question which the young man asked. He had the idea that he had to DO something in order to be saved. But salvation is not something we earn; salvation is something God give us (Romans 6:23). We don't DO something in order to be saved and go to heaven. Salvation is not based on what a person does; salvation is based on what God does ... Salvation is a gift, given to us in the Lord Jesus Christ. In order to get eternal life, we have to receive Jesus.

Jesus is the only way of salvation – I John 5:11-12. The word “inherit” means “to become an heir.”

II. The Master Matthew 19:17-21

A. The Master's Inquiry Matthew 19:17-21

“Why do you call Me good?” Instead of answering his question, Jesus asked him a question in return. Why did Jesus do that? Jesus wanted to see if the young man really knew to whom he talking: “There is no one good but One, that is, God.”

Jesus was asking, “Do you realize who I am? You can't call Me good unless you call Me God. If you don't call Me God, you can't call Me good.”

What a person believes about Jesus is at the heart of salvation. If you believe that Jesus Christ is God and if you receive Jesus as God, it will have life-changing effects. You will never again be the same.

Jesus questioned the young man not only about his understanding about who He was, but also about the purpose of the commandment.

Jesus asked him about the Second Tablet of the Ten Commandments. The first four commandments deal with our relationship to God. Jesus didn't ask him about his relationship to the first four commandments, but He asked him about his relationship to the last six commandments, those relating to our relationship to man.

His answer: “All these I've observed from my youth up.” He concluded for himself that he was a good man; that he had kept all these from his youth up. I've discovered that when we conclude for ourselves, when we evaluate our self, we see ourselves as pretty good ... And a lot better than others.

Mark says, “Jesus beholding him” which means that Jesus looked inside him and saw that the young man was being truthful as far as his knowledge of the Law went. Outwardly, he had kept the Law, but he made only a shallow examination of the Law. He looked at the Ten Commandments as a check-list for “Thou shalt not,” but missed all together the spirit of the Law, that Jesus explained on the Sermon on the Mount.

1. “You have heard it said, 'Thou shalt not kill' ... but I say to you that whosoever is angry with his brother is in danger of hell fire.”
2. “You have heard it said, 'Do not commit adultery,' but I say that whosoever looks upon a woman to lust after her has committed adultery with her already in his heart.”
3. “You have heard it said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy,' but I say to you, love your enemy.”

It's not just what you don't do, it's what you do that's important.

B. The Master's Invitation Matthew 19:21

When it said that Jesus “beheld him” and “loved him” it also means that Jesus saw what the young man could become if he received Him as his Savior.

“One thing he lacked” – What was it? He suffered from a divided heart. He wanted to love God, but he also loved his gold – he was

rich! He would not give up his love for riches and whole-heartily trust and follow Jesus, and Jesus knew it. That's why Jesus asked him to sell all he had and give it to the poor and follow Him.

As Jesus listed the six commandments, He said, "Defraud not." The word "defraud" here means "to advance or enrich yourself while doing wrong or injury to another." He was guilty of not only the letter but the spirit of the Law and Jesus pointed this out to him and wanted him to give this up and follow Him whole-heartily.

It all boils down to this: You can't have your sins – and heaven too. John Bunyan said, "Wilt thou have thy sins and go to hell or leave thy sins and go to heaven?" It's just that simple.

I don't want you to think that salvation is built upon giving up anything. This was just a test that Jesus presented to this young man to give him a revelation of himself.

Jesus knew what was keeping this young man from whole-heartily trusting and following Him. It was his love for money.

Jesus also knows what it is that's keeping you from following Him whole-heartily. What is it? Is it money or some dishonest relationship or some secret sin?

Gypsy Smith tells the story of a great revival in Boston. For three weeks the power of God had fallen on that place. On the last night, during the final invitation people streamed down the aisle. A mother who had been present every night stood there with her four-year old son. She knew he was too young to be saved, but she thought it would help the boy remember that his mother had brought him to the meeting if he could only shake hands with Smith.

The mother explained why she had brought her son to shake Smith's hand. Gypsy bent down to honor the mother's request, but the little boy wouldn't shake hands. Gypsy plead, "Shake my hand" but the boy put his hands behind his back and shook his head negatively.

The mother and Gypsy both tried and finally the boy extended his left hand. Gypsy said, "No, the other hand, the right hand." Finally, the boy brought out the right hand, all doubled up. Gypsy said, "I don't want to fight. Open your hand." He wouldn't do it, so finally Gypsy opened the little hand by force, and discovered the reason the little boy wouldn't open his hand. He was holding three pee-wee marbles.

I've seen that little boy full grown. Jesus comes with nail-pierced hands and offers salvation, but folks hold on to some passing play thing and will not receive Jesus.

III. The Mistake Matthew 19:22

It was decision time for this young man. What would he do? Then comes the fateful answer. The young man stands to his feet, looks at the tender Christ, shakes his head and voices a quiet firm "No."

"And he went away." "And he went away." "And he went away." That short sentence contains the tragedy of a soul!

This young man, holding his destiny in his hands, having the power to say yes or no, turned his back on the wooing, winsome Christ and refused to follow Him.

When Jesus answered his question, notice how suddenly his interest, eagerness, enthusiasm cools off. Why? He had great possessions.

One moment he ran courageously to meet Jesus and knelt at His feet ... the next he slowly gets up from his knees and walks away, carrying with him his fine gifts and his materialistic heart.

He did not doubt Jesus knew the way to eternal life: he was just not willing to pay the price.

He made a sudden discovery. He had never imagined that his riches or his trust in riches stood between him and eternal life.

It's one thing to be disappointed in others; it's another to be disappointed in yourself.

Someone says, "Maybe he came back later and accepted Christ." There's no record of it.

It's interesting to me that Jesus didn't go running after him and say, "Wait! I'll compromise with you! I'll bargain with you! I'll require less of you." 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 this young man!

THAT'S NOT FAIR! NO, THAT'S GOD'S GRACE

Matthew 20:1-16

It usually begins to form in our minds and flows from our lips during our teenage years. Three little words: "That's not fair." or "It's not fair." Have you ever thought that or said that?

I must tell you the truth up front: "Life isn't fair, but God is good all the time and all the time God is good!"

It's not fair that some people are taller or faster or smarter or can eat gallons of Blue Belle without gaining a pound.

Or we may complain:

- "I've been with this company for years, and that young up-start gets the promotion! It's not fair!"
- "I've been a good parent, and raised my child to know the Lord, and they have rebelled against God and me! It's not fair!"
- "I've lived a clean life, I've never smoked, and now the doctor tells me I have lung cancer. My uncle smoked a pack a day for 30 years and he's fine! It's just not fair!"

And how about in the spiritual realm?

- Joseph was a clean living young man who loved God and lived for Him. His brothers hated him and sold him to some slave-travelers. He became the slave of Potiphar. Potiphar's wife tried to seduce the young handsome Joseph and when she caught him by his coat and tried to make him lie with her, Joseph left his coat and fled. Potiphar's wife lied and told her husband that Joseph tried to force himself on her. Joseph was thrown into prison for resisting her temptation. I wonder if Joseph ever thought, "This isn't fair.?"
- Or how about when Daniel was thrown into the lion's den for praying to his God? Was that fair?
- Or what about Job? He did nothing wrong, and yet, he suffered like no other man. It didn't seem fair!

Let me tell you the story of this passage and to help you understand it, I'll add times and dollars to the story and then I'll read the passage.

The kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning (6:00 a.m.) to hire men to work in his vineyard and he agreed to pay them a denarius (\$100) for the day and sent them into his vineyard. About the third hour (9:00 a.m.) he went out and saw others standing in the market place doing nothing.

He told them to go and work in his vineyard and he would pay them what was right. So, they went.

He went out again about the sixth hour (noon) and the ninth hour (3:00 p.m.) and did the same. Then about the eleventh hour (5:00 p.m.) he went out and found still others standing around. He asked them, "Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?" "Because no one has hired us," they answered. He said to them, "You also go and work in my vineyard."

When evening came (6:00 p.m.), the owner of the vineyard told his foreman to call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last one hired and going to the first. The workers who were hired about the eleventh hour (5:00 p.m.) came and each received a denarius (\$100). So, when those came who were hired first, they expected (they supposed) to receive more.

But each one of them also received a denarius (\$100). When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. "These men who were hired last worked only one hour," they said, "and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day." And he answered one of them, "Friend, I am not unfair to you. Didn't you agree to work for a denarius (\$100). Take your pay and go. I want to give the men who was hired last the same as I gave you. Don't I have a right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?" "So, the last will be first and the first will be last."

When we think about what the workers were paid, our immediate reaction to that story is, "Hey, that's not fair!"

Read the Passage

To really understand this parable, you must understand that these verses in Matthew 20 connect with Matthew 19.

The rich young ruler had bowed down before Jesus and asked what he must do to have eternal life. Jesus knew the real problem of his heart was covetousness and that he was not willing to give up all for Christ. So, Jesus said to him, "Go, sell what you have and give to the poor and come, follow Me." The young man was not willing to part with his possessions and the Bible says that he went away from Jesus "sorrowful because he had great possessions."

Jesus then said, "It's hard for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God." Then He said, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God."

Peter's mind clicks when Jesus said that and in Matthew 19:27 Peter says, "Lord, we (the disciples) have left ALL and FOLLOWED You. What shall we have?" What are we going to get out of this deal of following You? Jesus gives Peter the answer in Matthew 19:28-29.

Jesus told Peter whatever good things they had forsaken for His sake would be returned to them a hundredfold. In other words, they were not making Sacrifices – they were making Investments! But not all of the dividends would be received in this life.

Jesus detected in Peter's question the possibility of a wrong motive for service, so Jesus adds a warning, because He wants us to have a right motive and a right attitude in service.

Peter's question implies that God owes us something for following Him. "What are we going to receive because we gave up all and followed You?" It's as though God owes us a debt and a debt implies an obligation. "So, what will there be for us?"

Actually, God owes us nothing, and whatever we receive from Him we receive only because of His grace. This whole parable is about God's Grace!

Notice Matthew 19:30: "Many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first." Then He says the same thing in reverse order in Matthew 20:16: "So the last will be first and the first will be last."

The truth is, many of us mistakenly believe that God owes us something for following Him. Dr. R. A. Torrey was teaching on prayer in Australia. One day he taught on the power of prayer and just before the noon meal someone placed a note in his hand. It read:

"Dear Dr. Torrey,

I am in great perplexity. I have been praying for a long time about what I am confident is according to God's will, but I do not get it. I have been a faithful member of this church for 30 years. I have been the Superintendent of the Sunday School for 25 years and an elder for 20 years; and yet, God doesn't answer my prayer. Can you explain why?"

Dr. Torrey replied that he could explain it quite easily. He said, "This man thinks that because he has been a faithful church member for 30 years and a Sunday School Superintendent for 25 years, and an elder in the church for 20 years, that God is under obligation to answer his prayer. He is really praying in his own name, and God will not hear our prayers when we approach Him in that way. If we would have God answer our prayer, we must give up any thought that we have, any claims upon God. There is not one of us who deserves anything from God." What is true of prayer is true of other areas as well.

In this story of God's amazing grace, let's learn four lessons:

I. A Lesson About Timing:

It's never too Late to Come to God

Some workers started at 6:00 a.m., others at various times: at 9:00 a.m., at 12 noon, at 3:00 p.m., some at 5:00 p.m. – one hour before quitting time.

The early call is God's very first call to a person. It is that time of special willingness and eagerness to serve God. In the first call to a person's heart, there is a tug, a pull, a voice, a thought, a movement in one's heart to listen and turn to God.

Each time of service symbolizes a lifetime. Each time he returns it is an act of God's grace.

I think those first workers represent folks who have been a part of God's Kingdom for most of their lives. A lot of us have been going to church for nine months before we were born. Church has always been an important part of our lives.

Most Christians come to Christ at an early age, but on rare occasions there are some who come to Christ late in life. Even more rare are what we call "death-bed conversions." When Jesus was hanging on the cross, a condemned thief who was hanging on a cross beside Him said, "Remember me when You come into Your Kingdom." Jesus didn't look much like a King at that moment, but He said, "Today, you shall be with Me in paradise."

It's never too late to trust Jesus. Oops, I need to qualify that. There IS a time when it's too late to trust Jesus. If you die without

putting your faith in Jesus, then it's too late.

The final call is the last call of God to men and God strongly rebukes them. Notice Matthew 20:6.

II. A Lesson About Grace:

All Who Respond to God's Invitation will Receive All There is to Receive!

At the end of the day, all the workers received the same amount, a full denarius, which was a full day's wage. All who are part of God's Kingdom receive the same thing.

Salvation is the sovereign work of God in a person's life. Those who answered the final call of the owner received the same as those who answered the "early" call. Those who are saved at the "final hour" are just as saved as those who answer the "early hour" call of Jesus.

If you get saved as a child, you are no more saved and no less saved than someone who got saved as a teen or as an adult or as a senior adult. All who are saved are equally saved.

The REAL prize is a personal relationship with Jesus Christ; not heaven or eternal life. "But it's not fair for someone who is saved late in life to receive the same as someone who was saved early in life and served God faithfully all their life." That's not fair, but thank God, that's grace.

Just as sin made us all equally lost, it is only the grace of God that makes us equally saved. No matter when we were saved, whether it was in the early hours, the middle hours, or the final hour, we were only saved because God showed His grace to us through His Son dying on the cross in our place, paying our price, and enduring our pain. Salvation is His to give to all who respond, regardless of when they respond.

III. A Lesson About Authority:

God is Sovereign; He has the Right to Do Whatever He Wants to Do.

I love the part where the 12-hour workers complained to the owner. He just smiles and said, "I paid you what we agreed on. If I want to be generous, then that's my right, because it's MY vineyard and it's MY money. Get over it."

True story: A young man stayed up all night studying for his final exam in one of his theology class in seminary. As he entered the class he looked around and knew there were some slackers who hadn't studied much all year, but he was ready to ace the exam. Before the professor passed out the exam, he led a brief review of some topics that would be on the test. He said it would be a fill-in-the-blank test.

As the professor began to tell them some of the topics that would be on the test, the young man began to panic because many of the topics were not in his notes. He thought, "This isn't fair." Then the professor said, "We didn't talk about many of these topics in class, but they were in the book and I told you at the beginning of the semester that you were responsible for all the material in the textbook."

As the professor passed out the exam papers, he told the class to keep them face down until everyone had received the test. When they turned the test over, they were shocked to see that all the blanks were already filled in. There was a note at the bottom that said, "This is your final exam. All the answers are correct. You will receive a perfect score on the final exam. The reason you passed this test is because the creator of the test took it for you. All the work you did or did not do in preparing for the exam did not help you get the "A". You have just experienced – Grace!"

The young man said that he learned more about God's grace that day than from any theological lecture.

IV. A Lesson About Attitude

Be Thankful for God's Blessings Without Comparing Yourself to Others

Beware of the danger of watching other workers and measuring yourself by them. Paul warns in I Corinthians 4:5, "Judge nothing before the time." We see the worker and the work, but God sees the heart.

I can think of a couple of grumblers in the Bible who complained about God's grace.

Jonah preached to the people of Nineveh that God would destroy them unless they repented. Well, they repented, and Jonah pouted and complained to God about His grace in forgiving them.

Remember the story of the Prodigal son? The older brother pouted, because he was angry, and would not go in to the party the Father gave when the younger son repented of his sins and came back home.

May I tell you, I'm amazed that God saved me (us) at all!

I stand amazed in the presence, of Jesus the Nazarene,
And wonder how He could love me, a sinner, condemned, unclean.

He took my sins and my sorrows, He made them His very own,
He bore the burden to Calvary, and suffered and died alone.

When with the ransomed in glory, His face I at last shall see,
'Twill be my joy through the ages, to sing of His love for me.

WHAT'S IN IT FOR ME?

Matthew 20:17-28

Since Matthew 16, Jesus has underscored and repeated that He is going to the cross to die. This is the third time Jesus has told His disciples that He is going to die on the cross. Jesus now begins His last trip to Jerusalem before His crucifixion.

I call your attention to two things in these verses:

I. The Itinerary of Jesus Matthew 20:17-19

Jesus knew His Father's plan and will for Him on earth. He had come to pay the redemptive price for man's sin. He knew that everything He did lead to the cross. The cross was always on His mind, but when He spoke of the cross to His disciples, He knew they did not comprehend what He was telling them. That's why the Transfiguration was so meaningful to Him. Moses and Elijah understood that Jesus must go to the cross and that's why these two Old Testament saints talked to Him about His decease; His death, His departure.

The first two times Jesus predicted His death to His disciples, it was very brief because that was all the disciples could take at the time. He told them the Jewish religious leaders along with the 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!” – Matt.20:18-19. Jesus made eight amazing predictions about His death. He said:

1. “We are going up to Jerusalem
2. “The Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priest
3. “And to the scribes
4. “They will condemn Him to death
5. “Deliver Him to the Gentiles
6. “To mock
7. “To scourge
8. “To crucify
9. “(Then God would act) on the third day He will rise again.”

Jesus was well aware of His suffering and death.

II. The Inquiry of Jesus

As Jesus was speaking of His sacrifice for man's sin, His disciples were busy trying to promote themselves.

A. Their Request Matthew 20:20-21

When you put the Gospel of Matthew and the Gospel of Mark together, you learn some added details.

Mark tells us that James and John came to Jesus and they asked Jesus for a blank check, as it were, "Lord, please sign the check at the bottom and we'll fill in the amount."

James and John come to Jesus and say, "Teacher, (Notice they called Him Teacher and not Lord. Why? Because they were trying to get Jesus to submit to their will, and you don't ask your Lord to do that. Your Lord is someone to who you submit your will. The two should have asked, "Lord, what do YOU want US to do for You?") But notice: "Teacher, we want You to do FOR US whatever we ask." Dangerous request!

Matthew adds this: It wasn't just James and John who made the request. Their mother got involved and she also asked for her sons. Their mother's name was Salome and she was a sister to Mary, our Lord's mother, which would make James and John first cousins of Jesus.

Here is what made the three think they could ask such a thing of the Lord:

1. They based their request on their relationship to Jesus. Their mother, Salome, was Mary's sister; she was the aunt of Jesus, and her two boys were our Lord's first cousins.
2. They were merely claiming the promises they had been made by the Lord back in Matthew 19:28-30. 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. Of course, that would leave Peter out, because he was also a member of the inner circle, but They thought of asking and did, but Peter did not.

Of course, we know that several times Jesus had to rebuke the disciples, because they were ALL arguing over who was the greatest in the kingdom. These two just asked that they be given the two "reserved seats."

B. The Response Matthew 20:22

Jesus told them that they didn't know what they were asking for.

Then He asked them two things:

1. "Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?"
 2. And, are you able to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?"
- "They said to Him, we are able."

There is a difference between drinking the cup of suffering and being baptized with suffering.

The "cup" refers more to what a person takes into himself and bears within himself. It's more internal suffering and agony.

The "baptism" refers more to what is put upon a person from the outside. It is more external suffering.

The "cup" means drinking the bitterness and agony of trials, pain, sorrow, heartbreak, and disappointment and tears. It is like what Christ experienced in the Garden of Gethsemane when He sweat great drops of blood.

The "baptism" of suffering means being immersed in afflictions, rejection, physical abuse, persecution, and martyrdom.

Think of some of our missionaries who suffer Internally as well as Externally!

C. The Revelation Matthew 20:23

Jesus tells them that they will experience His anguish to a degree. All of His disciples 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 was given the Book of Revelation and then died an old man alone.

Notice Matthew 20:24. Jesus knew that the ten were just as guilty as James and John in being self-centered, greedy, and wanting top positions.

After He calms them down, Jesus reminds His men that the style of greatness and leadership for believers in His kingdom is different than the world's. The Gentile leaders dominate in dictatorial fashion, using carnal power and authority. Believers are to do the

opposite – they lead by being servants and giving themselves away for others, as Jesus did.

When you are looking for a leader, be sure to ask yourself, “Is this person a servant?” If the answer is no, look somewhere else.

Would you like to be a leader in God's kingdom? Are you a servant? Are you a slave for Jesus? Then go to the head of the class.

An old gospel song brings this truth home in a very practical way:

Lord, help me to live from day to day, In such a self-forgetful way
That even when I kneel to pray, My prayer shall be for others.
Help me in all the work I do, To ever be sincere and true,
And know that all I do for you, Must needs be done for others.
Savior, help me in all I do, To magnify and copy you.
That I may ever live like you, Help me to live for others.

WHAT DO YOU WANT JESUS TO DO FOR YOU?

Matthew 20:29-33

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.

I. The Condition of the Man Matthew 20:29-30

Matthew tells us there were two blind men sitting by the road coming out of Jericho, and they were begging alms. It was Passover season and beggars knew that during that time of the year, the hearts of men were soft and sensitive to the poor and needy. There were even professional beggars, who had nothing wrong with them, but they would fake some ailment and they could be well-off financially by the time Passover season was over.

Both Mark and Luke tell us that at least one of these blind men was begging.

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 foot- step 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 two 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.

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 had known that Jesus was passing by.

Notice this: Bartimaeus couldn't go to Jesus, so Jesus came to him.

II. The Cry for Mercy Matthew 20:30-31

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 some- one 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 Matthew 20:32-34

A. Jesus Called For the Man.

“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 living 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 ago were telling him to shut up, go out of their way to show him attention.

The people said to the blind man, “Arise, He's calling for you!” He didn't need a second invitation! Can you imagine the thrill of Bartimaeus? This may have been the first time anyone ever called for him. All he ever heard was, “Get out of my way!” “Get away from me!”

Mark says that the blind man threw his garments off of him. Blind men didn't do that. They kept everything within arm's reach, because if they didn't, they may never find it again. But throwing off his garments speaks of throwing off anything that would hinder him from getting to Jesus. It also meant throwing everything of the old life away. He really believed that Jesus could heal him and he wouldn't need those old things again.

B. Jesus Confronted the Man Matthew 20:32-34

“What do you want Me to do for you?” That sounds like a dumb question, but Jesus never asks dumb questions.

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 of 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 besides 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 Matthew 20:34-35

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 opened.

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 thought 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.”

What do you want Jesus to do for you? Ask Him!

JESUS' “FIRST” TRIUMPHAL ENTRY

Matthew 21:1-11

The most important life ever lived was the life of the Lord Jesus. Everything about His life is unique.

1. His Birth is Unique.

An angel appeared to a teenage girl named Mary, who was a virgin and He told her that she was highly favored in the eyes of God and that she would conceive the Son of God when the Holy Spirit overshadowed her.

The same angel appeared to Mary's future husband, Joseph, and told him that the child conceived in her was of the Holy Spirit.

At His birth Jesus was visited by angels, shepherds, and wise men.

The king at that time was named Herod and when the wise men told him that Jesus would be the King of the Jews, Herod killed thousands of babies, hoping to kill Jesus, because he was afraid Jesus would take his throne.

2. His Life is Unique.

We are told that Jesus went about doing good – only good! He never did a sinful thing. He never did a sinful deed, He never thought a sinful thought, He never had a sinful motive.

His teaching was full of wisdom and truth. He performed miracles of healing for others. He showed us what God is like, for He is God – incarnate.

3. His Death was Unique.

The truth is, the most important thing about His life was His death. He came to this earth to die; to be our substitute; to pay our sin debt on the cross.

Each of the four Gospel writers thought our Lord's death was the most important part of His life.

– Matthew devotes one-fourth of his gospel to our Lord's last eight days on earth (Chapters 21-28).

– Mark uses one-third of his gospel to speak of the last days on earth (Chapters 11-16).

– Luke gives a fifth of his chapters to the events of the last week (Chapters 19:28-24).

– Most remarkable of all, John gives half of his Gospel to our Lord's last week on earth (Chapters 12-21).

We have come in our study of Matthew to the last week of our Lord's life on earth. The first thing that happened to start that week off

was the triumphal entry into Jerusalem.

This is what we often call Palm Sunday. Each of the Gospels records this event.

The first significant detail they record is that Jesus arranged what was to happen. This was not merely a case of some spontaneous outburst of excitement on the part of the people. Rather, it was something about which the Lord Himself carefully planned to make a statement.

It is Passover season for the Jews. They would spend eight days each year at this time to celebrate Passover, that time when the Jews commemorated the slaying of the Passover lamb that brought them deliverance from Egyptian bondage. But Jesus did not come this year to commemorate the Passover lamb that was slain 1,500 years before. This year He was entering Jerusalem to BECOME the Passover Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.

I. The Preparation for our Lord's Entrance into Jerusalem

Matthew 21:1-4a

Jesus and His disciples had spent the night before (the Sabbath evening) in Bethany with Lazarus, Mary, and Martha (John 12:1ff).

It is a slow, steady incline from the Mount of Olives to Jerusalem. When they reach Beth phage, Jesus commands (and it was like a kingly command) two of His disciples to go to something like a side-street at Beth phage and they would see a donkey and her colt tied close together. They were to untie both and bring them to Him. If anyone asked why they were doing so, just tell them that the Master had need of them.

Let me point out that Jesus and His disciples had "drawn nigh unto Jerusalem" by foot. Jesus and His disciples always traveled by foot wherever they went. This is the only time in Scripture that we see Jesus riding anything and it was on a borrowed donkey's colt.

Notice that the disciples didn't have to look for the animals Jesus sent them to bring Him. He said that, as soon as they came into the village, they would "immediately" find not just a donkey, but a donkey and her colt tied together. Seeing the donkey and her colt tied together must have given the two disciples confidence to untie them and bring them.

Let me point out that it was the colt that our Lord rode on – the colt that had never been broken. A colt was a symbol not only of peace, but of purity and innocence. They put their outer garments on both animals, but our Lord rode only the colt.

If the Lord rode only the colt, why did our Lord instruct that the colt's mother was brought along as well?

I see our Savior's mercy in this. He is so kind that He would neither bring the colt along without its mother, nor distress the mother by taking her colt away from her. Our Savior was merciful and gracious even to the beast on which He rode.

II. The Prediction of our Lord's Entrance into Jerusalem

Matthew 21:4-5

When Jesus rides into Jerusalem on this donkey, He is doing so for a very specific purpose.

1. By entering into Jerusalem this way, Jesus is evoking a display of enthusiasm on the part of the crowd for Him. He is calling attention to Himself.

Up until now He pushed attention away from Himself. When He healed someone, He would say, "Don't tell anyone." Why? Because His time had not come. But now His time had come! He was proclaiming and wanted everyone to know that He was the Messiah! He did not want any Jew to be able to say, "If we had only had the opportunity to embrace You as our King and Messiah, we certainly would have done so." He stripped away that excuse from the Jewish nation when He rode into Jerusalem and publicly offered Himself to them as they Messiah.

2. By entering Jerusalem this way, He was demanding a response from the Pharisees and the Sadducees. They were jealous of Jesus and wanted to stop Him at any cost. Now that He declared Himself to be King and Messiah, how would they respond?

3. Jesus going into Jerusalem this way fulfilled Messianic prophecy recorded about Him in Zechariah 9:9. That's why Jesus does not attempt to restrain the crowd from saying to Him "Hosanna to the Son of David. Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!"

4. By coming into Jerusalem this way, Jesus is once again showing them that what Israel expected their Messiah to be like was not what they got when He came. They were expecting a great conquering military leader to

put down Rome, but the Messiah would set up a rule of righteousness.

Notice Matthew 21:5

III. The Perceptions of our Lord's Entrance into Jerusalem

Matthew 21:10-11

In Verse 10 Matthew tells us "the whole city was moved." The word "moved" comes from the Greek word from which we get our word "seismic." In other words, Matthew tells us the whole city was "quaking" – not physically, but mentally and emotionally – when Jesus made His entry.

Look what they asked: "Who is this?"

There were three responses: Celebration – Opposition – Indifference.

That's the same response we hear today when we ask "Who is Jesus?"

Here's how some respond: He is:

Lord – Liar – Lunatic

Divine – Deceived – Devil

Who do you say Jesus is? You must make your choice? Is He the Son of God? Is He a madman? Or is He something else?

The Bible says He is Lord and every knee must bow to Him! That is the only saving response.

Have you embraced Him as Savior and Lord?

IV. The Prophecy Concerning the Lord's Next Triumphal Entry

Revelation 19:11-16

What a contrast there will be between our Lord's first entrance into Jerusalem and His next entrance into Jerusalem. The first entry was on a meek and mild donkey – a symbol of gentleness and peace, but the next entry will be on a white stallion of a Warrior.

The first entry was to make atonement for our sins, but at His next entry 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 entered the first time, they said He was Jesus, the humble prophet of Nazareth, but when He come the next time, He will be called The Word of God: King of Kings and Lord of Lords!

HIS HOUSE **Matthew 21:12-17**

Notice again Matt. 21:13: "My house shall be called a house of prayer, but you have made it a den of thieves."

"My house." Actually, Jesus is quoting two Old Testament prophecies.

- Isaiah 56:7. God is speaking here through this Old Testament prophet about including Gentiles in His salvation plan. "Even them I will bring to My holy mountain, and make them joyful in MY house of Prayer. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on MY altar; for MY house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations."
- Jeremiah 7:11: "Has this house, which is called by My Name, become a den of thieves in your eyes? Behold I, even I, have seen it, says the Lord."

At the beginning of our Lord's ministry, right after performing His first public miracle of turning water into wine, Jesus walks into the Temple area, into the Court of the Gentiles, and there He saw the corruption and the dishonesty of the religious leaders as they made great gains off of the people who had come to worship God. Jesus made a whip of cords, drove out the animals, overturned the tables of the money changers, and in religious indignation, cleansed the Temple. After seeing what Jesus did in the Temple, the

disciples remember what was written in Psalm 69:9, "Zeal for Your house has eaten Me up."

How and why we worship God has always been of utmost importance to God.

The first time worship is mentioned in the Bible is in Genesis 4 when Cain and Able brought their offering to the Lord. Able brought of the firstborn of his flock – a blood sacrifice, which God required. Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground – from the works of his hands, a bloodless sacrifice. God accepted Able's offering, but He rejected Cain's offering. It mattered to God what was brought to Him in worship and why it was brought.

Then God set up worship for His people as they were going through the wilderness to the Promised Land. Then He gave the whole Book of Leviticus telling the priestly leaders what was expected of them as they led His people in worship.

You go to the last book in the Bible, the Book of Revelation, and you find Christ in the midst of the churches. He is holding the pastors of the churches in His hand, and He examines and evaluates His church.

By the way, Jesus sees and evaluates our church. Oh, I pray that He is pleased with what He sees. If He is not pleased with what He sees in our church, I pray that He would reveal it to us so that we can correct whatever needs to be corrected. It is His church and I want Him to be honored, glorified, and pleased in all that we do for Him.

Let me share three thoughts with you as we look at His House:

I. The Purpose of God's House

Let me remind you that in the Old Testament God had a Temple for His people, but since our Lord's death and resurrection, He has a people as His Temple.

God lives in me and He lives in you if you are saved in faith through the Holy Spirit.

I Corinthians 3:16-17; 6:19-20; 3 Corinthians 6:16b-17.

God WITH me is comforting. God FOR me is encouraging. But God living IN me is transforming.

But what does God expect of us as His temple? What is the Purpose of God's temple?

A. We, as God's temple, are to be a Place of Prayer.

That's what Jesus said in Matthew 21:13. My house is to be a house of Prayer." What does that mean? It means that everything we do or say is to be done in the spirit of prayer.

- 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 you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know."

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 nearby;
Temptations lose their power when Thou are 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 indeed, 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. We, as God's temple, are 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. We, as God's temple, are to be a Place of Praise – Psalm 103:1.

D. We, as God's temple, are to be a Place of Peace (for He has made us whole).

E. We, as God's temple, are to be a Place where we Practice the Presence of the Lord

“Change my heart O God,
Make it ever true,
Change my heart O God,
May I be like You.”

II. The Pollution of God's House

The Temple was defiled and needed to be cleansed. Two things were going on that Jesus said polluted His house.

1. The Pollution of buying and selling sacrificial animals.

The Law required a perfect sacrifice be brought to offer to the Lord. 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.

2. During Passover the Temple Tax was due and each male above age 18 had to pay the tax.

They must pay a half-shekel, which was about one-and-a-half days wage for a common man. This money was used to pay for the daily sacrifices and operating expenses for the Temple year round.

Because the money was given for the Lord's work, no foreign money was allowed because it was considered unclean. No image of an alien king on the coin was allowed because Jehovah God was Israel's God and the image of another on the coin made it unclean and unacceptable. So, there was a need for money changers to change the foreign coins into Jewish coins. The changers were allowed to charge a fee for exchanging the money into Jewish coins. They would put the Jewish coins in the coin boxes and use the same Jewish coins over and over again. This dishonesty made the exchangers rich. Jesus said this dishonesty was polluting the Temple worship.

III. The Praise in God's House Matthew 21:14-17

When Jesus drove out those who were polluting the Temple, the people brought the blind and the lame to Him in the Temple, and He healed them.

God wants His house to be a healing station. Don't think of physical healing, but spiritual healing.

There are many who come to God's house, either who are spiritually blind or who cannot see the things of God clearly. Jesus opened the eyes of many in His day and He is still in the business of opening eyes that are blinded by sin or eyes that are dim because they do not know God's Word for them. How many times in a church service the Holy Spirit will enlighten you on some spiritual truth and you say to yourself, “I never saw that before,” or “Oh, yes, now I see!”

They also brought the lame to Jesus to be healed. Some are hindered in their life and cannot walk with the Lord as they would like and Jesus comes to heal and fix the problem so they can walk with Him.

And notice: The children began to praise Him as they shouted out, “Hosanna”, “Save now”, “to the Son of David,” “to the Messiah!”

The religious leaders were “indignant” (“they were up in arms and beside themselves and took Him to task”). They asked, “Do You hear what those children are saying?”

Jesus said something like, “Yes, I hear them and it's a blessing to my heart. They are doing what you ought to be doing!”

If you are saved, your body is the temple of God. God lives IN you! Are you keeping God's residence clean?

It was Augustine who said that when he was tempted to sin, he would say to himself, “Augustine, knowest thou not that thou are carrying around God with thee wherever thou goest?”

THE TWO SONS

Matthew 21:28-32

Most of us are familiar with product warning labels. Here are some actual warning labels that are rather humorous.

1. Window air conditioning units are now required to display the warning:

Caution: Avoid Dropping Air Conditioner Out of Window

2. The tag on irons says:

Warning: Never Iron Clothes While Wearing Them

3. A warning label on a Halloween Superman Costume reads:

Warning: Cape Does Not Enable User to Fly

4. Nabisco Easy Spread Cheese announces on its label:

For Best Results Remove Cap

5. The label on Little Ones Baby lotion reads:

Keep Product Away from Children

A warning label is designed to protect us from harm. If there was a warning label attached to this passage of Scripture, it would read: Warning: If You Reject God's Son You Will Receive God's Judgment.

The Pharisees and the chief priest saw themselves as the good guys. They kept the Law of God and lived a life characterized by acts of righteousness. When John the Baptist and Jesus preached repentance, they saw no need to repent because they were already good folks.

The other people were the bad people – especially the worst of the worst – the prostitutes and the tax collectors. But Jesus shocked them in Matt.21:31b when He said, “Assuredly, I say to you that tax collectors and harlots enter the kingdom of God before you.”

Do you know why it's easier for a “bad” person to get into heaven than a “good” person? Simple answer: because NOBODY is good. Only God is good. The Bible says in Romans 3:12, “All have turn away, they have together become worthless; there is none that does good, no, not one.”

A “bad” person is quick to admit they need salvation, whereas a “good” person often thinks they're already good enough.

In this passage Jesus presents a contrast between the grossly sinful people, as represented by publicans and harlots (Matt. 21:31), and those outwardly righteous Jewish leaders who felt they needed no repentance.

This parable contrasts the repenting crowd of gross sinners with the unrepenting crowd of religious leaders who thought they were too good to have to repent.

I. The Command for the Sons

Notice that it is the father who gives the command to both sons to go into the vineyard and work. The father here represents God the Father.

God the Father has the authority over us. His Word is our command. We do not have the option of whether or not we want to obey His commands. We obey them or we will be guilty of disobedience to God.

The request was not harsh or unreasonable, but it was firm. It is also clear: “Go work today in the vineyard.”

The request is a call to submit one's self in total surrender to God. In essence, it is a call to be saved.

The truth is, man doesn't like anyone telling him what to do or how to live his life – even God! We don't want to bow to heavenly authority. We want to run our own life and we don't want God to interfere.

But what a mistake it is to ignore the authority of God. And God's demands are not to be postponed. God's command demands immediate attention.

II. The Conduct of the Sons

This is the main focus of the parable, and the conduct represents two different kinds of people.

A. The Conduct of the First Son

• His Refusal – Matthew 21:28-29

The first son said, "I will not." This is disrespectful rebellion. He wanted to go his own way and do his own thing. He didn't like being told what to do.

He made no excuses, there were no apologies; just a bold, unashamed refusal.

This response represents those people who are out and out sinners. They have no time for God or His commandments. No one mistakes them for being godly folks.

• His Repentance – Matthew 21:29

"Afterward." There was an "afterward" where he thought about what he had said and what he had done. He was convicted of his wrong conduct, repented of his evil, and then went to his father's vineyard to work.

Here's the evidence of his repentance: he went into his father's vineyard to work. The proof of repentance is in the performance. One may "say" he has repented, but the proof will be in his conduct which follows his confession.

When the Pharisees and Sadducees come to the baptism of John, he spotted their hypocrisy and said to them, "Oh generation of vipers, bring forth fruits meet for repentance" (Matthew 3:7-8). John would not baptize them for there was no evidence of repentance.

A lot of folks who claim to be saved give no evidence of soul salvation. No change has taken place in their life. Jesus said, "Ye shall know them by their fruits" (Matthew 7:16).

B. The Conduct of the Second Son Matthew 21:30

He heard the same command as the first son.

The father told this second son to go into the vineyard and work and he said, "I go sir." If the story stopped there, the second young man would be the "poster boy" for responding. But Jesus reveals an awful truth about this son:

"... but he did not go."

His response ... his promise ... his vow, was nothing but an outright lie. This son said one thing and did another. His lips spoke obedience, his life disobedience.

Jesus described the Pharisees in Matthew 23:3 when He said, "for they say, and do not."

The second son sounded like such a nice, respectful young man when he spoke to his father: "Sir, I go."

Jesus said in Matthew 15:8: "This people draweth nigh unto Me with their mouth, and honor me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me."

There are many who can talk very religiously when they want to. They know how to speak the Bible language, but it never shows up in their life or conduct. That's why Jesus repeatedly called the hypocrites.

Matthew 7:21.

III. The Comparing of the Sons Matthew 21:31-32

After the parable, Jesus gave an examination to His listeners. "Which did his father's will? The first son or the second son?" They answered correctly: "the first."

Now Jesus makes the application. He tells the religious leaders that they are like the second son. They are all talk. They are not real.

They are like so many that have made empty professions. They had said, "Jesus, I gave You my life," but their words were only lip service. Their profession is empty. It's not real. They are still lost.

As a pastor, I rejoice when someone comes forward and says they want to be saved. I try to lead them in the Biblical way of salvation. God is speaking to their heart. I want to make sure that they really connect with God as they submit themselves totally to Him and yield all they are to Him in repentance and faith. I want to make sure they are totally committed to Him.

But – I cannot see their heart. I cannot see their commitment. I cannot see if they pass from death into life.

I rejoice that so many show evidence that they are new creatures in Christ. The change in their life is so evident. They have a new love for Christ and the things of God and Christ has made such a difference in their life.

But I must tell you, there have been some who have come, saying they want to be saved. They profess they are saved, they are baptized, but there is little if any evidence that they have been saved. I cannot look into their hearts to see for sure. All I can do is go by their testimony and pray that their salvation is real.

But when I come to a passage like this one, I want to ask each person to reflect upon their life and ask themselves the question, "Have I truly repented of my sins? Is Jesus my Savior? Am I really saved?"

If the answer is "Yes," then rejoice in that. If the answer is "No," then be like that first son and do what you should do today.

MURDER IN A VINEYARD

Matthew 21:33-46

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 Matthew 21:33

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 Matthew 21:45 and you will see that the Jewish religious leaders knew that Jesus was talking directly about them.

Here is what we learn in Matthew 21:33.

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 chose 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.

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 Matthew 21:34-39

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 works: 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.

Matt.21:40: "What will the owner of the vineyard do?" Destroy the vineyard workers and give the vine-yard 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 to 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 God promised to bless is His Word. 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 Matthew 21:40-44

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 Matthew 21:42-44 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.

THE GREATEST COMMANDMENT **Matthew 22:34-40**

If you ask questions you often get insights and understanding into a person's life that you would never get if you did not ask questions.

For example, suppose there was a fire in your house. You make it out of the house and so do your children and your pets. You have time to go back into the house and get one more thing. What would you get? Whatever you would want to get would give a great clue as to what you think is important in life.

Or, after having your first born child for a year, the hospital calls and tells you they have evidence of a mix-up at the hospital and you may have the wrong baby. Would you investigate or would you leave it along at that point? (Oh, I know, it would depend on what kind of kid you brought home.)

Or suppose you had a real voodoo doll and when you stuck pins in it, it would cause pain to the person you wanted to inflict pain on. Would you use it? And how often!?

Or suppose you were in the Walmart parking lot and as you were going into the parking place, you accidently put a ding into a brand new Porsche. There are many folks around and they saw what you did. Would you write a note with your name and phone number on it and put it on the car or just leave? I ask that because that actually happened. The driver of the car saw all those people watching him, so he found a pen and paper and wrote this note: "I have just dinged your new car. A lot of people saw me do it. They now see me writing this note. They assume I am leaving my name and phone number for you. I am not. Good-bye!"

Questions are important and Jesus is being questioned, but the questions are designed to trip Him up.

It is the last week of our Lord's life on this earth. In about four days He will be hanging on the cross.

Here's the setting. On Sunday He came riding into Jerusalem on the colt of a donkey. The people are shouting "Hosanna to the Son of David." They are spreading their garments and palm branches before Him. He is not that excited because He knows the same folks shouting "Hail Him" will be shouting "Nail Him" by week's end.

He knew He would become the Passover Lamb. He also knew what was said in Exodus 13. The people had selected the Passover Lamb. They were to keep the Lamb up and watch it for five days to make sure there was no flaw or disease in the Lamb. They would inspect the Lamb for five days.

Now Jesus is going to be inspected by the most critical folks of that day – the scribes, the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the Herodians, and the chief priest.

The Pharisees and the Herodians ask Him a political question: "Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar?" They knew if Jesus said they should pay taxes to Caesar, the people would rise up against Him. But if

He said, "Don't pay taxes," the government would get Him for tax evasion. But Jesus outsmarted them. He said, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesars, and to God the things that are God's".

The Sadducees, who didn't believe in the resurrection came next and asked Him a theological question. A man married a wife, but died before she had children. Now there were seven brothers. Brother two, three, four on to number seven married her according to the Law and none produced a child. "Whose will she be in heaven?" Jesus told them they didn't know the Scriptures. There would be no marriage or giving in marriage in heaven.

Now a scribe, a lawyer, comes to Jesus and asked, "Which is the greatest of the commandments?" The scribes had determined that there were 613 commands in the Old Testament. Two hundred forty-eight were positive injunctions while 365 were negative prohibitions so, which one was the most important? The scribes considered some to be more important than others: some are heavy, others light; some important, others not so important.

Of course, James 2:10 tells us, "For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and offend in one point, he is guilty of all."

All the other men were trying to test Jesus, but it seems this Man really wanted to know the truth. No one was able to answer Jesus a word and I think this man saw something in Jesus that convicted him, so he really wanted to know the truth.

What is the greatest commandment? What does God really want from us? Notice Micah 6:8.

Now Jesus gives the man two commandments because the two go together and you can't separate the two: Love God and love others.

A. Loving God is personal.

"You shall love the Lord Your God." He is your very own God. "Your" is a personal relationship – not a distant relationship or an impersonal relationship. God is ever so close and we are to be personally involved with Him.

Loving is an act that is alive and active.

We are to love Him with all of our being – our heart, our soul, our mind.

Man is responsible to maintain a loving relationship with God. What does that involve?

1. A loving relationship involves Commitment and Loyalty.

True love demands commitment and loyalty to only one. That's why God says, "You are to have no other gods." God demands loyalty.

2. A loving relationship involves Trust and Respect.

It means loving the person just for who he is. We love God for Who He is:

- He is Creator and Sustainer of life.
- He is the Savior and Redeemer of souls.
- He is the Lord and Owner of our lives.

3. A loving relationship involves giving and surrendering of oneself.

We are to give ourselves to Him and surrender ourselves to Him.

4. A loving relationship involves Knowing and Sharing.

It involves knowing Him better, growing in our relationship to Him, sharing our life with Him, keeping nothing from Him.

5. A personal relationship can only be maintained through Communication with Him.

We must talk with God and allow Him to talk with us. The fastest way to kill a relationship is by not communicating. It's true in a marriage and it's true in our relationship with God.

B. We are to Love Him with all of our Heart.

We are to love Him with all our affection and will.

C. We are to Love Him with all our Soul.

All our life, our consciousness, our breath.

D. We are to Love Him with all our Mind.

All our thoughts and understanding.

How do we demonstrate our love? By loving our neighbor as our self.

Who is our neighbor? A good neighbor is one who shows mercy on any who needs mercy.

I Corinthians 13:4-8 tells us what true love is:

Love is patient and kind.

Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude.

Love does not demand its own way.

Love is not irritable, and it keeps no record when it has been wronged.

It is never glad about injustice but rejoices when the truth wins out.

Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance.

Love never fails ... it will last forever!

YOU MIGHT BE A HYPOCRITE IF ...

Matthew 23: 1-13

We come now to the last public sermon of Jesus, spoken in the Temple, just before He went to the cross. He would teach many other things to His disciples in private, as we shall see, but this is His last public message.

What do you think His last public message would be about? Well, I would have thought His last public message would have been one of salvation and have an invitation. On the contrary, it was a message of condemnation and denunciation against the religious hierarchy of His day. It was a strong, brutal denunciation against the false religious system and its leaders.

Why? Why would Jesus do this? For the same reason Paul – when he was leaving Ephesus for the last time – called the elders together and said, “For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also, from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Therefore watch” (Acts 20:29-31). They will seek to take away your liberty in Christ through legalism and a works salvation.

Jesus will call the Pharisees blind guides, fools, whitewashed tombs, and hypocrites. This twenty-third chapter can be divided into three parts:

- Our Lord's warnings of the hypocritical practices of the scribes and Pharisees – Matthew 23:13-26
- Our Lord's woes to the Pharisees – Matthew 23:13-36
- Our Lord's weeping over the doom of Jerusalem for its hard-hearted rejection of Him –

Matthew 23:37-39

These are some of the harshest words ever recorded from the lips of Jesus.

Read the Passage.

In Matthew 23:13 Jesus calls the scribes and Pharisees “hypocrites.” Are you aware that Jesus is the only Person who ever called another person a “hypocrite” in the Bible? We throw around the word “hypocrite” a lot. People who don't attend church often complain the church is full of a bunch of hypocrites. One church put on their church sign. “This church is not full of hypocrites. There's always room for more.”

Wherever religion is valued and respected, wherever Christianity is highly thought of, there will be a temptation to counterfeit it. Some will seek to fake it. They will attempt to look spiritual without actually being spiritual.

The word “hypocrite” literally means “someone who acts in a play.” The actors wore masks so the audience could identify the different characters each was intended to portray. So, practicing hypocrisy means “wearing a mask designed to impress or deceive others.” Hypocrisy is saying one thing, but acting another way. It is appearing to be one thing on the outside, but being totally different on the inside. It is wanting others to think of us in one way when we are not really like that at all.

How can you tell if you are a hypocrite? You may be a hypocrite if:

I. You Don't Practice What You Preach Matthew 23:1-4

Notice in Matthew 23:2 “the scribes and the Pharisees SIT IN MOSES' SEAT;” literally the text says they “have seated themselves in Moses' seat.” In other words, they had seized the position of authority, even though they were not called by God to do so. These false spiritual leaders lacked God-given authority.

The word “seat” here, in the sense that Jesus speaks of it, is a position of authority that a teacher in Israel would occupy. In our day we might say, a learned professor in a college or university “chairs” the department of such-and-such and it's a “seat” he has occupied for many years.

The problem with the scribes and Pharisees is that “they seated themselves in Moses' seat.” There was no authority from God, but they wanted people to look upon them and treat them with respect that one under God's authority would have.

But now here is the other problem – Matthew 23:4. They not only lacked authority from God, they lacked Integrity. They did not practice what they preached. They told others what to do, but they didn't do them themselves.

But notice. Jesus didn't say, “The scribes and Pharisees are a bunch of hypocrites; therefore, ignore everything they tell you. Don't even bother to do what they say!” That would not be in keeping with God's command to “honor” and “respect” spiritual authority.

In Acts 23 Paul stood before the Roman Council. Because Paul was a Roman citizen, he was to be treated a certain way. For example, he was not to be hit or struck as he testified. But as Paul made his opening statement, the high priest, Ananias commanded that a soldier strike him on the mouth. Paul's temper flew up and he said, “God will strike you, you whitewashed wall.” Then those who stood by said, “Do you revile God's high priest?” Then Paul humbled down. He still should not have been struck, but Paul said, “I'm sorry. I didn't know he was the high priest. God said we were not to speak evil of God's ruler of your people.”

Look what Jesus says: “The Pharisees say, but they don't do what they say ... they don't practice what they preach. Do what they say do, for what they are saying is right, but don't do what they do.” Do what they say, but don't follow their example.

In Matthew 7:3-5 Jesus talks about seeing a speck of sawdust in your brother's eye when you have a plank in your own eye. If you are preaching to others, be prepared to apply your teaching equally to yourself.

II. If You Desire to be Seen of Men, Rather Than Pleasing God Matthew 23:5-6

They do their good deeds to be seen of others. It's about motives. Don't put your piety on parade. What the Pharisees did wasn't done out of a heart of reverent service to God, but, rather, it was all done to catch the eyes of other people. They lacked humility.

Jesus said the Pharisees make their phylacteries broad. “Phylacteries” were little boxes, tied to leather straps and tied to their foreheads or to their hands or arms. Inside these boxes were strips of copied portions of Scripture or written prayers. They were making public display of Deuteronomy 6:6-9, to make them look more prominent.

Then they would enlarge the borders of their garments and lengthen their tassels to give the impression that they were more devoted to the Law than anyone else.

III. If You Love Being Addressed with a Special Title Matthew 23:6-10

I'll be the first to confess that preachers are the worst at wanting titles. There are all kinds of diploma mills out there where pastors

can write off to and get a mail-order "doctor's degree." They do that so they can be called "The Reverend Doctor Tinkling Cymbal" or "The Right Reverend Sounding Brass." I have observed that the guys who order their doctor's degree are the ones who want to be recognized and called "Doctor."

I don't make a big deal about it, but I prefer not to be called "Reverend" or part of the "Clergy." I don't like the distinction clergy/laity because Every Member Is A Minister. Some of us do it as a vocation and the rest of you do it as Volunteers. The word "laity" come from the Greek word "laos" which means "people" and, hey, I'm a people too.

When I was a young preacher, I found that the word "reverend" only appears once in the KJV. It says in Psalm 111:9, "Holy and reverend is His name." God is the only One who deserved the title "reverend." Besides, if you knew me like God knows me, you might fire me, but you wouldn't call me "reverend"! Thank God for His grace and mercy!

There were also social benefits to being a scribe or Pharisee. They were the most highly respected members of the community. They got invited to the important feast, and when they arrived, they found the best place at the table with their names on it. When they went to the synagogue, they found a seat of honor set aside just for them. When they walked down the street or when they went into the market-place, they were recognized and greeted, calling them "Rabbi," which means "honored teacher."

Be careful about titles: your holiness or your excellency or Father.
Brother and sister are fine.

Jesus closes with the Path of Greatness. He says, "The way up is down!" (Matthew 23:11-12).

See James 4:7-1

EIGHT WOES ON FALSE RELIGION

Matthew 23:13-36

Matthew 23 is the last public message Jesus will give before He is hung on the cross. He will have some very important things to say to His disciples in private, but He speaks His last public message in the Temple.

In Matthew 23:1-12 Jesus speaks words of Warning to the scribes and Pharisees. He tells them they have no authority from God, because they had not been called of God. Then He tells them they are without integrity for they don't practice what they preach. They tell others what to do, but they do not do what they tell others they must do. He also tells them they lack sympathy and humility.

Now in Matthew 23:13-36 Jesus pronounces seven Woes upon the religious leaders.

Finally, in Matt. 23: 37-39, Jesus Weeps over Jerusalem for in about 40 years they will be destroyed.

So in Matthew 23 we see our Lord's Warnings, His Woes, and His Weeping.

We can only imagine how the scribes and Pharisees must have cringed beneath the lash of the Lord's denunciation of them. Remember that these men were the most highly respected religious leaders of that day. They were highly regarded as the best folks of their day. They declared that they believed the Scriptures and made it their duty to obey them in even the smallest particulars. The very name "Pharisee" meant "separated," meaning that they were trying to separate themselves from all contamination of sin.

When Jesus denounced them, every eye in the Temple must have looked at them. How those Pharisees must have boiled inwardly when the Lord used them as object lessons to teach the people and His disciples how NOT to serve God.

Jesus is going to call them "hypocrites," "fool," "blind," "whited sepulchers," and "a generation of vipers" or snakes.

You will remember that our Lord began His preaching ministry with the Sermon on the Mount and gave the people eight Be-Attitudes. Now, He is going to end His preaching ministry with eight Bad-Attitudes. The be-Attitudes are the attitudes that are to BE in the life of the Christian. The BAD- Attitudes is what Jesus saw in the lives of these Pharisees. They are presented to us in woes.

The word "woe" is probably the most stern denunciation that can be given to man. It is also the most tragic because it involves the souls of men and is given by the Judge of all the earth, the Lord Himself. The warning was also deserved.

But there is something else I want you to see: Christ was angry, but He was also sorrowful. He was harsh and condemning, but He was also broken-hearted and full of pity. At the end of the "woes," our Lord wept, because He knew the consequences of their sin.

Let's look at these "woes:"

I. "Woe" To The Blockers Matthew 23:13

Matthew 5:3 says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit," the kingdom belongs to them. The Pharisees were proud in spirit.

"I thank you, God, that I am not as other men are ..."

Note Verse 13: "They shut up the kingdom of heaven AGAINST men." The word "against" means "in the face." The picture is that of men's standing right at the door desperately needing to enter, but false religionists shut the door of heaven in their faces.

How? The false religionists do not enter heaven themselves because they reject Jesus as Messiah, as being the Lord from Heaven, the very Son of God. They preferred their own ideas of religion rather than God's ideas. They prefer keeping the Law by works and the position, honor and recognition from men watching them work their works, rather than depending on God's grace and mercy.

They do not enter the kingdom themselves and they shut the door in the faces of others by misleading them.

II. "Woe" to the Fleecers Matthew 23:14

False religionist used the guise of religion for greed, especially to steal from widows. There are some preachers and leaders who court the attention and favor of people, especially widows, for the purpose of getting their money. They seek large donations, gifts, or investments to promote themselves or their ministries.

Widows in particular are susceptible to those who SEEM to be so devoted to God. Jesus said that the damnation of these shall be greater. There are some sins more horrible than others. Using religion for selfish ends is one of them. This sin will have a greater damnation.

Note also that widows hold a special place in God's heart. He has always instructed His people to care for widows in a very special way.

III. "Woe" to the Recruiters Matthew 23:15

Jesus knew these men had worked hard – not to reach folks for God, but for a man-made religion. They were not bringing people to a personal relationship with Christ, but to their own ideas of religion.

Here is the problem. The primary people they went after were the God-fearing and devout people who had already shown interest in religion. But the problem was, these men were going the wrong way and they were leading their followers the wrong way.

Jesus makes a strange statement when He says of their converts, "You make him twice as much a son of hell as yourself." What did Jesus mean by this? These scribes and Pharisees, with their empty, false religion, were ultimately going to hell and their followers would go there too. They were recruiting people with a false gospel and they were filling folks with a false hope.

Before, these folks were just lost. Now they are still lost and they were entangled with false doctrine and false teaching. They were not only doomed; they were so deceived they could not see the truth.

Since you and I have the truth in Christ, we ought to be recruiting folks for Christ.

IV. "Woe" to the By-Passers Matthew 23:16-22

A common practice in that day was to take oaths. If they wanted to guarantee something was true, they would take an oath. They might say, "I swear by the Temple in Jerusalem." That was a sacred oath and it bound a person to carry out what he had promised.

But, the Pharisees had developed a system by which they could by-pass their oath when it was to their advantage to do so. They would make an oath, and then if they wanted to by-pass it, they would say, "I didn't swear by the gold in the Temple and so my oath doesn't count."

Or "If I swear by heaven – that's nothing, but if I swear by Jehovah who dwells in heaven, well, that counts."

We say, "Oh, I know I promised you so-and-so, but I was just kidding and I had my fingers crossed, so I don't have to carry the promise out."

Oaths, swearing and cursing reveal a weak character and lack of trustworthiness. The reason an oath is needed is because a person's word and character are sometimes suspicious and questionable. Therefore, he feels he must enforce his word with an oath. A truthful and trustworthy person only needs to say "Yes" or "No." He will stand behind his word (Matthew 5:37).

V. "Woe" to the Neglecters Matthew 23:23-24

Religionists stress the lighter duties while omitting the greater duties.

They pick and choose what they want to do or what they are willing to do and omit the rest.

They stress outward duties such as tithing, rituals, ceremonies, and works; but they minimize the inward duties of the heart.

Jesus mentions three duties of the human heart that are omitted:

1. Justice: Treating our neighbor as we should; doing and saying nothing that would hurt another person; showing honor and respect to all men; never being guilty of injustice.
2. Mercy: Showing care, concern, kindness, and tenderness to all who are weak and needy, and not being hard, distant, demanding, or cruel.
3. Faith: Believing God and trusting Him to fulfill His promises.

Religionists omit these weightier matters, but major on the lighter matters. Tithing is something folks can see them do, so they go overboard on tithing. God said in the Law that His people were to tithe on their corn, wine, and oil. But the Pharisees expanded the tithe to include the tiny seeds of the dill and the leaves on the mint bush.

Here is how they made the small big: They would count the tiny seed in the dill – used as a spice: "nine for God; one for me." Or they counted the leaves on the mint bush: "One for me; nine for God." But they omitted such things of the heart like mercy, faith, honesty.

Jesus said, "You take care to look for a gnat that may be in your wine glass, but you gulp down a camel."

VI. "Woe" to the Outsiders Matthew 23:25-26

For the Pharisees, outward appearance was important, but not the inside. Wash the outside of the cup and plate, but leave the inside dirty.

They guarded against scandalous sins that would damage their image and reputation to the public, but little attention was paid to the inside. Jesus said they were blind to their real problem.

VII. "Woe" to the White-washers Matthew 23:27-28

Over time tomb stones would become weather worn and stained. Every year just before Passover, the people would mix powdered lime and water together to form a substance similar to paint known as whitewash. This was not done to make the tombs look more beautiful, but for protection.

The Law said (Numbers 19:16) that any contact with the dead would defile a person, so before Pass-over, the people would whitewash the tombs in order to make them conspicuous so the travelers into Jerusalem might avoid ceremonial defilement.

It was actually a warning that corruption was within. When the Pharisees blew the trumpets when they tithed, and disfigured their faces when they fasted and enlarged the borders of their garments and made their long prayers to be seen of men, they were really saying, "There is corruption within me."

VIII. "Woe" to the Iffers Matthew 23:29-32

The Pharisees had built tombs and monuments to the Jewish people and the people killed them for preaching and pointing out their sins. Now the Pharisees say, "Our fathers killed the prophets of God but if they were sent to us today, we would not kill them and, they implied, we would honor them." Jesus said, "You would do the same as your fathers."

Jesus tells them that they will continue to kill the prophets as God continues to send them to His people. And they did.

They killed Stephen with stones. They killed James, the half-brother of Jesus, with a sword. They crucified Peter up-side-down. And they hung Jesus on the cross!

Jesus said, "You killed Able, the first Old Testament believer who was martyred in the Bible, and you killed Zechariah between the Temple and the Brazen Altar, the last Old Testament believer to be martyred, and, yes, you will kill the Son of God. And all these things will happen in your generation."

And it happened just as Jesus said. The destruction of Jerusalem and the burning of the Temple took place 40 years later in A. D. 70.

SAFE BENEATH HIS WINGS

Matthew 23:37-39

Our Lord is closing out His last public message before He hangs on the cross. When we read the words of Jesus in Matthew 23, we almost don't recognize Him.. We often picture Jesus as meek and mild and when we read these harsh pronouncements, we see a different side of Jesus. He repeatedly bitterly denounced the Jewish leaders for their religious hypocrisy. He calls them hypocrites, blind guides, fools, a bunch of snakes, and whitewashed tombs.

After spending most of His message pronouncing doom and gloom on the religious mafia, we finally see the tenderness of Jesus. One commentator writes, "The lightning and thunder of the seven woes ends in a soft rain of pity and tears." There is no vindictiveness in the words of Jesus. His heart was broken because the people of Jerusalem rejected Him. John 1:11 says, "He came unto His own and His own received Him not."

Jesus closes His sermon with a parable; a word picture of a hen gathering her chicks under her wings to protect them. In Luke 19 we are told that as Jesus looked at Jerusalem, He wept over the city.

We are told that on the slopes of the Mount of Olives there is a beautiful church built by a famous Italian architect. He called the church Dominus Fleuit, which means, "The Lord wept." The church is designed to look like a teardrop. Inside the chapel is a single window that faces the Temple Mount where the beautiful Temple would have been in Jesus' day. Today, the Muslim Dome of the Rock sits in that place. When you look through the window of the church, it looks as if the cross in the window frame is resting on the Dome of the Rock – a reminder that Jesus will rule over the nations.

But on the church's floor is a beautiful mosaic. A picture of a chicken sheltering her chicks beneath her wings. The somewhat strange thing is that the chicken is portrayed with a halo that represents the deity of Jesus.

As we look at this passage, I would point out several things:

I. The Declaration Matthew 23:37

"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem." You can hear the passion and the compassion in our Lord's voice! These words are not limited just to the folks who were in the city at that time. God had chosen the Jewish people of Israel as His very own. He had given the Jews that land. He was their God. He had given them many advantages and many promises. Yet, they had rejected Him and the Jews must pay for that rejection.

Listen to Romans 2:6-9" "God will render to every man according to his deeds ... unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness ... indignation and wrath ... tribulation and anguish ... upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentiles."

Jerusalem had rejected its King; now the King rejected Jerusalem.

The double use of the name Jerusalem – "Jerusalem, Jerusalem" – are words of compassion and sorrow – and it is as if the Lord was saying, "How could you reject Me after all I have done for you?" It is almost a word of unbelief or not being able to understand. It is a word of pathos and pity. Jesus used the double name before.

- In Luke 10:41, rather than Martha sitting at the feet of Jesus loving Him and learning from Him as Mary was, Jesus said, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious (worried) and troubled about many things. But one thing is needful, and Mary has chosen that good part."

- In Luke 22:31 our Lord says, "Simon, Simon! Satan has asked for you that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you that your faith should not fail."

- Acts 9:4 the Lord spoke to Saul of Tarsus, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" And Saul answered, "Who are You, Lord?" Then the Lord said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It's hard for you to kick against the prodding sticks."

Now listen to our Lord's declaration, "How often I wanted to gather you under My wings." "How often:" "Again and again." Every

message and every miracle were designed to draw you to Myself.”

The word “often” speaks of “grace upon grace,” “but you repeatedly rejected my grace!”

II. The Disappointment Matthew 23:37

We all know God is most often called our Father, but God's nature isn't restricted to masculine characteristics. The Bible clearly teaches that God loves us the same way a mother loves her children.

Isaiah 66:13: “As a mother comforts her child, so I will comfort you.”

Isaiah 49:15-16: “Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you. See, I have engraved you on the palms of My hands.”

The word “engraved” really means “to cut.” God has literally cut us into His hands.

When Jesus was looking for a particular mother to illustrate God's love, He chose a hen.

Most preachers love fried chicken. I heard about one rare preacher who didn't like fried chicken.

He was the guest preacher for a week at a country church and each evening they ate at the home of the church members. At every house he was served, you guessed it, fried chicken. He didn't like chicken, but he ate it without complaining. On the last evening as he sat down to another platter of fried chicken, he was asked to give the blessing before the meal. He looked at that platter of fried chicken and he prayed, “Lord, chicken hot and chicken cold. Chicken young and chicken old. Chicken tender and chicken tough. Thank you, Lord, but I've had enough!”

The hen can teach us some things about God's care of us:

1. A hen constantly communicates with her chicks.

If you have been around barnyard chickens and saw a mother hen with her little chicks, you know the mother hen clucks constantly so her chicks can find her. She is calling her chicks and her chicks recognize her call. Jesus said, “My sheep listen to My voice; and I know them, and they follow Me” (John 10:27).

2. A hen calls her chicks to feed.

The mother hen will find something to eat and then calls her chicks and allows them to eat before she does.

3. A hen shelters her chicks from harm.

Chicken hawks try to grab baby chicks, but the mother hen is too heavy for the hawk to carry, so she calls her chicks under her wings and with great courage protects them.

One day a chicken coop caught fire. They finally extinguished the fire. As they went through the rubble they found a dead hen near her nest. She was charred from the smoke and fire. Someone heard a cheeping sound and when they pushed the hen over, four baby chicks scurried out from under her. Though she died in the process, she protected them.

Psalms 91:4 says, “He will cover you with His feathers, and under His wings you will find refuge.”

The saddest words for Jesus to speak, and next to the last words He spoke, were, “But you were not willing.” They were not willing to accept God's love or protection.

Whether or not God can save you depends on your response to His call in your life. He said to the Jews, “I would, but you would not.”

III. The Destruction Matthew 23:38

The siege of Jerusalem took place in A.D. 70 and it was one of the most terrible in history. At times the Romans massacred all the inhabitants of a city.

When Titus took charge of the campaign, he added new horrors. He crucified Jewish prisoners, as many as 500 at a time. The

prisoners were brought in at night and the soldiers fastened the victims to the crosses in all sorts of ludicrous or laughable positions. Soon the places chosen for the crucifixions were covered with crosses, and the Romans ran out of wood.

Matthias the high priest was slain, but not until his three sons were massacred before his eyes.

The people who tried to desert Jerusalem were seized and they cut them open alive, looking for gold and jewels because the Romans suspected them of swallowing the gold and jewels.

May I tell you, the safest place for you and me is beneath the wings of God!

Chuck Templeton and Billy Graham began preaching about the same time and even went to school together for a short time. Many believed that Templeton would be the greater preacher. But Templeton got involved in some liberal teaching. He tried to get Graham to follow him, but he would not. They went their separate ways. Templeton denounced his faith and became an agnostic.

One of Templeton's books was entitled, Farewell to God: My Reasons for Rejecting the Christian Faith. When he was 83, Templeton was ill but he was still defending his rejection of God.

Toward the last of Templeton's life, he was being interviewed and the interviewer asked Templeton point-blank how he felt about Jesus. Here is what the interviewer wrote: "Instantly, Templeton softened. He said, 'In my view He is the most important human being who ever existed.' Then his voice began to crack, as he haltingly said, 'I ... miss ... Him!' Then Templeton's eyes filled with tears and he wept with his shoulders shaking. And the interview was over."

I keep going back to the five words Jesus spoke with a broken heart as He gazed at Jerusalem. He said, "But you were not willing."

Jesus offers you His love; His mercy; His forgiveness. What will you say to Him?

Related Resource:

- [Click more detailed discussion](#) of Charles Templeton
- Counterfeit New Births - What the New Birth is Not!

WHAT ON EARTH IS GOING TO HAPPEN? Matthew 24:1-3

We are living in a day of tension and uncertainty. Every nation in the world seems to be at odds with some other nation. Then, our own nation seems to be divided. The Republicans are divided against the Democrats and the Democrats are divided against the Republicans. But then, the Republicans are divided against the Republicans. Jesus said that "if a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand" (Mark 3:25).

Then there is the great conflict between God and Satan; right and wrong; light and darkness! Someone said, "It seems as if everything that is not nailed down is coming loose and the devil is pulling nails as fast as he can." Even those who have fought for what is right are getting tired of the fight and many are ready to throw up their hands and say, "What's the use in trying?!"

Let me remind US: "I've read the back of the Book and we WIN!" But between now and the end of the Book, what on earth is going to happen?

Matthew 24 and 25 is called The Olivet Discourse because Jesus gave the discourse on the slopes of the Mount of Olives overlooking Jerusalem and the Temple Mount.

The Olivet Discourse is the second longest sermon by Jesus Christ. The only longer recorded message is the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7). The Olivet Discourse is also the longest prophetic section in the New Testament outside the Book of Revelation. Therefore, it deserves our careful attention.

Four things I would call your attention to:

I. The Parting of Jesus

We need to see the setting for our Lord's discourse and to do that we must go back to Matthew 21. Matthew 21 begins the last week of our Lord upon this earth before His crucifixion.

On Sunday morning He rides into Jerusalem on the colt of a donkey. We call it the Triumphal Entry. The people lay their garments before Him and palm branches and shout "Hosanna," "Praise Him who comes in the name of the Lord." Jesus doesn't get too caught up in all that because He knows those shouting, "Hail Him." will be shouting "Nail Him" before the week is over.

Jesus will go on to cleanse the Temple and denounce each of the religious leaders and bring woes of condemnation upon the Pharisees and scribes. Then Jesus will depart Jerusalem, but before He does, He weeps over Jerusalem. Just before He leaves, He says something unbelievable and the disciples are going to ask Him about it and their question gives way to the Olivet Discourse. He says in Matthew 23:38: "See! Your house (the Temple) is left to you desolate (empty, barren, uninhabited, lonely)."

They couldn't believe their ears. The Temple was surrounded by great walls and it was located on a hill so that the Jews thought no one could ever destroy the Temple. That's impossible!

Now look at Matthew 24:1. Jesus departed – went out and departed from the Temple with His disciples. As they were going out of Jerusalem, His disciples said, "Lord, look at the size and the majesty of the Temple." Mark 13:3 tells us all but four of the disciples left to go somewhere – maybe to buy food – but Peter, James, John, and Andrew stayed with Jesus and asked Him privately three questions. Look at Matthew 24:2-3.

1. They wanted to know WHEN the Temple would be destroyed. Our Lord's answer is not recorded in Matthew, but it is given in Luke 21:20-24.
2. Then they asked about the sign of Christ return. The answer is in Matthew 24:29-44.
3. Their final question was concerning the sign of the end of the age and is found in Matthew 24:4-8.

The Purpose for Judgment

We are going to look at our Lord's Prediction in just a moment, but I want you to first see the reason or the purpose for prophecy.

It is important who you listen to when it comes a prophecy. Our Lord gives us one major criteria for a TRUE prophet.

See Deuteronomy 18:20-22.

Few things are as fascinating as prophecy. Most people would like to know the future. Some are good reasons and some are not so good. Let me give you a few:

1. Some would like to know the future out of Fear, so they can avoid life's difficulties or tragedies.
2. Some would like to know the future in order to Plan for it successfully. If we could know what the stock market will do in the next few months or years, we could all become wealthy.
3. Others want to know the future out of simple Curiosity, to be on the inside track, as it were.

But God has reasons for giving us prophecy concerning the Second Coming:

1. The Second Coming brings Anticipation – Matthew 24:42-44; 2 Peter 3:10-14

There is something very therapeutic about anticipation. It gives us a sense of excitement and something to look forward to.

2. The Second Coming brings Comfort.

1 Thessalonians 4 tells us of the return of the Lord and Paul ends the chapter by saying: "Comfort one another with these words." Why preach a funeral or offer comfort to those who have lost a loved one if Jesus is not coming again to catch believers away – both dead and alive?

3. The Second Coming brings Self-control. Titus 2:11-12

4. The Second Coming brings Purity. 2 Peter 3:11

An old man was always the first one out of his work place when the whistle blew. Someone asked him if he watched the clock all time so he could get ready to leave when the whistle blew. He said, "No, Sir, I stays ready all the time so I won't have to gets ready."

Because Christ could come at any moment, we ought to stay ready.

5. The Second Coming brings Work.

The Second Coming inspires and compels us to work for the Master. Jesus said, "Occupy till I come" and "Blessed is that servant whose Master finds him working faithfully when He comes."

Think of it this way. What if you knew for certain that Christ was coming again at noon tomorrow? Would it make any difference in the urgency with which you tried to warn and win others? A sense of the imminent return of Christ is the fuel that inspires our labor for Him.

Ladies, did you know there is a time when you can get more work done than at any time? If you are sitting in a chair and you see a car drive up with unexpected guest, it's amazing how much stuff you can pick up and straighten up between the time the doorbell rings and you open the door to invite them in.

Again, it may be better to stay ready so you won't have to get ready.

Two thousand years ago, most people had given up on the Messiah. It had been 2,000 years since the promise had been given by God to Abraham. It had been 1,000 years since the promise had been given to King David. It had been 700 years since the promise had been given to Isaiah. It had been 400 silent years when there was no prophet from God and the close of the Old Testament. The Jewish nation had waited for their Messiah year after year, generation after generation, century after century. And most had given up and said, "Maybe we misunderstood. Maybe He's not coming."

But in the fullness of time and in a little Judean town, He did show up. Most people missed it at the time, but there were two old people in nearby Jerusalem who were waiting and watching. Simeon and Anna. It had somehow been revealed to them that the Messiah would come under their watch, and they were waiting and ready. And in Luke 2:25-38, the old man, Simeon, took the Christ Child in his arms and praised God saying, (Read the Passage).

Peter says that in the last days, people will say, "Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation" (2 Peter 3:4).

Don't stop looking for Jesus to return! The signs of His coming are everywhere and He will come in a time when you think not.

I. The Prediction of Judgment Matthew 24:1-3a

"Tell us ... when will the destruction of the Temple take place?" Jesus doesn't answer this first question in Matthew 24, but He does in Luke 21:20-24.

Israel's first Temple was built by Solomon and stood on Mount Moriah for over 350 years until it was destroyed by the Babylonians under King Nebuchadnezzar in 586 B.C.

Some fifty years later, when the captive Jews were allowed to leave captivity, King Cyrus, king of Persia, allowed the Jews to go back to the land of Israel and rebuild the walls of Jerusalem (under Nehemiah) and the Temple and city of Jerusalem (under Ezra). The old folks returning would be 60-75 years old. They remembered the old Temple Solomon built and how great it was. Zerubbabel built this second Temple and when the second Temple was built, the young men rejoiced (for they had not seen Solomon's Temple), but the old men wept because this second Temple did not begin to match the splendor of Solomon's Temple nor did the presence of God reside within it. The nation was small and weak; thus, the new Temple was smaller and less beautiful by far.

About twenty years before Jesus spoke these words in Matthew 24, Herod had started a tremendous rebuilding and expansion project in the Temple. The project would go for another twenty or so years, all the way to AD 66. Some 40-46 years. The prediction of Jesus that the Temple would be destroyed in AD 70 means that the Temple had only been completed for four years. Not only that, it took Rome about four years to destroy Jerusalem and the Temple.

The Temple was magnificent. It was built of white marble plated with gold. The Temple was a massive structure that could hold thousands of people.

The disciples called the Lord's attention to the stones and the building. The stones were enormous. Some were 40 feet long, 18 feet high, and 15 feet wide and weighed a hundred tons, two hundred thousand pounds. They were cut by hand 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 gold. No wonder they were proud of their Temple.

Luke 21:20-24 gives us our Lord's prediction.

Understand that the destruction of the Temple and the fall of Jerusalem was a judgment upon sin. God had been patient and long-suffering with Israel for generations, in fact, from the very beginning of their history. But Israel had always rejected God's pleadings. Therefore, the predicted judgment had to fall. What Israel had sown was to be reaped.

It was all due to sin. Jerusalem committed the most heinous sin in human history: the people rejected God for centuries and eventually killed God's very own Son. Therefore, Jerusalem was utterly destroyed.

There is a severe warning here for all men and nations. Sin results in desolation. Rejection of God's son will bring judgment upon any person and any nation of people.

Here's our Lord's prediction:

1. Jerusalem would be surrounded by armies.
2. It will be a day of vengeance (Luke 21: 22). "Vengeance" means "to execute perfect justice. It is judgment that flows out of righteousness and justice. This is not retaliation or self - gratification. It is judgment that makes things right, exactly as they should be.
3. Women, especially, will find it difficult to flee the onslaught.
4. An unbelievable number will fall by the sword.

II. The Persecution of the Judgment

The Jewish historian, Josephus, gives the story in the four year siege. He said it was one of the most ghastly sieges in all history. When Titus and the Romans came to the city, the city was divided among three warring factions of Jews, who were at each other's throats and they paid no heed to the approach of the Romans. Thus, Titus came up and surrounded the city while it was distracted by its own internal warfare. The Romans assaulted the walls again and again, and gave the Jews every opportunity to surrender, and save their capital from destruction.

During the long siege a terrible famine raged in the city and the bodies of the inhabitants of the city were literally stacked like cord-wood in the streets. Mothers ate their own children to preserve their own strength. The toll of Jewish suffering was horrible, but they would not surrender their city.

When at last the walls were breached, Titus tried to preserve the Temple by giving orders not to destroy or burn it. But the anger of the soldiers against the Jews was so intense that they disobeyed the order of their general and set fire to the Temple.

The Jews had put great quantities of gold and silver inside the Temple for safekeeping. This melted and ran between the rocks and into the cracks of the stones.

When the Temple was on fire, everything was plundered that came to hand, and ten thousand of those that were caught were slain; nor was there any pity of any age. Children and old men, profane persons and priests, those who made supplication for their lives, and those who defended themselves by fighting.

The noise of the flames carried a long way, together with the groans of those who were slain – the Jews were now surrounded with fire and sword. The blood was larger in quantity than the fire, and those that were slain more in number than those who slew them. The ground did nowhere appear visible, for the dead bodies that lay on it, but soldiers went over heaps of those bodies as they ran upon those fleeing from them.

Molten gold was everywhere in the Temple, but the Romans had to wait for the stones to cool so the Romans could plunder the gold.

Jesus makes an interesting point in Matthew 24:2. He said, "Not one stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be THROWN down." Jesus didn't say the stones would "FALL" down or be "SHAKEN" down, but "THROWN DOWN." The Temple is going to be destroyed, but it is not going to be destroyed by a natural disaster like earthquakes. It's going to be destroyed by some human force. It is going to be intentionally and deliberately dismantled and torn down.

The Romans took long bars and pried apart those massive stones. Thus, quite literally, not one stone was left standing upon another.

The Temple was totally destroyed. The only thing left was part of the Western Wall which was to protect the Temple. We call it the Wailing Wall today.

Do you remember that Jesus told His disciples that when they saw Jerusalem being surrounded by armies to flee to the mountains immediately? Many believers did heed the warning of Jesus. They fled Jerusalem before the attack, sometime around AD 66. They fled to a small town called Pella in the district of Decapolis.

This whole section encourages us to be Rapture ready. Jesus could come FOR His saints at any moment. When that happens, the saved will be taken with Him and the lost will be left behind to face the Tribulation on earth.

GENERAL SIGNS OF OUR LORD'S RETURN

Matthew 24:1-14

It is the last week of our Lord's life before His death on the cross. As He is coming out of Jerusalem, He tells the religious leaders that their house is left to them desolate (Matthew 23:38). Four of His disciples – Peter, James, John, and Andrew – asked Jesus to explain what He meant.

“Their house” or the Temple was the pride and joy of the Jewish people. They talk to Jesus about the massive building and the huge, beautiful stones of the Temple. Jesus tells His disciples that the time is coming when one stone will not be left upon another stone. They cannot believe their ears, so they ask Him three questions in Matthew 24:3:

1. “Tell us, when will these things be?” When will the Temple, be destroyed? Jesus answers their question in Luke 21:20-24. It happened just as Jesus said in A.D. 70.

2. The second question: “What will be the sign of Your coming?” Jesus answers that question in Matthew 25:15-31.

3. The third question: “What is the sign of the end of the age?” Jesus answers the third question in Matthew 24:4-14.

Notice carefully that Jesus does not deal with the Rapture or the catching up of the saints before the Tribulation begins.

Nor does He deal with the Church Age, for this was a mystery – hidden in times past, but now revealed – after the resurrection of Christ. So, Jesus passes over the Rapture and the Church Age and goes to the time of the Tribulation.

That's important to know because many Bible students place what Jesus says in Matthew 24:4-14 and connects it with the sign of the Rapture rather than the Revelation of Jesus.

In saying that, some will say, “Well, Preacher, I don't know why we are going over these verses. I've heard all my life that there are going to be wars and rumors of war, and earthquakes and famines, so why go over all this again? Tell us some things we don't know.”

That's about all most folks know about the Olivet Discourse, but the tricky part in interpretation is understanding where the divisions lie between the questions being answered by Jesus. As you can imagine, there are several viewpoints that reliable Bible students hold concerning where the divisions lie.

What's really at question is which of the signs are what are referred to as “general signs” which have been occurring ever since Jesus uttered these words, and those signs which are more dramatic in nature and will directly precede Jesus' Second Coming.

The dramatic signs are described in the three sets of judgments in the Book of Revelation: Seal Judgments, Trumpet Judgments, and Bowl Judgments.

The “general signs” shall be occurring all through history up until Christ's Second Coming to establish His Millennial Reign, however they will be occurring with much greater frequency or destructive power during the seven-year Tribulation Period leading up to the Second Coming.

These signs will continue through the seven years of Tribulation, but the pattern for these signs will be seen in the first three and a half years of the Tribulation. It will be the time of the Seal Judgments and the Four Horsemen of Revelation 6.

What sort of time will it be?

I. A Time of Deception Matthew 24:5

Since the resurrection of Christ there have been many people who have come along claiming to be the Jewish Messiah, or God in the flesh.

The term “antichrist” is a word that means “one who opposes Christ” or “who is a false imitator of Christ” and he will arise at the beginning of the seven-year Tribulation Period.

Note I John 2:18; 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4, 9-10; 1 Timothy 4:1.

In our day, there have been those – cult leaders – who have set themselves up to be worshiped: Sung Yung Moon (cult known as the “Moonies”), Charles Manson, David Koresh, Jim Jones.

II.A Time of Dissension Matthew 24:6-7

Do these names sound familiar? Rwanda, Cambodia, Kosovo, Lebanon, Iraq, Northern Ireland, Somalia, Israel, Gaza, the West Bank, Pakistan, Afghanistan.

Jesus said, “All these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet.”

It has been estimated that in the last 3,000 years of recorded history, there have been only 286 years in which there was no war recorded, and the average period of time for each war is two years.

In the United States alone there are approximately 22,000 – 25,000 gang related deaths each year.

III. A Time of Devastation Matthew 24:7b (Famines)

We all know of the massive famine that has been occurring to an increasing degree the last 30 years or so in Ethiopia and African nations.

Today, at least half of the world will go to bed hungry each night.

The average American dog has a higher protein diet than most of the people of the world. While we sit down to dinner tonight, 400 people will starve to death.

Revelation 6:5-6, with the breaking of the Third Seal – famine over the earth.

In John's day, a denarius was a day's wage, and a quart of wheat was only enough for one person to eat normally. Wheat was meant for human consumption; barley for cattle consumption.

I. A Time of Disease Matthew 24:7c (Pestilences)

A pestilence is an outbreak of disease on an epidemic level. One only needs to think of words like anthrax, botulism, or even the plague. Think, as well, of the hazardous materials that are increasingly used.

II.A Time of Disasters Matthew 24:7d (Earthquakes)

A study was done of the increase in killer earthquakes of 6.0+ on the Richter scale on the earth:

- From 1940 to 1950, there were 4,
- From 1950 to 1960, there were 9,
- From 1960 to 1970, there were 13,
- From 1970 to 1979, there were 51,
- From 1980 to 1989, there were 86,
- From 1990 to 1994 (5 years instead of 10), there were over 100.

In Matthew 24:8 Jesus said that these were the “beginning of birth pangs,” indicating the way in which the signs will occur. Just like the pains of childbirth for a woman, they will begin slowly and then the frequency of the occurrence and the severity of the signs will quickly increase in their frequency and the amount of destruction with which they occur.

In regard to the way in which these “birth pangs” will occur, John MacArthur points out that the

- Seal Judgments unfold over a period of years (Revelation 6:1 – 8:6),
- Trumpet Judgments unfold over a much shorter period of time, perhaps as short as a number of weeks (Revelation 8:7 – 9:21),
- Bowl Judgments occur over an even shortened period of time, which may be as short as a few days or even hours (Revelation 16:1-2).

The frequency and the amount of pain and suffering will continue to get worse the closer to the end of the Tribulation you go.

III. A Time of Death Matthew 24:9

It will be a time of martyrdom. Many will die for their faith.

IV. A Time of Disloyalty Matthew 24:10

There will be crushing pressure and persecution.

V. A Time of Delusion Matthew 24:11

Rebuilding 9:21 tells us that part of the delusion will come from an increase of drug use. The word “sorceries” comes from the word we get our word pharmacy from. False prophets and false religion will make use of mind-altering substances such as narcotics.

VI. A Time of Defection Matthew 24:12

The words “because iniquity shall abound” is better translated, “because lawlessness will increase, the love of many will grow cold.” That is, “the restraining force will be removed.”

Look at 2 Thessalonians 2:6-9. Who is that restraining force? It is the Holy Spirit of God. The Holy Spirit resides in each believer. When the Rapture takes place, the Holy Spirit who resides in believers will also be taken up.

The world may make fun of Christians, but do you know what makes Christians different than the rest of the folks in the world? The Holy Spirit lives within us, trying to make us more like Jesus, correcting us when we need to be corrected, working within us so we will not follow our fleshly desires. You can sense Him putting on the brakes in your life when you are tempted to do something wrong, can you not?

What if the Holy Spirit was not within you restraining you and you were left to do as you please and follow your evil desires. How much sin and hurt and problems the Holy Spirit has saved us from because He is in us, restraining us from wrong and sin.

When He is taken out of the way, there will be no restraint to keep one from sin.

VII. A Time of Declaration Matthew 24:14

In His mercy and grace, God will have His preachers during the Tribulation. But, you do not have to enter the Tribulation when you can trust Jesus now. You don't know when the Rapture may take place. Maybe today.

Are you ready?

TRIBULATION PREACHERS

Matthew 24:14

Will there be people saved during the Tribulation Period? The answer is “Yes!”

We sometimes think of the end times and the Tribulation as only doom and gloom, but there will also be a great revival during that time, fueled by 144,000 incredible Jewish evangelists. Many people will make a commitment to Christ during the Tribulation, but sadly, many of them will be put to death because they trusted Christ.

John describes these 144,000 in Revelation 7:1-4, 9-14. (Read)

In the midst of the great Tribulation, God shows mercy and grace. He reaches out, especially to the Jewish nation; to those who rejected Him as their Messiah.

It's interesting to me that several cultist groups have claimed that they represent the chosen 144,000. For example, the Seventh Day Adventists claim to be a part of the 144,000. The Jehovah's Witnesses use to claim that all their members were included in the

144,000. Of course, once they grew to a size greater than 144,000 they had to start thinking about what to do with leftovers.

First of all, the Bible says that they are all Jews. So, when someone claims that they are a part of the 144,000, you ought to ask them which tribe they are from.

A second thing is this: They minister during the time of the Tribulation, after the Rapture of the Church.

Though the Bible does not specifically say this, it has long been speculated by the Church that these 144,000 are God's anointed evangelists to preach the saving gospel of Christ to the lost people of the world during the Tribulation Period and these evangelists will win a multitude of folks to salvation in Christ.

Three things I want you to see about these Tribulation Preachers:

I. Their Protection Revelation 7:4

Twice in this verse we are told that they are sealed: sealed by God. This is not an external seal like the Antichrist will put on the forehead and hand of those who are marked with the number 666 so they will be able to buy and sell during the Tribulation.

The seal is more than the seal of the Holy Spirit which believers in Christ have been given, it is an internal seal which will protect them from the troubles that are about to come upon the whole world.

In the Book of Exodus, we see God doing a similar thing when He makes a distinction between the Egyptians and the Hebrews. When God sent the ten plagues upon Egypt, we are told that the Hebrews didn't suffer the plagues while the Egyptians did. For example, the Hebrews didn't suffer the swarms of insects, or the dying cattle, or the hail, or the darkness, or the death of the firstborn.

It was as though God set a hedge about them and spared them the judgment.

We see the same thing with Noah and his family, and with Rehab and her family, and Daniel in the lion's den, and Jonah in the belly of the fish.

Why were they sealed? They were sealed because they are God's possession. A seal shows ownership.

Unless God seals these witnesses for their own protection, they would not have lived to preach more than one message. God's seal made them untouchable. They cannot be hurt or destroyed.

Not everyone who is saved during the Tribulation will be saved. In fact, it appears that most of them will be put to death, but these Jews will be protected. Two-thirds of the Jews living during the Tribulation will be killed.

Both Jews and Gentiles will be saved during the Tribulation. In Verses 1-8, Jews are saved; in Verse 9-14, Gentiles are saved.

There are some who will not be able to be saved during the Tribulation. Those who have heard the gospel with the ear of understanding before the Rapture will not be able to be saved, because God will send strong delusions as a part of His judgment to those who have rejected Him. See 2 Thessalonians 2:9-12.

II. Their Position Revelation 7:13-14

In Revelation 7:13 one of the elders asked John who these folks were and where they came from. In Rev. 7:14 John said, "Sir, you know"; that is, "I don't know. You tell me." Answer: "These are they that come out of the Great Tribulation"; "those killed during the Tribulation for their faith." They are the Tribulation martyrs in heaven.

They are different from the Church. Compare Revelation 4 with what we find in Revelation 7.

- Believers living at the time of the Rapture of the Church will have no place or part in the Tribulation; these people in Revelation 7 will live during some of the Tribulation days, be killed, and received into heaven.
- Those in Revelation 4 wear white garments (Revelation 4:4); these in Revelation 7 wear white robes (Revelation 7:9).
- Those in Revelation 4 sit on thrones around about the throne (Revelation 4:4); these in Revelation 7 stand before the throne (Revelation 7:9).
- Those in Revelation 4 wear crowns (Revelation 4:4); these in Revelation 7 are uncrowned.

- Those in Revelation 5 have harps and vials (Revelation 5:8); those in Revelation 7 have palms in their hands (Revelation 7:9).
- Those in Revelation 5 sing a new song (Revelation 5:9); those in Revelation 7 cry out with a loud voice (Revelation 7:10).
- Those in Revelation 5 are kings and priests and reign with Him (Revelation 5:10); those in Revelation 7 serve Him day and night (Revelation 7:15).

There will be a cosmopolitan make-up of heaven – Revelation 7:9 “of all nations, kindreds, peoples, and tongues.”

III. Their Promise

At the end of the Tribulation the Lord will return to earth to initiate 1,000 years of peace and righteousness on earth. These 144,000 will populate the earth at the beginning of the Millennial Kingdom.

THE WORST DAY ON EARTH OR THE ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION Matthew 24:15-20; 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12

It seems that all of mankind has always been interested in the future. No matter when they lived on this earth, they have always been interested in what is going to happen in the future.

It was true 2,000 years ago when the disciples of the Lord asked Him to explain the future. Jesus had just told His disciples that the Temple was going to be destroyed. To the disciples, Jerusalem without the Temple meant the end of the world, so they wanted to know, “When is the Temple going to be destroyed and when will the end of the world be?”

Jesus has told them about the destruction of the Temple. The explanation is found in Luke 21. Jesus has also told them about the end of the age, and we shall see what Jesus says about His Second Coming.

Jesus talks about what the nations can expect immediately after the Rapture of the Church and through the first half of the Tribulation Period or the first three-and-a-half years of the seven years of the Tribulation, we saw that in Matthew 24:4-14.

Now Jesus is going to tell us about the last half of the Tribulation and these prophecies will relate only to the Jews and Israel. It is interesting to note that during the first three-and-a-half years of the Tribulation, the judgments will be natural: wars, famines, earthquakes, etc. But during the last half of the Tribulation, the judgments will be supernatural and devastating.

The Antichrist will come on the scene immediately after the Rapture. He will make a covenant with the Jews for seven years to protect them and their Temple. But he will break that covenant at the end of the first three-and-a-half years. At that time the Antichrist will set himself up in the Temple and demand worship from all men. This is what Jesus calls the Abomination that brings Desolation.

Satan is in control of the Antichrist. At the end of the first half of the Tribulation, the Antichrist will cause a living statue of himself to be put into the Temple, and his associate (the false prophet, Revelation 20:10), will cause the whole earth to worship it. Satan has always wanted the world's worship. During our Lord's 40 days of temptations in the wilderness, Satan promised Jesus that if He would fall down and worship him, he would give Him all the kingdoms of the world. He could bypass the cross and still have all the kingdoms of the world. Of course, Jesus would not do so. But in the middle of the Tribulation, Satan will begin to receive worship in the Temple. Jesus called this statue “the abomination of desolation” (Daniel 9:27; Matthew 24:15).

Look again at Matthew 24:15. All the things Jesus has spoken of in Matthew 24 have been a build-up to the Great Tribulation, but in verse 15 He speaks of an event that initiates the most awful period in the history of Israel.

The word “abomination” means “disgusting, repulsive, gross ungodliness.” The word is used to represent immoralities and spiritual uncleanness of false religion.

When Jesus speaks of the Abomination of Desolation, He references the prophet Daniel. God had revealed to Daniel that an evil man would replace the world ruler, and the new leader would bring abominations that would bring desolations.

Remember, biblical prophecy often has both a present and a future fulfillment; so when Daniel spoke of the abomination that causes

desolation, he was referring to an event that would take place soon and another event farther into the future.

We know that the future evil man will be the Antichrist who will be on the scene during the Tribulation. But who was the evil man who would come soon after God's revelation to Daniel?

Remember that the second man will be much like the first man, only much, much worse.

Notice Daniel 7:25. The words "for a time and times and half a time" refers to the time of the Tribulation. The Tribulation will be seven years, so "a time and times and half a time" will be three and a half years.

Notice Daniel 9:27; 11:21, 31-32: ("the people who know their God shall be strong and firmly resist him").

Note Daniel 12:11: (1,290 days is three and a half years).

Let me pass by a lot of history and let me tell you about the first man, the forerunner of the Antichrist.

Alexander the Great died at age 32 or 33, and it was determined to have his Greek Empire divided between his four generals. A general by the name of Seleucus took control of the portion of the Greek Empire that was headquartered in Syria. Roughly 200 years after the close of the Old Testament and 200 years before the birth of Christ, a child was born into the Seleucid Dynasty and named Antiochus IV. His name meant "Antioch the Great," but he began referring to himself as Theas Epiphanes, which means, "the manifest God." He believed himself to be God, but the people referred to him with a play on words, "Antiochus Epiphanes" which means "Antioch the Mad" and he was indeed crazy.

Antiochus did all he could to Hellenize Israel or force them to act, speak, and live as Greeks instead of Jews. He forced the Jews to dissolve their Old Testament laws. He kept them from circumcising their children, making it a capital crime. Mothers caught with a circumcised child was thrown over the city wall to their death. Antiochus stopped the daily sacrifices, and then he himself sacrificed a pig on the altar of God. He forced the Jews to eat raw pig meat and if the Jews refused, they were choked to death on raw pig meat. Anyone found with a Book of the Law was jailed or killed, and the book itself was burned.

All synagogues and Jewish schools were closed. Those who refused to work on the Sabbath were arrested. Antiochus attempted to put an end to all visible expressions of the Jewish faith.

Antiochus wanted to destroy the Jews, but he ended up doing exactly the opposite. A Jewish zealot named Judas Maccabees put together a little army that lived like beast in the field, feeding on whatever they could find to eat. They would hide in the hills and every once in a while, descend upon a town, pull down the pagan altars, cleanse and rededicate the Temple, and restore orthodoxy to the Jewish faith. That event is why Jews today celebrate Hanukkah – the reinstatement of their religion under Judas Maccabees.

Daniel 11:36-45 takes the event and the person of that time to show what the Antichrist will be like in the last days, just before Christ's Second Coming. Let me list some things we are told in the Book of Daniel that we will find in the Antichrist.

1. He is arrogant, self-willed, and self-confident. He never stops talking and boasting about him-self.
2. He is a blasphemer and is outspoken in his public opposition to God.
3. He is deceptive, ruthless, and utterly devoid of integrity.
4. He will initially be very successful, but his reign will be limited by God.
5. The Antichrist will have no natural desire for women (Daniel 11:37). Most Bible students believe this means he is homosexual. That shocking thought helps us understand the evil forces behind the modern Gay Rights movement. If this interpretation is true, it means the way is being paved for the Antichrist to rise to power as an openly practicing homosexual. For 6,000 years society has looked upon homosexuality as perversion. Just in our lifetime – or you could say since 1948 when Israel was reborn and God restarted His prophetic clock – have homosexuals "come out of the closet." Many public schools and even liberal churches proclaim that there is nothing wrong with the homosexual lifestyle. In fact, special laws have been created to protect them. Our nation is encouraging homosexuals, giving same sex couples the right to marry and fining those who refuse to bake them a cake for their wedding or refuse to let them be married in a church, or to go to any restroom they want to go to. They not only want their "Right" to marry each other, but to adopt children.

What does the Bible tell us about this Antichrist who will be revealed during the Tribulation?

I. The Personality of the Antichrist

We do not know WHO he is, but we do know what he will be like.

A. He will be Charismatic

Three times in Daniel 7 (8, 20, 25) we are told this man will speak pompous words (boastful words; great things).

He will be a golden-tongued orator, so much so that he will capture the attention and admiration of the world.

Daniel 7:20 describes him as a man “whose appearance was greater than his fellows.

He will be a strikingly attractive person and people will flock to him.

B. He will be Cunning

Daniel 11:21: He “shall come in peaceably, and seize the kingdom by intrigue.”

He will get what he wants by secret or underhanded plotting and schemes.

He will be a political genius, a masterful diplomat, and a clever leader.

C. He will be Cruel Daniel 7:23-25

He will spare no one in his quest for world domination.

Those who become Christians during the Tribulation, he will persecute.

The word “persecute” here means “to wear out.” It indicates a slow, painful wearing down of the people of God. He could kill them on the spot, but he had rather make them suffer so he tortures them.

II. The Program of the Antichrist

Revelation 13:3-4 describes his most sensational moment. The Antichrist will actually be killed, but to the astonishment of all the world, he will be raised back to life by the power of Satan in a grotesque counterfeit of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

After his death and satanic resurrection, the Antichrist will assassinate the leaders of three countries in the European Union, and all other nations will immediately relinquish their power to him.

It is then that he will set himself up to be worshiped by all the people of the world.

The mark of the beast will be placed upon all those who follow him. Anyone who does not bear His mark will be unable to buy or sell in the world's economy.

Notice: Matthew 24:15-22; Daniel 9:27; 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4

There will be:

A. Desecration – Matthew 24:15. Notice the words “when you see.”

Whatever Jesus is talking about will be a public and visible event. It will be so obvious that no one can miss it.

“Standing in the holy place” can only refer to the rebuild Temple in Jerusalem.

The “abomination of desolation” happens at the midpoint of the seven-year Tribulation

Period when the Antichrist enters the Temple in Jerusalem, stops the regular sacrifice, proclaims himself as God, and demands that people worship him.

B. Danger Matthew 24:16-20

This is God's evacuation plan for those who live in or near Jerusalem during the Tribulation Period.

Although the Antichrist will have worldwide power, he will center his attention on Jerusalem.

The Jewish people who felt so safe following him as the man of peace will soon find out how wrong they were.

C. Distress Matthew 24:21-22

The final days before the return of Christ will be the greatest period of distress in world history. But as terrible as things have been,

the worst is yet to come.

Only for the sake of the elect, those true believers who came to faith in Jesus during the last days, even in wrath, God displays mercy in that the Tribulation comes to an end.

D. Deception Matthew 24:23-27

These last days will be marked by enormous spiritual deception.

The Bible doesn't give us this information about the Antichrist to tickle our fancy or to stir up our curiosity. Like everything else in the Bible, this truth is meant for our spiritual growth.

How should we live in light of the coming Antichrist?

1. Be Alert

Don't be sucked in by the spirit of the Antichrist that is already in the world. That spirit tries to make us think that sin isn't really sinful and that there is no such thing as right and wrong.

It also seduces us into silence when we ought to be speaking out.

2. Don't be Naive

We ought to brace ourselves because the worst is yet to come. No matter how good the world seems to be in terms of technology, the moral compass is pointing in the wrong direction.

3. Be Bold

This is no time for compromise. In times like these, Christians ought to be bold and open about our faith. Let your voice be heard so loud that no one can doubt whose side you're on.

4. Live Without Fear

If you know the Lord, you are joined to the one who is the ultimate victor in the battle between good and evil.

As the Southern Gospel song says, "I've read the back of the Book and we win!" If you don't know Jesus as your personal Savior, come to Him before it's too late.

THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST

Matthew 24:29-31

The most prophesied event in the Bible is the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. The most dramatic event in all history will be the visible appearing of Jesus Christ. No one can possibly miss it when it occurs. Not only is it the most prophesied event and the most dramatic event, but the Second coming of Christ is also the most significant event in Bible prophecy. It is so important that there are over 300 separate prophecies relating to it in the Word of God.

David Jeremiah notes that "for every biblical prophecy on the first coming of Christ, there are eight concerning His second coming."

While Christians have always believed in the return of Christ, they have often disagreed over the details. In our day there is a lively debate over how the Rapture (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18) relates to the Second Coming (Matthew 24:29-31).

- Some see them as the same event.
- Others see them as separated by three-and-a-half years.
- And many are like the man who said that he was a "pan-trib;" meaning that he just believed it's all going to "pan out" in the end.

Well, let me say that God's plan will certainly "pan out" and will ultimately come to pass.

Many Bible students (myself included) believe that Christ's return will occur in two stages, which is usually called the "Pre-Tribulation" view. That is, we believe Christ will come Before the Tribulation to resurrect dead Christians and to "rapture" or lift off the earth living believers. Those Christians who are raised or raptured will be taken to heaven (the Father's house) where their works will be judged at the "Judgment Seat of Christ" (2 Corinthians 5:10). This will be followed by the "Marriage Supper of the Lamb" (Revelation 19:7-10).

While this is going on in heaven, the horrors of the Seven-year Tribulation will unfold on the earth. The Antichrist will be revealed and he will commit the “abomination of desolation” at the mid-point of the Tribulation. The last three-and-a-half years will be marked by a succession of judgments that result in the near-total destruction of human society. When humanity, having chosen to follow the Antichrist, has become ready for final judgment, Jesus will return from heaven with the saints and angels at His side. He will defeat the Antichrist and his followers at the Battle of Armageddon. Then will establish His kingdom on the earth (Revelation 19-20).

Having said all of that, many Christians still apply events that should apply to the Rapture that should apply to the Second Coming or what Paul calls the Glorious Appearing (Titus 2:13); and they apply events that should apply to the Second Coming to the Rapture. So, let me give you some differences between the two.

- In the Rapture, Christ comes FOR His saints, at the Glorious Appearing, He comes WITH His saints.
- The Rapture takes place IN THE AIR, the Glorious Appearing ON THE EARTH.
- In the Rapture believers go FROM Earth to Heaven, at the Glorious Appearing they go FROM Heaven to Earth.
- At the Rapture Jesus comes to REWARD His people, at the Glorious Appearing He comes to JUDGE the Earth.
- At the Rapture He CLAIMS His bride, while at the Glorious Appearing He COMES WITH His bride.
- The Rapture takes place BEFORE the Tribulation; the Glorious Appearing takes place AFTER the Tribulation.
- The Rapture marks the beginning of the TRIBULATION; the Glorious Appearing marks the beginning of the MILLENNIAL Kingdom.
- At the Rapture believers are saved FROM the “wrath of the Lamb;” at the Glorious Appearing Christ appears to END the wrath of the Lamb.
- There are NO signs of the Rapture while there are MANY signs of the Glorious Appearing of Christ at the end of the Tribulation.

- Jesus said that He was coming back again – John 14:1-3
- The angels said, “This same Jesus” is coming back again – Acts 1:11
- Paul said Jesus was coming back again – I Thessalonians 4
- John said, “Even so, come quickly, Lord Jesus – Revelation 22:20

And He will return the same way that He left: Personally. Literally. Bodily. We might also add that His coming will be Sudden and Unexpected. And the Bible talks about the Imminent return of the Lord.

The three verses we are looking at today (Matthew 24:29-31) describe the coming of Christ at the end of the Tribulation. They deserve our careful attention.

I. The Progression of Events Matthew 24:29a

“Immediately after the tribulation of those days.” The time? “Immediately after the tribulation of THOSE DAYS.” “Those days” refers to the Tribulation period Jesus described in Matthew 24:4-28. They are the final days of tragedy that will mark the end of the present world age.

II. The Panorama in the Heavens Matthew 24:29

The heavenly bodies will be shaken. These are literal events that will happen in the future. There is no reason to interpret them symbolically.

The sun will somehow be darkened and the moon will disappear. The stars will fall from the sky and every star, planet, comet, meteor, asteroid, and every other heavenly body will be shaken out of its God-appointed place.

The whole universe will begin to disintegrate as the clock of God's creation winds down. The sun and moon will rapidly cease to give

their light.

Are there other places in Scripture that tell us of these events? Yes, and remember these Bible writers are separated by hundreds of years and thousands of miles, so they could not have copied each other.

- Isaiah 13:6-13 “Howl” or “Wail” means a mournful cry
- Ezekiel 32:7-8
- Joel 2:10, 30-32
- Revelation 6:12-17

Three things I would point out:

Colossians 1 tells us that Jesus holds all things on earth together by the power of His hand. He holds the stars and moon and sun and every grain of sand and dirt. If He were to release his hand, everything would leave its intended place.

We are told the sun and moon will stop shining and the stars and heavenly bodies will fall to the earth. Scientists have told us for some time now that our sun is a small star and that it has already used half of its hydrogen and when that happens, it is always followed by a “nova,” where the star reaches the end of its life. Scientists are expressing concern over the possibility of what they call “death of the sun.” Could this be what Jesus is describing here?

In heaven there is no need of the sun or moon, for the glory of Christ will light heaven.

III. The Person in the Sky Matthew 24:30

The sign of the Second Coming of Christ will be the appearance of the Son of Man in the heavens – and every eye will see Him!

See Revelation 1:7; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9

This will be the second time the world sees Jesus Christ. The last time it saw Him was on a bloody cross, writhing in the agonies of death, apparently a shameful failure with no glory, no power, and no success. But when it sees Him again, it will see Him coming triumphant in power and glory.

Notice: “All the tribes of the earth will mourn.” Why? It will be because of the direct fulfillment of the prophecy of Zechariah 12:10-11.

They will recognize in that day that the One whom their fathers, in ignorance and blindness, had crucified, was the One who had loved them and given Himself for their sins. They will cry and in sadness and heartache over the long years of rejection that have followed His crucifixion.

In the day that Israel shall look on Him whom they have pierced, they may well say to each other what is recorded in Isaiah 53:1-5.

IV. The Purpose of His Coming Matthew 24:31

These “elect” are not the elect who were saved during the Church Age. They are already in heaven. These elect are the elect of the Tribulation. Many Jews will see His wounds and with broken heart turn to Him in belief.

Listen, the time is short. Jesus could rapture us up today.

A professor at Dallas Theological Seminary kept a little plaque on his desk bearing only two words: “Perhaps Today.”

What difference would it make in your life and mine if every morning when we awoke we said aloud, “Jesus is coming soon. He may come today.” The Bible says, “Blessed are those who love His appearing.”

“And Lord, haste the day when our faith shall be sight,
The skies be rolled up as a scroll.
The trump shall resound and the Lord shall descend,
Even so” ... is it well with my soul?

A tourist visiting Switzerland observed a beautiful mansion on the lonely shore of a picturesque lake. The house was surrounded by well-kept gardens and gorgeous flowerbeds. Not a weed was to be seen anywhere. It was obvious that much work had gone into developing the grounds. Complimenting the gardener on the beauty and order of the garden the tourist asked, "How long have you been the caretaker here?" The gardener replied, "I have been here for twenty years."

The tourist further asked, "And during all that time, how often has the owner of the property been in residence?" The gardener smiled and said, "He has been here only four times."

"And to think," exclaimed the visitor, "that for all these years, you have kept this house and garden in such superb condition. Why, you look after them just as if you expected the owner to come tomorrow."

"Oh, no," said the gardener. "I look after these grounds as if I expected him to come today."

Up to this point in Matthew 24 Jesus has been giving us a broad sweep of predictive prophecy about His Second Coming. Now He changes His approach and begins giving a series of stories and illustrations, telling us how we are to live as though we were expecting Him to come – not tomorrow – but today.

Jesus gives five different stories or illustrations to drive home the importance of being ready for His return.

I. The Fig Tree Matthew 24:32-35

Luke adds something that Matthew does not tell us. Luke 21:29 reads, "Behold the fig tree and all the trees." The fig tree in the Bible is often a picture of Israel ... and all the other trees" would picture the nations of the world.

Prophecy also tells us that when Israel reunites as a state after being SEEMINGLY dead, that a signal that His coming is near. Israel became a state in 1948. A generation is usually 40 years in the Bible. So Jesus could be saying that His coming will be 40 years from the time Israel becomes a state again. That event was a signal that the time is near. Jesus says in Luke 21:28, "And when these things BEGIN to come to pass," suggesting that a sign need not be full-blown before it is important to God's people.

The budding of the trees indicates that summer is near. The fig tree was the first tree to bud and blossom and that indicates that springtime is near. But Jesus said, "When you see ALL these things, know that it is near."

I think what Jesus is saying is, keep your eyes open on the signs of the times so that you will stay alert and ready. When all of these things are fulfilled, the age will be at an end – and not before.

Then Jesus gives us His guarantee in Matt.24:35: "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away."

II. The Days of Noah Matthew 24:36-39

Jesus tells us something about "date-setters" in Matthew 24:36 – and there have been many of them. Mark 13:32 adds something Matthew doesn't give us. He says:

- No man knows the time when Jesus will return.
- The angels, who are in the presence of God, do not know the time of His return.
- Jesus didn't know – at the time He spoke these words on earth. He does know now.

Why should we not set a date for His return?

1. Because it is Stupid

God's calendar is not the same as man's calendar. One day with Him is like a thousand years to us. If we ask God to wait just a minute, it's going to be a while.

Think about this: Our calendar says 2017. The Hebrew calendar goes back to the beginning of time – six thousand and something. Alexander the Great started a new calendar. So whose calendar would you go by?

2. Because it is a sin

Jesus told us not to set dates.

3. Because it is Senseless

If we could pick the date, what good would it be?

It's interesting that when Jesus spoke of the days of Noah, He doesn't emphasize the sensuality or sinfulness or evil of the people of Noah's day. His point was that they lived unprepared for judgment because the common interest of life kept them from listening and obeying the message. It was business as usual.

III. Selective Removal Matthew 24:40-42

Jesus is saying to be prepared. The ones who were taken were the ones who had made preparation; the ones left did not.

IV. The Thief in the Night Matthew 24:43-44

Jesus is saying, "Be ready" for you don't know when He is coming. It will be unexpected, suddenly, surprisingly.

What does a thief take when he steals? That which is valuable to him. Who are the valuable ones to the Lord? Those washed in the blood of the Lamb.

V. The Wise Servant Matthew 24:45-51

Jesus has gone to heaven, but He has told us that He is coming back. So, what do we do in the mean time? Jesus presents two servants before us: The wise servant and the wicked servant.

See Matthew 24:45-47.

The wise servant knows that he is the Lord's steward and that he is to be faithful to the task God has given him. He is to minister to the rest of the household, and notably, to give them their food at the proper time – their spiritual food. He is to be busy, diligently fulfilling the task the Lord has entrusted to him.

What a satisfying feeling it will be to know that he did his work well in the eyes of the only one who counts.

But not every servant of the Lord proves to be wise and faithful. See Matthew 24:48-51. He says to himself, "My master delays." He has given up on his master's return.

But his master does return and the master is critical.

Paul deals with this in I Corinthians 3:11-15.

Live as though He might come today.

DON'T BE FOOLISH **Matthew 25:1-13**

Before reading the Passage.

Notice the first word in Matthew 25:1 – "THEN" – Then what? What then?

It's important for you to know that Matthew 24-25 is known as The Olivet Discourse.

On the Mount of Olives, the disciples come to Jesus privately and say, "Lord, You have been talking about going away, but You say You are coming back again. You've also said that this would be the end-time. Tell us, Lord, about the end-Times."

"What will be the sign of Your coming? What can we look for?"

"When will it take place? Lord, can you tell us that?"

Jesus answers, "I cannot tell you the e-x-a-c-t time. Nobody knows the exact time; not even the angels in Heaven. Only my Father

knows that right now. But I can give you some 'signs' – some things to look for, some things that will be happening, just before I come back.”

Then Jesus gives them some MORAL signs to look for and some POLITICAL signs and some signs IN NATURE and some signs RELATED TO THE NATION OF ISRAEL.

What a wonderful promise: Jesus is coming again!

In the New Testament alone there are more than 500 references to the Second Coming or the Blessed Hope. In each of the contexts, the message is the same – Watch! Prepare! Be Ready! Jesus is Coming.

Read the Passage.

Four things I want you to see as we examine this parable:

I. The Explanation

Time after time Jesus likens His relationship between Him and His followers as a marriage relationship; Him being the Bridegroom and us being His Bride.

The Eastern weddings were much different than our weddings today.

In our weddings, the groom and the best man and the preacher usually come to the front of the church. The groomsmen line up across the front on this side and the bridesmaids line up on this side, everyone facing the door, waiting for the bride to appear and walk down the aisle. She is the highlight of the whole thing.

Not so in the Eastern wedding. It is the groom, not the bride, that is the highlight. A Jewish wedding consisted of three parts:

1. The Engagement

Jewish weddings were oftentimes arranged by the father of the young man and the father of the young lady. In other words, the marriage was contracted, sometimes before the children were even born. Two old boys could be sitting on a fence row, talking and one of them says, “We’ve been friends for such a long time, wouldn’t it be nice if one of us has a son and the other has a daughter? Why don’t we just arrange for them to get married?” The other man says, “All right. Let’s go down to the courthouse and make this thing legal.” And, so, they drew up a legal contract and it’s done and done!

2. The Betrothal Ceremony

The two kids grow up and the time comes to get married. Family and friends would be there, vows would be made and they would be legally married. They would be legally married, but they would not start living together. The marriage would be binding and could only be dissolved by divorce or death.

The betrothal could last for week, months, even a year. The bride with her brides-maids or virgin maids would go to her parent's house and prepare for moving in with the groom.

The groom would leave his bride, usually would not see her again until he had established himself in a business or trade, maybe farming, some means of making a living so he could provide for his bride. He was also, during this time preparing a place for them to live, either build them a house or make other arrangements.

3. Then would come the third state: The Engagement, the Betrothal, and now the Wedding Feast.

The feast would usually take place at night. The groom comes with his groomsmen to the house where the bride and her maids are waiting. The groom sends one of his groomsmen, someone like our best man, running through the streets to the bride's house shouting with joy, “The bridegroom's coming; go out to meet him.”

The bride with her maids, their lamps or torches lit, would go out to meet the groom. The groomsmen and bridesmaids would lead the way, lights burning bright, singing and shouting until they get to the new house. The best man would put the bride's hand into the hand of the groom. They would for the first time be left alone together. The marriage would be consummated and the couple would live together in their new home.

What a beautiful picture of when our Heavenly Bridegroom, the Lord Jesus, comes back for us, His Bride. Our Heavenly Bridegroom has gone to prepare a place for us to live with Him.

We don't know the day or the hour He is coming, but He tells us to watch and to be ready. He's coming!

II. The Preparation

Notice: While the Bridegroom was away, making provisions and preparing for his Bride, his Bride was to make preparations. She was to keep herself ready. She didn't know when the Bridegroom was coming, so she had to be ready at all time.

Notice Matthew 25:5: "While the bridegroom delayed." In some of our Lord's other teachings he has hinted that He will be away for a long time. No one knows the reasons for His delay. I think it had to do with His mercy in allowing still others to come to Him and even for His own to live more committed to Him. We know the certainty of His coming, but His delay further verified that no one knows the day or hour of His return.

Delays often test us. When a teacher leaves the classroom for an extended period of time, the student's behavior is tested. Often a teacher slips back into a room to find the students behaving in a way they would NOT if she had been there. The same thing happens on a job when the boss has to be away for a while. The workers slack off and fail to do their best.

But consider our spiritual lives. We know Jesus is coming again, but His delay in coming may cause us to become slack in our obedience and faithfulness to Him.

Jesus focused on the ten virgins and their lamps or torches. Five are wise and five are foolish. There are some similarities and some differences between the two.

A. Similarities

- All had been invited to the banquet and all had responded positively.
- All ten had gone out to wait for the bridegroom.
- All of them had their lamps with them.
- All the virgins wanted to see the bridegroom.
- All were in the right place at the right time for the right reason.
- All of them wanted to go to the wedding banquet.
- All had some oil in their lamps at the beginning.
- All fell asleep while waiting for the bridegroom.
- All were awakened by the midnight cry.
- All the virgins got up to prepare their lamps.
- All appeared to be equally prepared for the bridegroom's coming.

That last statement is crucial. Let's suppose that we were to ask the ten virgins to stand in front of us in no particular order. Could you pick out the five foolish virgins? Answer: No, and neither could I. We could argue it and say, "Number 2 looks a little bored. Maybe she's a foolish virgin."

Or, "Look at Number 6. She's chewing gum. How wise can she be?" Or, "I know Number 10. There's no way she's a wise virgin." But it wouldn't make any difference. I submit to you that there was no way to tell in advance who was wise and who was foolish. To the untrained eye, they would all look the same.

B. Differences

There was one critical difference. It was not a matter of dress or outward appearance. They all looked and dressed alike. It was something that was not really visible that separated these young girls.

The one major difference is that five had oil in their lamps and five did not. Oil in the Bible is a symbol for the Holy Spirit.

There is no such thing as a Christian who does not have the Holy Spirit of God residing in his life. If you are saved, the Holy Spirit indwells your life.

Romans 8:9, 16

It is possible to look like a Christian and talk like a Christian and act like a Christian but not really be a Christian.

2 Corinthians 13:5: Examine yourselves ... Test yourselves ... How do you know you are saved? God changes your heart.

For one thing, you have a "sin alarm system" and it starts to go off when you sin. Sin now bothers you. You know sin hurts Jesus. It was my sin that nailed Him to the cross. I no longer want to hurt Him and I know sin hurts Him.

Then you want to obey His commandments. You have a new love for the Word of God.

– You have a new love for fellow believers and for His Church.

– And I'll tell you this, you have a sense of His Divine Presence and when He's not in control of your life, you know that, too.

Matthew 7:21-23. There is no substitute for the genuine work of the Holy Spirit in your life making you more and more into His image.

III. The Revelation Matthew 25:6-9

The time has come! The ten hear the cry at midnight! "Behold, the Bridegroom cometh!" He comes to take us to the wedding feast!

You can imagine the flurry of activity and excitement. The moment they had waited for had arrived. They all arose and trimmed their lamps. So far so good, or so it seemed.

It was then that the five foolish trimmed their lamps and tried to light the lamps. But they had no oil in them and they would not burn. They knew immediately that they had not prepared.

The foolish – those with no oil – are exposed. Their pretense is over and their sinful, foolish character is exposed.

It is going to be a moment of sheer terror when unbelievers face a Holy God and realize with absolute certainty that they are eternally lost.

They'll be like the people standing in neck-deep water outside the closed door of Noah's ark. The moment for salvation will be past and all hope will be gone forever. They are unprepared.

All of the days and hours prior to this event pass before their eyes. They think of the times they intended to prepare for His coming, but they delayed. "It's not convenient now. I have other things to do."

Think of their Desperation – Matthew 25:8-10.

Some folks think: How selfish and un-Christian. The wise should have shared their oil with the foolish.

There are some things that cannot be shared with others. There are some things every man must do for himself, or they cannot be done.

Every man must trust Christ for himself. No one else can do it for him. If I could, I would.

No one can borrow another person's faith. Every man is responsible and accountable to God for his own personal preparation.

One day you will stand before God and hear Him say, "Why should I let you into MY heaven?" What answer will you give?

"My mother was a godly woman." "Fine," the Lord will reply, "but what about you?"

"I joined the church." Every Sunday two churches gather here: an outward church and an inward church. The outward church is everyone who comes to New Hope. It consists of regular attenders, friends, visitors, and there are a large number of people whose names are on the rolls, but who rarely attend but still consider this their church. As such, this visible church contains the truly converted and the unconverted.

People come to church for all sorts of reasons, some good and some not so good. Some come because of family ties, to see friends, to get out of the house, because of the music, to impress people, out of guilt, because they think they're doing God a favor. These are not evil in themselves, but they can be excuses that keep them from coming to Christ for salvation.

One phrase in Matt.25:10 struck me: "And the door was shut." There's an awful finality about those words. The words literally mean "to be shut never to be open again."

There is coming an end to the day of grace.

- The day of grace will come to an end at death.
- The day also will come to an end at the second coming of Christ.

After that – it's too late.

Let me point out a couple of things that you may have missed when we read through the passage. Notice Matthew 25:1: "The kingdom of heaven shall be likened unto ..." That phrase, "Kingdom of heaven" is unique to Matthew. All the other Gospel writers use the term, "the kingdom of God" and refer to all those who are truly, genuinely saved by the grace of God between His first coming and His second coming. It refers to the rule and reign of Christ in the life of a saved person.

Matthew uses the phrase, “kingdom of heaven” to refer to both those who are truly saved and those who profess Jesus as Savior but do not possess Him in their hearts. For example, Matthew says the Church will be made up of both wheat and tares; both true and false professors.

Here Matthew talks about the “wise” and the “foolish;” not the “good and the bad.” The foolish were not BAD people; only foolish people.

Notice Matthew 25:3: “The foolish took their lamps and took no (EXTRA) oil with them, but the wise took (EXTRA) oil with them.”

You see, there was a delay in the bridegroom’s coming. No one knew about the delay, but the wise took plenty – EXTRA – oil with them – the foolish did not.

When the cry went out, “The bridegroom is coming” both the wise and the foolish “trimmed their lamps” getting ready to go out and meet the bridegroom, but the lamps of the foolish would not light. There must have been some oil in the lamp when they began to wait on the bridegroom, for they were surprised the lamps would not light when the cry came forth.

It’s evident that the oil represents the Holy Spirit. The ministry of the Holy Spirit is to impart to men the knowledge of Jesus Christ by pointing the light of the testimony of Christ to men. But there are levels of such revelation.

Here is the ministry of the Holy Spirit to the lost:

John 16:13-15: “When He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears, He will speak;

He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take what is mine and declare it to you. All things that the Father has are Mine. Therefore, I said that He will take of Mine and declare it to you.”

John 16:8: “And when He (the Holy Spirit) has come, He will convict the world of sin.”

But I say again, just being under conviction of the Spirit is not salvation. One must yield to and submit to the convicting power of the Holy Spirit.

Hebrews 6:4-6:

- Heb. 6:4: “Those once enlightened” – They have received the instruction of biblical truth through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. But understanding the gospel is not equal to regeneration.
- Heb. 6:4: “Tasted the heavenly gift” Tasted in the figurative sense. Consciously experiencing something of the Spirit. It is a momentary thing; not a continuing or permanent thing.
- Heb. 6:4: “Have become partakers of the Holy Spirit” the convicting ministry of the Holy Spirit.
- Heb. 6:5: “And have tasted the good Word of God” You have come in contact in some way with the Spirit. Again, being under conviction is not the same as conversion.
- Heb. 6: 6 “If they fall away” If they fall away or finally reject the wooing of the Holy Spirit to the point that they would re-crucify Jesus.

IV. The Application Matthew 25:10-13

Notice the last, final plea: “Lord, Lord, open to us.”

The double use of “lord” stresses the urgency of their plea. They were desperate for entrance.

Notice the self-deception. They thought they were friends, but He said, “Assuredly I say to you, I never knew you.”

Good News! Today the door is still open!

Jesus leaves us with three truths:

A. Prepare Now

1. Jesus is coming again. The question is not, “Is Jesus coming again?”, but “When will Jesus come again and will you be ready?”

2. There's a great day coming, a great day coming; There's a great day coming by and by;
When the saints and the sinners shall be parted right and left, Are you ready for that day to come?
There's a sad day coming, A sad day coming, There's a sad day coming by and by:
When the sinner shall hear his doom, Depart, I know you not, Are you ready for that day to come?

3. Jesus is standing at your heart's door, standing and knocking, He's knocked before;
This is the question you face once more, 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?

B. No one can prepare for you.

Not parents ... wife ... husband ... it is a personal, individual matter.

C. You can wait too late – Matthew 25:10-12

1. Note: "The door was shut" – Both a glad word and a sad word.

A glad word ... for some were shut in;

A sad word ... for some were shut out.

2. I thought of the door to the ark during the flood ... shut IN/OUT

An orphanage administrator brought a small boy before the disciplining committee for some trouble he'd gotten in. In he walked – stubborn, rebellious, defiant. He stood there before the silent committee members for a few moments, and as they looked at him, his lip began to tremble and his eyes filled with tears. He put his hands in his pockets and drew a mark across the floor with the toe of his shoe. Finally, he said, "Isn't anybody going to forgive me?"

Forgiveness was waiting for him. All he had to do was to give up his rebellious attitude and ask for it.

God is ready to forgive those who are willing to reach out in faith and ask for it.

Matthew 25:13

USE WHAT GOD HAS GIVEN YOU

Matthew 25:14-30

Before reading the Passage.

Let me remind you that this parable is part of the Olivet Discourse. The disciples had come to Jesus and asked Him some questions about the end times and when He was coming back again.

They wanted to know what some of the "signs" of His Second Coming would be. After telling them to look for some moral signs and some signs in nature and some signs related to the nation of Israel and some other "signs," Jesus gives some "end-time parables."

- In Matthew 25:1-13 there is the parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins, which deals with WATCHING for our Lord's return.
- Now in Matthew 25:14-30 we have the Parable of the Talents, which deals with WORKING until our Lord's return.

One of the main themes of this parable is our faithfulness to the Lord and His work until He returns. We are to be busy for Him.

A little boy was sitting in his classroom, staring out the window, daydreaming. The teacher looked at him and said, "Johnny, what are you doing?" Quickly he replied, "Nothing, teacher, nothing." "That's the point!" she said. "You're supposed to be doing something."

Most of us are pleased with ourselves because we are not doing anything wrong. But the Bible says, "Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin" (James 4:17). That's the message of this parable.

Read the Passage

If I were to ask you, "What is the main point in this parable of the talents?," what would you reply? Usually folks would come up with

one of two answers:

1. We should all use our God-given talents and abilities faithfully for Him.
2. Or ... and this goes a little deeper: If we don't use what God has given us for His glory, we'll lose it.

But Jesus had another – more important – life-shaping truth in mind.

This parable is about taking risk. The question is this: “How willing are we to take a risk for the sake of Christ?”

Someone has said that churches go through three stages:

1. Risk-takers – They get out of their comfort zone and take huge steps of faith.
2. Care-takers – The mind-set is just to maintain what we've got. Don't grow, but don't lose anything either.
3. Under-taker – Just get discouraged, give up, stop trying.

There's something about the idea of risk taking that excites us, but at the same time strikes fear in our hearts.

We love the idea of risk taking IF someone else is taking the risk.

While only the brave or faithful or crazy are daring enough to take risk, the rest of us watch in awe, shaking our heads and saying, “Boy, look at that!”

Most of us are committed to a lifestyle built on playing it safe. In fact, we avoid as much as possible the idea of taking risk.

Four truths I want us to see:

I. The Responsibility of the Servants

Here again is the idea of the master – our Lord – going away for a long time, with the idea of his returning. While he is gone, the master – our Lord – puts his servants – all who follow Him – in charge as stewards.

Notice in Matthew 25:14 that he did not GIVE his goods, he DELIVERED them. They were still his goods. The servants merely had stewardship over them. They were to manage the goods on the master's behalf while he was away.

Today the word “talent” means some skill or ability that we might have, but in Jesus' day a talent was a measure of weight ... of about 75 pounds.

It may refer to anything of value, but most of the time it referred to gold or silver. If it referred to gold, the standard would be like this:

- One talent (75 pounds) of gold: about \$30,000.
- Two talents of gold: about \$60,000.
- Five talents of gold: about \$150,000.

Now, here's the point: The master invested a great deal in each of them – even the man with one talent. And He invested a lot in each one of us.

1. God has invested LIFE in us.

Life is so short and fragile. We don't all have the same number of years delivered to us. How are we using what has been invested in the precious gift of life that God has given?

Psalm 90:12: “So teach us to number our days that we might have a heart of wisdom.”

Our days slip away so quickly. Every day should count for the Lord.

2. God has invested LOOT (money) in us.

Large or small we are accountable to God as to how we use what He's given us.

3. God has invested the LOVES of our life.

Our mates, our children, our grandchildren.

How was it determined who got what? Three servants here; three different amounts.

Matthew 25:15: "According to his several abilities" to use them. We don't all have the same abilities nor equal gifts nor equal opportunities.

Some are born with sound, healthy bodies while others are born with inherited tendencies toward disease.

Some are born into families with high moral standards, while others are hampered by being born in families poisoned by unclean living.

Some are born with greater education influences, while others are born in families that are mentally challenged.

God assigns work and opportunity according to ability. The talents represent opportunities to use our abilities.

The man with much ability was given five talents; the man with average ability received two talents; the man with minimal ability received one talent.

If five talents were given to a person with minimal ability, he would be destroyed by the heavy responsibility. But if only one talent were given to a man of great ability, he would be disgraced and degraded.

We have been assigned our ministries according to the abilities and gifts God has given to us. Somebody says, "But that's not fair. If I had the abilities and gifts of so-and-so, I'd have greater opportunity for success and I could make more money ..."

Let me remind you: "To whom much is given, much is required."

God knows what each of us is capable of, and gives accordingly. What God does ask of us is to do our best with what He's given us.

Which if fuller, a quart jar or a gallon jar? If each has been filled to capacity, then each is full, and neither can hold any more. We are not asked to accomplish any more than we are able with the abilities God has given us.

The five-talent person is not better than the two-talent person; just different.

Value is determined, not by what we have, but by what we do with what we have. The one-talent man can be as faithful as the five-talent man.

I like what Billy Graham's mother said to a reporter. He asked her how it felt to have a son so mightily used of God. She said, "Which of my sons do you mean? One of them is a Christian dairy farmer. The other is a Christian preacher."

The truth is, the vast majority of us are "one-talent" people.

Lincoln said, "The Lord sure must love common folks, because He made so many of us."

The five-talent person is not to feel that he is greater honored in the presence of a one-talent person.

He is not to feel nor act superior to the one-talent person. Nor is the one-talent person to feel inferior to the five-talent person. If both are equally faithful in using what God has given them, they are equal in God's sight.

II. The Reaction of the Servants

The man with the five talents and the man with the two talents both went out and traded and re-traded and invested and re-invested what they were given as long as their master was away.

They were busy using their talents for the benefit of the master.

But the man with one talent buries his. He just puts it in the ground as though it were nothing.

He doesn't steal it or squander it, but he doesn't use it productively. He just buries it. You see, it means nothing to him.

He puts it out of sight; out of view of himself and others. No one was able to see what he was entrusted with.

III. The Reckoning of the Servants Matthew 25:19-27

Imagine the scene as the first two servants enter the master's office and the master asked, "What have you done with what I entrusted you with?" They lay before him the evidence of their faithfulness.

He commends them – "Well, done!" "Good!" "Faithful!"

He rewards them – they started out as servants. They become rulers. They enter into the joy of all the Lord is and has.

They both received the same reward. There were different gifts, but the same affirmation from the Master.

But the third man ... the one with one talent (Matthew 25:28).

What did this servant do that was so bad?

A. He had a wrong view of his master.

The first two servants revered and honored their master. They had a real affection and love for their master and felt it a real honor to be entrusted with what the master left them.

But this third man accused him of being a “hard man.”

Not a man of love and compassion, but one to dread. Instead of serving him joyfully, he was afraid of him. The word “hard” also means “tightfisted or severe.”

The master had already proved his kindness and fairness by the way he treated the first two servants.

B. He had a desire to keep things just as they were.

The master didn't want things to remain just as they were. He had made an investment in the servant.

One reason was that he was afraid that he might fail, so he never tried to succeed. God would rather we try something and fail than to do nothing.

We drive nails in our spiritual coffin when we are content to just maintain what we have.

If he had just put the money in the bank and let it draw interest it would have been better than doing nothing. That's better than remaining idle.

Look at the way the master described him:

1. Wicked Matthew 25:26

The word “wicked” means “evil intended” and deals with motives.

He didn't intend to be used of God.

Doing nothing with the life God has given us is the same as doing something evil.

2. Slothful

The word means “to be pokey, to drag your feet, to go along but not to put yourself in what you're doing, to be lazy.”

The first two servants used only 16 words each to tell what they had done. The third servant used 43 words to explain why he did nothing.

Lazy people are usually big talkers. They never have time to do anything, but they always have a lot of time to tell you how much time they didn't have.

3. Unprofitable – means to be useless; worthless – wicked and worthless!!

IV. The Rewards for the Servants Matthew 25:28-30

What we do not use for the Lord, we are in danger of losing.

God has given us one life to make a difference in this world for Him. Will your life prove to be a good investment for His kingdom?

The “outer darkness” here need not refer to hell, even though that is often the case in the Gospels. The man was dealt with by the Lord, he left his opportunity for service, and he gained no praise or reward. To me, that is outer darkness.

When you're done, will you hear Him say, “Well done?!”

SHEEP ON THE RIGHT – GOATS ON THE LEFT

Matthew 25:31-46

This is the last parable Jesus told before the cross. It is a parable of the Sheep and the Goats. It's a parable about judgment.

This passage has been interpreted in a number of different ways throughout the history of Christianity. Some of the best Bible students in the world – past and present – have had trouble knowing all that Jesus is talking about in this passage. I have read after some ten to twelve men – men like David Jeremiah, Ray Stedman, Warren Wiersbe, Ray Pritchard, and David Dykes, and all of them have a little different view as to what the passage is teaching. Only one writer was honest enough in the end to say that he was not sure what the real interpretation was, but he would do the best he could. I respect that man for being honest. I want to be honest also. I don't want to speculate as to what Jesus meant in the passage, but I do want to share what seems to me to be clear.

Let me give you a few of the interpretations that men have given to this passage on the judgment of the nations.

1. Some see here at the end of time, whenever that may be, there is going to be one general judgment that all humanity that has ever lived, beginning with Adam and Eve all the way to the last person born on earth, of all races, colors, and creeds, who will one day be assembled together in one place in a general judgment, and the Lord, Who knows all the facts, will separate the Sheep (saved) from the Goats (the lost).

We know this is not the correct interpretation, because Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:10 that the saved will be judged for their works after the Rapture, at the Judgment Seat of Christ. Then a thousand years later, Revelation 20:11-14 tells us the lost will be judged at the Great White Throne Judgment.

2. A second interpretation is that this passage of Scripture is teaching that the Lord will one day judge all of the nations on the basis of how they treated the nation of Israel. They see three classifications of people here. They see the sheep and the goats and those whom the Lord identifies as "my brethren." This interpretation sees "my brethren" as Jews. So, they believe that, at some point in history, God is going to gather all nations together and God is going to judge the nations on the basis of their treatment of the nation of Israel. And those who have treated the nation of Israel fairly and respectfully will go to heaven; those who have abused Israel will go to hell.

Now when God called Abraham and made him the father of the nation of Israel, He did promise there would be a special blessing upon those nations that honored Israel. But I do not believe that a person will go to heaven or hell on the basis of how they treated Israel.

Look again at the phrase, "My brethren." In Matthew 12:46-50 while Jesus was speaking, some told Him, "Your mother and brothers are outside, wanting to speak to You."

Jesus answered, "Who is My mother and My brothers?" Then He answers, "Whoever does the will of My Father."

3. A third view is that Jesus is speaking of the judgment of those who heard the message of the 144,000 and trusted Christ since these believing Jews will not receive the "mark of the beast" (Revelation 13:16-17), they will be unable to buy or sell. How, then, can they survive? Through the loving care of the Gentiles who have trusted Christ and who care for His brethren. Those who were saved in the Tribulation showed evidence of their faith by caring for His brethren, much like those who provided food and safety as they were hidden from Germans in World War II. Problem: folks are not saved on the basis of how they treated the Jews.

I have problems with these views, but let me tell you what I do believe. I believe this is basically a summary of all the Bible teaches about the coming judgments of God. Jesus was teaching His disciples some general truths about judgment to come.

I. The Judge Seated Matthew 25:31

The Lord Jesus Himself will be the Judge. John 5:22 says, "For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son."

Notice that Christ "will sit on the throne of His glory," so this judgment will take place on earth, not in heaven.

Note Isaiah 9:7. Christ will reign over the restored earth for a thousand years in His kingdom, then over a newly created heaven and earth all eternity.

Consider this: When He came the first time, there was little glory to be seen. Oh, there were angels singing, but only the shepherds heard them. And only the shepherds and the wise men marked His birth. He arrived on planet Earth unwanted, unnoticed, and unexpected. Over His first coming, write the word HUMILITY in large letters. He came as a gentle lamb, meek and mild, and offered Himself on the cross for the sin of the world.

But over His second coming we should write the word GLORY in large letters. HUMILITY then, GLORY to come. The day of GLORY will come, the throne will be set up, King Jesus will take His place, and the judgment of the nations will begin.

II. The Subjects Gathered Matthew 25:32-33

When you read the word “nations,” don't think in terms of nations with borders like the United States, Canada, or Brazil. The word “nations” means Ethnic groups.

In the first century sheep and goats would normally be kept together in the same herd and from a distance looked much alike, so that it was difficult to tell them apart. But when the time came, the shepherd would quickly herd the goats in one direction, the sheep in another.

The purpose of this judgment is not to determine who is a sheep and who is a goat. That has been determined long beforehand. This judgment is a public separation of the two groups of people. In the beginning they are all together. When the judgment is over, the two groups are forever separated.

This is true to life as we know it today. We live together, work together, play together. We live on the same street, go to the same restaurants, watch the same television programs, attend the same schools. It's sometime difficult to know for certain who is saved and who is lost. But the Lord knows His own because He saves them one by one.

III. The Evidence Introduced Matthew 25:34-45

Now we come to the unexpected part of the story. When the King introduces the evidence upon which He makes His judgment, He doesn't say anything about faith, salvation, grace, the new birth, accepting Christ, Bible reading, prayer, worship, or tithing. So, if the things we count as important aren't even mentioned, what does matter when it came to entering the kingdom?

What really counts is the nature within you. What's the difference between “sheep people” and “goat people?”

A. “Sheep” have a servant's heart and naturally help those in need.

“Sheep people” were revealed because they showed love and mercy to those who needed help. Sheep tend to be gentle, docile creatures that follow a shepherd. Sheep have a flock mentality. Sheep seldom attack their own kind. Goats are different by nature.

B. “Goats” have a selfish heart and naturally ignore those in need.

Goats are unconcerned for those who are in need.

I don't have much experience around either goats or sheep, but I found a website where a woman named Marnie Pehrson raises both goats and sheep and she compared the two. She wrote: “Sheep are generally docile creatures who follow their shepherd in all things. Goats, with their individualistic me-first mentalities, mark a stark contrast to the easy-going, follow-the-leader temperament of sheep.” Here's how she describes three of her goats:

“These three goats have three distinct personalities, but one thing they have in common is their complete inability to share. They'll knock each other out of the way, fight, and quite literally horn in to get what they want. Wilma is one of the most selfish beasts I've ever seen. Not only does she want all the feed for herself, but she can't stand for Hannah to have a speck of it. Not only does she not share a trough with Hannah, but also, she doesn't want Hannah to have a trough of her own. She'll leave her own feed to ram her horns into Hannah's side and drive her away from her food.

Wilma makes me think of people who aren't satisfied to have their own success, but can't even tolerate anyone else having some too. This competitive, jealous, scarcity mentality is what gives goats a bad name, and I'm certain it's why Jesus used goats to illustrate the nature of the selfish individuals who do not give their hearts to Him.” (Marnie Pehrson)

Notice that these goat-people are not judged because they did something terrible. They didn't commit murder, they weren't child-abusers or drug pushers. They were judged because of what they FAILED to do. They did nothing!

Helping those in need doesn't earn you salvation, but it is evidence of your salvation.

When Jesus looked on crowds of suffering people, He was moved with compassion. When Jesus has changed us, we demonstrate that change by showing the same compassion He showed to hurting people.

Jesus mentioned six categories of people who need mercy: the hungry need food; the thirsty need a drink; the naked need clothes; the stranger needs hospitality; the sick and imprisoned need visits.

Notice that when Jesus said that He was in all six of these conditions – the goat-people ignored Him, but the sheep-people ministered to Him. In both cases, both were surprised to know that Jesus suffered from these six categories.

Jesus identifies with His people. When you help them, you help Him. When you ignore them, you ignore Him. In Acts 9 when Jesus stopped Saul on the road to Damascus, He didn't ask, "Why are you persecuting the Christians?" Instead Jesus said to Saul, "Why are you persecuting ME?"

IV. The Verdict Pronounced Matthew 25:46

The end of the story is short, simple, and impossible to misunderstand. The goats go to hell; the sheep go to heaven.

Look back up at Matthew 25:41.

So, are you a sheep or a goat? Check your heart. Do you have a servant's heart always ready to help hurting people or do you have a selfish heart always looking for "What's in it for me?"

LIVING IN THE SHADOW OF THE CROSS

Matthew 26:1-5

This is not the only time and place where Jesus predicted His death. At the mid-point of His three-year ministry, Jesus started predicting His death.

- Matthew 16:21
- Matthew 17:22-23
- Matthew 20:18-19

In 1873 the English artist William Holden Hunt, painted a fascinating picture called "The Shadow of Death." If you're ever in Manchester, England, you can see the original. In the picture, Jesus is portrayed as a young adult working in the carpenter's shop. It's the end of the day and the floor is littered with wood shavings. The young Jesus is stretching His tired

muscles, and the setting sun casts a shadow of a cross on the wall. We don't have to wonder about the symbolism because the artist himself writes, "Mary, who has been looking at the gifts of the Magi, looks up in time to perceive this prevision of the crucifixion. Her attitude tells of her fright and terror through her features are not portrayed. The weary Lord falling on the rack which holds the carpenter's tools, with the mandrel placed vertically in the center, at once realizes the form of a cross, and the hands falling thereon suggest the idea of a figure nailed thereupon, and thus, the particular death our Lord would die."

(Catalogue, "The Shadow of Death," William Holman Hunt)

In this message I want to share three foundational truths about the cross. The first two are theological truths, and the third is a practical truth.

I. The Cross Wasn't an Afterthought; It Was Always God's Plan

When you read the story line of the Bible, don't be tempted to think that God made everything up on the fly because man kept messing up His plan.

God created Adam and Eve and, Oops! They did the one thing God told them not to do. Then the world got so evil that Oops! He sent a global flood to wipe them all out except for Noah and his family.

You can rest assured that the words "Oops!" or "Oh, no!" are not a part of God's vocabulary. He has had a plan from the very

beginning of time and the cross of Christ wasn't PLAN "B" when PLAN "A" failed.

Revelation 13:8 tells us that the Lamb of God was slain from the creation of the world. No! The cross is the central event in human history.

II. The Cross Wasn't Just an Execution; Jesus Willingly Embraced It.

Jesus lived His life in the shadow of the cross. The Romans crucified thousands of criminals and left them hanging on trees and crosses along the roads to serve as a deterrent to rebellion from the Jews.

I wonder how many crucifixions Jesus witnessed during His life. And every time He saw Someone hanging on a tree or a cross, He knew that would be His fate.

Notice John 10:17-18. Jesus didn't lose His life on the cross; He gave it for the salvation of humanity. He wasn't a victim of death; He was a volunteer for death; then He was a Victor OVER death!

III. The Cross Isn't Just a Symbol; It's the Doorway to Life

A soldier in battle was digging in a foxhole while artillery shells were landing all around him. His shovel hit something metal. He reached down and uncovered a small metal cross that had been buried. He wasn't very religious, but he clutched it for hope. At that moment another soldier, who happened to be a chaplain, scampered into the same foxhole. The soldier held out the cross toward the chaplain and said, "You're just the person I wanted to see, Padre. Can you tell me how to work this cross?" We can't work the cross, but the cross works for us, for our redemption.

Billy Graham once wrote in Decision magazine, "I find that I can preach on any subject other than the cross, and it does not seem as offensive to people as the cross does. I can preach on doing good works, on social improvement, and people applaud me. The offense of the cross arises chiefly from the fact that the cross condemns every other way of salvation. Jesus said, 'There is only ONE way; ONE road; ONE gate to the kingdom; and that is the way of the cross.'"

Jesus said, "Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in Him may have eternal life." (John 3:14-15). "But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself." He said this to show the kind of death He was going to die."

(John 12:32-33)

When Jesus spoke these words to the Jews, they all knew the story of Moses and the bronze serpent. You may not know it; so let me tell you the full story, because it is one of the most interesting illustrations of the cross in the Old Testament.

Moses was leading the children of Israel toward the Promised Land, a land flowing with milk and honey. They came to Kadesh Barnea, right on the border of Canaan. I suspect it must have been a Baptist congregation with Moses, because the first thing they did was elect a committee, the Holy Land Exploration Committee. It had twelve members. These twelve spies slipped across the border to check out the land. They came back and all twelve reported it was a good land. But ten of the spies said there were giants in the land and that it was impossible to conquer. But two of the spies said, "Yeah, those giants are big, but our God is bigger! Let's do it!"

Can anyone name the two spies who trusted God? Joshua and Caleb. We still name our sons Joshua and Caleb. Can anyone name one of the ten who didn't trust God? Nope, I didn't think so. History forgets negative, defeated people who live by fear instead of faith.

Again, there's a clue that they were Baptists because then Moses led them in a business meeting to take a vote. Moses said, "All in favor of going in and taking the land say, 'aye!'" Joshua and Caleb said, "Aye!" Moses said, "All opposed to going in and taking the land say, 'Nay!'" Remember, there were about a million people in this multitude, so there was this huge sound that echoed off the mountain ranges, "NAY! ... Nay! ... Nay!"

God wasn't happy that they wouldn't trust Him, so He said, "Okay, you're going to wander in the wilderness for the next generation." As Keith Green said in one of his songs, "Take another lap around Mt. Sinai."

Not long after this, the people started complaining and griping against God and against Moses. God was feeding them with manna every morning, but they griped about the lack of variety in their menu. They said, "We detest this food." God's patience was running

a little thin at the time, so the Bible says He sent poisonous snakes into the camp, and they bit the people, and many people died. Now you may be thinking, "Wow, that seems pretty cruel of God to do that." My job is not to defend God or the Bible, my job is just to proclaim it. If you have a problem with a God who sends poisonous snakes to bite rebellious grippers, you can take it up with God.

After a few hundred fatal snakebites, the people come to Moses and say, "We have sinned against you and against God, please ask God to take away the snakes." Moses prayed to God, and God gave Moses a curious way to fix the problem. The Bible says, "The LORD said to Moses, 'Make a snake and put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live.' So, Moses made a bronze snake and put it up on a pole. Then when anyone was bitten by a snake and looked at the bronze snake, he lived" (Numbers 21:8-9).

God didn't take away the snakes; He made a way to survive them. We want God to remove all the bad things in our lives, and instead He gives us the prescription to endure and survive them. The prescription was pretty simple: Look and live. He didn't say bow down before the snake, or bring an offering to the snake – just look and live.

Jesus said that Moses' snake-on-a-stick is a picture of the cross. You may be thinking, "Pastor, I don't get the symbolism. Why a snake? A lamb I could understand, but why a snake?" I think there's a very good reason why God instructed Moses to put a snake on that pole.

From the very moment Satan slithered his slimy existence before Eve, there has been something sinister and sinful and scary about snakes! Did you know a snake is the symbol of sin?

The reason God told Moses to put a snake on a pole is because this pole is a symbol of the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. When Jesus was lifted up on the cross, He carried our sin. The Bible says in I Peter 2:24 that "He bore our sins in His body on the tree." So, God had Moses put a snake on the pole to show us that Jesus would carry the sins of the world on the cross.

The prophet Isaiah said, "Surely He took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows ... We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah 53:4, 6).

Here's the truth. All of us have been snake-bitten by the fatal venom of sin. Nobody is immune. But God has given us a remedy in the cross of Christ. Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, Jesus was lifted up on the cross, and if you will simply look to Jesus and trust His finished work on the cross, you can live. You can live now, and you can live eternally.

Salvation is a lot simpler than most people think. You don't have to memorize the Ten Commandments, or pray a certain prayer, or walk down an aisle, or be baptized. You simply have to LOOK and LIVE. It's not complicated.

Those of us who have been saved by looking to Jesus on the cross should share this message with everyone we meet. Before we leave this story in Numbers 21, let's push the rewind button in our minds and go back 4,000 years, and walk with me through the camp of the Israelites where poisonous snakes are slithering everywhere. Be careful and watch your step!

Think about what it must have been like in that camp, and then apply that to people we know in Tupelo, because we encounter people every day who have been snake-bitten by sin. So, you're in that snake-infested camp and you walk up to a person and say, "Hey, I can't help but notice you've been bitten. Good news, there's a cure! Moses put a snake on a pole and if you will look at that snake, you can be healed!" The man says, "Well, yeah! I'm bitten, but I'm not bitten worse than anyone else around me. In fact, I know folks who are bitten worse than I am." Sadly, there are some people who will never come to Christ because they say, "I'm no worse than anybody else!"

Then, you walk up to another man and he still has a snake attached to his arm. You say, "I see you have been bitten. You have a problem there!" He says, "Yeah, I have a problem. I admit it but you know what? I'm just going to shake this thing off myself. I've been able to handle every other problem in my life and I think I can handle this one too." Sadly, when some people realize they have a sin problem they think they can fix it themselves.

You continue your tour of the camp and venture into a tent. A man is lying on a mat. His leg is swollen and purple from a fatal snakebite. His wife runs in because she has just heard about the cure. She says, "Sweetheart! I know you have been bitten, but I have good news for you! There's a cure! Moses put a snake on a pole and God said that if you look at it you would live. Please, dear, let me help you over to the opening in the tent so you can see the snake on a pole."

But the man looks at his wife and says, "Are you talking about the snake on the pole theory? Would you explain to me how looking at a bronze snake on a high pole can improve my condition?" She says, "I can't explain it. God just said, 'Look and live!' The man scoffs, and says, "I'll have none of that foolishness. The bronze serpent theory is just superstition!"

And the Bible says, "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing" (I Corinthians 1:18).

If someone asks me, “Will you explain to me how the blood of a man who died 2,000 years ago can forgive my sin?” I can't explain HOW it works; I just know it works.

Before we leave the camp, let's make one more stop. We come upon a young mother and wife named Rachel. She's weeping as she piles stones on the grave of her husband who died from the venom. Her young son, Joseph, stands at her side. As she lays a stone on the grave, she hears a cry and turns in time to see a poisonous serpent slither away after biting Joseph.

She cries, “Oh, Joseph! Joseph! Not you too!” Already his temples are beginning to pulse and his leg is beginning to swell. Rachel grabs him up in her arms and she rushes him to her tent and lays him down and gently takes a wet, moist cloth and wipes his forehead.

Then somebody comes to the door of the tent and they say, “Rachel, listen! There's a cure! Moses put a snake on a pole and if you just look at it and believe God, you'll be healed!” Rachel says, “How can you say that?” The person at the door of the tent says, “Because I was bitten and I looked and I am healed!”

So, the mother picks up her little boy and carries him over to the door of the tent and says, “There it is, honey. Look! Just look!” Joseph obeys God's simple direction to look and live. He trusts God and when his eyes focus on that bronze serpent, the color returns to his face, and the swelling immediately goes down. Within a few minutes he jumps down from his mother's arms – healed and delivered.

That's what can happen to any sinner when they look to the cross and trust the work of Christ. You can look and live!

Jesus lived in the shadow of the cross, and so should we. There's only one safe place to find refuge from the judgment of God against sin – and that's in the Shadow of the Cross. There's no other way to be saved except through the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ.

An old hymn named “The Way of the Cross Leads Home” says it all:

“I must needs go home by the way of the cross;
There's no other way but this;
I shall never get sight of the gates of light;
If the way of the cross I miss!”
(Words by Jessie Pounds)

EXTRAVAGANT LOVE

Matthew 26:6-13

Before Reading the Passage.

Again, we are in the last week of our Lord's life upon earth before His crucifixion. Simon the Leper has invited Jesus to dinner, along with several others. In fact, there were seventeen people at the dinner.

1. Simon the Leper was there. We don't know much about Simon, but apparently the Lord Jesus had healed him from leprosy. The early Church fathers tell us that this Simon the Leper was the husband of Martha, the sister of Mary and Lazarus.

2. Then there was Martha. She is doing what we always see her doing in Scripture – she is serving.

3. Next, we find Lazarus, the brother, who had been raised from the dead just a few weeks before.

4. Then there were the twelve disciples.

5. Then there was Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus.

Every time we see Mary in Scripture she is at our Lord's feet – listening to Him, learning from Him, and expressing love to Him.

A. The first time we see Mary in Scripture she is at her own home. Martha is there as well, working and preparing a meal for Jesus and the others. Mary is sitting at the feet of Jesus, listening to Jesus teach.

Luke 10:38-42 tells that as Mary was sitting at Jesus' feet, Martha came from the kitchen and said, “Lord, I'm in this kitchen by

myself, trying to prepare You something to eat, and Mary is out there sitting at Your feet. Don't You care that I'm having to do all the work myself? Tell Mary to get in here and help me!"

Jesus said, "Martha, you are worried and frustrated about many things, but Mary is doing the most important thing she can do – learning from Me." As if to say, "Martha, you ought to try what Mary is doing."

B. The second time we see Mary is at the tomb of Lazarus and she is again at Jesus' feet, leaning on Him. In John 11:28-32 Mary runs to the tomb of Lazarus where Jesus is, falls at His feet, leaning on Him and says, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."

C. The last time we see Mary she is on her knees before the Lord, worshiping Him and loving Him. So the three times we see Mary in Scripture, she is at the Lord's feet – Learning from Him, Leaning on Him, and Loving Him in worship.

Listen as I read the Passage:

There are certain scenes in Scripture that seems to be so sacred and precious that you can almost hear the Lord say, "Take the shoes off your feet, because you are standing on Holy Ground."

Mary is expressing extravagant love and worship unto the Lord! The word "extravagant" is defined as "spending too much, or excessive spending, or spending above and beyond what is reasonable, or going overboard and doing too much."

But when it comes to worshiping our Lord Jesus, nothing is too extravagant. After all, He is worthy of everything we can render to Him and more, because all we are and have comes from Him anyway.

The word "worship" comes from an old English word that means "worth-ship." It literally means "to give to God everything He is worth," including our praise, our love, our service, and our gifts.

Three things I want to share with you from this passage:

I. The Devotion of Mary Matthew 26:7

John 12 tells us the woman's name was Mary, and Mark 14 tells us that the costly perfume was spikenard and that it was a Roman pound's worth of twelve ounces. It was in an alabaster box and it cost 300 denarii.

An alabaster box was actually a small clay vase that was made by a potter to hold twelve ounces of this precious perfume. The potter would shape the little vessel very carefully, making the vase with a long, thin neck that could easily be broken to let out a small amount out at one time. The vase was sealed at the top and made so it could be re-sealed for special times. It was usually used at weddings or funerals.

The cost was 300 denarii. A denarius was a day's wages for the common man. Based on a six-day work week, 300 denarii was about a year's wages. Think about what your yearly wage is. That's what that little vase of perfume would cost today if you gave what she gave to the Lord in those few moments as she poured it all on our Lord's head and feet.

Jesus had done so much for this family.

- Simon had been healed from his leprosy. Once he could not come around his family. He had to cry out, "Unclean. Unclean." when he got close to another person. Now that he was healed, he could once again be with his family.
- Lazarus who had been separated from his family by death, came forth from the tomb at the Word of Jesus.
- Mary and Martha had been saved by the Lord and then witnessed their brother coming out of the tomb alive again.
- The disciples, with the exception of Judas, had been saved by the Lord; they had seen Jesus heal the sick, cast out demons, walk on water. They had heard Him teach and watched His example.

As Mary sat there, listening to all that the Lord did for her and for her family, I think Mary's heart was about to burst with love for Jesus. Not only that, she understood what none of the disciples understood, that it would not be long until Jesus was hung on the cross. This may be her one and only opportunity to express her love and commitment to her Lord.

Opportunities do pass ever so rapidly and if we don't act immediately, we miss them forever!

Love is never known unless it is experienced and shared.

Mary could wait no longer, she had to show Jesus how much she loved Him. She gets up from the table, goes to get the precious vial of perfume, and anoints the Lord's head and feet and wipes His feet with her hair.

It was a personal act of worship. The Hebrew word for worship means to bow down as an expression of humility and adoration. The Greek word for worship means "to kiss toward."

Psalm 29:2 says, "Give unto the Lord the glory due unto His Name; worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness."

Not one word is recorded that Mary said, but as she was pouring that perfume on Jesus, she was pouring out her heart of love and gratitude to Him.

Worship is my personal response of love to God, thanking Him for changing my life. Worship is not coming to God to GET something; it is coming into His presence to surrender something. And you never think how much it cost to show your love.

Jesus held back nothing from us; we should hold back nothing from Him. The song write speaks for Jesus when he writes:

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?

II. The Denouncement of Mary Matthew 26:8-9

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."

It's the Gospel of John that tells us that it was Judas Iscariot who started whispering, "Why this waste? She could have sold the perfume and given the money for the poor." The other disciples joined in with Judas' attitude.

By the way, 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. G. Campbell Morgan said, "It's a great compliment to be criticized by certain people."

Nothing we ever do for Christ is a waste. 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.

III. The Defense of Mary Matthew 26:10-13

Mary didn't come to her own defense, but Jesus did! "Leave her alone. Why do you trouble her?" Meaning "That's enough! Stop it! She has done nothing wrong and everything right."

Jesus said, "She has done a beautiful thing unto Me. Wherever the gospel is preached in the whole world, what she has done will be told as a memorial to her." I have just done what Jesus promised would be done concerning Mary.

Many of us have unused perfume. We need to break a vase and anoint the Lord. He would be honored. We would be blessed and so would others.

THE SINS OF JUDAS **Matthew 26:14-16, 20-25**

Before reading the Scripture.

There are some names recorded in history that are synonymous with betrayal. One of those names emerged in the writings of William Shakespeare as he presented the death of Julius Caesar which occurred on March 15, 44 B.C.

Caesar was attacked by a group of senators who were intent on taking his life. Caesar initially resisted his attackers until he saw his closest friend, Marcus Brutus, with a knife. Seeing his friend among his attackers, Caesar uttered the words, "Et tu, Brute?" Which basically means, "Even you, Brutus?" Brutus would forever be known as a betrayer of Caesar.

Another name that is synonymous with betrayal is one that came from the Revolutionary War. An army officer who was highly respected and trusted by General George Washington would be found involved in a plot of betrayal which would have involved the surrender of West Point to the British. The name Benedict Arnold would forever be associated with betrayal.

There is one name that is more widely identified with betrayal than any other name in history. It is the name that appears in our text today. That name is Judas Iscariot.

Read the Passage.

Of all the places to look for the one who would betray our Lord Jesus, who would have thought it would have been among the twelve men who had followed Jesus for three-and-a-half years? Among the very ones that Jesus choose to follow Him. Yet, it was prophesied thousands of years earlier in a Messianic Psalm. "Yea, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of My bread, hath lifted up his heel against Me" (Psalm 41:9).

I want us to look at Judas for a moment and see his:

I. Privileges

No other lost man had grater privileges and advantages than Judas; and yet, he betrayed Jesus. What a warning that is to us.

The name "Judas" means "a praise unto Jehovah." His parents must have been godly people who desired and hoped that this son would trust and honor and live for Jehovah, the Living God.

- Then he was personally chosen to be an apostle by Jesus Christ.
- He forsook all to follow the Lord.
- He spent three-and-a-half years traveling the length and breath of Israel with Christ.
- He saw most if not all of the miracles of Christ in person.
- He heard Christ give all his famous discourses.
- He was sent out with the other apostles to preach the gospel.
- He was a trusted leader of the apostolic band. So much so that they made him the treasurer of the band.
- No one ever suspected him of treason. Mark it down, no one ever dreamed that Judas would be a defector. To the very end they found his conduct to be above suspicion.

Even when Jesus announced that one of the twelve would betray Him, no one said, "I know who it is! It's Judas!" No, each disciple instead questioned their own loyalty and asked, "Lord, is it I?"

It was not until the gospel writers began to write, some 20 to 50 years later, did they remember little things about Judas and in listing the disciples they always put Judas last in the list and then added, "and Judas who betrayed Him."

II. Plot

So why did Judas do what he did? What made him tick? Was he crooked from the beginning? When Judas responded to Christ's call, did he join the Master's band with the intention of becoming a traitor?

The answer must be "No". All the evidence points in that direction. From everything we know, Judas must have been as sincere a follower as anyone else ... in the beginning. The problem was that he was not truly saved and the others were. He never fully committed himself to Christ and the others did.

Well, exactly when and where and why did the feelings of anger and disloyalty and doubt begin to take over Judas' heart? We cannot say, but there are some hints as to why he did what he did.

1. Some say Judas betrayed Jesus for money. Looking back after some 60 years after the crucifixion of Jesus, John writes about Judas that he was a thief and had been taking money from the bag the whole time. But 30 pieces of silver was not much money.

2. Most likely Judas began to be disillusioned about Jesus. He thought, as did the other

disciples, that Jesus would be a kind of political Messiah who would lead Israel to overthrow the yoke of Rome. But then Jesus began to talk about dying and that His kingdom was not of this world, crucifixion made Jesus seem like a loser. Judas was displeased with the way things were going.

Let me make a couple of observations here. It is not by accident that Matthew and the other gospel writers put this incident along side of the incident of Mary anointing Jesus. The incident of Mary shows her loyalty to Christ. The incident of Judas shows his disloyalty. We need to compare and contrast these two incidents.

Notice Matthew 26:14-16.

The chief priest didn't come to Judas; Judas came to the chief priest and asked, "What are you willing to give me if I deliver Him to you?" They said, "Thirty pieces of silver." Now note: "So from that time Judas sought opportunity to betray Him."

This is what the Bible calls "Presumptuous Sin." Note Psalm 19:13; 2 Peter 2:10.

What are "presumptuous sins?" When a person plans to sin or seeks the opportunity to sin or prepares to sin in such a way as not to be found out, that is presumptuous sin.

Look at Exodus 21:14. This is intentional murder. It is planned, thought-out murder.

Look at Numbers 15:30-31. This is intentional, deliberate sin.

In God's sight presumptuous sins are an abomination to Him. It is when we plan out our sin. Let me give you some examples:

- Here is a young person who plans to illegally engage in under-age drinking.
- Here is someone who plans to cheat in their business or to cheat the IRS or to be unfaithful to their spouse.

Get the picture? Let me just say a word to those who maybe in the planning stages of some sin – Don't do it!

"Well, Preacher, I can always ask forgiveness for it." To sin willfully is a dangerous thing. Let me show you a second thing. How we respond to reproof and correction says a lot about our character.

Judas criticized Mary for "wasting" the perfume on Jesus and Jesus defended her. In Matthew 26:10 Jesus said, "Hush! Stop bothering her about this. She has done a good thing unto Me." And Judas "sought opportunity to betray Him" from that time.

I said that how we respond to reproof and correction says a lot about our character. Let me show you some verses:

- Proverbs 10:17 ("ereth" or goes astray);
- Proverbs 12:1 ("brutish" or stupid);
- Proverbs 15:5, 10, 31-32;
- Proverbs 17:10

Those who have experienced grace, know they need grace. They should never take offense at someone who reminds them with love and in the right spirit that they need grace and may need to repent.

III. Pretense Matthew 26:20-25

What a hypocrite Judas was. He knew and he knew Jesus knew that he was going to betray Jesus; yet, he asked, "Lord, is it I?" Jesus was not his Lord. In just a little while Judas will betray the Lord with a kiss.

Look what Jesus said. "Woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed. It would have been good for that man if he had not been born." By the way, that is true of every person who dies without Jesus!

John tells us, "And Satan entered into Judas" and later Judas would hang himself. Judas would die before Jesus!

THE LAST SUPPER

Matthew 26:17-20, 26-30

We are not only in the last days of our Lord's life upon this earth, but when we come to this passage, we are in the last hours of His life upon this earth.

When we come to these verses, it is Thursday; our Lord will be crucified early Friday. Jesus will eat this last meal with His disciples before He is crucified. He has so much He needs to tell them before He is crucified.

Let me remind you that John writes his Gospel much later than do Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

- Mark and Matthew write their gospels around 50 A.D.
- Luke writes his gospel around 60 A.D.
- John writes his gospel around 85 or 90 A.D.

John has no doubt read and re-read the other three gospels and he realizes that the first three had left out some important truths. In fact, about 90 percent of the material in John's gospel is not contained in the other three gospels, so about 90 percent of John's gospel is new and has not been presented before.

For example, John gives us five chapters concerning the last week of Jesus on earth that the other three gospels do not give us. John 12:23 – 17:26 is new material.

- John 13 tells us that Jesus washed the disciple's feet in the Upper Room; this is not recorded in the other gospels.
- John 13 also gives us details about Judas betraying the Lord and Peter's denial that the other gospels do not.
- In John 14 Jesus declares that He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, and that no one can come to the Father except through Him.
- John 14 also gives us the teaching concerning the Holy Spirit, that He will be WITH us and will DWELL IN us after Jesus has gone back to Heaven.
- In John 15 Jesus says that His relationship with His followers will be like that of the vine and the branches; that we are to abide in Him as a branch abides in the vine and brings forth much fruit.
- John 15 also tells us that as Christ's followers, we have a new commandment to love one another.
- John 16 tells us more about the relationship between the Holy Spirit and the believer.
- Then John 17 gives us the High Priestly Prayer of Jesus, as He prays for Himself and then for us.

Well, why are there four gospels? Good question! I'm glad you asked. Each gospel writer writes to different audiences and therefore emphasizes different aspects of our Lord.

- Matthew writes to the Jews and presents Jesus as the King.
- Mark writes to the Romans and presents Jesus as the Servant.
- Luke writes to the Gentiles and presents Jesus as the Son of Man.
- John writes to Every man and presents Jesus as The Son of God.

Suppose I saw some tragedy take place and a policeman, a fireman, a doctor, and a family member came to me and asked me to tell them what I saw. I would tell the facts as it related to each one of them. It would all be true; yet, with a different emphasis. So, it is with the gospels.

Now, let's look at the Last Supper in that light. Look at three things:

I. The Preparation For the Meal Matthew 26:17-19

For some 3,500 years the Jews had been observing Passover. Passover brought back both Bitter and Sweet memories for the Israelites. The Bitter memories focused on their bondage or slavery to Egypt. The Sweet memories focused on Jehovah's delivering them from bondage and the plagues, especially the death of the firstborn.

Much preparation had to be made for the week-long Passover.

- A place had to be secured and the place had to be meticulously cleaned, making sure that every trace of leaven, which speaks of sin, was removed from the place.
- A spotless lamb must be chosen. They must slay the lamb, putting the blood at the foot of the altar. Then they must roast the lamb.

- They were to eat the lamb with bitter herbs, usually horseradish, to remind them of the bitterness of slavery.
- Then they were to eat it with Charoses (a unique Passover dip made of chopped apples, nuts, figs, and wine) to remind them of the mortar used to make bricks to build Pharaoh's cities.
- Then they would eat hard-boiled eggs to remember the oppression and struggles from generation to generation (just like eggs get harder and 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 unleavened bread and the wine. Wine was considered the drink of free people.

II. The Participation in the Meal

Look back at Matthew 26:17-19. The strange thing is that this was one of the most important weeks in Jewish life. They always prepared way in advance for Passover. Yet, the disciples had to ask, "Where do You want us to prepare for You to eat the Passover?"

Why was the place not already picked out and prepared? Let me point out that Jesus is in charge of everything that is happening here. He is not surprised by the plot against Him. He is directing everything here.

He knew the plans of Judas to betray Him. If Judas had known the place where they would observe the Passover, he may have had our Lord's killers kill Him before the cross, and Jesus was determined to die on the cross for man's sins.

Notice again how Jesus was actually orchestrating those events and doing so according to prophecy (Matthew 26:18).

Men didn't carry water in that day. Women did. Most Bible students believe that this last meal took place at John Mark's parent's home and that Jesus had talked to this man earlier about using the upper room and carrying the water on his head so the Lord's disciples could identify him.

Notice Matthew 26:26-27. I think it was here that Jesus intentionally modified the traditional Passover Feast. The Passover was intended to cause the people to remember their deliverance from Egyptian bondage, but Christ our Passover has delivered us from a greater bondage – the bondage of sin, and Satan, and the fear of death.

We no longer remember the Passover lamb whose blood was spread on the doorpost of each home, but we remember Christ our Passover – the Lamb of God who takes away our sins – who was given to deliver us from sin, Satan, and the fear of death.

As the meal continued, Jesus would end the old sacrificing of lambs, for He is the Lamb of God, slain once and once only for our sins. No need to kill any more lambs.

Now look at Matthew 26:26-27. He took the bread and wine and said, "Tomorrow – when I am hung on the cross – things will be different!"

"He took bread, blessed it and broke it, and gave to the disciples and said" Tomorrow, my body will be broken for you! "Take, eat; this is my body."

"And He took the cup" and said, "Tomorrow My blood will be shed for the remission of sin!" "I am shedding My blood as a payment of your sin debt!"

III. The Praise After the Meal Matthew 26:30

Jesus lead the singing! What did they sing? Was this spontaneous praise?

"And when THEY had sung a hymn" and the "they" includes Him! Jesus singing! He's about to be arrested and tried and slapped and stripped naked. People are going to pull chunks of beard from His face. They are going to nail Him to the cross. AND HE'S SINGING!

What a Savior we have! He is not crying. He is not hiding. He is not trembling. He is not running. He's singing.

I'm glad to know that Jesus sings. Jesus is our Savior and He's singing. Do you know why? He's singing because He's got a song. It's a terrible thing when you lose your song.

Scripture tells us that after Passover the Jews sang a group of Psalms called the "Hallels" (halals). And they consist of Psalms 113-118.

Let me just read some of these Psalms:

- Psalm 113:1-3
- Psalm 115:1-3, 9-11
- Psalm 116: 5-7, 12-15
- Psalm 117: 1-2
- Psalm 118: 1, 14, 28-29 Then Psalm 118:24 – The day of His resurrection is His greatest day!

Hebrews 12:2

PRELUDE TO DENIAL

Matthew 26:31-35, 69-75

Have you ever failed the Lord? Oh, I don't mean have you ever failed the Lord intentionally or deliberately, for if you are a child of God and you love the Lord, I don't think you would set out to fail the Lord and sin against Him.

But the truth is, even if you are saved and love the Lord, there are going to be times that you fail the Lord.

In Romans 7, Paul said, "I don't understand myself." Paul says, "I just want to be honest and to make a confession. When I don't want to sin and even if I do my best not to sin, I sin anyway. I don't want to, but I do. And even if I want to do good, evil seems to be in my heart and even when I want to do good, I mess up!"

Is that true of you? Do you ever get frustrated at yourself because, no matter how much you want to be like Christ and do what is right, you fail!

Can I tell you something: All of us are that way. The Bible says that there is none good; that all of us – hear this – ALL of us do wrong, no matter how much we try not to.

One of our Lord's best disciples would testify that that's true of him. Simon Peter loved the Lord. He would never intentionally do anything to hurt his Lord. He was one of our Lord's choice disciples. He was a leader among the disciples. He had great influence among the disciples. He was big and strong and was not afraid to take a stand for his Lord – usually! But Peter's darkest night; his greatest failure came about midnight on Thursday night before his Lord was crucified at 9:00 o'clock on Friday morning.

Read the Passage.

Let me share three things with you about the Prelude to Denial:

I. The Prediction of Peter's Failure

Did you know that the Lord knew that Peter was going to deny Him before Peter did it? Jesus predicted to Peter and to all the disciples that ALL of them would leave Him.

Jesus quotes Zechariah 13:7 in Matthew 26:31-32. This was a warning to Peter and to all the disciples. Our Lord wanted to prepare them for their failure.

Jesus said, "All of you will be made to stumble;" "to fall away." I don't know what the other disciples thought when Jesus said that to them, but Peter spoke up and said, "Lord, you're wrong."

Even if all these others are made to stumble or fall away, I will not!" Then when Peter said that he would not fall away, all the other disciples joined in and said, "neither will we!"

Luke 22:31-32 tells us something that Matthew doesn't tell us. Jesus said, "Simon, Simon" – Remember that Jesus had changed Peter's name from Simon to Peter. Simon was his fleshly name that meant "shifty one," "Unreliable one." Jesus changed his name to Peter – a rock; a dependable, solid one. Now Jesus calls him Simon – twice!

"Satan has asked for you that he might sift you as wheat." Satan wants to turn you every-which-way-but-loose! He wants to put you in his sifter – like someone who would take wheat at harvest time, put it on a screen tray and violently shake you back and forth to get rid of all the husk and chaff. Satan wants permission to shake you, to expose you to see what you are really made of.

“But I have prayed for you – interceded for you.” What did Jesus pray for? He didn't pray that Peter would not fail. That was Peter's choice. Rather, He prayed that his FAITH would not utterly – totally – finally fail. It's a picture of a runner who falls down in a race and refuses to get back up again.

Why did Jesus pray that Peter's faith fail not? Because our faith is the more important part of us. We fail – yes! But our faith causes us to rise again and keep going!

Listen to Peter's pride and arrogance – Matthew 26:33.

Listen as Jesus warns him again in Matthew 26:34. Look at what Peter says again in Matt. 26:35.

But, now, look at Matthew 26:69-75a.

I. The Pathway to Peter's Failure

What caused Peter to fail? If someone like Peter could fail, then we too can fail.

Let me give you several reasons Peter failed and if these things are in your life, it will cause you to fail and to deny the Lord as well. Here is the Prelude to Denial:

A. Overconfidence

Peter thought he was stronger than he was. May I tell you, overconfidence may be the number one reason we as Christians fall into sin.

Here is a great Bible principle: None of us are as strong spiritually as we think we are!

I Corinthians 10:12: “Let him who think he stands take heed, lest he fall.”

Proverbs 16:18: “Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.”

Let me say it again: None of us are as strong as we think we are. All of us are weaker than we think we are.

While it is good to a point to have self-confidence; it is dangerous to be overconfident.

Self-confidence is the first step to success; overconfidence is the first step to failure.

The same Bible that says, “I can do all things through Christ which strengthens me” says, “And without Me you can do nothing.”

Paul knew the danger of overconfidence.

Philippians 3:3: “Have NO confidence in the flesh ... The arm of flesh will fail you.”

Romans 7:18: “For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) dwells no good thing.”

Romans 3:12: “There is none that does good, no, not one!”

You and I don't know how wicked our sin nature is. Have you ever heard someone say, “If I know my heart, I would never ...” The truth is, we don't know our heart. Jeremiah 17:9

A lady came to me broken and crying saying her husband had been unfaithful to her and she said, “I didn't think he would ever be unfaithful to me.” Then she said, “I wish the devil would put a temptation before me so I could prove I would never be unfaithful to my husband.”

I told her how dangerous that would be and she had better be careful and be on guard. She thought she was too spiritual to yield to that kind of temptation. In less than six weeks she came back to me, broken, because she said that she had done what she said she would never do.

Notice two things:

a. Peter thought he knew more than Jesus. Jesus said he would deny Him three times before the crowing of the rooster. He contradicted Jesus. “Lord, you're wrong about me!”

b. Peter thought he was a notch above the other disciples. Peter said, "Lord, all these other disciples may flee, but not me!" Jesus warns us not to exalt ourselves above others. "I may die with you, but I'll never deny you." He was the only one who did!

B. Peter Failed to Pray Matthew 26:36-46 (Matt. 26:41)

Peter saw no need to pray that he enter not into temptation. No need to ask for divine help.

C. Peter Followed Jesus Afar Off Matthew 26:58

The first step to backsliding is slack-abiding. One step from grace is 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 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 yet we pay no attention and wonder why we yield to sin.

D. Peter Identified Himself with the Enemies of Christ Matthew 26:69, 71, 73

John tells us Peter stood around the fire, warming himself with the enemies of Christ. He wanted to blend in with the crowd. So, he gave the impression that he was one of them.

He 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 that you are to lift them up.

I Corinthians 15:33: "Don't be fooled by those who say, 'Let's eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die' for bad company corrupts good character."

Peter denied the Lord which shows he feared men more than he feared and revered God.

When Peter identified with the enemies of Christ, he began to become like them. Look at Matthew 26:73-74.

Peter kept trying to get closer and closer to Jesus so he could see what was going on. What he saw was them ridiculing Jesus, slapping Jesus, spitting on Jesus, putting Him to shame. Yet, Peter made no protest because he had to keep up his deceptive appearance.

Then a man kin to the man that Peter had cut his ear off, said, "You are one of His disciples. I saw you in the Garden with Him and your speech betrays you."

Peter said, "I don't know The Man." He claimed he didn't know – not Jesus – but The Man!

How could Peter watch how they treated Jesus and do nothing?! And how can we say nothing in defense of Jesus when He is abused in word and deed by the enemies of Christ?

Scripture tells us Peter began to:

"Curse" means to call down a curse – to make an oath. Peter actually called upon God to witness his lie about Christ as being truth. 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.

Some think foul language is a sign of strength, but it's a sign of weakness. Cursing does not make one a he-man, but a weak-man. Foul language only shows a lack of character and intelligence. People who use vile, foul language just show they don't have enough intelligence to express themselves any other way.

II. The Pardon For Peter's Failure Matthew 26:75

As Peter was cursing and swearing, the rooster crows. 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 a 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 AGONY IN GETHSEMANE

Matthew 26:36-46

Prayer was not a new thing for our Lord. In fact, our Lord's prayer life was one of the things that amazed our Lord's disciples about Him.

They saw Him as He stood and prayed. They saw Him as He knelt in prayer. Here they saw Him in Gethsemane with His face on the ground in prayer.

They saw Him get up before the sun came up and go to a place to be alone with His Father to pray and they saw Him pray at night. They would ask Him, “Lord, teach us to pray.” Prayer meant something to Jesus!

I'm afraid that often times when we pray, we don't really pray. We SAY our prayers; we offer our prayers; prayer for us is often a formality, but we don't really pray.

Ten minutes after you and I pray, can we tell someone WHAT we prayed; what we asked God? Were we definitely conscious that we had actually come into the presence of God and actually spoken to Him? Or has prayer become more of a habit for us and nothing more?

It's interesting to me that around the last days of our Lord's life, nameless friends rallied round Him to give Him aid. I think of the nameless men who gave him the donkey on which He rode into Jerusalem; then there was the man who gave Him the use of the Upper Room wherein the Last Supper was eaten; and now here is a man who gave Him the right to enter into the Garden on the Mount of Olives.

In Jerusalem itself there were not public gardens for the city itself was set on the top of a hill and every inch is of value for building. But wealthy citizens had their private gardens on the slopes of the Mount of Olives. Many Bible students believe that the family of John Mark owned this private garden and had given Jesus and His disciples permission to use it as a get-away place for prayer.

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 on to a sheet-like 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 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. Then, finally, stones were attached to the tree trunk to crush even more oil from the sacks.

Notice Matthew 26:38, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death." These words mean "to be completely surrounded with sorrow," "to be squeezed in from every side with sorrow."

"Tarry ye here, and watch" means "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 a conflict that I nor any other has ever entered into before. I need you to stand with me and to enter into battle with Me against Satan."

Hebrews 5:7 says, "He offered up prayers and petitions with fervent cries and tears to the One who could save Him from death."

Dr. Luke tells us, "And being in anguish, He prayed more earnestly and His sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground." The pores of His skin began to ooze bloody sweat.

I. Gethsemane was a Place of Struggle Matthew 26:36-38

Jesus endured the supreme struggle. No one has even had an inward struggle like this one. Our Lord was wrung out until He had nothing left. His was an emotional, physical, and spiritual struggle.

Let me give you some words that describe His mental and emotional agony: weight, pressure, anguish, sorrow, excessive strain, distress, intense sorrow of heart.

The death Jesus was facing was different from the death for all other men. In His death, Jesus took all the sins of the world upon Him and stood before God the Judge and accepted the verdict of guilt for every man. And accepted the penalty and punishment of death for every man.

He did not experience death for one man's sins; He experienced death for every man's sins. And remember, He had no sin. We know what it's like to be under the condemnation of sin, but not Him! He never knew sin.

Death means separation from God, but Jesus had never been separated from His Father. Jesus struggled with being separated from His Father. But the salvation of mankind hung in the balance.

Here was God's plan: In some mysterious way, God would take the sins of all the world and lay the whole body of sin upon Christ. In some mysterious way, God would make Christ to become sin for us!

What would it be like to bear all the judgment and condemnation of sin for all men? The hellish experience is seen in His cry from the cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken Me?"

II. Gethsemane was a Place of Supplication Matthew 26:39, 42, 44

Matthew said Jesus prayed, "O my Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me ..." Mark adds that He said, "O, Abba Father." Abba was the most affectionate term a Jewish child could ever use to address their father. It meant "Daddy" or Papa." Jesus said, "Daddy, you can do anything. I'm asking you to take this cup from Me – if it is possible."

"To drink a cup" means to experience something. Jesus peeked into that cup, and what He saw caused His blood to freeze. The Son of God recoiled in horror. What did He see in the cup?

Jesus IS the God-man: one hundred percent God and one hundred percent man. No man wants to die at age 33 and no man wants to die on a cross in shame. Is that what Jesus is talking about. NO! Others have suffered and died for Christ and they did not withdraw from the physical pain.

Listen to Hebrews 12:2.

At this point Luke adds something Matthew doesn't give us. Notice Luke 22:41-44.

The inward agony and struggle of Jesus had wrung Him out and He was afraid He would die too soon – prematurely in the Garden instead of on the cross, which He was determined to do.

Satan could not get Jesus to sin. The only other thing Satan could do was to kill Jesus before He went to the cross.

How do I know that? Look at Hebrews 5:7. Make no mistake, God answered our Lord's prayer. He did not die before the cross.

III. Gethsemane was a Place of Surrender Matthew 26:39, 42, 44

After asking if it be possible to let the cup pass from Him – “Father, if there is any other way for Me to accomplish redemption for man other than this cup” – Then He realizes this is the will of the Father, and He says, “Your will be done!”

IV. Gethsemane was a Place of Strengthening Luke 22:41-44

As I have said, Jesus is the God-man: one hundred percent God and one hundred percent man.

- As man He got thirsty; as God He gave the Living Water.
- As man He got thirsty; as God He walked on the water.
- As man He got thirsty; as God He turned water into wine.

Angels did not assist His divine nature, but they did assist His human nature.

After the temptations in the wilderness, we are told that the angels came and ministered unto Him.

(Matthew 4:11)

So, what does all of this have to do with us? Someone has said that “God cannot mightily use a person until He has first thoroughly broken a person.” Sometimes God has to allow hurt to come in our lives before He can use us.

Have you ever really been broken? Has it ever seemed that the rug has been pulled out from under your feet and it seems all is lost? That there is no more hope? That there is nowhere else to turn – But to God!

Maybe you've been to the doctor and He confronted you with the “C” word.

Maybe there was a car accident and a family member was killed.

Maybe your house was destroyed and all your belongings are gone and you had no insurance and now you have to start all over again financially.

Maybe you lost your job and with your health problems and your age, no one will hire you.

Maybe your mate decides to leave you and takes the children with them and drains your bank account.

Bill Gaither wrote a song a number of years ago that asks a question: Have You Had a Gethsemane?

“In the garden Christ went to pray,
When it seemed hope was gone.
He prayed with a broken heart,
And He prayed all alone.

Have you had a Gethsemane?
Have you prayed in despair?
In the dark of the dreary hour,
Did the Lord hear your prayer?

Have you had a Gethsemane?
Have you prayed the night through?
Have you shed tears of agony
When no hope was in view?

Have you prayed, “If it be Thy will,
May this cup pass from me,
But if it's Thy will, Dear Lord,
I will bear it for Thee.”

We looked last week at “The Agony in Gethsemane.” This week we will look at “The Arrest of our Lord in Gethsemane.”

When we come to these verses it is late Thursday night and early Friday morning. Jesus has eaten the Last Supper about 5:00 or 6:00 o'clock Thursday night, but He will have nothing else to eat or drink; nor will He have any sleep or rest until His crucifixion.

Four words describe our Lord's life through the rest of the Gospel of Matthew: His condemnation, His crucifixion, His conquest, and His coronation.

The events of His last night moved at a rapid pace.

- He has eaten the Last Supper with His disciples in the Upper Room.
- He has washed the disciples' feet.
- He has pointed out His betrayer.
- He has predicted that Peter would deny Him three times.
- On the way to Gethsemane He prayed His High Priestly prayer.
- Then He prays in agony in Gethsemane.

So now we come to our text and I want to point out four things to you:

I. The Despicable Disciple Matthew 26:47-50

The last time we saw Judas he was in the Upper Room, where Jesus identified him as the betrayer. Judas left after that and went to the priest and collected the “large crowd” that would take the Master into custody.

I call Judas the “Despicable Disciple” because that's what he was. Judas cheapened everything he touched. His name means “praise;” yet, there was nothing praiseworthy about him. Rather than a “praise,” he became a curse. A hated byword. We don't name our children “Judas”! We may name our dog “Judas”, if he's sorry enough.

Yet, Judas had privileges that few men have had. The Lord Jesus chose him to be one of His twelve disciples, even though He knew what Judas was and what he would do. What a wonderful act of grace that was to Judas. He got to be with Jesus for three years, he got to be with eleven others who loved Jesus and were committed to Him. He saw the miracles of Jesus and heard the preaching of Jesus and was even given authority from Jesus to do miracles. But he never committed himself to Jesus. He was a fake. A pretender. Lost!

Everything about Judas was deceitful.

He pretended to love Jesus, he pretended to be a true disciple, at the Last Supper when Jesus announced that one of the twelve would betray Him and all of them asked, “Lord, is it I?” Judas was the last to ask, “Is it I?”, knowing that he had already made the deal with the religious leaders to do so. Then, with the greatest deceit of all, he used the sign of affection and loyalty as a way to identify Jesus as he kissed Him repeatedly.

Judas brought with him members of the Sanhedrin, the Temple guards, the elders, the Pharisees and the religious leaders. Most agree that the number would have been in the hundreds, possibly as many as 600 men. They came with torches and lanterns to seek out the Light of the world. They came with swords and clubs to subdue the Prince of Peace.

Why so many? Were they afraid the eleven disciples would start on uprising? Or that Jesus would do some miracle to evade them?

Many commentators have asked, “Why was Judas needed at all?” Jesus had not been hiding. He could hardly have been more open. Jesus even asked them twice, “Who are you seeking?” and when they said, “Jesus of Nazareth,” Jesus told them twice, “I am He.”

When Judas kissed Jesus – repeatedly – Jesus called him, “Friend”: “Friend, why have you come?”

Judas had come with animosity in his heart, seeking to appear friendly. Jesus was well aware of the intent and desire of Judas and yet He addressed him as a friend. By asking about the intent of his coming, Jesus wasn't seeking to learn why Judas had come. Jesus knew why Judas was there, and yet He offers an opportunity for him to repent and respond to grace by faith.

When Jesus called Judas “friend,” it was not sarcasm. Jesus' greeting was not meant to be intimate, but gracious.

I. The Dangerous Disciple Matthew 26:51-56

Luke 22 tells us that when the soldiers started to lay hold of Jesus, Peter said, "Lord, shall we strike with the sword?", but Peter didn't wait for a reply from the Lord. He started swinging at the man closest to him. He swung at his head, but only cut off his ear. Jesus told Peter to put his sword up and then he healed the man's ear. With great tenderness and gentleness, our Lord touches Malchus, the chief servant of the High Priest, and his ear was restored. If our Lord had not done so, there may have been four men on crosses that day and Peter would have been one of them.

I want to ask Peter why he didn't strike Judas, the sorry rascal.

Peter had pledged to Jesus that he would be faithful to Him to the end and that he would die with or for Him if necessary. Peter saw this as an opportunity to be a faithful disciple to the Lord Jesus.

What Peter did was dangerous, unnecessary, and a mistake, but you have to admire Peter. The Temple Guard was there and they were armed. Peter was outnumbered and outmanned. They had more weapons than he, but he was willing to take out the sword and go out fighting. I wonder what we would have done in the same circumstance.

Don't think for a moment that Jesus was a helpless, powerless victim and that things had just gotten out of hand. This night had been ordained since before the foundation of the world. He was not being forced to submit to the arrest against His sacrificial atonement for sin!

Notice Matthew 26:53-54. These soldiers and guards didn't realize how little power they had against Jesus. The Lord tells Peter that He could pray to His Father and He would send twelve legions of angels to protect Him. A Roman legion, was 6,000 men. Jesus said He could call 72,000 angels. That's 6,000 angels for each of the eleven disciples and Himself. In 2 Kings 19:35 one angel slew 185,000 men in one night. One angel slew every Egyptian firstborn who didn't have the blood of the lamb on their doorpost.

Listen as Jesus rebukes the religious leaders – Matthew 26:55-56.

They had come as if they would face a dangerous criminal, but He was only guilty of love and sacrifice. What they were doing was the beginning of the greatest injustice ever committed. But what Jesus was about to do, He must do alone!

II. The Determined Deliberator Matthew 26:57-61

From about 1:00 A.M. Friday morning until about 8:00 A.M., Jesus was involved in both a Religious trial and a Roman trial. In fact, there were three Religious trials and three Roman trials.

The Religious Trial

The first part of the Jewish trial was a preliminary hearing before Annas (John 18:19-24).

The issue is somewhat confusing because John calls both Annas and Caiaphas, "the high priest." The reason he does so is because Annas was the true high priest, appointed for life as high priests were. But the Romans had replaced him with Caiaphas, the son-in-law of Annas. When the Romans took over the nation of Israel, they could be certain of having a religious leader who would cooperate with their policies. Both Annas and Caiaphas were Sadducees and managed the "Temple business," including the money changers which Jesus had overthrown twice during His ministry. Of course, both of these men were most happy to lay hands on their enemy. But Jesus refused to answer the questions of Annas and that phase of the trial ended when Annas became frustrated with Jesus and Annas gave up and sent Him to Caiaphas.

The second part of the Jewish trial was conducted before Caiaphas who accused Jesus of blasphemy because He said He was the Son of God. He determined that Jesus should be put to death. Notice that we are told three times in Matthew 26:59-60 that they sought false witnesses against Jesus.

The third part of the Jewish trial was a formal hearing before the entire Sanhedrin at daybreak (Matthew 27:1). The Sanhedrin was the Jewish Supreme Court.

The Roman Trial

The Roman Trial also had three parts: First before Pilate, then before Herod, and then before Pilate again.

All six trials were unjust and illegal because they broke their own rules. Let me name a few:

1. All criminal cases must be tried during the daytime and must be completed during the daytime. This trial was conducted at night.
2. Only if the verdict was "Not Guilty" could a case be finished on the day it was begun, otherwise a night must elapse before the pronouncement of the verdict, so that feelings of mercy might have time to arise.

3. No decision of the Sanhedrin was valid unless it met in its own meeting place, the Hall of Hewn Stone in the Temple precincts. The Sanhedrin was to judge the case, not prosecute it. In the trial of Jesus, they assumed both roles.

4. If any witnesses were found to have given false testimony before the court, they were to be given the same punishment being sought for the accused.

5. The accused was always allowed to call witnesses in its defense. Jesus was not given the privilege of calling a single witness.

Could Jesus have found any that would have testified for Him? What about Blind Bartimaeus or the woman He had spared who had been taken in adultery or the man named Lazarus who had been raised from the dead, or the thousands He had fed with the lad's lunch?

III. The Decisive Decree Matthew 26:62-68

Even before the Roman trial, they abused Jesus. The Jews had no authority to do so. Only Rome had that right.

They spat upon Him. They punched Him. They hit Him. They slapped Him. They brutalized Him. With face bleeding and swollen they blindfolded Him and said, "Prophecy! Tell us who is striking you!"

Isaiah 50:6: "I gave my back to those who struck Me (the smiters) and My cheeks to those who plucked out the beard; I did not hide My face from shame and spitting."

My back ... My cheeks ... My face.

Isaiah 52:14: "His visage (His appearance) was marred more than any man, and His form more than the sons of men."

He underwent inhuman cruelty to the point He no longer looked like a human being. His appearance was so awful that people looked at Him in astonishment. That was just part of the price He paid for our sin debt and He did it all because He loved you and me and didn't want us to go to Hell.

"O, how He loves you and me, O, how He loves you and me,
He gave His life, what more could He give, O, how He loves you and me!

Jesus to Calvary did go, His love for mankind to show;
What He did there brought hope from despair, O, how He loves you and me!"

SIN WHEN IT IS FINISHED

Matthew 27:1-10

Our Lord had been arrested in the Garden. When the soldiers laid their hands on Jesus, Simon Peter pulled a short sword and swung it at the closest man, cutting off his ear. Jesus healed the man by restoring his ear back in its place.

In the Upper Room Jesus had made a prediction about two of His disciples.

He predicted that Simon Peter would deny Him three times before the rooster crowed the next morning. The last few verses of Matthew 26 record that Peter did deny the Lord three times just as Jesus predicted.

Jesus also predicted that Judas would betray Him and that prediction also came true as Judas betrayed the Lord with a kiss.

Matthew pauses as he tells us about the three Religious trials and the three Roman trials and gives us the final end concerning Judas. Matthew is the only Gospel writer who gives us this ending of Judas' life, and one reason he does so is to show us the difference between Peter and Judas after they both failed the Lord. We will see how both men responded to their failure later in the message.

For now, we will focus on Judas. Three things I want to point out about Judas:

I. His Realization Matthew 27:3a

“Then Judas, His betrayer, seeing that He (Jesus) had been condemned ...”

All of the disciples scattered when the soldiers lead Jesus away, but at least three of them followed the procession to see what would happen: John, Peter, and Judas.

Standing in the shadows in Caiaphas' courtroom, both Peter, John, and Judas watched to see what would happen. Peter and John probably had no idea that Judas was there.

Matt. 27:3 tells us that Judas saw that Jesus was condemned. Then in the informal night session of the Sanhedrin, they decided on the death of Jesus.

Judas saw and heard all that went on: Both the questioning of Jesus and the abuse of Jesus.

When Judas heard that Jesus was condemned to death, something happened inside of Judas – something he never expected to happen.

Numbers 32:23 says, “Be sure your sin will find you out.” Literally, “your sin will find you!” The realization that Jesus would suffer crucifixion, even though He was innocent, began to sink in on Judas – and it was his fault! No doubt guilt began to grip his heart.

Jesus had disappointed Judas because he thought Jesus would destroy the Roman rule over the Jews and He would build His kingdom on earth and would play a big part in the kingdom.

There is a great truth in this passage. We all have a conscious that reveals right from wrong. I am convinced that the Spirit of God deals with all people regarding their sin, revealing Christ as Lord. Regardless of one's spiritual state, eventually there is a realization regarding sin. Even the vilest of sinners will come to the realization that their sin is wrong. It is dangerous to ignore our conscious and the pleading of the Spirit.

Judas had a conscience and it struck him down. Probably against his will, his conscience forced him to face the wickedness of what he had done in betraying Jesus.

Judas hadn't anticipated his conscience dealing with him. His inner shame and misery were not part of his plan when he betrayed the Lord for money. But now that the deed was done, his conscience would not let him enjoy his success or the money. It gave him no peace. It tortured him until he felt he could bear it no more. His conscience didn't prevent him from committing his foul deed, but it did prevent him from enjoying it and from being able to live with himself afterward.

The word “conscience” means “joint knowledge,” knowledge that one shares with another, namely with God. Thomas Aquinas defined conscience as “a man's judgment of himself, according to the judgment of God in him.”

The Puritans called the conscience “God's spy in our hearts and God's deputy within us.”

Though the word conscience is not used in Genesis 3, it is plainly present. It was the conscience that compelled Adam to hide in shame from the presence of the Lord. It was their conscience that made Adam and Eve suddenly ashamed of their nakedness. They knew what they had done was evil.

Now the Bible recognizes that the conscience can sometimes be suppressed or its voice stifled. It can become evil or ignored. But the existence of the conscience and its operation in the human heart is one of the great arguments for the existence of the Christian God.

The conscience is a powerful thing. It has caused some to confess to crimes, like murder, even when the police have given up on the case. It causes some to feel compelled to confess what they have done. Conscience is the contemporary witness of human nature to the future last judgment.

When Judas heard the High Priest accuse Jesus of blasphemy and heard the false witnesses testify against Jesus, he knew it was not true. If Judas had seen any fault in Jesus or any inconsistency or any hypocrisy or any sin in Jesus, he could have justified the betrayal in his own mind.

Judas could not say, “I heard Him stretch the truth” or “I heard Him gossip.” Instead, Judas realized Jesus was exactly Who He declared Himself to be.

II. His Remorse Matthew 27:3

There are two words in the KJV that are translated “repent,” but if you will look in another translation you will find the word “remorse” or “regret” in some instances.

I told you at the beginning of the message that Matthew puts the records of both Peter's failure of the Lord with the failure of Judas of the Lord close together.

The difference between these two men is not that one denied the Lord and the other betrayed the Lord. It does not lie in the fact that one was guilty and the other innocent. Both of these men had a conscience that condemned him because of his sin.

What's the difference in the two men? The Holy Spirit used the conscience of Peter to lead him to true, genuine repentance, while Judas expressed only remorse and regret.

Real repentance is the commitment for life to two complete turns: One turns from sin (for life) and turns to God (for life). Does that mean you will never commit that sin again or turn back to that sin again? No, but it does mean if you do turn back to the sin, as soon as possible you go through the process again: Turning from the sin and turning back to God.

Luke 22:61 tells us that when the rooster crowed after he had denied the Lord the third time, Jesus turned and looked at Peter. It was a look of love, but it was also a look of pain. I think Peter's denial of Jesus hurt Jesus far more than the slapping and spitting and the lashes He experienced. Peter remembered what Jesus said he would do and when Jesus looked at him, it broke his heart. Scripture says, “And he went out, and wept bitterly” (Matthew 26:75). Peter experienced real repentance. Peter repented of his sin, threw himself on the mercy of God and found grace and forgiveness.

A conscience can force you to face your sin, but it cannot deliver you from yourself. Only Christ can do that.

For Judas there was no deep remorse or regret in his soul over what he had done, there was only regret that things had not happened the way he had hoped or expected they would.

Judas did everything but go to Jesus for grace and forgiveness. Judas confessed that he was a sinner (Matthew 27:4). Many have confessed themselves to be sinners without their confession making the slightest difference in their lives. Pharaoh confessed, “I have sinned,” but he didn't change. Balaam confessed, “I have sinned,” but there was no change. Achan confessed, “I have sinned,” but no change. Judas said, “I have sinned,” but he confessed it to the priest; not to God. No priest has ever been able to forgive one sin. Only God can do that.

Judas confessed that Jesus was innocent (Matt. 27:4), but confessing Jesus is innocent never saved a single person. By the way, Pilate said three times, “I find no fault in Him!” “He's innocent!” – but he was not saved.

Judas even brought the money back to the priests that they gave him for betraying Christ. Judas was trying to atone for his sin by bringing the money back. We cannot undo what we have done. Once a thing is done nothing can undo it, alter it, or bring it back! No action can be recalled. Only Jesus can atone for sin.

Judas didn't want the money and neither did the priests. They called it “blood money” but they had given it to Judas.

III. The Results Matthew 27:3-4

Judas brought the money back, told the priests he had betrayed innocent blood, and they said, “So what?! That's your problem!” It was like they were saying, “You fool, Judas! We don't care about you. We were just using you.”

I think there will be a lot of folks in Hell declaring, “What a fool I was. I knew what I should have done. I had many opportunities to do it, but I thought I had plenty of time.” The devil will be laughing at a lot of folks in Hell that he tricked in different ways to reject Jesus.

Matt.27:5 says, “Judas went and hanged himself.” It's interesting to me to know that Judas hung himself on a tree. Deuteronomy 19:16-19 says if a man bears false witness in a court of law and someone suffers because of the lie, the false witness will share the same fate as the one about whom they lied.

Do you remember the title of this message? “Sin When It Is Finished.” I took the title from James 1:13-16. The life and death of Judas is a perfect example of Matt.27:15: “Sin when it is finished brings forth death.” When sin is finished ... when it is full grown ... when it fully runs its course.

Galatians 6:7 says, “Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man sows, that shall he also reap.”

Ecclesiastes 8:11: “Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore, the heart of the sons of men is fully

set in them to do evil.”

Because payment and punishment for evil deeds is a long time coming, people in general think they can get by with their sin.

On the judgment day, sin and the sinner will meet face to face and have a bitter reckoning.

Remember the title of the message: “Sin When It Is Finished.”

The Bible is not through with Judas. Matthew says that “Judas went and hanged himself.” But Peter has more to tell us about Judas.

Look at Acts 1:15-18. We do not know exactly what happened. Maybe his body bloated in the hot sun and the rope or his belt broke and “All his bowels gushed out.”

Now notice Acts 1:25. “That he might go to his own place.” “Judas went to his own place ... to the place he deserved to go to.” That is true of every person.

Jesus said to those who have received Him – “I go to prepare a place for you, and if I prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto Myself.”

If we receive Jesus as our personal Savior, one day He will come and receive us into His eternal home.

JESUS BEFORE PILATE

Matthew 27:1-2, 11-14

Matthew begins to tell us about the trial of Jesus before Pilate in Matthew 27:1-2. Then he stopped. He said, “But let me take a moment to tell you what happened to Judas.” He does this deliberately so he can contrast Peter and Judas when they failed the Lord. Matthew sets these stories side by side for warning and for a comparison and for a contrast. After we read Matthew 27:1-2 he picks up the account of Jesus before Pilate. So, I'll read Matthew 27:1-2 and then Matthew 27:11-14.

Matthew gives us the shortest version of the Roman trial of Jesus than any of the Gospel writers. If you tie the Roman trials together, you will find that Jesus first stood before Pilate. Then He went before Herod. Then He went before Pilate again.

Jesus has already faced the three Religious Trials. He stood before Annas, then Caiaphas the High Priest, and then the formal verdict before the Sanhedrin. They found Him guilty of blasphemy because He declared Himself Christ, the Messiah and the Son of God. If anyone else had made such a claim, it would have been blasphemy, but Jesus was just proclaiming Who He really was.

The Jewish religious leaders said He should be put to death, but the Romans had taken the right of capital punishment away from the Jews. In the first place, the Jews never put anyone to death by crucifixion. Their method of capital punishment had been by stoning.

But the Old Testament prophets and writers declared that the Messiah would be put to death on a tree ... a cross ... by crucifixion. God had it arranged that His Son would die on a cross for man's sins.

Now I want to point something out here. The Jews had a part in putting Jesus to death, but so did the Gentiles. Soldiers in the Roman army were from all parts of the Gentile world. So you see, ALL men, of every nation and race, are guilty of crucifying the Lord.

Now as we look at the trial before Pilate, I want to point out three things.

I. The Resistance of the Jews

We need to remember two things: The Jews hated Pilate and Pilate hated the Jews.

1. The Jews hated Pilate because of what he represented. He was a symbol of their loss of freedom. The Jews were under Roman oppression and Pilate was the Roman governor and they hated him.

But the Jews hated Pilate more for what he had done. He brought images of the emperor and put them in the Temple and commanded that the Jews worship the images. For the Jews that was blasphemy and they refused to obey. They even revolted and caused such an uproar that Pilate had to back off and remove the images, but they still hated him.

The governors who served before Pilate were sensitive to the Jewish customs and had generally avoided acts that could offend or inflame the people. But Pilate showed no such sensitivity. Pilate stole the sacred corban money from the treasury of the Temple and used it to build a fifty-mile aqueduct to the city. The act outraged the Jewish citizens and the people gathered to protest the sacrilege. Pilate sent soldiers into the crowd disguised as common people who, on a pre-arranged signal, pulled out hidden clubs and daggers and attacked demonstrators. Luke refers to a similar massacre in which Pilate "mixed" the blood of certain Galileans "with their sacrifices" (Luke 13:1).

When the religious Jewish leaders brought Jesus to Pilate, they would not go inside Pilate's palace because he was a Gentile. If they had gone inside, they would have been defiled and would not have been able to participate in any of the Passover celebration. So, Pilate took Jesus inside his palace to question Him.

2. But Pilate also hated the Jews. When the Jews refused to obey him and he had to back down, it made him look bad before the emperor.

But he hated them more because the Jews claimed to be God's special people and received special favor from God. They even claimed that God aided them throughout all their history by protecting them and providing for them, especially during times of war.

II. The Reluctance of Pilate

The religious leaders thought Pilate would just accept their verdict concerning Jesus and put Him to death as they desired.

One of the Sanhedrin had probably contacted Pilate to inform him that they were bringing someone for him to judge. It was about 5 o'clock in the morning so the Sanhedrin wanted to be sure that Pilate would hear the case that early in the morning. He must have agreed to a quick trial, but when the leaders appeared the next day, they were startled to find that the governor wanted to begin a formal hearing. They seemed to have been caught off guard since they did not have their charges against Jesus well thought out.

John gives the fullest account of these proceedings, indicating that when Pilate reopened the case, demanding, "What charges are you bringing against this man?" the best they could do was to say, "If He were not a criminal, we would not have handed Him over to you" (John 18:21-30). When they were forced to produce a charge, Luke says they dragged up everything they could think of, hoping that one of the accusations would stick.

The Jews knew they could not say He needed to be put to death because of blasphemy. That cut no ice with Pilate. He would have laughed them out of court.

So, they had to change the charges. What they thought was worthy of death meant nothing to Pilate. So, they changed the charge to treason.

Luke 23:1 says:

- "He perverted the nation." He corrupted or twisted the minds of the whole nation and led them astray. He led no one astray.
- "He forbids the paying of taxes to Rome." But Jesus taught, "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."
- "He said that He Himself is a King." Jesus had never said He was a King up to this time. Others had said so, but not Jesus.

Pilate asked Him, "Are You the King of the Jews?" Jesus answered, "It is as you say." That is, "Yes, but not of this world."

Jesus didn't look much like a King. He was beaten, bloody, His face was swollen, and His beard was spittle-matted. Yet, Pilate saw something royal about Jesus in spite of His bloody appearance.

He was royal in the majestic silence with which He faced His accusers. Notice Matthew 27:13-14.

Pilate saw a calmness about Jesus. A quietness. Jesus needed no glittering diadem, no regal purple robe, no ivory throne, no imperial guard, no diamond-studded scepter. Pilate sensed that he was in the presence of a greater King than the Caesar, that Jesus was more than a King!

Matthew 27:18: "For (Pilate) knew that they had handed Him over because of envy (resentment and jealousy)."

Three times Pilate said, "I find no fault in Him."

Pilate wanted to free Jesus; to set Him free. He was reluctant to continue to try Him. Pilate was impressed with Jesus!

1. In John 18:31 Pilate said, "'You take Him and judge Him according to your Law.' They said to Pilate, 'It is not lawful for us to put

anyone to death.”

2. Matthew 27:19. Pilate's wife sent a message to him, “Have nothing to do with this JUST man (same words Judas used), for I have suffered many things today in a dream because of Him.” The Romans were particularly superstitious where dreams were concerned.

3. Pilate tried to substitute Barabbas for Jesus – Matthew 27:15-18.

4. Pilate tried to wash his hands of the consequences of crucifying Jesus – Matthew 27:22-25. The Jewish leaders tell Pilate that they are willing to take the consequences for having Jesus crucified. “His blood be on us and on our children.” I'll bet the leader's children might have wanted to have a say in this decision. The truth is, their children have paid a great price!

But notice: Pilate couldn't transfer the consequences of his choice to someone else.

No one can. We all have to live with our decisions and choices.

III. The Reasoning of Pilate

Pilate tried to be neutral concerning Jesus Christ. He wanted to be innocent of the Lord's death, but he failed miserably. He was not able to be neutral, but in the end he took his stand against Jesus.

So will you unless you decide for Jesus now.

Jesus said, “If you are not for Me, you are against Me.” (Matthew 12:30)

What a coward Pilate was. He said, “I find no fault in Him” and then handed Him over to be crucified.

Jesus is standing in Pilate's hall –

Friendless, forsaken, betrayed by all:

Hearken! What meaneth the sudden call?

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 OR BARABBAS?

Matthew 27:15-26a

Pilate has done everything he can think of to get Jesus off of his hands. He didn't want to have to make a decision about Jesus.

- He examined Jesus over and over and four times said, “I find no fault in Him;” yet, he gave Him over to be crucified.
- He tried to avoid making a decision about Jesus by sending Him to Herod. Herod just sent Him back to Pilate.
- His wife even warned him, “Have nothing to do with that just Man.”

Pilate thinks of one other way to get Jesus off his hands. There was a custom of releasing one prisoner during Passover – whomever they wished. This custom came about as an effort to appease the Jews in hopes of preventing a riot.

Pilate knew just the man! Barabbas! Pilate looked upon Barabbas as a habitual criminal. He was a notorious prisoner. He was a robber; not just a thief, but one who took from others by force, even if he had to commit murder to do so.

He was also a rebel – an anti-Roman insurrectionist. He was in prison with two of his gang members – most likely the two thieves who were crucified with Jesus. That means that the cross that Jesus was crucified upon was meant for Barabbas!

Jesus, on the other hand, went about doing good. He healed the sick, brought dead folks back to life, calmed storms, taught good moral truths. Pilate thought, “Given the choice between the two – Jesus or Barabbas – anyone with good sense would say, “Release Jesus!”

But the crowd didn't look at Barabbas the same way Pilate did. The Jews hated Rome. They had hoped that when Messiah came, He would put down Rome and set them free.

They had hoped Jesus would do that, but then Jesus began talking about dying. He began saying that His kingdom was not of this world. He disappointed them.

If Jesus couldn't overthrow Rome, maybe Barabbas could. So, the people say, "Release Barabbas!"

Then Pilate says, "What then shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?" This is life's most important question.

Three questions come to my mind when I ask, "What shall I do with Christ?"

I. What Can I Do With Jesus?

Here are two options: You can Receive Him or you can Reject Him, but you cannot remain neutral about Him.

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 Jesus: "He who is not with Me is against Me" (Matthew 12:30).

What an opportunity Pilate had to make a right decision!

A. Pilate Examined 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 that 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 in Him. Pilate should have said at that moment: "Case closed! Set Him free!", but he did not.

B. Pilate Evades Jesus

He tries everything to get Jesus off his hands.

C. Pilate Exonerates Jesus

He proclaimed, "I find no fault in Him." But the crowd keeps pressing Pilate to crucify Jesus. What did he do?

1. He violated his own conscience.

Pilate knew which was the right decision to make, but that's not the decision he made. That happens all time in church. The gospel is preached, the Holy Spirit stirs the heart and impresses the heart to make a decision for Christ, but they refuse to do so.

2. Pilate Tried Compromise

He offered to crucify Barabbas and release Jesus. When the crowd began to shout, "Release Barabbas," he lacked the courage and the decisiveness to take a stand for Christ.

3. Pilate Ignored the Right Thing to do the Easy Thing

4. He was Shaped by the Crowd and Went with the Crowd

II. Why Must I Do Anything with Jesus?

A. Because God Has Given You the Power of Choice

No one else can experience the power of choice for you. I don't want folks making decisions for me that are going to affect my life and my eternity. They might not make the decision I would make for myself. They might make the wrong choice or me.

B. Because Jesus died for my sin.

C. Because you must personally experience the consequences of your choice.

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 for ourselves.

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 and reject Him.

You must respond for yourself. No one can trust Jesus for you!

B. It’s a Pressing Question

Today is the day of salvation. 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’s a Powerful Question

It’s powerful because it is far reaching and life changing. Once we are asked by the Holy Spirit to make a decision for Christ, no matter what we answer, we are never the same again.

We will all live forever somewhere. What we do with Jesus will determine how and where we will spend eternity.

THE SUFFERING AND DEATH OF JESUS

Matthew 27:26-50

On December 7, 1941, the Japanese bombed the naval base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, and President Franklin Roosevelt referred to that day when he said, “It was a day that will live in infamy.”

Another infamous day that is fresh in all of our minds is September 11, 2001. Of course, there are other days in history to be remembered because of something that occurred on those days.

But the day before us in our text has the distinction of being both a day of intense evil and a day which witnessed the triumph of good over evil. There is no other day in history that rises to the level of the day The King was crucified.

- It was an infamous day because it shows men at the height of his sinfulness.
- It was infamous because He came unto His own and His own received Him not.
- It was infamous because the Creator was put to death by His creatures.
- However, it was an infamous day because sin was defeated, the power of Satan was forever broken, and because the black halls of death were invaded by the Prince of Life.

I want us to travel back to that day some 2,000 years ago and watch as the King of Glory was crucified at Calvary.

It is a sacred place. We shall be standing on Holy Ground as we watch Jesus Christ die for our sins.

As we look at the death of Jesus, we will see that it was:

I. A Voluntary Death

It was not something that anyone forced Jesus to do or asked Him to do. He died for us because He loved us! He hated our sin, but He loved us. I owed a debt I could not pay, so He paid a debt He did not owe. Only He could pay our sin debt, and though we did not ask Him to do so, He willingly and freely paid our sin debt.

He made it clear that He did not have to do so, for He said that He could call 72,000 angels and they would rescue Him from death.

John 10:18: “No man is able to take (My life) from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it (up) again.”

Scripture says, "They LED Him away." They did not force Him; He voluntarily went with them.

II.A Vicious Death

The Gospel of Matthew gives us more information about the physical suffering of Jesus than any other Gospel writer. Much of the physical abuse was prophesied a thousand years before His crucifixion by Isaiah and David. And keep in mind that crucifixion was not even known or used in their day, but God showed them that this would happen to His Messiah and they wrote it down.

A. The Jews Abused Jesus First

Keep in mind that what the Jews did to Him, they did before He was sentenced to die on the cross. The Jews had no right to even touch Him, because they sought false witnesses to testify against Him and found none who could keep their accusations and lies straight (Matthew 26:59-66).

We are told that the Jews spat in His face and beat Him with their fist (most likely, His body). Others used the palms of their hands and slapped Him. Others pulled the beard from His face.

Isaiah 50:6: "I gave My back to the smiters, and My cheeks to them that plucked off the hair; I hid not My face from shame and spitting."

The word "shame" means mocking and ridicule. See Psalm 22:6-8, 12-13.

From about 12:00 o'clock until about 5:00 Friday morning, the Jewish religious leaders abused Him. His face must have been swollen, His lips bleeding, spittle mixed with blood from His face. All of this was illegal. It was against their own Jewish law to try a person at night. They were the guilty sinners; not Jesus.

Jesus actually fared better before Pilate than He did before the Jews until Pilate finally gave in to have Him crucified.

B. Pilate Prepares Jesus for Crucifixion

The events leading up to the crucifixion were much more severe than we often understand or grasp. In fact, Isaiah 52:14 tells us that His appearance when they finally put Him on the cross was so marred – more than any man – that He didn't even look like a man. Let's go through some of the things He suffered.

1. They Scourged Him Matthew 27:26

They scourged Jesus in the courtyard. They didn't always scourge people they crucified. Pilate had Jesus scourged, hoping after seeing how His flesh was torn and His body bleeding and the weakness of His body, they might have mercy on Him and decide not to crucify Him, but not so. Some men who were crucified could live three days on the cross, but not those who had been scourged. Jesus lived only six hours. The two thieves who were crucified with Jesus were probably not scourged. That's why they had to break their legs, so they would die before the feast day.

Scourging was such a horrible punishment that the Romans were not allowed to use the scourge on Roman citizens. The Jews used scourging, but they could not beat someone more than 40 lashes. If someone gave someone 41 lashes and the person died, the person who administered the scourging was himself scourged until he had no more life. That's why the Jews always used "40 minus one" when scourging someone – 39.

Matthew passed over the scourging rather quickly in his account, not going into the agonizing details that would have been all too familiar to the people of his day.

I encourage you to get a Bible dictionary, or a Bible encyclopedia and read about scourging. I'll admit, I've learned some important things about scourging that I did not know.

The scourging was done with a whip, which had a handle and leather thongs, and in the ends of the leather thongs there were bound pieces of sharp bone or metal or lead or brass. It was designed to rip the flesh when pulled back upward.

The hands of the victim – in this case, Jesus – would have been tied either to a pole or between two poles. The victim would have seen stretched until he was standing on his tiptoes. Then two soldiers who were skilled in the use of the whip would have administered the scourging.

The beating was methodical. These two skilled soldiers were usually proud of their skill. They would deliver a slow, methodical blow, rip as much flesh as they could from the victim and wait for the reaction from the crowd. Then the other soldier would do the same, trying to tear more flesh away than the first. With the victim standing on tiptoe, they would aim not only for the back, but try to make

the whip go around the side to pull flesh from the front of the body. They were careful not to hit the head with the whip.

Psalm 22:17: "I can count all My bones. They look and stare upon Me." This messianic Psalm speaks of Jesus as He was on the cross.

John MacArthur writes this about scourging: "Muscles were lacerated, veins and arteries were torn open, and it was not uncommon for the kidneys, spleen, or other organs to be exposed and slashed. As would be expected, many men died of scourging before they could be executed."

You need to know that the first word Jesus spoke from the cross was repeated over and over – not just on the cross, but during His abuse before He was hung on the cross: "Father, forgive them."

Remember it was my place and your place He was taking on the cross. He was bearing the punishment for sin that you and I deserve.

2. They Stripped Him Matthew 27:27-28

A whole band of soldiers took Jesus into "the common hall" and He became their "torture toy." This was the soldiers time with Jesus. Pilate didn't care what they did to Him as long as He didn't die before He was crucified.

"They put on Him a scarlet robe." "He's accused of being a king, let's dress Him like a king." Again, He prayed, "Father, forgive them."

3. They Spat upon Him Matthew 27:30

4. They Slandered Him Matthew 27:31

Remember, everything He took, He took in our place.

It's humbling to know that the only man-made thing that will be in Heaven will be the scars that He received in my place and yours.

The song writer said:

"I stand amazed in the presence of Jesus, the Nazarene,
And wonder how He could love me, A sinner condemned, unclean

O, how marvelous! O how wonderful! And my song shall ever be:
O, how marvelous! O how wonderful! Is my Savior's love for me!"

III. A Vicarious Death

The word "vicarious" means substitute; it means one person taking the place of another person. That's what Jesus did for me. It should have been me taking all that pain and suffering – And you, too!

Second Corinthians 5:21: "For He (God the Father) has made Him (Jesus) to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him."

"He took my sins and my sorrows, He made them His very own;
He bore the burden to Calvary, And suffered and died alone.

O, how marvelous! O, how wonderful! And my song shall ever be:
O, how marvelous! O, how wonderful! Is my Savior's love for me!"

If I had time, I could show you that everything Jesus suffered was a picture of sin.

- Barabbas was the guilty one; yet, Jesus died in his place as his substitute.
- They put a scarlet robe on Him to mock Him. The Bible says our sin was placed on Him.
- But I want us to look at Matthew 27:29 – the crown of thorns. There were no thorns on earth until sin entered. The punishment for Adam's sin way back in the Garden of Eden was that the ground would bring forth "thorns also and thistles."

Those thorns were a direct result of sin. They are part of the condemnation upon us and this world of sin. The "Crown of Thorns" speaks of the condemnation He was willing to accept for our sins.

IV. A Victorious Death

Jesus died on that cross for our sins, but before He died, He said, "It is finished!" Redemption's price is paid in full!

They buried His body, but three days later – He AROSE! And He lives today!

"I serve a risen Savior, He's in the world today,
I know that He is living whatever men may say,
I see His hand of mercy, I hear His Voice of cheer,
And just the time I need Him, He's always near.

He lives, He lives, Christ Jesus lives today.
He walks with me and talks with me, along life's narrow way.
He lives, He lives, salvation to impart.
You ask me how I know He lives –
He lives within my heart!"

V. A Valuable Death

His death, burial, and resurrection paid the price of our sin debt. Trust Him and you'll see the value of what He did on that cross.

But I wonder if His death was in vain for someone here. Did Christ's death mean nothing to you because you have not received Him?

You see for you to be saved, it takes more than His death, burial, and resurrection. You must repent of your sins and by faith receive Him.

PONDERING AT THE CROSS OF JESUS **Matthew 27:35-36**

It was a terrible, horrible sight at our Lord's crucifixion. You look upon Jesus and you see a bruised and bleeding man. In fact, the Bible says that now He doesn't even look like a man – just a bloody mess. It was ugly. Many of us could not witness a crucifixion without getting sick at our stomachs.

But did anything positive happen to those who were there? We know of the mean, cruel things that happened there, but was there anything positive? Thousands were there that day, weren't there some whose lives were changed for the good that day?

In our passage we are told that the four soldiers who crucified Jesus – those that nailed Him to the cross and lifted the cross between heaven and earth, gambled for His garments at the foot of the cross.

It was a common thing that when the one who was to be crucified was about to be put to death, he was first stripped of all that he had on. Being stripped naked added shame to a man's pain, and so that was part of the crucifixion. It was also common for the soldiers who crucified the man would divide up what the man would leave behind.

Usually the Jewish man had five pieces of clothing: sandals, an outer garment or robe, a headpiece, a belt, and an inner garment. That fifth piece or the inner, seamless garment is what the four soldiers were gambling for. If it was ripped, it would do no one any good.

After they had gambled for each man's part, they sat down and watched over the crucified man until he was dead. They, along with others, pondered what was going on that day.

The word "ponder" means to mentally weigh and carefully consider a matter from all sides. It implies a careful deliberation and consideration of a matter. At least one of these soldiers, the centurion, came to this conclusion about Jesus (Matt. 27:54), "Truly this was the Son of God."

When I say they "pondered" Jesus as He was dying, they studied what He said; how He reacted when folks said mean, hurtful things

about Him; and what His attitude was while He was dying.

They may have noticed first how He lay Himself down and stretched out His arms to be nailed to the cross. They had to force other men's arms and hold them tightly so the nail could be driven in their hands. All the time they would be cursing and trying to spit in the soldier's face. Not Jesus! He was praying for them.

Then Jesus showed great concern for those crucified with Him. Even after both men had cursed Him and mocked Him, when one of them asked Jesus to remember him when He came into His kingdom, Jesus promised him a place in Paradise.

They watched as He made sure His mother would be taken care of after He was dead. No doubt about it: Jesus was different from other men. Even with all His pain, He was thoughtful, caring, and was focused on others instead of Himself. He touched the lives of others even while He was dying on the cross.

Whose life did He touch?

I. Simon of Cyrene Matthew 27:32

Simon was compelled or forced to carry the Lord's cross. He may have protested, but he was forced to do so.

Jesus fell to the ground under the weight of the load of the crossbar. The crossbar might have weighed from 100 to 150 pounds. What an embarrassing thing! To have to carry a condemned man's cross. I wonder if Jesus said something like, "I'm sorry you are having to do this. I could go no further." Our Lord's fresh, warm blood was on that crossbar and Simon may have been covered with the Lord's blood before he got to Calvary.

We know that incident had a profound effect on Simon because Mark 15 tells us that two of Simon's sons became strong, active Christians.

II. The Thief on the Cross

Remember that at first, both of the thieves cursed and mocked Jesus. But something happened as this man pondered what he saw in Jesus.

This thief even rebuked the other thief for what he was saying to Jesus. Then he stood up for Jesus. He said, "This Man has done nothing wrong." "Don't you even fear God seeing you are under condemnation?" Then he admitted he was a sinner – "For we are indeed worthy of what we are receiving." Then he asked Jesus to remember him when He came into His kingdom. He believed that Jesus had His own kingdom.

He Revered God. He Renounced self. He Respected Christ. He Requested salvation.

III. The Roman Centurion Matthew 27:54

1. He was Alert

He was watching Jesus. He was performing his duty in that he was guarding the three crosses, but his eyes were fastened upon the middle one.

2. He was Alarmed

This was not his first crucifixion. He was a veteran soldier. But when God caused the three-hour blackout, and the heavens moaned with thunderous groans, and the rocks began to split, the Bible says he "feared greatly."

3. He was Accurate

He said, "Truly, this was the Son of God." His appraisal was right but his timing was wrong. Not only "WAS" He the Son of God, He IS the Son of God.

IV. The Apostle Peter

Peter pondered the blood of Christ. Peter said that we are "redeemed with the precious (one of a kind) blood of Christ" (I Peter 1:18-19).

V. The Apostle Paul

Paul said, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Galatians 6:10).

Again, in I Corinthians 2:2: "For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified."

VI. God the Father | John 5:9-12

May I tell you: God the Father is proud of His Son. Both at His baptism and at His transfiguration, the Father said, "This is my Beloved Son in whom I am well pleased."

Romans 1:3-4 says that "Jesus Christ our Lord" has been "declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead."

God the Father is proud of His Son, and we should be as well!

CALVARY MIRACLES

Matthew 27:45-54

It is not surprising that miracles accompanied the death of Jesus since they also accompanied His birth.

First, there was the miracle of the Virgin birth itself. Mary was only a teenage girl. God spoke to her to see if she would be willing to be used as the vessel through whom the Son of God would be born. She was willing, but she wondered how it would be since she was a virgin and had not known a man. She was told that the Holy Spirit would overshadow her and she would give birth to God, wrapped in flesh – the God-Man – the incarnation of the Son of God.

Then God would provide a light – a bright star to lead wise men to where the Child was. They would bring gifts and worship Him.

Then a multitude of the heavenly host – angels – would appear to shepherds, again in heavenly light and glory, magnifying Jesus' birth and leading them to Jesus, and there they would worship Him as well.

The Virgin birth – a bright star to lead them to Jesus – the visitation of angels in marvelous light, leading shepherds to Jesus so they could worship Him. How different these miracles are compared to the miracles at His death. Darkness, earthquake, tearing of the Veil, splitting of the rocks, and opening of tombs!

Have you ever thought about it? In everything Jesus Christ did for man, man made it more difficult for Him to do.

Jesus was born God-incarnate so He could redeem us, and what did man do? Herod tried to kill Him. He even killed all the boy babies two years old and younger to make sure he killed Jesus.

During His ministry of teaching and healing, the religious leaders tried to push Him off a cliff to His death because they hated Him.

One of His own betrayed Him and He was handed over to a mob who beat Him, spat on Him, and finally nailed Him to a cross. And all He was doing, He was doing for the eternal good of man, and man just made it more difficult to do. Thank God, He loved us so much that even man's resistance toward Him would not stop Him from fulfilling His divine purpose.

At the cross – after He had paid the full price for our sin debt – miracles took place. Only Matthew reveals them to us, and I want us to examine them.

I. The Miracle of the Sun Matthew 27:45-50

Folks have tried to explain away this miracle. They have said that it was nothing more than a sandstorm or an eclipse. Not so! From 12 noon until 3:00 o'clock in the afternoon, a supernatural darkness was over all the land. It was a supernatural darkness sent by God the Father. What kind of a darkness was it? Why did it come?

A. Darkness of Sympathy

The Creator was dying on the cross, and all of creation was suffering with the Creator.

Remember that when the first man and woman sinned, what they did affected all of creation. God forgave their sin, but He could not deliver them from the sad consequences even today. Creation became subject to vanity because of man's sin. Romans 8 tells us all of creation is groaning and travailing in pain together. Why? It is awaiting the coming of the Creator who will set creation free. I think that this darkness is the darkness of sympathy – all of creation was sympathizing with the Creator.

When Jesus died, He did redeem creation. Man took thorns and made a crown of thorns and put that crown on His head as they mocked Him. But really, that crown of thorns was symbolic of what He did. He took our sins to the cross. Remember there were no thorns on earth until Adam sinned. He bore the crown of thorns just as He bore our sins in His body on the tree. He has broken the power of sin. As a consequence, one day creation shall be delivered, the King shall reign, and there will be no more thorns and thistles or disease or death.

B. Darkness of Solemnity

Our Lord's death on the cross was a very solemn, serious, holy event. I would remind you that the Bible refers to Hell as a place of "outer darkness."

The darkness was a time of God's judgment upon the spotless Lamb of God who was dying in man's place.

Much had been going on for the three hours before the darkness on the cross – from 9:00 A.M. until 12 noon. Jesus had been praying for the soldiers and the others that had a part in His crucifixion. He had made a promise to one of the thieves who was beside Him on the cross. He commended His mother to the care of the Beloved Disciple.

But with the descent of the darkness all narrative ends. So, I want you to see the:

C. Darkness of Secrecy

In those three hours Jesus Christ was accomplishing a great work that He alone could accomplish. During those three hours of darkness, He was carrying on an eternal transaction with His Father. The Son of God took the burden of our sins upon Himself, and was punished for them in our place.

At the end of three hours of darkness, He cried with a loud voice, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" Literally the text should read: "My God ... Why didst Thou forsake me?" Whatever needed to happen during those three hours of darkness Had Already Happened."

Habakkuk 1:13 supplies the answer to the Lord's question. He said, "Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look upon iniquity." The Father turned His back upon His Son. This was the only time there was a break in the fellowship of the divine family.

That's what sin does – sin separates and isolates. Sin separates man from God and even from himself and others. That's what hell is – eternal loneliness, eternal isolation. There is no friendship in hell. There is no fellowship in darkness of hell.

The last two sayings come quickly now: "It is finished!" "Into Your hands I commend My spirit!" Then the KJV says that He "yielded up the ghost;" literally, "He dismissed His spirit." Obviously, the Lord was in control even to the end. He did not succumb to the tortures of the body and soul. When He was ready, when He was certain that all had been fulfilled, THEN, AND ONLY THEN And Not Before, did He surrender His Spirit.

II. The Miracle of the Sanctuary Matthew 27:51a

This Veil of the Temple that was 60 feet long, 20 feet wide, as thick as a man's hand, so massive that it took about 300 Jewish men to hang in place, and that a yoke of oxen could not rent, was rent by God Himself to provide a way into His presence.

This is the Veil that separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies in the Temple. It was placed there to keep men from the Holy of Holies, except for one man, the High Priest, from going once a year into the Holy of Holies and into the presence of God.

It was torn at 3:00 o'clock, the time of the evening sacrifice and the exact time of Jesus' death. The old sacrificial system was over! Jesus had provided the Perfect Sacrifice. There was no more need to shed the blood of animals.

Hebrews 9:25-28 Hebrews 10:19-24

III. The Miracle of the Stones Matthew 27:51b

The earthquake split the rocks and broke open many of the tombs. Earthquakes themselves are not miraculous, but the timing of this one is. It took place at the precise moment when Jesus died.

IV. The Miracle of the Sepulchers Matthew 27:52-53

Notice that these "saints" did not appear in Jerusalem until AFTER the resurrection of Jesus.

I Corinthians 15:20-23: "Every man in his own order (or time)."

There are so many questions we would love to know the answer to, but Matthew answers none of them. I'm sure he had his reasons. Questions like:

- Who were these folks that came out of the graves? Well, we know they were saints.
- How many were there?
- Did they go into the houses of the people or only walk the streets?
- Did they speak with people and carry on conversations with them?
- Did they appear only once or from time to time during the forty days our Lord was on earth before His ascension?
- How did returning from the dead affect them and the others who saw them?
- Did they die again? If so, were they buried again in their own tombs?
- Were they saints that had died recently or were they important folks of the Old Testament?

Well, what is it that God is teaching us here? One truth is that He is teaching us the truth and certainty of the final resurrection. This is a foretaste of the final resurrection.

I Corinthians 15:20-23, 51-58

THE BURIAL OF JESUS

Matthew 27:57-66

The Lord Jesus had been on the cross for six hours. The last three hours was spent in total darkness as Jesus took our sin upon Himself and actually became sin for us. It was in those three hours of darkness that the judgment of God for our sins fell on Him and He suffered the wrath of God and paid our sin debt.

As the sun began to shine again, Jesus cried with a loud voice, "It is finished" and immediately following that He said, "Into Your hands I commend My spirit."

Passover started that day at sundown and it was unlawful for anyone to hang on a tree during Passover and the Romans honored the custom of the Jews.

Jewish law said no one could remain hanging on a tree after sundown, no matter what time of the year it was. The Romans had no such law and they usually left the body of a criminal on the tree for days, hoping that those who passed by would see the bodies hanging on the tree and would not risk going against Rome. Then they would take what was left of the body and throw it onto the garbage pile outside of the city that burned continually.

The Jewish law is found in Deuteronomy 21:22-23. The word for hang here most likely means to be hung by the neck by a rope since crucifixion had not been used before and would not be for the next thousand years.

As we come now to the burial of Jesus, it was sometime after 3:00 o'clock and Passover was about three hours later. The men had to be dead before they could take them down.

Orders were given to break the men's legs so they could suffocate and die quickly. The soldiers would take a steel hammer and shatter the bones between the knees and ankle and in a few minutes they would be dead. But when they came to Jesus, they found that He was already dead, so they thrust a spear in His side and there came out blood and water, that it might be fulfilled that not one of His bones was broken.

The men are dead. The crucifixion is over. All is quiet again. It's time to take the men down from the cross.

So now I want you to see:

I. The People Who Buried Jesus Matthew 27:57-58

This is a text rarely preached. It may be read in the course of reading the account of the Crucifixion of the Lord, but it is rarely

proclaimed, and it is a text that needs to be preached.

Two men who were members of the Sanhedrin were there at the crucifixion that day, but we are told that they were both secret disciples for fear of the Jewish leaders, and they did not consent to the death of Christ. It may have been that they were absent from the meeting that condemned Jesus to be crucified. The two men were Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, who came to Jesus by night.

I wonder if maybe Joseph and Nicodemus were standing together at the crucifixion of Jesus. How their hearts must have been stirred as they saw Jesus suffering on the cross for their sins and as they heard all the vile things said to Him as folks mocked Him. There, standing together, they made up their minds that when it was all over, they would take care of His body as best as they could.

I have a question: Why didn't His own disciples come to take care of His body? They were His closest associates. But instead of them burying Him, two unheard of disciples come forward to ask for His body.

We have never heard of Joseph of Arimathea before the burial of Jesus and we never hear of him again after His burial.

When John the Baptist was beheaded, three of the four gospels tell us that his disciples asked for John's body so it could be buried, (Matthew 14:12; Mark 6:29; Luke 9). They had character enough, loyalty enough, devotion enough, and courage enough to go and ask for John's body so it could be buried. Surely the Lord Jesus' disciples would show similar bravery, but they did not.

Think of the courage it took for Joseph to go to Pilate and ask for the body of Jesus.

1. He had not identified himself as a follower of Jesus up to this time.
2. He was unsure of the reception that he would get from Pilate and what would the Lord's disciples think of what he had done?
3. Both Joseph and Nicodemus knew they would be objects of ridicule and probably dismissed when they returned to the Sanhedrin, if they did.
4. And remember, those who buried Jesus, according to the Law, became defiled, and as such were prohibited from participating in the Passover Feast. Nicodemus and Joseph would have prepared for the great event, but when confronted with the problem, which was the more important, Jesus their Master, or observance of an ancient ritual? It only took moments for these men to make their decision.

Joseph must have been a man of much wealth and influence and prominence. He was able to secure a meeting with Pilate after hours and in a short time. Can you imagine going down to the Governor's mansion after hours and just knocking on the door and saying, "I'd like to see the governor!?" Your chances of that would be rather slim.

Keep in mind that all of this was in the providence of God. See Isaiah 53:9.

II. The Procedure of Burying Jesus Matthew 27:58-59

It seems that Joseph and Nicodemus took the Lord's body down from the cross. It's interesting to note that after His crucifixion, only kind, gentle hands touched Jesus. Rough, wicked hands had put Him on the cross, but now only helping, tender hands would touch Him.

There was a procedure that was used by the Jews in preparing a body for burial. The body would be washed. It would be wrapped in linen and it would be covered with spices. The spices would somewhat serve the function of modern-day embalming. John 19:39 tells us that Nicodemus brought "a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds weight."

Because it was late, Joseph and Nicodemus worked together quickly to carry out the procedure. Somewhere, perhaps in the shadows, the women were watching.

III. The Place for Burying Jesus Matthew 27:59-61

Prearranged funeral arrangements are not new. It was not unusual for wealthy people to have their burial places prepared far in advance of their death. The tombs, usually chiseled in limestone rocks, would be made large enough to accommodate entire families. Stone slabs

would be carved where the bodies would be laid to rest. They would also have a large stone in place to be rolled to cover the mouth of the tomb.

Matthew emphasizes the care and reverence taken with the Lord's body.

The burial of our Lord is more than saying, "Well, that's what you do with a dead body!" His burial was significant. Why?

1. His burial was the full and final demonstration of His death.

We have all heard of cases of someone who was thought to be dead, but it was discovered later that they were still alive. In fact, after the resurrection, that was one thing the religious leaders said about Jesus: That He appeared to be dead, but when He was placed in the cold, damp tomb, He revived.

No! The soldiers made absolutely sure He was dead when they thrust a spear through His side, causing a sudden flow of blood and water.

Life was gone! No more life remained. His body was placed in the tomb!

2. Christ would not be a complete Savior for us if He had not died, because only the dead can be resurrected from the dead.

Never had Christ's true identity been hidden as it was hidden when His lifeless body was laid in that tomb. The tomb and the spices were intended for a person who had died and for a body that would remain in the grave.

Although He told them He would rise again on the third day, everyone saw the Lord – DEAD! A failure! His work come to nothing! His enemies with their feet upon His neck! His body lying stiff and cold in the tomb. This is the end of the ministry of Jesus Christ!

At this darkest moment, those who had followed Jesus, reveal their true colors. His disciples are hiding in fear!

BUT – Sunday is coming and we will see Him Alive from the Dead!

The Grave is NOT His final Resting Place!

IV. The Precaution After Burying Jesus Matthew 27:62-66

Their concern was not that Jesus would rise from the dead. They had rejected that. They had tried to discredit all that He had done. They were concerned that His disciples would come and steal His body away.

So, they set a guard, put a seal around the tomb, made it as sure as they could.

They didn't have to worry about the disciples stealing His body. They were afraid. They were demoralized. They were hiding. They didn't even know where His tomb was. Peter and John had to be led by the women to the tomb when He did rise from the dead!

They had made the tomb as secure as they could, but that could not stop the Son of God from rising from the dead! The stone was not moved to let Jesus out – He was already out! It was moved to let folks in so they could see He was alive! And He's Alive for Ever More!!

RESURRECTION LIES

Matthew 28:11-15

The Lord has risen! An angel from heaven has come down, rolled the stone away from the mouth of the tomb, and begins to speak to the women who have come to the tomb. He tells them that Jesus is alive and to go into the city to tell His disciples. As they went to tell the disciples, Jesus Himself appears to the women and they grab hold of His feet. Then Jesus tells them the same thing the angel tells them, "Tell My disciples to go to Galilee and I will meet them there."

Matthew 28:11 tells us that some of the guards that were guarding the tomb also went into the city. So, there were two groups running to the city: the women and the watchmen (guards).

- The Women were overwhelmed with Triumph; the Watchmen were overwhelmed with Terror!

- The Women were about to share the most Tremendous Fact in history; the Watchmen would spread the most Tremendous Falsehood in history.

- The Women would carry their news to the Disciples; the Watchmen would carry their news to the Sanhedrin.

Notice that Matt. 28:11 states that only SOME of the soldiers reported to the Sanhedrin. Why not all of them? Obviously, some spokesmen had to make the Jewish leaders aware of the events which had taken place during the night. The lives of the guards might be endangered if false accusations were made before Caesar. The soldier therefore hurried to the city to speak of the earthquake, the appearance of the angels, and the disappearance of the body of Jesus.

Three things I want you to see:

I. The Startled Sanhedrin Matthew 28:11

The incredible had happened! Jesus was gone from the tomb. In an hour or two the news would be all over Jerusalem. From what the guards reported, something of a supernatural nature had happened and the tomb was now empty.

So, what are the Sanhedrin going to do? They are certainly not going to admit that the claims of Christ were true. That would mean that they were guilty of the greatest crime in all of history. What would the people do to them if they admitted they had put to death the Son of God?

What do you do when you are confronted with the truth that you are wrong? Confess it? Admit it? NO!! You lie and try to cover it up. Put the blame on someone or something else. No, that's not what you should do, but that's what they did and that's what we so often do.

So, what did they do? What must they do? First, they had to concoct a story. Then they must secure the silence and the cooperation of the guards.

The Sanhedrin had been able to buy Judas for the price of a slave, but it's going to take a large sum to buy off these guards.

II. The Subtle Scheme Matthew 28:12-14

Tell this story: "His disciples came at night and stole Him away while we were asleep."

Wait a minute! For a soldier of Rome to sleep while he is on duty or to lose what he is guarding was a capital offense. If that story were true, the guards would have been the first to deny it. It would have meant their death if they told such a thing. It would have been like signing their death certificate!

Then the Jews spoke about money – a lot of it. And with the promise and guarantee that they would square it with Pilate.

The Chief Priest and elders resorted to bribery to cover up His resurrection. "We'll pay you to lie and nothing will happen to you. We will guarantee your safety."

It was a ridiculous lie for at least three reasons:

1. If these soldiers were asleep, how could they have known who took the body?
2. And if they were asleep, Roman military law declared that the soldiers would be put to death and the Sanhedrin couldn't stop it – unless they had Pilate in their pocket and that would call for a lot more money.
3. If the disciples stole the body, why did not the Sanhedrin or the Roman governor arrest the disciples, bring them to trial and convict them of tampering with the governor's seal, and grave robbing. Nothing would have put a swifter end to the report of the resurrection than a body identified as Jesus of Nazareth. Of course, there was no body to produce.

This carpenter was becoming very expensive!

It's always more expensive to tell a lie than to tell the truth.

III. The Shameful Suggestions Matthew 28:15

"The soldiers took the money, did as they were taught and it is commonly reported AND believed among Jews until this day."

Matthew did not write his gospel until decades had passed, so he was able to make his observations.

The maxim of propagandists says, "If a lie is repeated often enough, people will believe it."

That lie is still a part of anti-Christian teaching today.

There are none so blind as those who have no desire to see. Liberals continue to tell the lie and some people continue to believe it.

But there has never been an explanation how a stolen corpse suddenly began to change the lives of men and women.

The truth is that Jesus is alive and His amazing power transforms life today.

THREE DAYS

Matthew 28:1-10

The Resurrection of Jesus Christ! We call it Easter Sunday. We often look at that one day – the day Jesus came forth from the dead. But there are three days that are a vital part of this event. There was a Friday, a Saturday, and a Sunday. Three days that are a vital part of this event.

1. Friday was a Gory Daydreaming

Jesus was treated like no man has ever been treated. He was beaten and bruised. His flesh was torn from His body with a whip. His hair was pulled out from the roots from His face. He was brutalized and mocked. They humiliated Him by stripping Him bare and then putting on Him an old dirty, worn-out robe to make Him look like a king, and for His crown – thorns that had been platted together in the shape of a crown.

Why? Because He was Pure and Perfect and mankind was sinful and evil. He simply told these men what they were like before a Holy God.

You can tell a lot about a man's character when you confront him – even in love – about his sins. When he is exposed for what he really is, instead of repenting and seeking forgiveness, he will try to kill the one who exposed him. So they nailed Him to a cross and He died on Friday.

2. Saturday was a Gloomy Day

Jesus was the promised Messiah, their Savior, the One who would make sinful man right before a Holy God. But man had killed Him. They had lost their only hope of forgiveness and salvation – or so they thought.

3. But now we come to Sunday – Friday, Saturday, and now Sunday – and Sunday was a Glory Day.

Jesus would rise from the dead! And because Jesus would arise from the dead – there is now hope for sinful man. And though man treated Jesus, the Son of the Living God, so shamefully, in His great love and mercy, He still wants to bring forgiveness and salvation to the very ones who treated Him so shamefully.

Saturday was a Day of Despair ... But Sunday was:

I. A Day of Discovery Matthew 28:1-8

The Resurrection changes everything!

Notice Matthew 28:1: "In the end of the Sabbath" Oh, I know Matthew was talking about the end of the Sabbath's hours of the week, but notice how the Holy Spirit had Matthew to write it down: "The end of the Sabbath."

Matthew's account of the resurrection of Christ in his Gospel is directed specifically toward the nation of Israel. It is an eloquent, profound, and startling commentary on a change in the national order of things. Judaism was finished. The Jewish Sabbath was rendered obsolete by the Lord's resurrection, just as the Temple was made obsolete by the tearing of the Veil, and the priesthood by the rending of the high priest's robe. Jesus is now our High Priest and no man now has to go before God for us. Now every believer can come "Boldly" before the throne of God for himself.

The resurrection spelled "the end of the Sabbath" and all it represented, but we also read in Matthew 28:1 that "it began to dawn toward the first day of the week." With spiritual insight the infant Church turned away from the Sabbath as a day of rest to the first day of the week as a day of worship (Acts 20:7; I Corinthians 16:1-2).

When the two Marys came in their sorrow to see the sepulcher, they saw the Savior instead! Oh, happy day!

Notice three things that took place at the Garden Tomb:

A. The Activity at the Garden Tomb Matthew 28:1-2

Matt. 28:2 tells us that “an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone from the door” of the tomb, and sat on the stone.

With the coming of the angel came “a great earthquake.” As the women made their way to the tomb that morning, surely, they experienced the earth trembling and shaking as they walked.

For three days the faith of the disciples and these women had been shaken, and now they feel a shaking under their feet as they walked to the tomb. They saw what happened to Jesus on the cross; they saw His body as it was put into the tomb and the stone rolled in front of the door to seal the tomb; and they were having a hard time believing that Jesus' word would be fulfilled. The very fact that these women were on their way to the tomb to anoint the body of Jesus indicates that they did not believe what Jesus had said about Him being raised from the dead. Their faith had gone through a crisis. God the Father is laying the ground work to strengthen their faith and ours.

God is about to vindicate and exalt His Son with these displays of power. Even if the Lord Jesus had been there in the tomb, there was no way that those women were going to get into the tomb to anoint the body of Jesus. They would have had to have moved the stone themselves, overpowered the guards, and remove the seal of the empire. There was no way those women were getting into that tomb.

When the women got to the tomb, they did not find what they expected. Instead they found the stone rolled away from the door of the tomb, and an angel seated upon the stone ... And I think the angel was smiling!

This was the moment of triumph for Christ and the angel of the Lord had come to share the Good News of the resurrection with the women.

In Matthew 28:3 we find one of the rare Biblical descriptions of angels. He was not a half-dressed baby with a bow and arrow in his hands and his name was con Cupid. Instead, the Bible says, “His countenance was like lightening, and his raiment white as snow.” The angel was clothed in a suit of blinding glory.

Then Matthew tells us that the guards were so fearful that they became like dead men. Normally these soldiers were afraid of nothing, but when the angel came and rolled away the stone and sat on it, these men were literally paralyzed with such fear that they could not move.

B. The Announcement from the Garden Tomb Matthew 28:5-6

1. Do Not Fear

What was there to make them afraid?

There is the open grave. A grave that is supposed to be occupied is not usually open, but this one was – And it was Empty!

Then there is a supernatural, illuminating, heavenly being sitting on the stone that was no longer at the door of the tomb – And he is speaking to them.

Then the Roman guards are all lying on the ground like dead men. Then the women noticed that the soldiers are not dead, they are just frightened nearly to death. What could have happened that caused them to be so afraid? Is it any wonder that the angel began with “Fear not!”?

2. He is not here.

What would you have thought or said if it had been you who went to the tomb expecting to see the body of Jesus?

“Not here! Then, where is He? Who took Him? Where did they take Him?” The list of questions could go on and on!

But no matter what you ask, He is still not in the Grave! You can look for a dead Jesus all you want, search high and low, but you will not find a dead Jesus.

3. He is Risen, As He Said. He is Alive!

I think the angel must have said, “Would you listen? Don't fear. He is not here.

He is Alive, as He said." Do you believe that? If you don't, it doesn't really matter, because it doesn't change anything. Jesus is Still Alive!

C. The Assignment From the Garden Tomb Matthew 28:6b-7

"Come and See." Then "Go quickly and Tell!"

II. A Day of Delight Matthew 28:8-10

Just when the women thought it couldn't get any better, when they obeyed what the angel told them, Jesus appears to them!

There's no substitute for prompt obedience to the revealed will of God if you want more and greater revelation.

Notice: In Matt. 28:8: The women departed "with fear and great joy." The word for "fear" here means "holy reverence." They were going to tell His disciples that Jesus had risen and was alive with Holy Reverence and joy.

Notice what Jesus said to the women as they were going to tell His disciples that He was alive. Matt. 28:9: "All hail" means, "Rejoice greatly!" And they fell at His feet and worshiped Him!

We don't need an angel to come down from heaven today to tell us that Jesus is alive. We have all that we need. He gives us this challenge: "Come and see." I trust you have already done that. If you have not, you can today.

If you have done the first part – "Come and see" – don't fail to answer the second part – "Go and Tell" – that others might believe and be saved.

THE GREAT COMMISSION OR THE GREAT OMISSION

Matthew 28:18-20

These are the parting words of our Lord for the Church just prior to His Ascension. Final words are important words. It's as if our Lord is saying, "Let Me remind you one last time what the desire of My heart is for you ... If you want to honor Me, do this ... I ask you to do this and complete My mission on earth!"

"These words are the mission statement for the Church. These are the marching orders for the Church. Do not fail to do what I command you to do. The task will involve determination and committed action. This is not just a suggestion. There is to be no option. Carry out My commission!" Signed: The Lord Jesus Christ, the One who paid your sin debt on the cross and gave you forgiveness and an eternal home with Me in Heaven.

But down through the ages, the Church has failed in its purpose. We are failing in our generation. I dare say the burden of our heart and the passion of our heart as we meet here each Sunday is not reaching the world for Christ, but to meet our own personal needs.

When the idea of foreign missions was introduced to the Baptist faith, it was met with great opposition. In one of the early conferences on missions, a well-known pastor stood and said to those who were trying to organize missions, "If God wants to save the heathen, He can do it without our help."

Consider these statistics:

- 95 percent of all Christians have never led a person to Christ.
- 90 percent of believers have no consistent witness for the Lord.
- Less than two percent are actively involved with some type of evangelistic ministry.
- 71 percent give nothing toward financing missions or evangelistic ministries.

It is clear that the Church has not taken our Lord's final words seriously. Our Lord's Great Commission has become the Church's Great Omission.

Most of us know the Great Commission, we just do not obey it. These verses are not just to be learned so we can lodge them in our heads; they are to become a part of our being.

They are to get into our Hands so we can reach out and help.

They are to get into our Feet so we can go and tell the Good News.

They are to get into our Tongue so we can proclaim that Jesus is Lord!

Because of my relationship with the Living Lord Jesus, I am not just to Hear His words, but to Obey His words.

We call these verses The Great Commission, but there are some other things that are Great in these verses that should motivate us to obey His command.

I. The Great Commander Matthew 28:18

There is no one like Jesus! He is the only Sovereign Lord. He has absolute sovereign authority and lordship over all. He proved that when He died on the cross, was buried, and rose again the third day.

During His life on earth, He continued to show that He is Lord over all Diseases, over the Devil and Demons, and over Death.

Philippians 2:9-11.

Jesus said in Matthew 28:18, "All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth." That ought to encourage us and give us confidence that He can accomplish the task He has given to us.

We have received our orders from the One who possesses All Power, All Ability, All Authority, All Right to do through us what He wants to be done.

We can accomplish His will because we are indwelt with His Power.

II. The Great Company Matthew 28:16-17

"Then the eleven disciples ..." Where is the Great Company? These eleven? Do you realize that this company would not fill one pew in this building!?

No, they were not great in number, but they were great in commitment, love, and obedience. They actually believed they could do what Jesus told them to do because He promised to be with them. And Jesus had told them that the gates of Hell could not prevail or succeed against them.

"But, Preacher, the task is unachievable. We don't have the ability or the strength or the finances."

These disciples were described as ignorant and unlearned men – most were fishermen. They had little training.

They were not wealthy men. When Peter and John were going to the Temple, there was a lame man lying at the Gate called Beautiful, and seeing Peter and John, he cried out to Peter and John for alms, but Peter responded, "Silver and gold have I none, but what I do have, I will give you. In the Name of Jesus, rise and walk."

"I don't have much and I can't do much," but Jesus can take what we do have and use it for His glory.

Now I must be honest with you, not everyone was on board with this. They never are. There are always some who say, "I don't think we can do it." Notice Matthew 28:17: "When they saw (Jesus), they worshiped Him; but some doubted." There are always those two camps.

It took the Apostles a long time to come to grips with the command of Jesus. But thank God, even Paul, the latecomer to the apostolic band, gave his entire life to do what Jesus asked them to do.

III. The Great Commission Matthew 28:19-20

Three things Jesus told the disciples to do: Make disciples, Mark disciples, and Mature the disciples.

A. Make Disciples Matthew 28:19

Notice the first words: "Go." Literally, "As you go ..." "He assumes they are going."

What are the first words the angel said to the women at the empty tomb? "Come and see ... Go and tell," (Matthew 28:6-7).

What was it the risen Lord said to the women when He appeared to them? "Go and tell," (Matthew 28:10).

Now He says it again: "Go." "As you go ... make disciples." The word "Go" requires and expects action. Jesus expects His disciples to "go" and to take the Gospel with them and share it with all they come in contact with. We can't accomplish His command sitting on a pew within our comfort zone.

The only way we can “make” disciples is by winning each one personally to the Lord. Only a saved person can be a follower of Christ. We must share the Gospel and win them to Christ first.

They knew it would not be an easy task. The disciples were well aware of how the multitude had treated Jesus. They knew public opinion wasn't in their favor. But Jesus promised them His power and presence. Wherever you go; As you go, make disciples (jobs, school, stores, friends).

By the way, seeing folks birthed into the family of God is the secret to a live church. There is something exciting about the birth of a baby into a family. Watch the reaction of a new mom and dad when a child is born into the family. There are new expressions of love and care and sacrifice and devotion. The same is true when one is birthed into the family of God. It does something for the church that nothing else can do.

Notice: “Go ye.” The Lord is not vague in whom was expected to carry out this order. In fact, He was very specific. He was talking to the disciples and He gave the order directly to them.

The command was given to His disciples. A disciple is a follower of Christ.

This work was not exclusively for the eleven, but it is a work that continues today.

If you are a child of God, you are responsible to fulfill the Great Commission. We will one day stand and give account to God of the life we lived and the faith we shared. Each of us must do our part.

“Must Jesus bear the cross alone,
And all the world go free?
No, there's a cross for everyone,
And there's a cross for me.”

B. Mark Disciples

Baptism is the outward expression of an inward experience. Baptism for us may not be a big deal, but for many it is a bold and often dangerous confession of Christ before a Christ-rejecting world. We identify ourselves with Christ. In many countries baptism is the final break with the past and invites persecution, discrimination, and death.

C. Mature Disciples

Don't dip'em and drop'em! Equip them in the faith. We are to make disciples, who in turn make other disciples. We are called to teach the new disciples all the things we have been taught of the Lord. This cannot be done in a hurry or in a short amount of time. We must make an ongoing investment in the life of the new disciple. As a pastor, as I continue to learn from the Lord, I must continue to invest in those I am disciplining. Discipleship involves long-term commitment and investment.

Carrying out this commission is the only reason New Hope, or any New Testament church exists. Nothing a church does brings as much glory to God as sharing the Gospel with a hell-bound sinner, that sinner being saved, and then maturing so that they can continue the cycle of making, marking, and maturing disciples.

IV. The Great Companion Matthew 28:20

The task would be impossible if “Go” was the only word, so the Lord added “Lo.” He promised, “Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world (age).”

Four times in the original text the word “all” is used.

- “ALL authority has been given to Me”
- “make disciples of ALL nations”
- “Teaching them to observe ALL things I commanded you”
- “I am with you ALL the day”

He equips us and is with us; so we are without excuse if we do not obey.

Would you live for Jesus, and be always pure and good?

Would you walk with Him, within the narrow road?

Would you in His service labor always at you best?
Let Him have His way with thee.